

THE OUTSIDERS

A Feature Documentary produced by Life Stories in Partnership with Neighbors Link

Our cameras will follow immigrant families as they live their lives and tell their incredible stories of bravery, struggle, inhumanity, and hope. As we commemorate the country's 250th anniversary, this vital film will weave together those stories with historical antecedents to reveal not only the immigrant stories but also the nation's ideals, promise, and failures.

This is not just a film about immigration. It is a film about America.

SYNOPSIS

Immigration and immigrants have been integral to America. 80 percent of Americans say immigration is “a good thing” for America. Two-thirds of Americans want a more ethnically and racially diverse nation. Just 1% of the country believes that America should be a white, homogenous nation.

And yet, immigration is now a divisive issue, filled with misinformation — deliberate and unintentional. The lives of hardworking, decent people and their families are being torn apart.

Donors can help change this by supporting a unique film project that will help bring clarity, empathy, and factual grounding to one of the defining issues of our time. Empowering audiences nationwide to see emotional human dramas taking place in our own neighborhoods, this film will illuminate the immigrant story.

Understanding the truth is how minds shift, communities soften, and meaningful change begins. We will answer the question, “*Who gets to be an American?*”

The story will be told through three strands:

1. The stories and experiences of contemporary immigrants in suburban NY. Neighbors Link, a local advocacy group that works to strengthen the entire community through immigrant empowerment and integration, will be featured.
2. Interviews with prominent celebrity immigrants, telling their stories.
3. The history of immigration in the United States is explored and explained using archival materials and expert commentary.

This will be the first documentary to bring together intimate verité storytelling with a sweeping history of exclusion, and to ground it all in real-time data with on-the-ground access provided through a partnership with Neighbors Link. Most films look backward at immigration or focus narrowly on crisis moments now in the news; this one does both and more. By intercutting lived experience, hard data from a front-line organization, and the historical patterns America keeps repeating, the film exposes a truth too big for any single approach to capture: immigration is not an abstract debate but a daily, measurable struggle for dignity within the American identity.

America is ready for an artful, trustworthy film that restores context, reveals the human stakes, and cuts through the noise with clarity and empathy. This documentary will show, in ways only this partnership and structure can, what is actually happening inside the communities we depend on but rarely see.

A New Way to Teach an Old Story

We have chosen an approach that we believe is the most powerful way for this generation to gain real understanding and empathy towards immigrants. Our research will fill in the gaps of the nation's selective memory, pairing historical context with emotional stories unfolding today. We will illuminate the forgotten patterns that reoccur throughout American history, showing how every newcomer group has been met with fear, exclusion, and claims that they could never truly belong. These cycles will help viewers see that today's debates are not new, but echoes of our past.

But history alone cannot create empathy and change. This film will bring audiences into the intimate spaces of immigrants' lives. We'll see them in their homes and workplaces; we'll witness their hopes and daily struggles. When viewers can both recognize the historical patterns and, at the same time, inhabit the lived reality of people who are too often unseen, they will begin to understand our shared humanity. This combination of memory and proximity is the most powerful way to expand the boundaries of who we consider "us."

A Unique Partnership

This documentary is made possible by having filmmakers work in close collaboration with Neighbors Link, a highly effective organization that is dedicated to supporting the immigrant experience. Headquartered in Mount Kisco, NY (located near the Life Stories production facility) this nonprofit organization is dedicated to strengthening communities through the healthy integration of immigrants. Since its founding in 2001, it has grown to offer a wide range of essential services, adult education (especially ESL), workforce development, legal and immigration assistance, parent/child support programs, and community outreach. It also runs a 'Worker Center' to advocate for labor rights and provides legal representation in immigration matters such as naturalization, asylum, DACA, and removal defense. Each year, Neighbors Link serves more than 10,000 immigrants and handles thousands of legal cases, relying heavily on volunteer support.

Our cameras will go behind the scenes to document Neighbors Link in action, fulfilling its role as a bridge between immigrant communities and systems of education, labor, and legal institutions. We will show what it looks like when immigrants and their families face barriers such as language, unfamiliarity with U.S. laws, economic precarity, or fear around immigration status. Our cameras will document how Neighbors Link helps reduce those barriers by offering tailored services, legal protections, and educational supports, thereby empowering individuals while promoting social cohesion, economic opportunity, and justice in the broader Westchester and Mid-Hudson region.

We will integrate immigration data that Neighbors Link has compiled, with the intent to weave this information into narrative storytelling. Hearing this data, and seeing what goes on behind their transparent walls, the power of Neighbors Link will inspire others across the country to establish programs to help and protect their own populations of local immigrants.

Producing with Caution

We will do everything we can not to cause problems for any of the individuals or groups that participate. We want to protect Neighbors Link, its employees and clients whom we will film, homeowners and businesses for whom Neighbors Links' clients work, neighbors and extended family members, and Life Stories itself. We have an obligation to ensure everyone's long-term safety and stability.

Life Stories and Neighbors Link will discuss ideas of filming documented immigrants without altering their faces and undocumented immigrants whose faces will not be seen.

The producers and Neighbors Link will mutually evaluate throughout production what is safe to film or put on-screen and what might trigger problems. The result of this ongoing evaluation is that we may film scenes that we later determine are not safe to use. Any filming that does not make it into the documentary will be destroyed to protect identities, or, if Neighbors Link deems it advisable, stored on a single, portable hard drive and later provided to Neighbors Link for its own use when any threat has subsided.

Our release date will be mutually determined. Our partnership will ensure that we all make all significant production decisions together.

STRUCTURE OVERVIEW

The film will unfold through three intertwining narrative strands; each capturing life as it unfolds in real time.

1. Contemporary Immigrants Working with Neighbors Link

- We meet present-day immigrants: landscapers, caregivers, restaurant workers, who keep New York's affluent suburbs humming but remain unseen.
- Their stories include desert crossings, ICE raids, and quiet resilience.
- We return to them throughout the film as they raise children, send money home, learn English, and quietly struggle to be seen, but not to be seen.

2. Notable Immigrants Reflecting on Arrival Trauma

- Prominent Americans including celebrities, political leaders, journalists and activists will reflect on their personal immigration journeys, marked by confusion, fear, and marginalization.
- These stories reveal how trauma persists even after achieving success and how racism and exclusion are baked into the immigrant journey.

3. Historical Storytelling filling-in America's Selective Memory

By intercutting present-day verité with historical case studies, the film critiques national amnesia, celebrating contributions while erasing systemic exclusion.

The Statue of Liberty's torch represents moral light, not bureaucratic approval. Throughout history, millions arrived without proper papers or under contested status. Irish fleeing famine, Jews escaping pogroms, Mexicans crossing to find work, and they, too, became part of the American story. The Statue's promise is aspirational, rooted in compassion rather than compliance. While the law defines entry, Lady Liberty defines values: that human dignity transcends borders, and that America's greatness lies in its capacity to absorb and uplift those seeking safety and opportunity

History shows that America thrives when it integrates, not excludes, turning once-unwanted newcomers into citizens who enrich culture and fuel growth.

This film will reveal a pattern of policies that have been proxies for racial hierarchy. These date back to before the formation of the country. Through rare archival materials and expert commentary, the film will make it very clear that what we are experiencing today is nothing new.

- Some featured historical stories with lessons for today include:
 - 1790 Naturalization Act (barring non-white people from citizenship)
 - Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)
 - Barred Zone Act (1917)
 - Emergency Quota Act (1921)
 - Angel Island Immigration Act (1924)
 - Mexican Repatriation (1930s)
 - Operation Wetback (1954)
 - Bracero Program (1946–1964)

ABOUT THE PRODUCERS

Kunhardt Film Foundation (d/b/a [Life Stories](#)), a nonprofit born out of the Emmy-winning Kunhardt Films, brings decades of experience in moral storytelling. Led by Teddy, George and Peter Kunhardt, the team is responsible for award-winning films, including *King in the Wilderness*, *Obama: In Pursuit of a More Perfect Union*, and *True Justice*. With nine Emmys and multiple Peabody Awards, the Foundation is committed to civic storytelling through documentaries, a national interview archive, and educational resources, all available to the public at no cost.