

ONWARD

DISCUSSION GUIDE: *SIN PAIS*



>> *Sin Pais* is a short documentary film by Theo Rigby. Below you'll find suggestions for how to use the story to support your work, as well as related data, scriptural references, discussion prompts, and tips for productive dialogue. Feel free to pick and choose sections of this guide that are most relevant to the kind of conversation you'd like to have.

How to Use *Sin Pais* to Spark Discussions About Immigration

Sin Pais is a moving story about a family that was torn apart by U.S. immigration policies. It highlights some of unintended consequences of current U.S. immigration policies. The film can be used to deepen understanding about the need for reform and to build empathy and support for undocumented immigrants. This short format makes it easy to incorporate into a variety of settings to prompt discussion and action. Here is a start:

- **Bring it to your Bible study, share group, or women's fellowship** to connect your faith and scripture to real-life experiences.
- **Build it into your professional development** to train staff or orient new volunteers on the issues.
- **Encourage your church leader to include it in their preaching or teaching** to highlight the struggles of mixed-status families who are under threat of separation by deportation.
- **Embed it** into social media platforms and websites to paint a vivid picture of the work your organization is doing.
- **Kick off a public event with a screening and data** to recruit new members and volunteers or to collect donations for campaigns/programs that help to keep families together and end the detention of families and children.
- **Incorporate it into town halls, press-briefings, or meetings** with potential donors, elected officials and other leaders to deepen understanding of the stakes and connect the story to experiences locally.
- **Co-host a screening with another group or congregation** that serves immigrant families and children to brainstorm opportunities for collaboration and service.

Click [here](#) to check out another resource created for *Sin Pais* by POV that includes different discussion prompts and other background and context.

Facilitation Tips

A facilitator's job is to create a safe space for discussion, while encouraging participants to share their experiences and insights in a respectful and productive way. Here are some tips:

- **Take some time to identify your own 'hot-button' issues** in advance of the screening. This will give you ample time to reflect and process your emotions so you can focus fully on facilitating the discussion.
- **Start the discussion by acknowledging that people may have different views on immigration**, and that we can learn valuable things when we share our views with and listen to each other.
- **If you're working in a religious setting, start with an opening prayer** that grounds your discussion in the scriptural basis for treating the "stranger" or the immigrant with respect, dignity, and love.
- **Plan ahead for how you will respond to possibly offensive comments.** You might acknowledge, for example, the good intentions behind a comment, then remind everyone of the purpose for the discussion.
- **Set ground rules to help foster a safe space for dialogue.** For example, remind people: there are no wrong answers and people are encouraged to share opinions, not convince others they are right; to make "I" statements and speak from their own experiences, and; allow an opportunity for everyone to be heard.

Discussion Prompts

Here are some smart ways to start a conversation after you screen *Sin Pais* with your group. You can customize the discussion with some of the relevant data and scripture we've collected below.

Conversation Starters (highly recommended)

- What, if anything, struck you about this story? Please explain.
- What moment or experience depicted can you most relate to? Please explain.

Going Deeper

- The Mejia family had been living in the U.S. for over 15 years when their home was raided and their family separated. **In your opinion what is the potential ripple effect of a deportation like this?** Who else could be affected in the Mejias' neighborhood, church, or school community?
- Elida struggles with her decision to leave her children, especially Helen (then 13), but ultimately feels it would be selfish to deny her the opportunity to stay. "She deserves a better future," she says. If you were in her shoes, **what emotional and spiritual struggle would you experience** in the face of such a difficult decision?



- Helen says, “If I get a B- in my class, they are like, “Why are you getting a B-? get an A.” **Why do you think Sam and Elida place such great emphasis on education?**
- Gilbert was just a year old when they arrived, and Helen and Dulce –both born in the U.S.—are U.S. citizens. “There is no other country but the one they have lived in,” says Elida. **Should this matter in terms of immigration policy?** Why or why not?
- Gilbert is permitted to stay in the U.S. as part of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program (see box to the right¹). **What are the benefits to the community or to our country** of finding a way to allow children like Gilbert to stay in the U.S.? Please explain.
- **How does your church community support young people** who are struggling to get ahead despite family problems or other difficult odds?
- **The parent’s deportation is hard on the children.** Helen’s grades dropped, and Gilbert was overcome with the pressure of supporting his sister while keeping up with his studies. If you were in Helen or Gilbert’s shoes, **what do you think the emotional or spiritual effect** of the experience would be on you? Please explain.

LEARN MORE:
Deferred Action for Children

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program is a policy—launched in 2012—that has offered many undocumented immigrant youth temporary work authorization and a two-year reprieve from deportation. As many as 2.1 million youth have been eligible.

Related Data

The Mejia’s are not alone; while the precise number of children and families separated by immigration enforcement is not being tracked, a study found that **for every two adults apprehended in a worksite raid, at least one child is impacted.**² Use the data and research below in your post-screening discussion (or feature it on your website or materials) to help make broader connections between the story and related trends. You can find additional data in the Did You Know? documents on the various issue pages connected to the story on www.OnwardProject.net.

DACA: Because Gilbert was eligible for “deferred action” status (“DACA,” see box to the right) *prior to* a February 2015 court injunction that has indefinitely stalled expansion of the program, he is still protected by it. This means he has temporary legal papers that make it possible for him to work legally to support his sister while she completes her education. This also means that Gilbert is now able to contribute to the U.S. tax base through his increased earnings.³

DAPA: The Deferred Action for Parents of Americans program (“DAPA” see box below⁶) was designed to protect families with mixed citizenship status, like the Mejia’s, from separation. To be eligible, undocumented U.S. residents must:

- Be parents of either U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents;
- Have entered the U.S. before January 2010, and;
- Have lived here continuously for at least five years (among other conditions).⁷

¹ Migration Policy Institute: migrationpolicy.org/research/daca-two-year-mark-national-and-state-profile-youth-eligible-and-applying-deferred-action

² Immigration Policy Center: www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/falling-through-cracks

³ Brookings: www.brookings.edu/blogs/the-avenue/posts/2014/11/19-daca-executive-action-immigration-singer

⁶ Brookings: www.brookings.edu/blogs/the-avenue/posts/2014/12/29-dapa-population-singer

⁷ Migration Policy Institute: www.migrationpolicy.org/news/mpi-releases-detailed-county-profiles-unauthorized-immigrants-and-estimates-deferred-action

Deportation: Unlike the Mejia family, two-thirds of people deported are subject to “summary removal procedures” that are aimed at streamlining deportation procedures but result in depriving people of both the right to appear before a judge and the right to apply for status in the U.S. Two of these procedures allow immigration officers to make a decision within a single day, which means they often fail to take into account critical factors, like whether a person is eligible to apply for lawful status, has long-standing ties here, or U.S.-citizen family members.⁴

Alternatives to Detention: Even when not in detention, immigrants who are suspected of not having legal status are still monitored by authorities. During the interim months, Sam and Elida lived at home and had GPS ankle bracelets. They reported to immigration officers twice a week and would show up in immigration court for hearings on their deportation cases. During this time they were able to support to their young children while the immigration court system considered whether or not they should be deported. Similar pilot alternatives to detention have proven successful and cost-efficient.⁵

LEARN MORE: Deferred Action for Parents

The Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) program is indefinitely stalled due to a February 2015 court injunction. It was designed to provide deportation relief and temporary work authorization for undocumented U.S. residents who are parents of either U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents (who entered the U.S. before January 2010 and have lived here continuously for at least five years, among other conditions).



Non-criminal Detention: Being in violation of immigration laws is not a crime; like a traffic violation, it is a “civil” violation. People who are held in a detention center are there for a deportation process that is aimed at determining whether they have a right to stay. Sam and Elida were placed in “non-criminal” custody⁸ in a detention center but, thanks to their lawyer, they were released under supervision by the Department of Homeland Security as soon as their court hearing date was set.

Right to Legal Representation: No matter where we were born, we are all entitled to the same basic respect and protections. However, unlike in criminal cases where low-income people may be appointed a free lawyer to defend them if they cannot afford one, the vast majority of people in deportation cases who cannot afford a lawyer are forced to represent themselves, well over three-quarters of detained immigrants (84%).⁹ The Mejia family was lucky to have a very good lawyer, which meant they could explore all their legal options (see their update video on OnwardProject.net).

Community Safety. A 2013 study showed that increased immigration enforcement by local police eroded trust in immigrant communities and made them significantly less likely to report a crime. Policies that promote trust between immigrants and authorities support safer communities.¹⁰

⁴ Immigration Policy Center: www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/removal-without-recourse-growth-summary-deportations-united-states

⁵ Vera Institute of Justice: www.vera.org/publication_pdf/aapfinal.pdf

⁸ Detention Watch Network: www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/resources

⁹ Detention Watch Network: detentionwatchnetwork.org/sites/detentionwatchnetwork.org/files/Real%20Deal%20on%20Detention%20March%202023_1.pdf

¹⁰ Policylink: www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/INSECURE_COMMUNITIES_REPORT_FINAL.PDF

Suggested Bible Study Additions

Read the suggested passage and the text accompanying it. Watch the film as a group. Then use the discussion prompts and reflection questions to make connections and ties between the scriptural stories and the film. Additional scriptural references are provided and can be used in the Opening and Closing Prayer.

Passage for Bible Study

The Book of Ruth: Ruth is a Moabite widow, who pledges to accompany her widowed Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi, back to Israel. She pledges her commitment to Naomi, saying “Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God, my God.” (Ruth 1:16) Despite her pledge, residence in the country, and conversion to Judaism, her status is second-class and tenuous. As a poor widow and foreigner in a new country she remains vulnerable, and must glean leftovers of the harvest to survive. It is not until she marries Boaz, and bears a son, that she is finally “redeemed” into full status and seen by the community as a whole member. Ruth, the foreign Moabite, becomes an ancestor of King David and Jesus.

Reflect on the story of Ruth and her “status” and how it connects to the situation of the Mejia family and many Long-term US residents who face the threat of deportation from a country which they have adopted, contributed to and made their home. Similar to Ruth’s pledge “your people will be my people,” Gilbert and many other young people have pledged their heart and allegiance to the US, but yet they still stand with less than citizenship status. What kind of policies and immigration reform would “redeem” and bring families like the Mejia’s into full membership and citizenship in our society?

Additional Scriptural References

Ezekiel 47: 21-22: So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel. You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel.

Deuteronomy 24: 17: You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice.

Ephesians 2: 19: So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.

For Further Reflection

Our country and faith traditions value hard work, service, and compassion. How could our public systems reflect those values, so that people like Mejia family can live in dignity?

About ONWARD

ONWARD, a one-stop, web-based collection of curated films, video clips, audio stories, hot-off-the-press books, and journalism that tells a deeper story about immigration today. Each story is carefully paired with data, scriptural references, tips, and more to make it easy for anyone –anywhere—to use vivid media to increase support for an immigration system that works for all of us.