

BOOK REVIEW

Living the Dream: New Immigration Policies and the Lives of Undocumented Latino Youth

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Living the Dream: New Immigration Policies and the Lives of Undocumented Latino Youth. By Maria Chávez, Jessica L. Lavariega Monforti, and Melissa R. Michelson. New York: Routledge, 2015. Pp. 194. \$41.95 (paper).

Living the Dream presents a cogent, theoretically rooted understanding of the effects of American immigration policy on undocumented youth. It examines the life of Dreamers—young (under thirty), high-achieving and often well-educated Latino immigrants brought to the United States as children without legal documents. The authors work to situate the current context of immigration policy enforcement after the start of the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program initiated by President Obama in June 2012, complementing previous immigrant integration literature (for example Ngai 2004; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Rumbaut and Portes 2001) with a personal and complex image of young Dreamers. Rooted in qualitative research, the bulk of their analysis is based on interviews with 101 undocumented Latino youth, collected post-DACA in California, Oregon, Texas, and Washington.

The book's opening chapter articulates a theoretical framework that links citizenship and the current immigration context to a legacy of racial exclusion. In demonstrating the unfair and punitive effects current immigration policy has on undocumented youth, the authors argue that undocumented youth present a test of the overall well-being of American Democracy. Chapter two

presents a brief history of immigration in the United States, in which the authors narrate the long, ever-changing and contentious relationship between American citizenship and the immigrant trying to claim it. Like Roediger (1991) or Daniels (2005), they situate the current context of immigration policy in a racial frame that penalizes immigrants and results in policies that increase deportation rates as well as dangerous conditions for immigrants in the United States.

With rich in-depth interviews, in subsequent chapters the authors present several aspects of the Dreamer experience. Chapter three describes the Dreamers demographically, socially, and economically. They reveal the youths' immigration experiences, from finding out about their status to the perils (and strengths) of "coming out" as undocumented. Chapter four unpacks the legal "limbo" of undocumented status and explores the youths' views on policies like the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) and DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). Chapter five provides a unique and telling perspective on the political and personal development of identities that bridge their American upbringing with their existence as undocumented youth.

The authors leave readers with three takeaways. First, while many experiences of undocumented youth are universal, they are also state and city dependent, particularly around educational access, driver's license acquisition, and employment. Simple access to opportunities made undocumented youths' lives more tenable in certain spaces, even while they were excluded equally under federal law. Second, political socialization among these 101 undocumented youths was heightened by their status, pushing them to become more involved and informed about salient policies and events. However, they also depoliticized their behavior, describing their actions

as “personal.” Their activism was tempered by feelings of rejection or anxiety about collateral effects like the deportation of family members due to their political activity. Finally, post-DACA, the undocumented youths remained generally optimistic, with a belief in the viability of comprehensive immigration reform and an end to their marginalized status. Responses to what newly legalized status might provide resulted in gendered perspectives: male youths saw security and opportunities for advancement, while female youths saw easier ways to give back to their community. This last finding provides additional room for exploration of the future of undocumented youth political activities.

The authors themselves point out the limitations of their study as not representing the breadth of experiences of all undocumented youth. While sharing the aspirations of many undocumented children, their subjects were highly educated, mostly of Mexican origin, high achieving undocumented youth. As a result, *Living the Dream* provides a clear understanding of the burdens faced by Dreamers able to cobble together opportunities for advancement, and the persistent barriers they face at maximizing their contributions to society, but it also provides a skewed perspective on other undocumented youth—those who have not been able to overcome persistent barriers and instead fade away into the shadows. Authors such as Gonzales (2011; 2008; Gleeson and Gonzales 2012) provide a broader profile of the many backgrounds of undocumented youth and their diverse experiences. This work, however, provides depth into undocumented youth political development, and specifically their post-DACA aspirations and role in understanding the health of American democracy. *Living the Dream* provides footholds for understanding all immigrant experiences, and pushes the literature to understand these undocumented youth as more than their status.

Scholars in Chicano/a studies, ethnic and American studies, and political science will benefit from this useful, accessible and thoughtful book. The text provides a rich discussion of immigration policies suitable for upper division or advanced high school students who will find the narratives of these youths compelling. Emerging scholars will find its treatment of immigration, citizenship and city/state politics beneficial for linking together frameworks of citizenship in a historical context of racial inequality.

References

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