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# Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, And The Battle For The American Dream



## Synopsis

Finalist for the J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize  
Four undocumented Mexican American students, two great teachers, one robot-building contest . . . and a major motion picture  
In 2004, four Latino teenagers arrived at the Marine Advanced Technology Education Robotics Competition at the University of California, Santa Barbara. They were born in Mexico but raised in Phoenix, Arizona, where they attended an underfunded public high school. No one had ever suggested to Oscar, Cristian, Luis, or Lorenzo that they might amount to much—but two inspiring science teachers had convinced these impoverished, undocumented kids from the desert who had never even seen the ocean that they should try to build an underwater robot. And build a robot they did. Their robot wasn't pretty, especially compared to those of the competition. They were going up against some of the best collegiate engineers in the country, including a team from MIT backed by a \$10,000 grant from ExxonMobil. The Phoenix teenagers had scraped together less than \$1,000 and built their robot out of scavenged parts. This was never a level competition—and yet, against all odds . . . they won! But this is just the beginning for these four, whose story—which became a key inspiration to the DREAMers movement—will go on to include first-generation college graduations, deportation, bean-picking in Mexico, and service in Afghanistan. Joshua Davis's *Spare Parts* is a story about overcoming insurmountable odds and four young men who proved they were among the most patriotic and talented Americans in this country—even as the country tried to kick them out.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The DVD movie of the same name is an entertaining feel good story. However, this book reveals all the details and the true reality of these young men's lives. After reading this, it's plain to me that we need a more realistic plan for handling immigrants who came to this country illegally. The largely conservative voices on this matter would paint all illegal immigrants with a broad brush as criminals and undesirable. When some of those same illegal immigrants prove to be talented engineers who could contribute much to the U.S., yet they still have no path to becoming productive U.S. citizens, something is seriously wrong with our laws. Joshua Davis has written both a great story and an eye-opening view into our immigration laws. For those who think that illegal immigration is a black and white matter, I think this book will show you the shades of gray. I highly recommend this inspiring, thoughtfully told story of going against the odds. I hope it inspires people to be kinder to each other and reach out a hand to help a fellow human being.

The story of these boys is both heartwarming and heartbreaking. The characters are well fleshed out. Their intelligence and drive to be accepted as Americans is a sharp contrast to the LA Raza Hispanics who do not seem to want to truly become Americans. It was wonderful the support they got from certain companies and individuals. The 2 teachers who sponsored the team gave so much of themselves to these young men. The hardships they went through after graduating from high school were so disheartening. Even Oscar with a college degree went thru hell. This story puts a real face to some of the problems resulting from our immigration laws.

I enjoy it when the ones people think are least likely to win actually do win in a big way. That's what this book is about. It's easy to like this bunch of teenagers who all come from sad circumstances and work together to win a robotics competition. The truly sad part of the story is that in the end, this victory doesn't improve their life situations as one would expect it to. The author explores some of the unfair treatment heaped upon undocumented aliens and the illogical fears people have toward them. Anyone that enjoys it when the underdog does amazing things should like this book.

This is the story about how high school kids, mostly illegal aliens from South American countries, and living in the barrios of eastern Phoenix come to win over the top colleges in the country in the Marine Advanced Technology Robotics Competition. Their ability to learn through doing, through finding ways to achieve what they want to build with virtually nothing but some PVC pipe and technical parts that they receive from expert in the robotics and other fields who respond to the kids

because they are passionate to learn and succeed. Competitors, like MIT are college kids with \$10,000 budgets to build the robot. It is an inspiring and soul-lifting true story that everyone should read who feels like they are disadvantaged because of their race, their living conditions, their poor schooling. It also demonstrates that with a talented and devoted teacher, virtually nothing is impossible.

I heard about this story from Science Friday on my public radio station. A movie has just been released based on this book, and Ira Flatow interviewed several of the boys who were involved. I quickly ordered the book, read it, and ordered another copy. I gave one to a Hispanic high schooler who needs to get fired up, and the other to a nonprofit that works with kids who have dropped out of school. What the book teaches us is this: The way to re-engage marginal students is not to offer them remedial classes, but to stimulate them with a challenge that doesn't rely upon classroom skills. As soon as they decide that a mental challenge is interesting and important, they will discover all sorts of intellectual skills as they try to solve the puzzle. This is a must read.

A really good story and I was sorry once it finished. From the very first page I was gripped by the story behind each of the teenagers involved. It truly reflects how given the right opportunity, the young can achieve things they never thought possible. I enjoyed it even more knowing it was a true story.

Well-written and well researched, this documentary follows the efforts of some exceptional high school students and teachers to take part in an underwater robot competition. With determination and ingenuity the small team of underfunded and naïve students managed to win the national competition, beating even prestigious schools like MIT. It also highlights difficulties and injustices confronted by Hispanic students whose parents entered the country without proper documentation, but grew up for many years in American society with the internal belief that they were genuine Americans. A touching story of many levels of discrimination.

An excellent account of what can be done when education is open to all and allowed to flourish rather than being intimidating or tested to death. Also the very human story of immigrant children - dreamers who deserve a place at our table. Should be required reading for all senators and representatives to congress.

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