

TITLE: Accessing the Empire: Cultural Citizenship and Belonging in the United States

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Latino identity in the United States cannot be separated from the issues of residency status and citizenship, particularly for undocumented people. National conversation, alongside policy change, is shaping the way that Latino identity is being seen and formed within the United States. I am looking specifically Latino's as one identity racialized as "brown" and how this racialization keeps them shifting between legality and illegality. The idea of cultural citizenship creates the space where immigrant bodies are able to access the ideas spread by the empire of the U.S., which include the American dream, human rights, and dignity for all. Latino's who have been able to have the advantages of residency or citizenship are never separated from their presumed heritages or histories, rendering them constantly illegal in every new action within the empire. I am looking at the spaces where Latino's can be any combination or resident, poor, rich, well-educated, loved, etc., and be read sometimes as legal and others as illegal. Undocumented students matter here because they are the impossible subject, where how they are read may shift and change, but they are never fully able to access the privileges on the empire.

Undocumented students and their relationship to pathways of citizenship are not the only topic being discussed. Bringing in an interdisciplinary lens through Women's, Gender, & Sexuality studies, I am focuses on how undocumented students form their identities and subjectivities (whether in-line or in opposition to) the laws and policies around them. The purpose of my study and paper are to better understand why the need for immigration reform is pressing on a national level, as well as how the larger ideals of the "American Dream" affect undocumented people on the individual level. My paper will explore the nuances of the language of citizenship and analyzing how the fight for immigration reform goes beyond legality or illegality because those statuses are constantly shifting from person to person, and situation to situation. Being able to access the privileges of the empire without question of motivation demands an assimilation of brown bodies that can never fully be completed.