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Blanca V. Guzman

Salve Regina University, blanca.guzman@salve.edu

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Misrepresented and Unheard: The *Latino Rebels*

By: Blanca Vaneza Guzmán

Prepared for  
Dr. Donna Harrington-Lueker  
English and Communications Department  
Salve Regina University

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## Misrepresented and Unheard: The *Latino Rebels*

**ABSTRACT:** *In today's political climate, immigration, undocumented immigrants, and the Latinx identity have been pushed to the forefront of the news cycle, political campaigns, and social justice movements. The social justice movement associated with the undocumented will be explored through one alternative news source, Latino Rebels. Through close textual analysis, it will become evident how Latino Rebels holds these identities of Latinx, undocumented, and immigrant very close to its own voice, and often amplifies a clear message for awareness and policy change, which goes beyond the traditional scope of objectivity in reporting.*

### I. Introduction

The United States is regarded as a country founded upon the hard work of many immigrants that laid the ground work to establish the great nation that many of us presently call home. However, that is just one view of the nation's history and a rather narrow view of immigration overall. In the recent decades, immigration has become a highly-politicized topic of discussion between the two predominant political parties. Within the past two presidencies, a lot of fundamental changes have brought immigration to the forefront of political campaigns, debates and social justice movements.

Word choice and lexicon when writing news are important because different interpretations can lead to different understandings. An example would be when the United States Library of Congress changed its subject headings and removed the use of the term *Illegal Alien* in June of 2016. This change of word choice was widespread, including information on their website and archives that outlined immigration law and due process for citizenship in the United States. The headings and subsequent references to unlawful immigration are now identified by terms such as *unauthorized immigration* or *noncitizens* (Peet 12). Changes in word choice like this is often contested and again politicized as being a political 'left' versus 'right' issue. In current debate, more conservative thinkers believe that not labelling undocumented or unauthorized immigration

as *illegal* undermines due process within the United States' immigration procedure when looking to enter the country or pursue temporary /permanent residence (von Spakovsky).

Subsequently, new policies that have come to the forefront of news and political discussion are those like the DREAM Act and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act) was first introduced in 2001 as a legislative proposal to provide protections and opportunities to undocumented youth that saw many revisions but never formally passed as a law. DACA was introduced in 2012 when created by then-Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, which gave temporary relief from deportation and lawful permission to work to undocumented youth that came to the United States as minors. A misconception between DACA and the DREAM Act is that DACA does not provide permanent legal status whereas the DREAM Act does provide a pathway towards permanent residence or citizenship (The American Immigration Council, 2017).

In the current political debate and news cycle, social justice movements have highlighted the extreme impact that policies like DACA or the DREAM Act have on immigrant communities that for a great majority impact the Latinx and/or Hispanic communities. 'Latinx' will be used throughout this paper and is used as gender inclusive terminology to reference people that identify with the Latino/a community. Continuing the discussion of several topics that fall under the wide umbrella of the Latinx identity, readers will find that this identity is often grouped in or associated with that of the undocumented immigrant. Undocumented is the term that will replace unauthorized or illegal to describe those without proper legal status. In early 2018, a government shutdown occurred because of the division between the two dominant political parties and their inability to create a bi-partisan bill that reigns as a 'win-win' situation with all constituents of the

United States and the estimated 800,000 Dreamers impacted by that respective piece of legislation, in addition to other budgetary disputes (Pullen).

Social justice movements typically challenge the status quo, and one that will be highlighted and thoroughly explored throughout this paper will be that of the Latinx undocumented immigrant in the United States. This movement will particularly be explored through one alternative news source and platform that holds these identities (Latinx, undocumented, immigrant) very close to its own voice, and often amplifies a clear message for awareness and policy change. This paper will aim to explore the identity of the Latinx undocumented immigrant through news coverage provided by *Latino Rebels*, a social justice focused online media source. *Latino Rebels* began its online publication in the year 2011, and serves its readers and community members by featuring news articles, podcasts, using social media (most notably, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube) and an interactive map called *Migramaps*.

## II. Literature Review

Immigration as a concept is rooted in different kinds of policy, which can ultimately be shaped by the constituents and its policy makers. How Americans make these decisions and form opinions can vary. In accordance with gatekeeping theory, many scholars believe that different kinds of media can shape the perceptions as to what the public finds important. This in turn, can shape the opinions around the different issues or phenomenon discussed as well. In a study conducted for the *Howard Journal of Communications* concluded that 39 percent of Americans access their news digitally versus print or radio broadcasts of news. This means that digital forms of news reporting, such as, online articles and short news packages concerned with immigration, will shape almost half of the American public's perception on issues surrounding immigration. In news stories that pertain to reports on Latinx immigration to the United States, different

perceptions of the undocumented immigrant are created. This perception can be positive or negative and is ultimately shaped by the writing/language, tone and the major voices that the reporter chooses to include when describing new populations of Latinx coming into the United States and how policy has an impact on them.

Dana Mastro et al. led studies on the use of language abstraction to reinforce existing biases over different ethnic groups. Mastro used theories like self-categorization theory, linguistic group bias, and the linguistic category model. Self-categorization theory posits that people are cognitively predisposed to divide their social environments into in-groups (groups they belong to) and out-groups (the *other*). Thereafter, people are more likely to see their own in-groups and process information in a way that upholds this positive identity over that of other out-groups. The authors of this article then write that, “self-serving intergroup biases can manifest in linguistic patterns that positively reflect one’s in-group compared to an out-group.” In other words, language that is used to describe groups that different than one’s own are more likely to reinforce existing stereotypes or simply place one’s own in group in a more positive light. This is the main idea of linguistic bias. The linguistic category model is quite complicated, but can be broken down into the thought that language has four different classes of words. These words can be put on a spectrum, ranging from concrete to abstract. Where the word is placed on this spectrum can also determine the nature of intergroups’ different social perceptions (See Fig. 1). As shown in the figure, adjectives are considered as being on the most abstract end of the spectrum, because they are believed to represent generalizations about or different qualities of different subjects (specific people, groups of people, persons, things). To the left of it, are state verbs, which are meant to be subjective in describing mental and emotional states though not directly seen or observed. Next, are interpretative action verbs, which can make up different

kinds of actions though context is required for proper interpretation. Lastly, the most concrete kinds of words on the spectrum are descriptive action words. These are the most concrete because they are based on observable information on specific behaviors.

Figure 1: The Linguistic Category Model



The more abstract the words and language patterns used to describe different groups of people, the more likely it is for the body of information to portray outgroups negatively and create more positive prototypes. On the other side, concrete language can be used to show instances where in-groups can be portrayed negatively and portray out-groups in a positive light.

The authors of this article also conducted a content analysis that concluded that negative news depictions of migrants used very abstract language versus positive representations of migrants, which veered more towards the use of concrete language. Moreover, linguistic patterns could reflect the social identity of the journalist and therefore have an impact on news consumers by passing on group-based stereotypes that assert existing intergroup biases in the U.S. Lastly, this can lead to better depictions of Whites as a result (as they still make up the majority in journalism), and more negative representations of ethnic minority groups. This long-term exposure is linked many negative intergroup feelings and perceptions. These conclusions were reached by conducting content analysis of newspaper coverage focused on stories that centered around the Minute Man Project, an anti-immigrant organization that was formed to “serve ‘as part of a blocking force against entry into the U.S. by illegal aliens,’” (136). Selection of news coverage of the Minute Man Project ensures that it will reflect intergroup dimensions. The “Minute Man project” is in reference to coverage of a conservative activist organization that

begun in August of 2004 by a private group that felt responsible to extra-judicially monitor the U.S.–Mexican border for incoming undocumented immigrants.

Content analysis driven articles have so far aided my research most when breaking down the image of undocumented immigrants through the eyes of the media. Quisaat also made use of content analysis to illustrate how framing can lead to the media creating different and often negative representations of immigrants in the United States, more so if the immigrants are undocumented. Their analysis focused on stories from *The New York Times* and *USA Today*, and specifically looked at two policy debates: on the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (also known as H.R. 4437) and the Arizona Senate Bill 1070 (2010). Both policies were similar in nature because they had to do with the criminalization of undocumented immigrants. Quisaat used framing research by looking at contradictory news frames, and how this phenomenon can lead to the further confusion of controversial policies such as these and make it even more difficult to reach common ground when writing or voting on policy. Though journalists aren't the only voice in shaping the image of the immigrant, their frames and portrayal of immigrants can determine as to where immigrants stand in America's social ladder. This analysis came to find eight dominant frameworks: Nation of Immigrants, Failed Immigration Policy, Dangerous Immigrants, Immigrant Takeover, Cheap Labor, Immigrant-as-other, Party Politics and Protest. Their sampling analyzed articles from the years 2006 and 2010, and over time the Nation of Immigrants framework (a superficially positive framework) went from 28.2% usage to 6.3% usage in 2010 and the negative Dangerous Immigrants framework went up from 15.5% to 22.4% usage (Quisaat 585).

The Failed Immigration Policy framework uses conflict as its centerpiece, and recreates immigration in terms of the problem being the government unable to perform its role rather than



immigration itself. However, the lexicon (word choice) associated with this framework reinforces negative feelings that Americans have; that lexicon included words like: *frustration, furious, punitive, lacking, piecemeal, overdue, patchwork, broken, neglect* and *slow*. These words can still create the image of the United States being burdened with the weight of other issues rather than taking care of its “native” population. The Dangerous Immigrant framework usually involves security measures being added to immigration policy. It evidently portrays immigrants as criminals and their acts of crossing the border as violations of U.S. sovereignty. The lexicon for this framework included: *illegal, aliens, fugitives, hoards, lawbreakers* (to describe and criminalize undocumented immigrants), *flow, flood, invasion* (to describe movement), *harm, threat* (to describe prescience and actions in the U.S.). The media reports the Dangerous Immigrant framework in a way calls attention to undocumented immigrants entering the country as life or death situations for border patrol agents and to elicit anger in readers. An interesting contradiction that the writers found was that, “migration exposes the paradox of democracy as its people grapple with the contradiction of unity and plurality. Securitization has the ability to preserve existing boundaries and keep identity strong and legitimate” (Quisaat 586). This means that though people want democracy and the inclusion of options and diverse viewpoints, they also find this same phenomenon alarming. The Cheap Labor framework centers around the tolerance of undocumented immigration because it benefits Americans and the economy, by reinforcing common thoughts that immigrants ‘take the jobs no one wants.’ This framework contrasts with the creation of H.R. 4437 because it is founded on the belief that undocumented immigrants want to take advantage of the welfare state without contributing to taxes or the economy when undocumented immigrants do both of those things (H.R. 4437 wanted to remove the ability for undocumented immigrants to have access to public education,

healthcare and other services). Lastly, the Immigrant-as-other framework portrays undocumented immigrants as unable to assimilate because the ‘cultural-gap’ between Us and Them is too wide. However, in this framework, assimilation is a “one-way street” in that speaking their native language is fine as long as English is learned at some point and their accent isn’t too overbearing. The lexicon includes words like that of: *unfit* and *backward*.

It is due to phenomenon like the use of negative lexicon to describe immigrants which leads to stereotypes and effectively brings about social justice movements. When a movement is forming, the most popular tool to inform and gather a platform of followers is through press (Ostertag 1). Conventional measures of a journal typically include importance, circulation, financial stability and longevity; but social movement journals need to go beyond this in order to be significant. As Bob Ostertag argues, social movement press, even journals that seem marginal at first glance, present an important role in shaping American society and have the ability to push news forward into the mainstream. An argument in favor of the alternative press like that of movement journals that Ostertag makes is the emphasis that traditional sources place on “objectivity”, circulation, longevity, geographic distribution and advertising revenue in order to maximize profits, and not as ends themselves (Ostertag 2). In his opinion, “objectivity” and “unbiased” have become buzzwords for media, but before big media oligopolists, these ideals did not exist. When journalism began to take shape, newspapers and magazines were written because the people involved had a point of view they wanted to spread in the first place. To Ostertag, it doesn’t make sense to write off alternative or movement press because, “the notion that journalists should—or even could—write without a viewpoint or opinion emerged as a necessary ideological underpinning of media oligopoly, the selling pit for the idea that media control by few is not inherently detrimental to democratic institutions or culture,” (Ostertag 3).

Overall, social justice press makes the effort to introduce and promote new ideas and challenge the status quo. He also looks to William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* and the abolitionist movement as an example of social justice journalism. This publication was fully operated by one person who never looked to other sources for information, yet it remains one of the most significant newspapers in U.S. history. What makes this example crucial for the case of social justice journalism is that in its writing, it demanded for immediate change as opposed to gradual change. It later coined the term "Garrisonian" which in contemporary writing tends to reference a style that is, "uncompromising [in its] willingness to speak one's mind on social justice issues, regardless of the consequences," (Ostertag 4). In Ostertag's opinion, discrediting social movement journalism is not necessarily censorship, but gatekeeping is a covert method of censorship. Gatekeeping theory is the framing of news, entertainment and advertising by a select few media organizations, so that they ultimately control what the public deems as desirable or important. This is also a method that can limit social change so that social norms continue to drive profit and are consistent with corporate interests (Ostertag 17).

People who have positions of power can also exercise some social power too in their daily duties, but those that do not can exercise this through publications rooted in advocating for change (Ostertag 10). For Ostertag, institutions hold social power, and these institutions can be anywhere from churches, to schools or families, mafias, states, antislavery committees or environmental journals. Social movement press has the ability to influence socially as much as the government does because they both have the ability to set relations between members and aggregate social resources (Ostertag 7). However, institutions must function even when social milieu is changing. States are hard to reform, but it is easier to reform than to start a completely new one (Ostertag 7). The main thesis of Ostertag's work is: "that the history of social justice

movement journalism can be understood only in the context of the particular movements of which each journal was a part,” (Ostertag 14). Ultimately, he means that words themselves cannot force change or make history or make more democracy. What happens after the words are written or spoken, however, have that power, and how the words are shared also matters.

### III. Research Question

Tone is most interconnected with the concept of language and how specific wording can shape how audiences perceive foreign populations (for the purposes of my research and interest, it will focus on undocumented immigrants). Lexicon contributes to the overall tone, and can illustrate different intergroup biases or overall linguistic biases that journalists may be reflecting when reporting on issues of immigration. This also can contribute to the understanding of different reports on policy and immigration discourses, which is ultimately shaped by how abstract or concrete the reporter’s lexicon came to being. This is particularly relevant to gatekeeping theory, because as long as these policies and topics are constant in the news cycle, the public will be more inclined to develop an understanding for immigration policy and in turn create an opinion regarding undocumented immigrants. In this fashion, language used in reporting uses different layers to build different interpretations that consumers can decode and form as a part of their own views on the policy being discussed or of the identity of the undocumented immigrant.

### IV. Methodology

To better understand where most of the Latinx identity has been shaped and how migratory issues have been brought to the forefront of the public conscious, the very first articles published by *Latino Rebels* containing coverage on issues like that of DACA and the DREAM Act will be analyzed. There is limited information as to how the publication came to be and who the full-

time staff are, however, all articles are archived by month and year. The earliest publications date back to 2011. A total of fourteen articles from the years 2011-2018 have been selected based on relevance to issues of social justice in the Latinx community, particularly those concerned in advocating for the undocumented immigrant, DACA recipients and those that qualify/identify themselves as DREAMers. I also decided to focus on this topic for my senior year thesis because of my connection to the undocumented community and the fact that I too identify as Latinx. Throughout this research, I also hope to better familiarize myself with the messages that are important to my own community so I may help amplify the voices of those not included.

I selected publications as early as 2011 when the site first debuted because it was post 2010, a formative year that introduced and catapulted DACA and the DREAM Act into the mainstream consciousness/news cycle. I decided to go as far into 2018 for more contemporary coverage of these pieces of legislation and the image of the undocumented immigrant overall to examine any similarities or differences between the Obama and Trump administration. Word choice, lexicon, images, videos and an interactive feature of the publication called “Migramaps” will be discussed, and will look to answer my research question of how *Latino Rebels* goes beyond the scope of a traditional news outlet by providing coverage on issues, advocacy and an inclusive community/platform all in their publication; while also adapting stereotypes into characteristics of their voice and brand which translates into empowerment for the Latinx community.

Two articles and podcasts by a radio show done for *National Public Radio* will also be analyzed and incorporated, however, it will be done to provide better context of the history of civil rights in the United States and how some may view the migratory rights movement when compared to the civil rights movement that was popular in the 1960s. These articles will also provide insight as to how other American reporters may portray and include the voices of

undocumented Latinxs in a radio show that is supposed to cater to a multi-cultural and diverse audience overall, versus *Latino Rebels*, which is written by in intergroup perspective of Latinx community members.

It can still make the thought of how some publications are viewed as being more objective and reputable than others very confusing. In my research, I decided to look into the genre that *Latino Rebels* is best characterized as, which is 'Alternative Press. Patricia J. Case, who compiles an annual list of the best alternative news sources, views that there are troublesome limitations that readers and the public can encounter when only selecting the most "objective and reputable" publishers. Though it is taught as an important pillar or concern of journalism, media objectivity is effectively a myth (Case 86). For Case, objectivity can be disregarded in other social science disciplines, especially when considering phenomena like intergroup bias; all collections will have a persuasive point or political polarization. Objectivity is an outdated concept now that it's better understood that fairness matters more than objectivity. This thought has been adopted by some journalists, according to Phillip Meyer, professor emeritus and former holder of the Knight Chair in Journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Weaver et. al 490).

Despite this, alternative news sources are ignored since they take clear stances on issues (political, social, economic, and so on). According to Case, alternative media can provide more depth in terms of perspective than commercial media (Case 87). In my analysis, *Latino Rebels* provides more context and depth in their stories due to the direct perspective of undocumented Latinxs through video clips, direct quotes and links to non-profit organizations that advocate directly for the causes they believe in. *NPR* also does this, and does a good job of balancing 'expert voices' alongside of those directly impacted by legislation or political commentary. The show and specific episodes selected for comparison make use of journalists that are immigrants

themselves, the children of immigrants or simply people of color that sympathize with the undocumented community or wish to place more attention or emphasis on the issue. I make the claim that *Latino Rebels* also makes use of stereotypes to create its brand and identity, but it overall makes an empowering statement by reimagining the negative stereotypes.

## V. Background

To fully understand what *Latino Rebels* represents to a community and overall as a platform, a larger context must be provided. *Latino Rebels* makes use of social science and social justice by covering political movements and taking firm positions on said movements through commentary, careful word choice, tone and imagery. Famous German political economist, sociologist and philosopher Max Weber saw the effects of mass communication especially through journalists. He is best known for his influence in social theory and social research (“Max Weber”). Weber was supportive of the highly-educated journalists and “saw them not only as political communicators but also as potential leaders of the masses through their ability to control the dissemination of information and opinion. He did not view journalists as impartial conveyors of information, but argued that they should use their abilities for *political causes*,” (Weaver et.al 483). Weber kept this practice in his own work and tried to be what he called ‘a responsible journalist.’ For Weber, the responsible journalist was one that advocated for justice and did not simply ‘state the facts.’ The *Latino Rebels* are a product of this thought, as they are responsible journalists in charge of communicating and advocating for the voiceless, undocumented, and otherwise marginalized. It is not known if the writers of *Latino Rebels* are highly educated, but this is not to discredit them even if they are not, as this would go against the principles of *Latino Rebels* anyway if they were to discriminate against a person that does not have access to a higher education. *Latino Rebels* looks to advocate and include the voices of all undocumented and

Latinxs, especially those that have not had the opportunity study. It is one of their main points in reforming the DREAM Act, because it does not provide an equal opportunity to those in marginalized communities or have had to sacrifice schooling in order to survive. It is this idealization of the highly educated that creates the trope of the “good immigrant” but is also a stereotype they must rely on to push forward any kind of immigration legislation that benefits undocumented youth.

An American scholar that thought differently to Weber was a man named Walter Lippman. Walter Lippman was an American reporter, writer and political commentator best known for his 1922 book titled, *Public Opinion*, and is regarded as the “father of modern journalism” (Britannica). Lippman would provide a counter argument where he would say that there is a difference between the social scientist and the journalist (as did Weber, but he combined them nonetheless). In Lippman’s book *Public Opinion*, he argues that “news and truth are not the same thing, and must be clearly distinguished,” (Weaver et.al 485). To Lippman, a journalist is obligated to draw attention to an event (to signalize it”) (Weaver et.al 485). The *Latino Rebels* do just this by highlighting the voices that are missing from public discourse or are automatically criminalized the more politically active they become. It makes one as a reader wonder that if the *Latino Rebels* continued to ‘signalize’ events surrounding political discourse on the topic of immigration and avoided their own style in terms of tone that they *could* be considered a more ‘credible’ source by this standard and less of an alternative news media source.

In fact, many American journalists from the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> centuries did not see themselves as any different from social scientists; truth was synonymous to fact. In the 1940s, the Commission on Freedom of the Press recommended that in the US, the press is to provide,” a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day’s events in a context which gives them



meaning...” (qtd. Weaver et.al 487). In this case, news does need more than just plain description of facts, and effectively needs both context and some interpretation so that it can be fully understood. Again, the *Latino Rebels* do this by providing context from the populations that are directly affected by current policy and political discourse surrounding the topic of immigration.

According to Dr. Jane B. Singer, professor emeritus of the University of Iowa for the school of Journalism and Mass Communication, journalism is undergoing very fast changes in terms of structure (“Jane B. Singer”). There are four key areas of change. These areas are as follows: changes in economic structure, organization, relationships and narrative. Overall, alternative revenue is being sought out due to the failure of previously successful business models, organization is changing because newsrooms are changing very much in terms of size and responsibilities of each member, narratives are becoming more postmodern and transparent, and relationships between audience and author are changing due to open constructions of meaning (Singer 89). For this reason, digital media is here to stay, and we can most likely expect that platforms like that of *Latino Rebels* will only continue to grow. However, the *Latino Rebels* site makes little use of digital ad space. The platform they use is *WordPress*, and they may have opted out of advertising space. They do, however, rely on donations from their followers. It is not known how many writers make up the *Latino Rebels* team, so it is unknown how much of the work is given to each respective team member. The narratives and tone though, are very much postmodern and conversational in most pieces. This tone does give a more transparent air, as Singer points out, being that the *Latino Rebels* do try to employ a ‘telling it like it is’ style in their pieces.

Singer also notes that “j-blogs” (journalism blogs) are on the rise, and are composed of conversational tones, not containing the ‘objective nature of news’ component in writing, and containing first person more than third person style narration (Singer 93). Due to this make-up, I believe that the *Latino Rebels* fit this genre very well if the *Rebelde* identity is generalized to one person speaking out for a wider audience. The audience in this case would be the Latinx community and the undocumented. It is important to remember, however, that they do incorporate the voices of freelancers and guest writers so that their platform is fairer and representative of the diversity found with the Latinx community. In terms of transparency, *Latino Rebels* is very good about including hyperlinks to their statements and where they have gathered information. Ultimately, being online allows you to hyperlink to evidence rather than the traditional media’s tendency to just ask people to “trust them.” In all my selected samples of articles, the *Latino Rebels* source their information by using hyperlinks to primary or secondary sources. By these standards, this raises the question that by making this widespread practice, couldn’t they be considered an effective and transparent news source?

As a platform, the *Latino Rebels* are making strides in a form of journalism that has slowly been on the rise during this new age of widespread and global communication. Though some may see it as being like that of the Arab Spring, where social media and the internet provided a new means of communication for citizen journalists to attract attention to issues that were not being covered as in depth in mainstream media, *Latino Rebels* offers a platform where those engaged in political movements get the coverage they desire and communicate alongside other writers and readers that have similar news values in mind. Now independent journalist and former medical correspondent for CNN, Andrew S. Holtz, uses journalism to also provide Public health and environmental awareness commentary in his work. It is his view that: “stories not

only shape how we view the world beyond our direct experience, they are so powerful that they can even shape our understanding of events we have witnessed,” (Holtz 267). To simply have fact without context is fruitless when delivering news. Finally, it is not the news stories themselves that produce action, rather it is in the hands of the now informed audience. News does “gate keep” in terms of highlighting what should be at the forefront of societal conversation, but it also attracts the attention of people in positions of power that can take action and make change (Holtz 267).

## VI. Analysis

*Latino Rebels* is a perfect example of providing information and creating dialogue that can initiate change, and is ultimately why publications of this nature are important. Their advocacy and non-sugar coated presentation of news and analysis of new policy that impacts the Latinx immigrant community includes the voices of the undocumented first hand. Though it can be viewed as a very emotional niche community/alternative news source, it is the direct result of legacy publications lacking in providing accurate and varied representation of Latinx immigrants. In more contemporary coverage of immigration discourse by *Latino Rebels*, the myth of the criminal immigrant is turned on its head.

Throughout this analysis, the *Latino Rebels* refer to ‘rebeldes,’ which is simply Spanish for the word rebels. Referencing *rebeldes* is something *Latino Rebels* does to convey a larger message on behalf of their platform, and it is also where an identity is formed for all those that identify with any of the issues or wish to provide further commentary on the discourse surrounding their identities. What it means to be a *rebelde* is spelled out in an article titled, “The Myth of the Criminal Alien,” as written by the *Latino Rebels*. In the article, stereotypes that surround the immigrant identity as well as misinformation are debunked by using reliable non-

partisan sources as evidence to their claims. Overall, the article highlights that the current definition of criminal alien has been expanded due to an executive order by the Trump administration, which states that sanctuary cities violate federal law, and that all immigrants (language used in executive order depicts immigrants as aliens) that have violated *any* law, no matter how small, should be removed from the United States (“Executive Order: Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States”).

*Latino Rebels* directly counters and says this expansion of the definition of what it means to be a criminal alien is due to an anti-immigrant sentiment due to the recurring aim to immediately criminalize the immigrant identity though studies demonstrate immigrants are lesser of a threat than native born individuals, and represent a small portion of people in jail. *Latino Rebels* clarifies that immigrants overall make up a small percentage of those incarcerated, excluding immigration offenses. All numbers and statistics are verified and made available by nonpartisan and nonprofit organizations like the American Immigration Council, which cites data provided by the FBI, US Census and the Congregational Research Service (Hernández). *Latino Rebels* does assert that family values (a quality found in ‘the good immigrant’) are important to the *rebelde*, for the make the connection that deportations do result in the separation and imprisonment of families who are typically seeking better economic opportunity or fleeing political persecution. Despite this, *Latino Rebels* makes the assertion that the personal stories of others very rarely incite sympathy and instead spread the image of a ‘hardened criminal.’ This kind of thinking is very like that of James Baldwin’s overview of race relations in the United States—not so much that it is a race issue, but that there is a culture of apathy:

“I’m certain again, you know, that like - again, like most white Americans I have, you know, encountered, they have no - you know, I’m sure they have nothing whatever against negroes.

That is not - that's really not the question. You know, the question is really a kind of apathy and ignorance which is a price we pay for segregation. That's what segregation means. It - you don't know what's happening on the other side of the wall because you don't want to know," (*I am Not Your Negro*).

*Latino Rebels* conveys and echoes this message, too, because they also incorporate the stories of the undocumented families that face the consequences of a complicated political climate intersecting a less than perfect immigration system and due process, which can be seen as very emotionally moving and heartbreaking. In this instance, however, *Latino Rebels* mostly advocate for the undocumented immigrant and the Latinx community, though they are a very progressive and intersectional publication overall. In this instance, the wall is less metaphorical (remember, President Trump won the election on a big campaign promise to increase the Mexican/American border with 'better' security), and segregation occurs when undocumented people are labeled as illegal and criminals. Personal stories of interest in this article included the extreme cases like that of Juan Francisco López Sanchez and Victor Areliano Matínez Ramírez that were used as talking points for months around immigration policy. In both cases, these undocumented people were also convicted criminals and documented as being deported and having re-entered the United States on multiple occasions (Hernández).

Another key component to the *rebelde* identity is not taking government issued information at face value, and questioning information. The stereotype of the criminalized immigrant is embraced and used ironically by the Latino Rebels, and is best sensed in their raunchy or edgy tone that can be picked up in a lot of their pieces. In an article titled, "Yes, 68% of ICE's Recent Gang Member Arrests were US Citizens," Latino Rebels has no problem in denouncing ICE for pushing forward a narrative that would indicate that immigrants are often

gang members with a violent history. However, that is not the case if the numbers are looked at far more closely. *Latino Rebels* makes the point that ICE tried to ‘bury the lead’ and not include the important information that of the 1,378 arrests conducted across the country (making it one of the largest gang surges ever conducted), 933 were United States citizens. The original release by ICE also stresses the fact that two of those detained were DACA eligible immigrants, though around that same time 1,000 unaccompanied minors were detained at the Mexican/American border. ICE also mentions how many of those detained had a relationship to MS-13, a notorious Central American gang that has been used in the current presidential administration’s reasoning as to why more border security is needed. In comparison, that means that not even a percent of all those detained were gang members, at *Latino Rebels* comparison. It is important to note that *Latino Rebels* takes the next step to look at data more critically, and smugly ends the article with, “but that’s ICE for you. Trying to play the shell game, (“Yes, 68% of ICE’s Recent Gang Member Arrests were US Citizens).”

As *rebeldes*, *Latino Rebels* is not afraid of questioning bigger governmental organizations like that of ICE, and they are also not afraid of sharing the stories of injustice where ICE may overstepped their boundaries as an institution. In a more recent article titled, “Undocumented Activist Targeted by ICE Asks Immigration Judge to Throw Out Case Based on First Amendment Violations,” *Latino Rebels* welcomes a guest organization named Mijente. As they describe in a smaller caption before their full article, “Mijente is a digital and grassroots hub for Latinx and Chicanx movement building and organizing that seeks to increase the profile of policy issues that matter to our communities and increase the participation of Latinx and Chicanx people in the broader movements for racial, economic, climate and gender justice.” The article centers around a foundress of the organization named Maru Mora-Villalpando, whom was sent a

deportation hearing notice in December of 2017 for her “anti-ICE” organizing. In this article, Mijente includes the original document in which she appeals to the immigration judge to throw out the case because it is based on her work in advocating for the undocumented and a clear infringement of her First Amendment rights. A Mijente spokesperson details that ICE is specifically targeting people like Mora-Villalpando who organize against the Trump administration’s racially motivated deportation agenda. The article gives the background that Mora-Villalpando is a mother of a U.S. citizen currently attending college. This kind of feature demonstrates how *Latino Rebels* acts as a platform for others to share information and their sentiments on current issues that directly impact them. By allowing guest writers, especially on behalf of organizations that have a clear mission statement that stands by the Latinx and undocumented community alike shows that *Latino Rebels* goes above and beyond as a publication due to their nature in providing information, language and a platform where readers and followers can mobilize and demand change or raise awareness (“Undocumented Activist Targeted by ICE”).

Again, some may be weary of alternative press or social justice journalism because of how forthright they are with political opinions, and it is no secret that *Latino Rebels* has some serious reservations with President Donald Trump. In article published on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017 titled, “When in doubt: MS-13!” the *rebeldes* do not shy away from poking fun at the current administration’s hyperbole description and response gang activity coming from Central America. The tone of the article begins as controversial and humorous, as they state Trump is “pushing the immigrant criminal terrorist thing again,” and provide a link to a previous article where the Trump administration stress the enormous threat that undocumented immigrants present within the United States. This article contains the video of a White House Briefing that centered solely

on Central American gangs like that of MS-13. *Latino Rebels* makes their clear position that gang paranoia is overblown, and links to *Fact Check* which corrects Donald Trump for blaming the Obama administration for allowing MS-13 gangs to form cities in the US (perhaps in reference to Sanctuary Cities). It also provides the insight that gangs like that of MS-13 are “made in the USA,” again, challenging the status quo and information put out by the US government by providing more context versus stating that immigrants themselves are ones involved in gang related activity. This is the only commentary *Latino Rebels* provides on the issue, then provides the transcript to the full text of the White House Briefing (“When In Doubt: MS-13!”). A little commentary is provided on behalf of *Latino Rebels*, but ultimately all the facts are there with full video transcripts made available for the reader to make their own assertions as to whether they disagree or not.

An article analyzed that also does this is titled “The Following Video From The 2018 Refugee Caravan Was Made by Migrants by Latino Rebels,” and is the most recent publication in my batch of selected articles (being that it was published April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018). This article begins by opening the position that Fox News and President Trump have been causing hysteria on the subject of the refugee caravan, which is very similar to the piece on MS-13 gang activity. This article contains a video embedded from an independent video maker “Neta,” which was there to film a vast majority of the refugee caravan. The video contains footage of peaceful marchers in the caravan (all in Spanish) detailing why they march (for better lives and in solidarity/advocacy for all people fleeing due to political, religious, issues of creed, sexual or gender identity. Followed after this video are tweets by Adolfo Flores of *Buzzfeed News*, whom has been covering the subject extensively on his Twitter feed because he is embedded with the caravan. There are only four tweets, but they are quite descriptive and provide direct links to be able to



keep up with Flores on the developing topic. Prior this, however, *Latino Rebels* states: “if you care about getting real news about the caravan,” then places Flores’ tweets as an accurate source of information. This little statement is enough to continue to demonstrate the humorous, provocative and telling-it-like-it-is attitude that *rebeldes* clearly are not afraid to have (“The Following Video From The 2018 Refugee Caravan Was Made by Migrants”).

For this developing topic a day prior, the *rebeldes* published an article on behalf of an organization that supports refugees of all creeds and wanted to deliver the message that stood at the heart of the Refugee Caravan of 2018, and this organization is called “Pueblo Sin Fronteras” which translates to “The Town Without Borders.” The article is titled, “Pueblo Sin Fronteras Stands in Solidarity with Displaced People and Denounces Calls for Violence Against the Refugee Caravan,” which is quite self-explanatory as to what the article touches upon. The article begins with an image of marchers with their faces covered to protect themselves from the harsh sun-rays holding large protest banners. It is difficult to properly understand what is written on these banners, but what I could gather is that one of them reads: “WE ARE ALL AMERICA.” *Pueblo Sin Fronteras* delves into the details as to why this caravan is taking place, stating that Mexican and U.S. policies support systemic violence against these refugees marching and actively fleeing from their Central American homes due to political corruption, violence, and other threats against their humanity. These Mexican and U.S. policies exist on behalf of initiatives recently signed in 2017, which ultimately criminalizes human rights defenders and continues to put the lives of refugees and asylum seekers in danger. A clear majority of those fleeing are from Honduras, whom are fleeing political corruption due to U.S. involvement in their government. At the end of the article, *Pueblo Sin Fronteras* poses their position that Trump is opportunistically using the refugee caravans as a pretext for threatening immigrants already in

the country, specifically recipients of DACA protections, being that he has given the “nuclear option” of removing protections from deportation and detention, further waging the futures of DACA immigrants as a bargaining chip with Mexico. Mid-way and at the end of the article are also images of children (as young as a month old) involved in the caravan and of a Honduran man marching with the Honduran flag. This article, like all of the articles analyzed and featured on *Latino Rebels* from guest contributors, are thought provoking, sentimental, but also contain all of the most current and up to date information on the issue at hand. These articles are effective because they are written by well-informed writers that sympathize with the issue, have experience in their corresponding fields, and provide enough context as to why the social movements are needed to begin with.

Another example where *Latino Rebels* acts like a microphone for other organizations that share the same values as the publication is the article titled “Virtually Every Latino Organization Is Condemning Decision to Ask for Citizenship in 2020 Census.” This article is not done by a guest contributor, but has many statements on the announcement that the Census will include a citizenship question in the year 2020. The organizations and statements reiterated are the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (a coalition of 45 Latinx organizations), The Mexican American Defense and Educational Fund, and The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials. All statements condemn the action, stating that the census will be incredibly inaccurate if this question is included and is ultimately a result of the current presidential administration’s xenophobic rhetoric. The article concludes with the fact that the Attorney General of California, Xavier Becerra, is taking action by filing a lawsuit against this decision. The article also includes the official PDF of the lawsuit and the following statement by the Attorney General: “An accurate census count sets in motion the services and benefits that shape

the future of every Californian. The census constitutes the backbone for planning how and where our communities will invest taxpayer dollars. California simply has too much to lose to allow the Trump Administration to botch this important decennial obligation. What the Trump Administration is requesting is not just alarming, it is an unconstitutional attempt to disrupt an accurate Census count,” (qtd. “Virtually Every Latino Organization”). In this article, *Latino Rebels* amplifies the message of the action being condemned, but it does not provide any of their own commentary or input.

What is most interesting so far in this analysis is that LR has an appreciation for the theme that the United States is a nation of immigrants. Very recently, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration services (USCIS) revised its mission statement and removed the following phrases: America’s promise as a nation of immigrants” and “granting immigration and citizenship benefits.” They present this recent news through the activism and perspective of a migrant rights group based in New York, that functions like an Immigrant Arts Coalition. *Latino Rebels* posted the link to the new USCIS mission statement, and the letter the group penned to President Trump as to how the omission of those phrases can be hurtful. However, in the initial introduction of the situation, *Latino Rebels* places the word harmful in quotations, which can cause the audience if they disagree or were simply borrowing the language from the group. The fact that *Latino Rebels* decided to run with the story and publish it can mean that they do agree that the United States come from a long history of immigration, or it could mean that they are trying to be inclusive of the larger narrative surrounding the conversation of immigration reform (Fitzpatrick).

The *Latino Rebels* are a self-described welcoming space that relies on voluntary efforts to magnify community voices and self-expression. They began in 2011 with only two members and have since then welcomed authors from all over the world. With an enormous global audience

and over 3 million visitors on their website, the *Latino Rebels* are on all the following platforms: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, and Instagram (“Support”). The *Latino Rebels* are self-sufficient due to the fact they rely on volunteer work, meaning that their work is driven on what some would refer to today as *citizen journalism*. Citizen journalism has seen an incredible rise from the days of the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York to the Arab Spring and documentation of citizens under fire in Syria in 2010. Citizen journalism relies on the voices of everyday people with access to the internet, social media and their own technological devices (namely camera phones) to fully develop their stories and document the injustices done to their respective groups and communities (Bulkey). The *Latino Rebels* also keep their audience informed by providing full transcripts of any relevant legislation surrounding topics that may impact the undocumented community, sometimes offering little to comment or opinion on government transcripts but subtly inserting their opinion, using relevant images depicting undocumented migrants at protests or advocating for their rights (“Full Transcript: Bipartisan Framework for Comprehensive Immigration Reform”). In more contemporary coverage, the *Latino Rebels* do this “passing along the information” style of reporting by reiterating announcements on behalf of the United States’ Department of Homeland Security. In the article titled, “Here is what DHS is saying about DACA Renewals and Whether It Will be Targeting Dreamers Now,” the article reports on the news that DHS will not be targeting or prioritizing people waiting for their DACA renewals for deportation. The official statement made on behalf of acting DHS Secretary Tyler Q. Houlton is directly quoted and simply reiterates what the secretary said what rules will be put in place when looking for deportation or renewal. What is surprising, however, is that *Latino Rebels* does not make any commentary, even after the Secretary uses language that they would normally not incorporate in their original content; words

and language like “aliens,” “threat to public security or safety,” “absent negative factors.” At the end of the article, the link to the official statement is also provided. This demonstrates how varied the content on *Latino Rebels* can be. Everything is categorized under tags, and those that do not contain “opinion,” are articles of this nature that just “state the facts” are reiterate the messages of the larger United States governmental organizations (“Here is what DHS is saying about DACA Renewals”).

The *Latino Rebels* also have a remarkable feature on their main website called “Migramap.” In this section of their page, citizens can report any Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deportation raids they may have witnessed or know of. They provide a disclaimer that all information will be kept anonymous and provide a link to the “United We Dream” website with an informational card that describes the rights of undocumented immigrants when questioned by ICE agents or other government agencies (“Migramap”). Their site also features a radio station, which is broadcast using YouTube and their “Live stream” feature, as well as their usual news content, which is tagged under a variety of topics.

In my preliminary sampling of articles, it was rather difficult to get publications or articles that were published around the same time because different outlets began producing content around the same time. To begin, I selected three articles or podcasts from all three sources for analysis. The date for the earliest and most relevant article on behalf of the *Latino Rebels* is June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011, and it is titled “Meet the new generation of Latino Leaders: The DREAMERS Who Are Changing the World and Keeping Hope Alive.” The author of the article is not listed, and the byline simply states *Latino Rebels*. What is unique about this text is that it begins with a poem titled “Long Live the Dreamers” by Amy Mejia, and is immediately followed by a headshot of a DREAMer. The post ultimately advocates for a campaign or project

that advocates for awareness of DREAMers and is titled “67 Sueños” or “67 Dreams”. Attached to the brief article is a video that demonstrates the group’s mission, which is to highlight the efforts of immigrant youth that strive change the world. The video breaks down the name of the group, as related to the group known as the DREAMers, young adults that entered the United States with no proper documentation as minors. At the time of this publication, it was estimated that 67% of undocumented youth were not pursuing a higher education program nor were they criminals. The video was composed first hand by undocumented youth and included testimonies of students that identified with the movement, sharing feelings of fear if being deported and their encounters with ICE. Under the video, their mission statement and a section called “elbow room” was also included, which explained the economic hardship and connection to poverty many undocumented youth people contributing to the discourse often omit. The group point to the 67% of DREAMers that have to rely on extremely underfunded school systems and why some may revert to petty crime out of economic necessity. This inclusion of the voice that is often shut out is a reoccurring theme for the *Latino Rebels*. In a media that promotes a political discourse that often pushes forward an image of the “good immigrant,” *Latino Rebels* provides a platform for those that do deserve representation but are often shut out due to circumstances they can’t control (like access to adequate resources). This article also demonstrates how the *Latino Rebels* rely on the stereotype of the criminalized immigrant in terms of content, however, they do take a different approach by attempting to oust it (“Meet the New Generation of Latino Leaders”).

A related article that iterates a similar message is one that is titled “VIDEO: What It Means to Be a DREAMer,” also written under the by-line ‘Latino Rebels.’ This text was published October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and collaborated with a campaign called IDREAM. This video is more heartfelt and strikes an emotional reaction from the viewer, by including teary eyed

testimonies of DREAMers with sad music in the background. All testimonies are very personal and tend to focus on the human perspective of the undocumented immigrant, which tends to become clouded amid economic reports, political analysis and the labelling that can come with public discourse. The campaign is advertised on the *Latino Rebels* website as a twelve-episode series documenting the faces of undocumented youth in Arizona, typically in an anecdotal style series of clips answering the question ‘what is a dreamer?’. The youth dive into stories about being inspired by their family members, living by mantras like that of “never give up” and “reach out to any opportunity.” What I found interesting in my analysis is that though the *Latino Rebels* look to contribute to a free discourse that provides a more human face to the undocumented migrant community, they still give into popular frames surrounding the image of the undocumented immigrant. In one of the campaign videos, a girl named Lily described herself as being different from typical American youth because she is focused on her community and family, organizes protests in her spare time and does not give into drinking and partying unlike other teenagers her age (“Video: What It Means To Be a DREAMer.”). Very subtly, Lily contributes to the “good immigrant” frame. The “good immigrant” is made up of the following characteristics: hard working, family oriented, highly educated, speaks great English, considers themselves as American and chases after their own idea of the “American Dream” by “pulling themselves up from their bootstraps” or coming from humble beginnings and have reached an incredible mark of success. Legislative language that surrounds the DREAM Act also reinforces this frame, as it is meant to essentially only allow what should be deemed as the best and the brightest to achieve a pathway towards citizenship.

More contemporary coverage provided by *Latino Rebels* also relies on content focused on the idea of the criminalized immigrant. The “Criminal Immigrant” is one that is interpreted as

such: a felon that the broke law by not abiding due process of migratory process, a deviant, often not human, and steals jobs by creating further competition in the job market. However, *Latino Rebels* continues to break past the negative stereotype and provide a platform for advocacy organizations and writers a like. A very personal example of *Latino Rebels* acting as a platform for exchange of ideas and sentiments for the sake of the community being heard would be an article written by a guest contributor titled, “My DACA Expires Today.” The anonymous alias is used to respect the privacy of the author and to also avoid ICE intervention (which will also be touched upon in later analysis). The only information that the guest contributor does provide on their identity is that they are a member of Make the Road New York,” the largest community organization in New York that offers services to organize immigrant communities. The article includes a graphic of the LR colors (red and black) and star (their logo) with the following quote from the article: “I refuse to live in the shadows. I refuse to live as a second-class citizen.” (“My DACA Expires Today”). In the article, the author states that Congress has failed to do its job in passing legislation that will protect immigrant youth across the country, and makes the point that their DACA protections expire March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The article includes heartfelt words and descriptions of hopelessness, hearts burdened with a heavy sinking feeling and abrupt realizations of shock that their future now had an expiration date. They also described the higher points of their debacle with outpours of news on DACA like welcoming feelings that courts stated that that DACA renewals could resume post the announcement of injunctions that would allow this. These high points, however, did come with lower points at realizing that even if they applied for DACA renewal, their status would still be pending after the expiration date. Their ultimate truth was that they felt that their future was jeopardized no matter what the Department of Homeland Security announced. Though this is a very personal human interest take on one



person's experience of what losing DACA means to them and the great advantages DACA had given them, it still provides helpful information that explains what DACA is what it means for the thousands of migrants that are at risk once it expires: no job opportunities, no protection from deportation, and the risk of being separated from family. The writer still inserts their own political opinion, which is to place blame on Republicans and Democrats for refusing to find common ground to advocate for DACA and Dreamers. The heartfelt article ends with a call to action for political leaders to stand firm on demanding fair legislation on behalf of DACA recipients and DREAMers. Though it is not explicit if the images are provided by LR or by the writer themselves, the article also ends with an image of a protest with people standing in a government building in a circle with one large sign that reads "GOP DON'T HOLD DREAM ACT HOSTAGE." If the images are in fact selected by Latino Rebels, they still manage to include some commentary by using an image that condemns the Republican party.

## VII. Conclusion

As a publication, *Latino Rebels* serves as a continuation of the American tradition of challenging the status quo in journalism. It does this while also serving a niche community and acting as a platform for empowerment and communication. The rebel identity cleverly takes on stereotypes that surround the Latinx and undocumented community by turning them on their head and creating a voice that is fearless and seeks justice. Because *Latino Rebels* is interactive, with features on their site that are designed to protect the undocumented community, it goes beyond the scope of traditional social justice journalism and j-blogs. Social justice journalism does not inherently look to organize movements, but rather provide accurate information to empower those that stand by the movement. What is unique, however, is the inclusion and collaboration with non-profit organizations that push forward

the message that *Latino Rebels* holds close to their own voice, which aids them in their objective of including varied representation of all perspectives surrounding current policy changes that impact Latinxs and the undocumented community.

In state of the current news cycle, alternative news publications should be further evaluated and looked at more critically. The context and first-hand accounts on policy, political climate, and discourse that alternative news media provide can be discredited due to their tendencies to be forthright with opinions backed by roots of social justice or historical movements. The lack of better representation of marginalized communities is what has created the need for publications like that of *Latino Rebels*.

It has now been unveiled, that as of April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018, *Latino Rebels* has been acquired by *Futuro Media Group*, the same nonprofit organization that works in conjunction with NPR and *Latino USA*. In their mission statement, it states that they seek to amplify and cover the news stories often overlooked by mainstream media, which meets the goal that *Latino Rebels* tries to fulfill by amplifying the voices of the misheard and misrepresented Latinx and/or undocumented community (“About,” *Latino USA*).

It will be interesting to see how *Latino Rebels* changes due to better access to funding, more writers or simply changes in staff and ownership. I believe that *Latino Rebels* will most likely seek to expand its international coverage of political unrest in Latin America and look to provide better coverage as to why people migrate to the United States. As a long-time reader, I hope that they will continue to use first-hand accounts through input brought to us by non-profit organizations, as it is unique and does provide a diverse representation of many Latinxs that may believe different methods of protest or expression are appropriate for different policy issues or debates. I also hope they will continue to serve the undocumented

community and empower those that have been left out of the discourse for far too long.

Being that *Latino USA* does identify itself as a non-profit organization, I do not suspect that the changes will impact the true voice of the *rebeldes*, but will only allow it to echo further.

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