



Association of Mexican American Educators Journal

A peer-reviewed, open access journal

Volume 16 Issue 1

2022

AMAΕ Open Issue

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ISSN: 2377-9187

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24974/16.1.467>

Fernández, J. S. (2021). *Growing up Latinx: Coming of age in a time of contested citizenship*. New York University Press. pp. 225. ISBN-13: 978-1479801220.

Paperback: \$30

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Against the backdrop of increasing tensions regarding the discourse and experiences of individuals who are not granted permission to occupy space within a “perfected” hegemonic citizenship, alongside contested ideas of the historical displacement of millions of Latinx individuals, Jessica Siham Fernández advances the academic discipline of citizenship construction as a sociopolitical identity. By legitimizing their lived experiences, while simultaneously challenging the institutional hegemonic narratives that impact the lives of millions of Latinx youth, *Growing Up Latinx* not only provides theoretical reconstructions of the categorization of the term “citizenship”, but also provides empowering narratives from Latinx youth through ethnographic analyses of what constitutes citizenship within the 21st century United States. Fernández further demonstrates how contested statuses of identity, legacies of colonial disenfranchisement, and continual discourse of racist nativism necessitate a reconceptualization of sociopolitical Latinx identities. The subject matter of this book should therefore be an interest to a wide range of academics, educators, social workers, and policymakers who strive to advocate for not only the legal representations of youth in the U.S., but also improve the understanding of identity politics, citizenship, and community empowerment through the authentic, inspiring stories of the lived experiences of Latinx youth.

Growing Up Latinx begins with an introduction by which Fernández bridges the context of her work with the state of citizenship within the United States for Latinx individuals along with the multitude of lived experiences within Latinx communities today. It is important to highlight that despite the vibrant expansion for many Latinx communities across the United States, competing realities of cultural innovation and perpetual discrimination exist simultaneously within the construction of *Latinidad*. Fernández presents the background and context for her research study which centers around an afterschool program at a local elementary school in

California called *Change 4 Good*. Fernández discusses the realities of this community, including the demographics of the students attending this program, her own positionalities, and her distinct lived experiences which ultimately become the rationale for conducting ethnographic fieldwork within this space. By engaging in critical reflexivity, Fernández prefaces the deep connections of her research through her own positionality and experiences as a key component to feeling compelled to write about Latinx youth citizenship.

Growing Up Latinx is organized into two sections, each comprised of three chapters. In the first section, Fernández conveys the humanity of her research by allowing the reader to engage with the lives of students attending *Change 4 Good* through their storytelling, critical literacies, and meaning-making surrounding the formation of citizenship. By allowing the first section of her book to be voiced and positioned around the students' lives, Fernández challenges the traditional writing of research by not placing the author's knowledge above the others. The students illustrate their experiences as individuals from mixed-status families and their experiences within schools and their communities, while also conceptualizing the complex nature of citizenship as a status, the practice of being a "good" citizen, which is often ratified through school culture and the hidden curriculum, and how their stories are incorporated into their development as agents of change.

Fernández integrates the stories from *Change 4 Good* into the exploration of major sociopolitical struggles surrounding the construction of citizenship and the development of students' social identities as embodiments of critical consciousness and political engagement within their schools and communities. The second section of *Growing Up Latinx* also engages with the construction of identity intersected with the meaning of citizenship and the conceptualization of rights as a problematized status symbol for Latinx youth. Fernández meaningfully constructs these two sections by interweaving the humanistic value of Latinx experiences with extensive sociopolitical issues that continue to impact their everyday lives. Fernández gives a voice to a community that is often marginalized by identity, citizenship status, race, class, age, and agency. *Growing Up Latinx* centers Latinx students' voices and stories around debates of legality and hegemonic discourses of citizenship construction, specifically at a time of contested citizenship within the United States. Fernández advocates for her student participants by demonstrating that youth-centered sociopolitical engagement is imperative in

order to amplify disenfranchised voices of youth and encourages educators to take on the task of facilitating youth-action programs that help bring about promotions of agency, emancipatory action, and identity formation.

By concentrating on the intersections of Latinx youth identity and the sociopolitical construction of citizenship, Fernández makes the case for examining institutional structures that perpetuate hegemonic power formations that deprive Latinx youth of participation that legitimizes their agency and autonomy. Furthermore, according to Fernández, “[L]atinx youth citizenship cannot be theorized without a youth-centered intersectional framework that challenges the racist nativism along with the ageism that shapes power structures that constrain youth agency” (Fernández, 2021, p. 12). Therefore, Latinx youth must be provided with not only the institutional space, but agency to construct counter-hegemonic discourse around citizenship through their stories. By conducting ethnographic research in an educational space, *Good 4 Change*, that followed youth participatory action research (YPAR), Fernández was able to centralize Latinx youth voices and experiences to demonstrate how agency through their stories could be used to subvert hegemonic dominance regarding the construction of citizenship.

The theorization of ‘belonging’ and thriving within the margins is paramount to Fernández’ conceptualization of the positionality of Latinx youth who often lack the cultural capital necessary to navigate spaces of hegemonic cultural dominance, e.g., schools, border crossings, and political classifications. Latinx youth often balance their identities between a multidimensional tension of cultural heritage, political identity, socioeconomic positionality, and physical attachment to what represents home and provides a sense of belonging. These detailed lived experiences of thriving within the margins are reminiscent of theoretical concepts proposed by Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa refers to these notions of belonging, while simultaneously not belonging, or the living embodiment of *nepantla*, a state of in-betweenness that one must learn to navigate as you become confined to this state of conflicting realities and ideologies (Keating & Anzaldúa, 2015). In other words, both Fernández and Anzaldúa would frame many Latinx youth as living within both a physical borderland and a metaphorical borderland, where not only one’s sense of belonging is continuously challenged, but also existing within a liminal space where cultural consciousness and emancipatory action can both

reside and be suppressed (Anzaldúa, 2012). Throughout the student narratives observed by Fernández, Latinx youth confront the constructions of the Nation-State structure, along with what establishes the ability for an individual to become a ‘good’ citizen. Latinx student youth within the *Change 4 Good* program were often confronted with the complexity of conceptualizing ‘citizenship’ and formed their meaning-making from both hegemonic discourses of citizenship and their own personal reflections of what granted them or their family members ‘proper’ citizenship. Intersections of oppression faced by Latinx youth, through both systems of ageism and racism, demonstrated that many Latinx youth often replicated nativist views of citizenship, however, when they recalled stories from their own lived experiences, “[t]hese served to offer a critique of US-based constructions of citizenship determined by a nation-state that relegated them, along with their families, to a second-class citizenship that reinforced their marginalization as perpetual foreigners” (Fernández, 2021, p. 31).

Further discussions with Latinx youth in the *Change 4 Good* program granted Fernández an insight into the uncompromising dichotomy constructed through school curriculum and youth socialization that presented key differences among what constitutes a “good” and “bad” citizen. Latinx youth in the program relied mostly on the concept of having papers/*papeles*, as a means to citizenship which was seen as being achievable through following the rules and regulations of the state, while simultaneously witnessing the state-sanctioned deportations against their families. Despite these tensions, Fernández witnessed the Latinx student youth defend the “good student/good citizen” construction and limit their own agency and power to challenge a dominant system. The goal for many marginalized communities may be to seek empowerment and a position to denounce systems of power wielded against them, however, it is critical to recognize that to encourage individuals who may not possess enough social capital to properly navigate and subvert these systems may endanger their livelihood and place consequences like state-sanctioned violence on them and their families (Bourdieu, 2010).

By implementing a framework of sociopolitical development theory, Fernández challenges deficit perspectives of Latinx youth as having the ability to engage in critical literacy development, emancipatory action, and political involvement (Fernández, 2021). Sociopolitical development theoretical perspectives provide the ability for members of a marginalized community to reclaim their agency and leverage power against their own oppressions, similarly

to how Latinx youth within this particular program were able to reshape their embodiments and ideologies regarding citizenship (Fernández, 2021). By reimagining citizenship and cultivating their stories and voices into forms of empowerment, Latinx youth in the *Change 4 Good* program not only collaborated in the development of humanizing curriculum, but also as producers of critical consciousness and representatives of sociopolitical citizenship. *Growing Up Latinx* is both an insight into the everyday lived experiences of Latinx youth and a guide that not only informs educators about the issues facing Latinx students around concerns of legality and sociopolitical citizenship, but also an empowerment narrative about how programs and curriculum like YPAR, youth storytelling, and youth-centered sociopolitical engagement can provide transformative significance in the lives of their students.

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