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Dreamer Drama: New Book Captures DACA Struggle – And Its South Florida Faces

By [TIM PADGETT \(/PEOPLE/TIM-PADGETT\)](/PEOPLE/TIM-PADGETT) • 21 HOURS AGO

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(http://wlrn.org/sites/wlrn/files/styles/x_large/public/201801/lwm_dreamers.jpg)

Wides-Munoz (right) interviewing Costa Rican-born Dreamer Marie Gonzalez Deel (left) and Marie's mother Marina Morales at their home in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

COURTESY LAURA WIDES-MUNOZ

Latin America Report

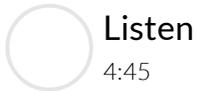
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Florida's largest accounting and advisory firm serving domestic and international clients.

Congress ended the federal government shutdown on Monday only after Republicans assured Democrats they would move to pass a DACA bill. DACA means Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals – the 800,000 undocumented immigrants who were brought to this country as children. They're also known as

Dreamers. Their struggle to avoid deportation – and live here legally – began almost two decades ago, and it's one of the century's most compelling immigration stories.



Miami journalist Laura Wides-Muñoz, who has covered immigration for more than two decades, captures that DACA drama in her new book "The Making of a Dream: How a Group of Young Undocumented Immigrants Helped Change What It Means to Be American"

(HarperCollins \$27.99). Wides-Muñoz, vice president for special projects at the Fusion network, spoke with WLRN's Tim Padgett about the book – and what might now happen to the Dreamers.

READ MORE: Dreamer Defiance: Freedom Tower Rally Pushes Congress for DACA Solution (<http://wlrn.org/post/dreamer-defiance-freedom-tower-rally-pushes-congress-daca-solution>)

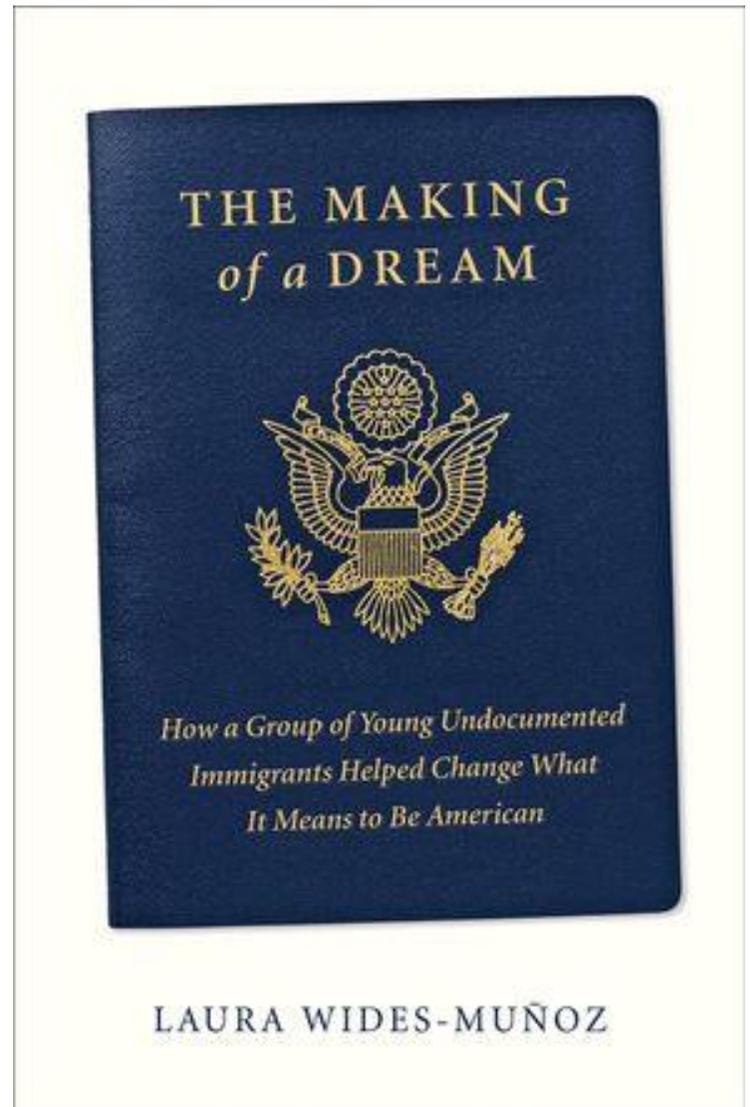
Excerpts:

PADGETT: This is a rich and remarkably informative book about the Dreamers– and about the long, still frustrated quest for the DREAM Act, the Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act that's being debated in Congress yet again. When and why did you start this project?

WIDES-MUÑOZ: It actually came about when I was sitting on the couch in fall 2012 and I was reading another not-so-deep tick-tock piece on what the Dreamers were doing in Congress. And I just thought someone needs to really step back and take a real historic look at how these young people got involved and got engaged. They didn't just pop out of Zeus' head like Athena, fully grown. It's part of a bigger story, and it's a great story, and these kids are amazing.

So I started seeking them out. But really, I had already followed the first person that I really wanted to write about: Felipe Sousa-Rodriguez, who's one of the main characters in the book.

He's a South Florida Dreamer from Brazil.



<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wlrn/files/styl>

Sometimes Dreamers are shown as these perfect young people who've just committed to the cause. But like any young

Right. I had followed him and some of the others when they did the march or the walk – the Trail of Dreams from Miami to Washington D.C. – back in 2010, which really helped to reignite the immigration movement. And so this book turned into sort of a love letter to South Florida. Felipe is part of a whole cast of young leaders out of Florida – many of them groomed at Miami Dade College – who've really taken on this issue and have become examples across the country.

persons they're questioning themselves. One of the important things to me is that this wouldn't be just a political tome but also human coming-of-age tales. –Laura Wides-Munoz

You also describe the Florida Immigrant Coalition, based here in Miami, as "one of the crucial dreamer incubators."

They provided a safe space. You have to remember back in the day a gathering of undocumented immigrants, they're liable to get deported and rounded up. So they helped people like Felipe come into their own and become leaders.

DARK MOMENTS

But there's also compelling human dramas here. Felipe was also wrestling with his own sexuality at the time – and not coincidentally he found guidance for the Dreamers movement from the successes of the LGBT movement.

He did. Sometimes Dreamers are shown as sort of these perfect young people who've just committed to the cause. But like any young person, they're questioning themselves. He went through some very dark moments. He actually also found love on the way. And I think that one of the important things to me when I was writing this story is that it wouldn't be just this political tome but really also human coming-of-age tales.

You point out that what helped make the Dreamers more successful is that they were "American-raised" young people and "the rest of the country could more easily relate to them than less assimilated migrants." Your book subtitle also makes the fairly bold assertion that the Dreamers helped change what it means to be an American. How?

They reminded people that when you live here and when you contribute day in and day out, pay taxes, go to school, at some point we have to address these people who really are American in all but name.



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Since 2001 Congress has failed repeatedly to pass a DACA bill. One of your most interesting narratives is how the Dreamers got then-President Obama to sidestep Congress in 2012 and order executive DACA relief. President Trump recently eliminated that DACA program, but a federal judge just ordered it back on. What do you think the future holds for Dreamers at this point?

Dreamers setting out from Miami's Freedom Tower on their walk to Washington DC in 2010.

CREDIT COURTESY ISABEL SOUSA-RODRIGUEZ

Whether a bill is passed today or tomorrow or next year, the cultural shift has already occurred. More than 80 percent of Americans support a path to legalization for these young people.

Laura Wides-Muñoz and Tim Padgett will discuss "The Making of a Dream" at Books and Books, 265 Aragon Ave. in Coral Gable, Feb. 2 at 6:30 p.m.

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