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Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity

MIGRANTS

WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

Migrants move from one country or place to another. This includes immigrants*, refugees*, internally displaced residents*, and asylum seekers*.

HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

The news is full of anti-immigrant rhetoric and false and misleading information about migrants. Representation in TV shows also reinforces harmful myths. Migrants are depicted as the "other" or outsiders, though they're integral community members. They're also repeatedly portrayed as criminals and sometimes as violent. These harmful depictions and misrepresentations fuel the public's belief that migrants deserve the cruel treatment they receive (e.g., imprisoned in inhumane detention centers and torn from their families). This fosters a lack of empathy toward migrants and apathy about changing our broken immigration policies and systems.

→ fact check:

*According to Define American, **63%** of immigrants on TV are depicted as undocumented. In reality, only **24%** of U.S. immigrants are undocumented.*

OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **The "Good" Immigrant:** Stories that portray immigrants as simply "hard working" or "good for the economy." Though well-meaning depictions, these characters need to be fully-fleshed out as complex individuals. Also, an immigrant, or any person, shouldn't have to be valuable to the economy to have rights.

- **Fear-Based Stories:** Portrayed as either living in fear (of deportation* or other types of discrimination) or inciting fear in others (e.g., criminal Latinx* immigrants, Muslim immigrants with terrorist ties, or the one dangerous criminal/terrorist who hides amid refugees).

- **Vague Portrayals:** Migrants with no specific heritage or culture and described only by where they're from. Worse, these characters are often reduced to just their immigration status.

- **The Marriage Miracle:** Portraying marriage as a legal, easy solution to citizenship. It's false, and it leads audiences to believe the entire immigration process is easy and to blame migrants who don't do it the "right way."

- **The Undocumented Migrant:** Stories that feature immigrants without legal status to live in the U.S. This reinforces the falsehood that most migrants are undocumented.

- **The Service Worker:** Shown primarily in service sector jobs (e.g., maids, gardeners, day laborers, etc.). In reality, migrants are a diverse group with a wide range of occupations and socioeconomic statuses.

- **Offensive Language:** At all costs, avoid using dehumanizing and radicalized terms such as illegal immigrants, illegals, alien, and illegal alien to refer to undocumented immigrants.

THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Cultural and Ethnic Specificity:** Migrants drawn with distinct behavior, idiomatic expressions, and traditions that reflect their original cultural and ethnic differences.

- **Shared Experience:** Address the shared experience between migrants and native-born citizens, such as the universal desire to belong, succeed, feel free, and find love.

- **Uncommon Depictions:** Stories about undocumented European immigrants, particularly white ones. Immigration isn't just an issue for people of color. On the flip side, tell more stories with documented Latinx, African, and Asian immigrant characters.

- **Treatment by Law Enforcement:** Accurate depictions of how migrants are treated at the border, airports, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facilities, and privately-owned for-profit detention centers and prisons. Conditions in detention facilities force migrants (including children) to endure sleeping on cement floors, open toilets, constant light exposure, insufficient food and water, lack of bathing facilities, and extreme cold that create lasting emotional and physical harm.

- **Why Asylum:** Specific and nuanced stories addressing conditions that lead asylum seekers to leave their homelands with characters sharing stories about why people have little choice but to leave.

- **Family Separation:** Humanizing and sympathetic stories about migrants torn apart by family separation and stories that explore actions and ways to end the inhumane policy.

- **Climate Change Refugee:** Portrayals of people displaced by catastrophic weather disasters.

- **Prejudicial Profiling:** Explore how dangerous and damaging profiling can be, not just to migrants, but also to U.S. citizens caught in the crossfire.

- **Hurdles in Legal Migration:** Highlight the challenges around trying to migrate legally (e.g., when a person's ID documents are lost during a war, or when someone can't wait years for a visa because they're in danger).

*Denotes a term in the glossary

➡ According to Define American, 63% of immigrants on TV are depicted as undocumented. In reality, only 24% of U.S. immigrants are undocumented.

➡ The fastest-growing undocumented population in the U.S. comprises Asian immigrants.

➡ The five pathways to citizenship (asylum, green card, marriage, military service, and U Visas) are not available to most undocumented immigrants.

➡ Many countries have decades-long wait-lists for applications to migrate to the U.S.

➡ Immigrants are far less likely than the native-born population to commit crimes. Yet one-third of TV immigrant characters are linked to crime.

➡ Undocumented immigrants pay billions into the Social Security Trust Fund (funds they'll never have access to when they retire), federal income taxes (though they're denied federal aid, benefits, and services), and state and local taxes.

➡ Refugees who become U.S. citizens pay, on average, more in taxes than they receive in government benefits.

➡ ICE is legally mandated to maintain tens of thousands of "active" detention beds every night. No other law enforcement agency has a similar mandatory minimum.

ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- *Black Alliance for Just Immigration*

- CATO Institute: *"Immigration and Crime— What the Research Says"*

- *Color Of Change*

- Define American: *"Immigrants and Immigration: A Guide for Entertainment Professionals"*

- Define American and The Norman Lear Center: *"Change the Narrative, Change the World"*

- *International Rescue Committee*

- *National Immigration Law Center*

- Pew Research Center: *"More Mexicans Leaving Than Coming to the U.S."*

  "Immigration"

- Southern Poverty Law Center: *"Immigrant Justice"*

- *UndocuBlack Network*

GLOSSARY

Asylum Seekers: Those seeking refugee status to secure protection based on their religion, nationality, political affiliation, or particular social or ethnic group membership.

Deportation: The forced removal of an individual from the U.S. because of unauthorized status, whether or not any criminal laws have been violated.

Immigrants: Those who move to take permanent residence in a new country.

Internally Displaced Residents: Those seeking refuge from a crisis in their own countries.

Latinx: For context, remember that Spanish is a gendered language where singular nouns are declined male/masculine (Latino) or female/feminine (Latina); plural nouns use the masculine declension (Latinos) even when women outnumber men in a group. "Latinx" (LAT-uhn-eks or luh-TEE-neks) is a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to "Latino/Latina/Latin American" and is fast growing as the preferred identifier among U.S. Latin American communities.

Refugees: Those forced to flee their home countries due to war, political persecution, natural disaster, famine, or poverty.

Visa: An official document that indicates that the holder has permission to enter and stay in a requested country for a specified period of time.

For in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms **(anchor baby, birthright citizenship, chain migration, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), mixed-status family, sanctuary city)**, *please visit our Expanded Glossary.*

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A list of the most up-to-date contact information for all of our partner organizations can be found on our website:
WriteInclusion.org/factsheets

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