



# Define American

Humanizing the conversation around immigration  
and citizenship in a changing America



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Immigration is not a political issue. It is a human one, and each of our stories are ultimately connected.

At Define American, we believe that we cannot change the politics of immigration until we change the culture in which people see immigrants, documented and undocumented. Changing culture means telling personal immigrant stories through news media and entertainment media (such as television and movies), thereby impacting the way immigrants are perceived. We believe that words matter, that language dictates politics, which impacts policy. Phrases like “anchor babies” and “illegals” not only demean and misrepresent undocumented immigrants, but also prevent others from seeing them as people who reflect our own immigrant roots.

Since 2011, Define American has been influencing and creating media on the crucial role of immigrants in a demographically changing America. We find ways for Americans with legal documents to see those without as the friends, neighbors, classmates, colleagues and community members they already are. Ultimately, our cultural work leads to effective political change for undocumented immigrants and their families at the local and national level. But just as importantly, we create and promote an environment in which immigrants are seen as human beings. After all, passing legislation does not automatically mean immigrants are accepted and welcomed. Our cultural investment--humanizing immigrants, changing hearts and minds-- transcends the politics of the moment.



Stephanie Solis, right, revealed her immigration status to her friend McKenzie Owen, left.

**We are nonprofit and nonpartisan, and depend entirely on the support of donations to carry out our work.**





# What We've Accomplished



A year after disclosing his immigration status to the public, Define American founder Jose Antonio Vargas gathered 35 other undocumented Americans to “come out” with him on the historic cover photograph for *TIME* magazine. Jose’s accompanying article, “We Are Americans\* (\*Just not legally)”, championed Define American’s messaging that undocumented immigrants are indeed Americans. The morning it hit newsstands, President Obama announced Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), a dramatic shift in immigration policy and a precursor to his broader executive orders on immigration.

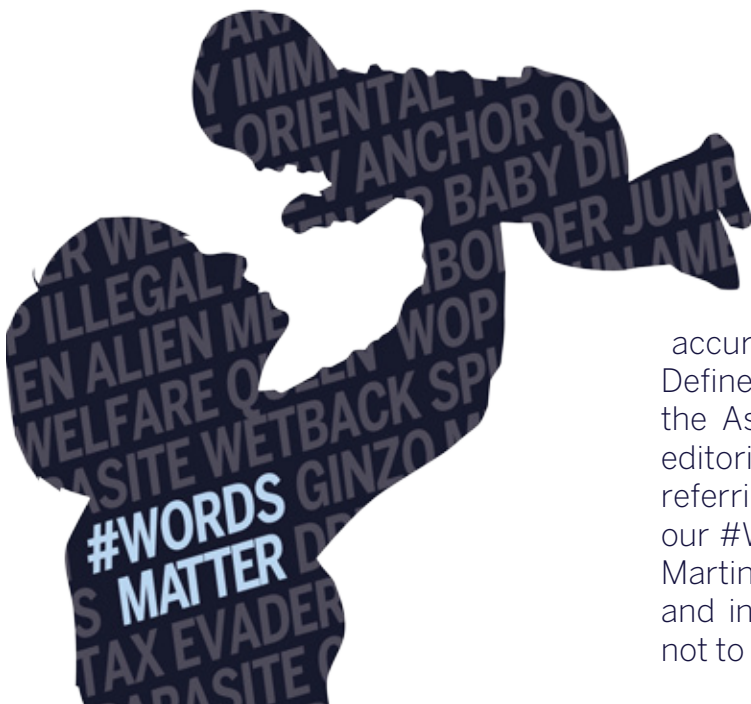


Photos by Gian Paul Lozza for *TIME*. Clockwise, from top left: Jong-Min You, Julieta Garibay, Manuel Bartsch and Tolu Olubunmi.





**Documented**, the first film to be produced and directed by an undocumented American, aired on primetime CNN in the summer of 2014. #Documented trended nationally on Twitter. Watch parties were held in over 44 states, and in collaboration with the Southern Poverty Law Center and the National Council for the Social Studies, we developed a high school curriculum centered on the film to provide a structure for discussions.



Our **#WordsMatter** campaign monitors the news, challenging the media's lexicon and providing resources to journalists on accurately reporting on immigrants and immigration. Define American's influence led to big wins including the Associated Press, NBC and ABC adjusting their editorial guidelines to prohibit the use of "illegal" when referring to undocumented immigrants. As part of our #WordsMatter candidate pledge, Bernie Sanders, Martin O'Malley, and Hillary Clinton (prompting national and international headlines) all also publicly pledged not to use this derogatory and inaccurate language.

In 2013, undocumented Americans collectively contributed \$11.64 billion to state and local taxes — roughly 8% of state and local tax nationwide. [itep.org](http://itep.org)

Two out of three Americans believe that unauthorized immigrants should be allowed to get legal status and a pathway to citizenship. [gallup.com](http://gallup.com)



**#whitepeople**



In July 2015, **White People** premiered on MTV. A documentary directed by Vargas and produced with Define American, **White People** explored white privilege and discrimination and, unlike no other TV special before it, sparked a dialogue about the intersection of race and immigration. The documentary features people like John Chimento (pictured), who lives in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, a historically Italian American neighborhood that is now more Chinese American. Within 24 hours of its premiere, **White People** trended #1 nationally and #4 globally on Twitter, and was the #1 trend on Facebook. Through various platforms, including its original television premiere and on Facebook and YouTube, more than 5 million people have seen the film to date.

The inaugural **Define American Film Festival (DAFF)** took place in Iowa in January 2016, with the presidential caucuses providing a backdrop to reach journalists and voters with a non-partisan view of one of the election's most critical issues--immigration. Six feature films preceded by six short documentaries, each exploring different immigrant experiences and issues, were screened over three days. Audiences were invited to participate in panel discussions afterwards featuring Oscar-nominated actors, directors, writers, community activists, local media and immigration experts.



Actor Demián Bichir embraces a fan.

Creating a pathway to citizenship would add a cumulative \$1.2 trillion to U.S. GDP over a decade, increase the earnings of all Americans by \$625 billion, and create an average of 145,000 new jobs each year.  
[americanprogress.org](http://americanprogress.org)

A mass deportation program to remove the 11.3 million people would cost up to \$600 billion and take more than 20 years.  
[americanactionforum.org](http://americanactionforum.org)



# Define American in 2016

For our work to have sufficient impact, our reach has to be massive and our response must be swift. This means balancing planned activity with the agility to capitalize on unique opportunities that arise through current events. This year, we are investing more resources in our most successful and enduring campaigns to deepen their impact. We're also rolling out new campaigns. Here are just a few examples:

When Vargas came out publicly regarding his status as an undocumented American, a wave of people were inspired to come out of the shadows. Our unique **online storytelling platform** provides a space for people all over the nation to come out, and to help lift up stories in the media of higher profile cases, such as trainer-to-the-elite Uriel Casas and Cesar Millan, the famed Dog Whisperer.

To both track our influence and expand it, we are developing a **media scorecard** that will rate each major television network on how well they portray immigrants, the language they use when referring to undocumented Americans, and whether they actually air content at all that incorporates stories on immigration which provoke positive changes in perception.

Define American launched our **College Chapters** program in 2015 to support students in leading change across the nation's university campuses. Chapters aim to change how young people talk about and treat immigrants by reaching out to the student body and by influencing the language used and stories covered in campus papers.



Miguel Pimentel, left, revealed his immigration status to his college professor, Dr. Jesus Diaz-Caballero.

**To learn more about Define American and how you can support our work, please contact Nadia Ammar, Development Director (213) 709-2622 [nadia@defineamerican.com](mailto:nadia@defineamerican.com)**

Define American is a registered 501(c)3 organization, EIN 46-4610491.