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Unidad 1, Perspectivas

*Forasteros en la ciudad*: Un documental

Panel de discusión

(Ronnie) I think that for me anyways I have older siblings, they came when they were about fifteen or sixteen, for them to learn English at that point being in high school was really difficult, and at that point this was like 2001, they were bullied a lot by people that they didn't like them just because they only spoke Spanish. The ESL classes weren't really good because we only really could live in bad neighborhoods. There was always a lack of professors, we didn't really get the attention that we needed at that point, and I found that me being younger I learned English a lot better, but for them anyways it was really difficult and then being in high school, seeing all these new immigrants coming in and them dealing with the same issues was a little bit sad I guess because nothing had changed the past 10 years that I've been in the country.

(Kevin) Hello, I might not be an immigrant but growing up in neighborhoods, I had a ton of experience having people coming from all over Latin America. The thing about how I grew up in Southern California, there was a rule where you couldn't speak Spanish in school or else, you'll get a referral (three or four hours you get suspended or something like that). We had to speak in secret and not be helping him in Spanish class or in math with Spanish, but it was hard. I can't imagine doing that without any sort of support.

(Mariel) Also not speaking as an immigrant but a daughter of as an immigrant. My family immigrated to the United States in 1985, right around the time that all of this is going on and worked in the meatpacking plant industry. I think that the most interesting challenge of a child growing up in the atmosphere is the responsibility that you hold, from interpreting and going to say the grocery store or the bank or to school and you are, see I was first grader, breaking that language barrier and now having to learn all of these really complex terms and in hearing situations about your family and about the community through the lens of a child and then translating that to your family. That was probably, I wouldn't say a bad struggle, but is most interesting and you do see that a lot today still. I would say thankfully in western Kansas and I speak in Dodge City that's where I'm from, that community and that diversity has grown so much that there are more Spanish-speaking or other bilingual people in the community that are able to help take that burden off or that responsibility off the children. Because you really grow up fast being an immigrant kid, you're pushed into this responsibility as at an early age.

(Ronnie) Just to add to that to too, I felt extremely bad for my dad for example because in Guatemala he was a lawyer, he was a teacher, and then having to come to the United States those titles meant nothing to people here because Guatemalan law does not work the same way as the United States law. He had to you work in construction, paint houses, now he works at a pig farm, helping the pig companies and making sure that everything is working fine. He doesn't get promoted though because he doesn't really know English very well, and if he does get promoted they end up putting a lot of stress on him and he just decides to go back down to where he feels comfortable because it was that promotion is not really an option for him

(Audience question) Do you feel the that the movie was a fair representation of how guards at Garden City is now and in the past or would you make additions to that narrative?

(Cort) I grew up about an hour from Garden City, but Garden City was our closest Walmart, if that says anything about the town that I grew up in. After graduating high school, I went to Garden City for Community College before transferring here. One of the things I liked most about this movie was how it represented Garden City. Garden City is an interesting place, it's a place where one of the town mottos “Opportunity USA”; the college's motto is “From here you can go anywhere”. I grew up listening to those commercials in the car a lot and I used to think that they were crazy but then I went to the college and I saw what Garden City was and what Garden City stood for. I think one of the greatest things about it is there's no there's no real congregation of one specific culture and area in a certain area like there. They're spread out like, there's just a bunch of people living together, and I think that that really speaks for what I hope to be the future of America.

(Mariel) I'm going to add to that before we move on. To answer your question, I believe that Garden City and Dodge City mirror each other very well, we're old high school rivals. I spent a lot of my childhood high school going to Garden a lot, the pool and the zoo I've been there tons. It's kind of surreal just seeing that on screen and seeing the high school and you know knowing that we would go against the Buffs and soccer all the time. I think one thing that I'm glad that they spoke on was the undocumented community. I think maybe could have discussed a little bit more and maybe discussed a little bit more on that struggle in the community because while there is a lot of immigration a lot of that due to the political climate throughout our history and the situation with immigration really is a hardship on that community and that deeply impacts cities like Dodge and Garden who are very reliant, I would say, on the undocumented community for labor. I would have hoped that, I mean it's 35 minutes so you can't really get too deep into it, but there are a lot of socio-economic issues. I'm also a big activist and that was what I was hoping a little bit more for, but I appreciated the sentiment. I think a lot of people don't consider Kansas as a very progressive or diverse location but Western Kansas is one of the most diverse communities and leaving that was a culture shock coming to Lawrence or I lived in Wichita for a while but it was a culture shock of being out of your community and recognizing what your privileges are and what they aren't in a community that is not your own.

(Audience question) I just was wondering, you already touched on how the political climate affects the communities out west? Have you noticed any increased anxieties among the community recently or like Fernando decided to self-deport, is the term return to his country? Has there been increased instances of people deciding to leave these communities?

(Ronnie) I don't know if they wanted to leave voluntarily. But, for example, I'm from Liberal Kansas and my friend called me and he's my age and he called me because about a month ago he got picked up by ICE and taken to Emporia where you had to spend two three nights in jail, $10,000 bail. I think it's one thing that didn't really get mentioned in documentary; that a lot of these like packing companies they hire a lot of illegal immigrants let them work for a few months and then they get the matter there and get a new batch in. I personally I came to the United States on political asylum. Seeing Fernando having to like go back to El Salvador to that violence I couldn't imagine myself, how my emotions would be if I had to do that myself and I was extremely happy to hear that he came back but I don't think a lot of people are that lucky. I've been in the United States since 2001 took me ten years to become a US citizen. It's really difficult. The tests may not seem that hard to some people, I've been speaking English for almost twenty years now, but then I have people like my dad who just became a citizen and having to answer simple history questions: name the 13 colonies or who was the first president of United States? That's stuff that in Guatemala you don't need to know who George Washington is, we see a dollar maybe once in our lifetime if we're lucky. I think that nobody really wants to leave the United States because most of our situations aren't really better in the countries that we come from. And for me the American Dream at the moment is to not be in debt, and to help my parents out when they're old. Oher than that, I don't really think there's an actual dream, for me anyways, people might see it differently but me just to be financially stable is what I want.

(Mariel) I think what your question is (you might already know the answer). It's interesting because we see a lot of, and I work directly with the undocumented community and with the immigrant community, that's a majority of my social activism work. We do see these increases a peak and valley of uncomfortability and uncertainty with status. This whole idea around citizenship and who and who isn't worthy of that citizenship to speak on his time to become a citizen. It took my parents 14 years and they did it the “quote/unquote” right way. That's thousands of dollars, lawyer fees, time energy, fingerprints. You're in the system as an undocumented citizen, you're paying taxes as an undocumented individual. The reality when we have a heightened political opinion saying that we want to reduce immigration, we want to reduce the amount of people here, that terrifies people, that causes people to wonder if you know even their certified citizenship is going to come into question. A good example would be my older sister: during the 1980s, the Reagan era, there was a push for immigration amnesty. It was a big decision by Congress to provide a citizenship to the current immigration population. My parents then had that opportunity kind of strike and become citizens. My sister was under the age of 18 at the time so she was granted amnesty, meaning she was a citizen because she is underage. That is still something that gets taken into question every time she has to do any sort of legal paperwork. She applies for a new job if she gets a speeding ticket, it shows on there that she is a citizen but under these certain conditions she's a citizen. That value of citizenship is so almost unattainable for people in such a struggle that when we have rhetoric in our government and in our world that is negative towards immigrants, you see a

lot of uncertainty and especially with federal forces like ICE coming in and doing what they are currently doing, which I know there's a lot of controversy around, whether that's right or not, I will personally say it's completely unjust, terrible and though that we have a peak in that right now that's been going on since the day immigration started. Like I said you see a lot of peaks and valleys and right now we're in a really an intense time with the community.

(Ronnie) Add to that one little thing: the whole part about them trying to check if you're actually a citizen or not, I've been a naturalized citizen since 2011 and anytime that I apply for a student loan or just to a college, I always get an email back from admission saying: “hey so we need copies of your driver's license or your social and your passport because the Social Security Commission, or whatever the they're called, they can't verify the US citizen or not”, when I don't understand that. I got my little certificate that says I'm a citizen, I don't know what else they want from me. But that's I think that's an issue same

thing with voting. I had to jump through quite a few hoops to do, that it almost feels like it almost feels like they do it on purpose to try and convince me not to do these things. I have to do all these extra steps even though in a sense I'm just a citizen just like everybody else now. I'm no longer a Guatemalan citizen. They took that passport away from me. I'm American technically but sometimes I feel they don't see me that way and it's disheartening.

(Cort) And that's the thing with communities even like Garden City that are praised for being so diverse, they're not exempt from that kind of anxiety and there will always be people that don't get it when it comes to immigration and seeing people as citizens. There are people in these communities that still want to push hate and push for people to not be allowed.

(Audience question) Hi, listening to how you feel about being immigrant children, you touched on it a little bit, do you still feel that there is an American dream, or do you believe in the American dream, or has that been tainted for you all?

(Ronnie) I think that, like I said, my American dream was/is to not be in debt and to make sure my parents are fine because it's thanks to them that I'm here and they went through a lot of struggle just to get me into college, because at this point in time in our country if you don't have some type of degree, you're not really going to get far, and now it's to the point where even just having a bachelor's degree is not enough and you need to have a master's or even like a PhD in something to really make it and make money.

For my dad his American dream was to own a house, which he does, he bought a golden retriever, and he has a car. I think for the older generation that dream is still alive, and a lot of people are still fulfilling that, but for us who are first generation or second generation that dream has definitely changed. For me if I don't own a house while I live in the United States, I don't think that's a huge issue now. I think the dream is different for everybody now whereas before I used to be kind of a cookie-cutter thing where it's “well you filled in all the checkboxes so here's the dream enjoy it” and I don't see that being my thing a anymore.

(Mariel) I think my parents are kind of the what you would typically consider the epitome of an American Dream. That whole working from nothing and coming to something. They came to the United States with a nine-month old baby and no money and rented one room house and cooked their first dinner on the radiator and now my father has his master's in ESL and teaches, and my mother who has no education is very high up in a banking career where she started by cleaning the actual bank that she's now essentially running. That idea of American dream I think they're definitely like the storybook example. My idea of American Dream is definitely skewed. I think the American Dream is perpetuated by a system that's not created for all of us. To say that there's an American Dream is unattainable for a lot of communities because they're constantly pushed down by oppression and by unfair situations that wouldn't allow for this idea to be successful and realized what this constructive American dream is. I personally don't believe that's attainable until there are systems that are broken down and dismantled and recreated so there's true equity. But I guess the idea of immigration American Dream is to really transcend that adversity and I'm very proud of my parents, I think they 100% did that and they always tell me that I'm their American Dream. That their children that's why so many families seek asylum come to the United States. It's for that opportunity for the next generations to maybe figure out what that dream is supposed to be and prosper but I don't think it'll be attainable until we do some fixing in our communities and in our government.

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