



# Undocumented: A Dominican Boy's Odyssey from a Homeless Shelter to the Ivy League

*Dan-el Padilla Peralta*

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**An undocumented immigrant's journey from a New York City homeless shelter to the top of his Princeton class**

Dan-el Padilla Peralta has lived the American dream. As a boy, he came here legally with his family. Together they left Santo Domingo behind, but life in New York City was harder than they imagined. Their visas lapsed, and Dan-el's father returned home. But Dan-el's courageous mother was determined to make a better life for her bright sons.

Without papers, she faced tremendous obstacles. While Dan-el was only in grade school, the family joined the ranks of the city's homeless. Dan-el, his mother, and brother lived in a downtown shelter where Dan-el's only refuge was the meager library. There he met Jeff, a young volunteer from a wealthy family. Jeff was immediately struck by Dan-el's passion for books and learning. With Jeff's help, Dan-el was accepted on scholarship to Collegiate, the oldest private school in the country.

There, Dan-el thrived. Throughout his youth, Dan-el navigated these two worlds: the rough streets of East Harlem, where he lived with his brother and his mother and tried to make friends, and the ultra-elite halls of a Manhattan private school, where he could immerse himself in a world of books and where he soon rose to the top of his class.

From Collegiate, Dan-el went to Princeton, where he thrived, and where he made the momentous decision to come out as an undocumented student in a *Wall Street Journal* profile a few months before he gave the salutatorian's traditional address in Latin at his commencement.

*Undocumented* is a classic story of the triumph of the human spirit. It also is the perfect cri de coeur for the debate on comprehensive immigration reform.

## **Praise for *Undocumented***

"Dan-el Padilla Peralta's story is as compulsively readable as a novel, an all-American tall tale that just happens to be true. From homeless shelter to Princeton, Oxford, and Stanford, through the grace not only of his own hard work but his mother's discipline and care, he documents the America we should still aspire to be." —Dr. Anne-Marie Slaughter, President of the New America Foundation

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