

Forming Solidarity out of  
Emergency: Black  
Immigrant Lives Within  
#BlackLivesMatter

Alex Birnel & Diego Mancha

# #UndocuBlack Network

- The UndocuBlack Network was co-founded by five UndocuBlack folks. Within six months of the organization's founding the members of the UndocuBlack Network were able to create a convening. It was the first of its kind, an Undocumented and Black Convening.
- The event took place in January 15th-17th, 2016.
- It featured participants of an age range of 15-50+ representing Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean.

# #UndocuBlack Network



# BIN Kinship Assembly 2016

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eM4xUkL6WqU>



# Testimonies of #UndocuBlack Organizing

- “After five years around immigrant rights organizing, that was the first time I felt like no one was left out. Queer, trans, differently abled, multi lingual, young, old no organizing and lots of organizing experience came together.” – Deborah Alemu, UT Graduate, member of University Leadership Initiative, on attending the BIN Kinship Assembly

# Battling Silence by Kemi Bello

First, I was illegal  
An identity given to me  
By a socio-political complex  
Hell-bent on forcing me to  
Reject my notion of self.

Illegal is illegal, they said –  
More than my age  
More than my gender/sexuality  
More than my humanity –  
I was now this thing, an ‘it’  
No longer a human being.

*I stay silent.*

Then, I was a dreamer  
An identity that built  
A collective consciousness  
And finally made me  
Part of an 'us.'

I was put on a giddy high  
Of dreams deferred  
Of "I have a dream"  
Of a rainbow of caps & gowns.  
For we are the dreamers,  
The mighty, mighty dreamers.

Never mind those whose  
dreams  
We are not acknowledging  
because  
They do not match our own.  
Never mind those who will not  
make it  
Far enough to don a cap and  
gown.

Suddenly, a proclamation:  
"But we are all dreamers,"  
documented or undocumented.

*I stay silent.*

Then I was undocumented  
An identity borne of the realization  
That I am more than just legislation,  
That this new piece of paper  
Would not magically heal the wounds  
of the struggle  
Wrought by lack of papers to begin  
with,  
That to drive home the assertion that  
No human being is illegal,  
We must first stop referring to  
ourselves as such,  
That dreams without concrete,  
effective action and empowerment  
Would not serve my growth.

Again, it was said:  
“But we are all undocumented,”  
united in this struggle.

*I stay silent.*



Then I became unafraid,  
Unashamed,  
Unapologetic –  
About my immigration status,  
About refusing to bow down  
to rhetoric & political punting,  
about choosing a movement  
over a campaign,  
about acknowledging the full,  
wide, deep and beautiful  
spectrum of the  
undocumented experience,  
and about reclaiming my voice  
and  
demanding that it be the only  
vehicle  
through which my story is  
told.

This time though,  
We were not “all unafraid.”  
Instead, I was being divisive,  
I was being stubborn,  
I was selfish, petulant,  
I was Radical.

Once again labeled an “other”  
In the delicate world of “Us”  
I called home.

*I stay silent.*

At the end of the day,  
Though our many struggles  
and experiences intersect,  
And you say we are all  
dreamers,  
My dream of existence in a  
society  
That still views me as illegal,  
as an it,  
Has yet to come true.

You say we are all  
undocumented,  
Yet I am the one who has to  
justify,  
In a court of law,  
The right to call the dirt I walk  
on  
And the air I breathe  
My Home.

Can I not claim an identity of  
my own,  
Without it being co-opted,  
rebranded,  
Misinterpreted and censored  
by those who are not affected?  
Those who support,  
understand,  
Sympathize, fight alongside,  
But who are not  
undocumented?

If you truly support me,  
You would understand  
the importance of my words,  
for they are one of the few  
weapons I own.  
If you truly support me,

You would understand,  
The necessity,  
In a world in which  
I am constantly told I have  
no rights,  
To have an identity to call  
my own.

If you truly support me,  
You would understand that  
My struggle is not about  
you.

If you truly support me,  
You would understand that  
We both lose  
When I remain silent.