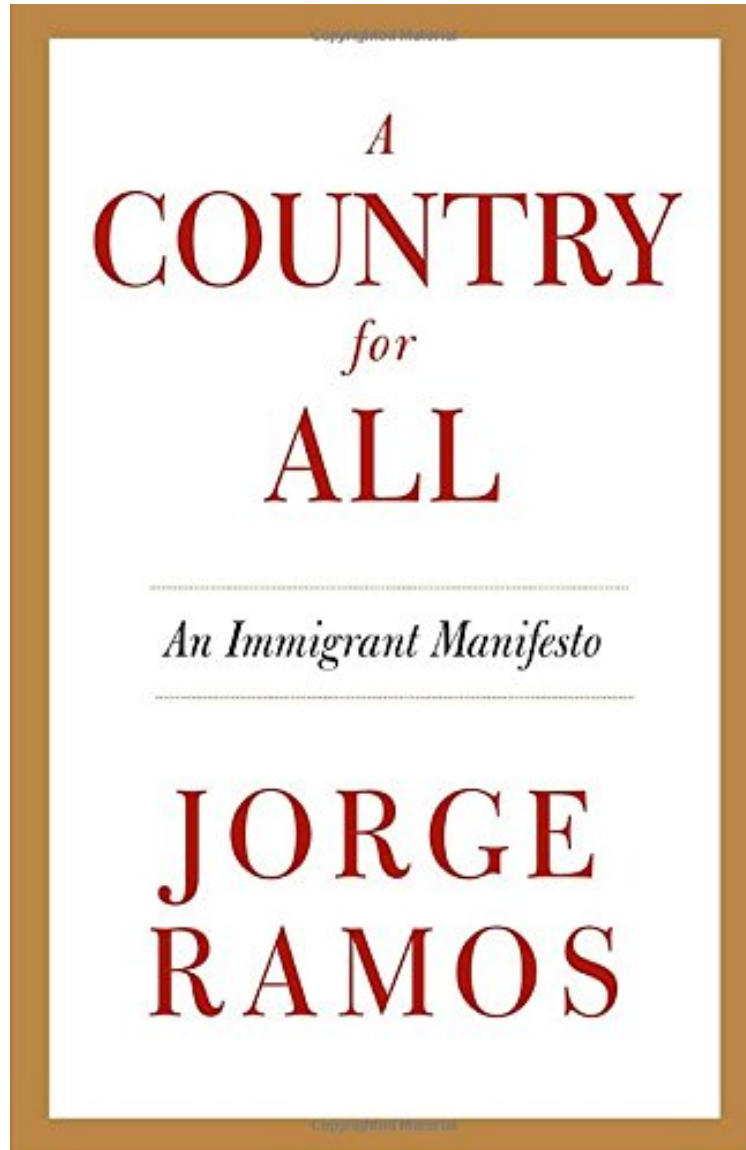



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A Country for All: An Immigrant Manifesto

Jorge Ramos

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Jorge Ramos : A Country for All: An Immigrant Manifesto before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Country for All: An Immigrant Manifesto:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Well worth reading By A. Sims Really important book, especially at this time. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A must read for those concerned about immigration reform in the U.S. By Customer Factual accounts of the status of immigrants in the U.S. with special attention to living realities and discrimination against Latinos and other Immigrants. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four

For decades, fixing the United States broken immigration system has been one of the most urgent challenges facing our country, and time and time again, politicians have passed the buck. With anti-immigrant sentiment rising around the country, and presidential elections on the horizon, its no surprise immigration reform is on every candidates agenda. While some candidates offer viable solutions, others perpetuate negative stereotypes and unpractical resolve. Ramos fearlessly questions political tactics, and has undoubtedly become the voice of the Latino vote in the US. It is now more important than ever to remember the role immigrants play in enriching our economy and culture, and to find a way to incorporate the millions of productive, law-abiding workers who have been drawn to the United States by the inexorable pull of freedom and economic opportunity. In this timely book, award-winning journalist Jorge Ramos makes the case for a practical and politically achievable solution to this poignant issue. Ramos argues that we have a simple choice: to take a pragmatic approach that deals with the reality of immigration, or to continue a cruel and capricious system that doesnt work, wastes billions of dollars, and which stands in direct opposition to our national principles.

About the Author Jorge Ramos is an Emmy Award winning journalist, syndicated columnist, and author of nine previous books. Hailed by Time magazine as one of the 25 most influential Hispanics in the United States, Ramos anchors the nightly news and hosts a weekly political show on Univision, the countrys largest Spanish-language television network. He regularly appears on ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN to discuss immigrant rights. Born in Mexico City, Ramos has lived in the United States for more than twenty-five years. Visit the author's website at www.jorgeramos.com. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

One THE INVISIBLES Nobody notices them. Sometimes they pass right in front of us, and we look through them as if they were not there. But they are here, and the United States would be a very different country without them. People don't realize just how important they are to our way of life. Those who go through each day unseen are undocumented immigrants. The invisibles. They go out of their way not to be noticed by authorities or counted by census takers. It's not always easy to distinguish exactly who is an immigration agent. In order to avoid the risk of making a mistake, they talk to no one. They stay away from the police. The invisibles keep their distance from them, even though many times they need protection from the violence of those who want to do them harm. The less they're seen, the greater the chance that they will be left alone to work and earn their wages in peace. They live in the shadows. Being seen is a great risk and could mean deportation from the country that they have called home for years, the country where their children were born and, for many, their grandchildren too. They live in silence. They don't often complain, though they certainly have reasons to. Complaints lead to questions. Questions lead to trouble. When we cross paths with them on the street, they quickly avert their eyes. Not being is their way of being. For them, not having an identity is their identity. Nevertheless, the United States could not function without their labor. They do this country's most difficult, least desirable, lowest-paying work. They clean what nobody else will clean, harvest the crops no one will harvest, cook our food, and build our houses. It's likely that you're hardly aware of their presence in hotels and restaurants. But they're there. They're like ghosts. They walk without making noise and speak only when it's absolutely essential for them to do so. They work behind the scenes, in kitchens, doing anything from washing dishes to preparing the finest cuisine. They learn quickly, and they are adept at making things--anything--because they are determined to survive. Their getting through the day gives their children opportunities they never had. They accept working conditions that no legal citizen can imagine. They don't have the benefit of minimum wage; it's unheard-of for most. They don't get health insurance, do not have labor organizations to support them, and operate under the perennial threat of being unjustly fired or reported to Immigration Services and thus deported--often forced to leave children behind. They clean up after us in public bathrooms, spending as many as ten hours a day steeped in filth for virtually no money. And though they are taken advantage of by so many, they continue to believe in the dreams that brought them here. Without them our lives would be far less comfortable. They are forced to sleep in trailers, or entire families are piled into a single bedroom. Mom, dad, and the children share a single ramshackle bed, because it's all they have. Many times they are forced to make room for an aunt or grandmother or the cousin of a neighbor's friend who just happens to show up one day. And they do so gladly, because to them family is all-important. They take care of their own. No one else will. Despite all the negative things that are said about them--that they're criminals and terrorists--we let them into our homes, we allow them to clean up after us, and we even let them care for our children. They are the nannies nurturing future presidents, governors, lawyers, doctors, mayors, actors, inventors, football players, Broadway and Hollywood stars. They care for the next generation so that these children's parents can work and go out at night. They take our children to the park, they feed them, they protect them, and they care for them as if they were their own, because--as is so often the case--circumstances made it necessary for them to leave their children behind in their home country. It may be only a few hours away by plane, or a phone card or a mouse click away, but for these immigrants their children might as well be on another planet. They're here because they were dying of hunger in their countries of origin, or because they don't want to condemn their children to the lives of poverty that their parents and grandparents had no choice but to endure. They came here in

search of opportunities that are absent in their native lands. And that is exactly why, even though many Americans don't realize that they exist, these immigrants are the strongest, bravest, most innovative, most persistent, most courageous, most devoted individuals you will ever meet. And each is fully committed to doing whatever it takes to succeed in the United States. But the cost is great. They become invisible. And now the time has come to offer them the recognition, respect, and, eventually, the visibility they deserve: the opportunity to coexist with us. There is no better source of self-esteem than being seen, and being recognized for your labor, without feeling fear and without being forced to avert your eyes. It's difficult to estimate exactly how many undocumented immigrants are currently living in the United States, precisely because they are undocumented. But the Pew Hispanic Center offers the most realistic statistics: nearly twelve million. The undocumented immigrant population continues to grow: In 2000, it was 8.4 million; in 2004, 10.2 million; and in 2008, 11.9 million. On average, 450,000 undocumented immigrants arrived each year between 2000 and 2004. This figure dropped to 425,000 per year between 2004 and 2008. Without a doubt, the U.S. economic crisis, coupled with the rise of anti-immigration measures, has had an impact on the number of people who are coming here for work. Increasingly, police across the country are being forced to act not only as local law enforcement but also as immigration agents. And there is a growing effort to criminalize the undocumented. The 1996 passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act increased the reasons for deportation, increased the penalties for immigrants found in the United States without legal documentation, and generally made the life of undocumented workers, who beyond being undocumented are not criminals, much more difficult. Instead of simply calling for the arrest and deportation of undocumented workers, this act encouraged that they be charged with additional crimes such as falsifying documents, making their already fragile legal situation even more difficult. This can mean months and even years in prison before they are actually deported back to the countries of their birth. Not only does this cause a great deal of suffering for the immigrants themselves, but prosecuting and jailing them costs the United States an untold amount of money. Every year it gets harder to find work and becomes more likely that families will be torn apart, yet they continue to come. Even with the reduced numbers of undocumented immigrants, for every one deported out of the United States, at least one more is entering. What sort of immigration policy is this? It could be described many ways, but efficient and inexpensive are not among them. On average, one undocumented immigrant enters the country every minute. One per minute. Hunger is stronger than fear. Undocumented immigration follows the simple economic relationship between supply and demand. As long as unemployment remains high and pay remains low in Mexico, Latin America, and developing countries throughout the world and work continues to be available in the United States, where one can earn five dollars an hour rather than five dollars a day, undocumented immigration will continue to be a problem. The vast majority--four out of five--of undocumented immigrants leave Latin America for the United States. And out of the 9.6 million undocumented Latinos estimated to be in the United States in March of 2008, 7 million were from Mexico. Fifty-nine percent of all undocumented immigrants are from Mexico, 22 percent are from other Latin American nations, 12 percent are from Asia, 4 percent come from Europe and Canada, and the remaining 4 percent are from Africa and other areas around the globe. Clearly, U.S. immigration policy is not working. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, undocumented immigrants represented one-third of the roughly 39 million foreign-born people living in the United States in 2008. Their numbers are growing at a prodigious rate, with an increase of 5.3 million since the year 2000. We are so accustomed to turning a blind eye to these workers that even Michael Chertoff, the Homeland Security secretary under George W. Bush and the man responsible for administering U.S. immigration policy, failed to realize that undocumented immigrants were working in his own home. According to a 2008 report by the Washington Post, five undocumented workers were employed by the service that cleaned Secretary Chertoff's house in Maryland for four years.³ He paid \$185 for their services every other week for four years. Secret Service agents regularly reviewed the cleaning company's employees' identification and never reported any problems. This issue came to light only when U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents discovered that the owner of the business had not properly verified his employees' documentation, nor had he filed since 1986 the necessary I-9 forms for reporting their income to the IRS. He was fined a total of \$22,880. Chertoff chose not to comment publicly on the issue. Were he and his wife responsible for confirming that no undocumented immigrants were working in their home? Legally, no. The cleaning company was required to verify that its employees' paperwork was in order. Nonetheless, the reality is that five undocumented immigrants regularly cleaned the house where Secretary Chertoff slept and went unnoticed for four years. This goes to show that undocumented immigrants are an integral part of everyone's daily life in the United States, even those holding the highest positions in our government. "This matter illustrates the need for comprehensive immigration reform and the importance of effective tools for companies to determine the lawful status of their workforce," affirmed Homeland Security spokesman Russ Knocke. Clearly, and if something like this could happen to Chertoff, what about the other 300 million Americans who aren't in charge of federal immigration policy and who don't have the benefit of the Secret Service, official investigations, and ICE agents to verify documentation? In a speech in late 2008, Michael Chertoff triumphantly stated that one of his major achievements was "reversing the flow of illegal immigration."⁵ He was referring to the fact that the number of undocumented immigrants crossing the border had shrunk, while the number of deportations had risen. A more positive achievement would have been to discourage

undocumented immigration while finding a way to legalize the undocumented immigrants already living and working productively in the United States. From the day that Chertoff took office as Homeland Security secretary on February 15, 2005, until he left that post on January 21, 2009, over one million undocumented immigrants entered the United States. (And I'm using the same statistics as the Pew Hispanic Center, which Chertoff mentioned in his speech.) This does not sound like a "reversal" of the flow of undocumented immigration. In the middle of 2007, with only a year and a half left before the presidential election, many people predicted that immigration would become one of the central themes of the campaign. At the same time, many in Congress were also thinking about reelection, or about protecting their political allies. Since immigration is so controversial, many politicians try dancing around the issue when seeking reelection. It was in that already highly charged environment that the Senate began debating the future of the 12 million invisibles. The debate, of course, was doomed to continue to the present. The immense political difficulties surrounding this issue are illustrated by the fate of George W. Bush's efforts to reform U.S. immigration policy.

President Bush arrived at the Oval Office in 2001 with the clear intention of fulfilling one of his campaign promises by finding a way to legalize undocumented immigrants. In fact, on July 10, 2001, during a ceremony on Ellis Island, the president made the following statement: "Immigration is not a problem to be solved. It is a sign of a confident and successful nation. . . . New arrivals should be greeted not with suspicion and resentment, but with openness and courtesy." Despite the clear support of the president--who, during his 2000 campaign, promised to make the INS more "immigrant friendly," to cut application times for citizenship and green cards, and to encourage family reunification--by June 28, 2007, there were still not enough votes in the Senate to approve the legalization of undocumented immigrants. Only forty-six senators voted in favor of the proposed legislation. With fifty-three voting against it, there was no way for the bill to receive the sixty votes necessary to become law. The invisibles remain invisible. And mute. To be clear, it was a bipartisan failure: fifteen Democrats, thirty-seven Republicans, and one Independent voted against the bill. President Bush himself admitted, in an interview with ABC near the end of his second term in office, that the impossibility of passing meaningful immigration reform was one of the biggest disappointments of his presidency. In the end, instead of legalizing undocumented workers, the Bush administration began stepping up its efforts to arrest and deport them. As the window of opportunity closed for these immigrants, it was a double blow: not only had their chance to become citizens disappeared before their eyes, but they were also faced with unprecedented persecution. In 2008, the ICE deported 349,041 people, a 20 percent increase from the previous year. Despite this record number of deportations, the quantity of undocumented immigrants entering the country was higher still. In fact, there were more than ever. The number of raids also swelled under the Bush administration, with federal agents rounding up immigrants from their homes or from the taquerias, factories, meatpacking plants, and painting companies where they worked. The immigrants caught in these raids were prosecuted in federal court, forced to give DNA samples, and detained for lengthy periods of time before deportation; they were treated, in many cases, as if they were accused terrorists. In fact, they are being prosecuted so vigorously that it has been a drain on the entire federal court system. In 2002, only 510 arrests resulted from these seizures. In 2008 this number had soared to 6,287.9. It's almost absurd (if it weren't so tragic) that in four days, the same number of undocumented workers will enter the country as were deported in the entire past year through raids. The social consequences are devastating. "You have single mothers now," Illinois congressman Luis Gutierrez said in an NPR interview. "You have young, fifteen-year-old kids with no father. Think about that for a moment. And the government took your dad away."