



Sueños Americanos: Barrio Youth Negotiating Social and Cultural Identities

Julio Cammarota

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Education is a primary route to rewarding employment and economic security. It is particularly significant for the future prospects of children who are ethnic minorities, were born into disadvantaged economic circumstances, or are dealing with language barriers. For nearly a decade Julio Cammarota interviewed and observed Latino youth between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four who lived in a barrio in a city on the California coast. He conducted forty life interviews, selecting six people to investigate in depth. Twenty of the study participants worked at a fast-food restaurant, while the other twenty worked at a community cultural center. Focusing on the experiences of his subjects in the primary settings of family, work, and school, Cammarota structured his research to examine how Latino youth negotiate myriad social conditions and hostile economic and political pressures in their daily lives. His extensive interviews and incisive analyses illuminate the complex relationships among low-wage employment, cultural standards, education, class oppression, and gender expectations. Among other topics, Cammarota investigates how working affects Latino education; how gender influences social relationships and life choices; how Latinos and Latinas try to maintain their distinct ethnic identity while attempting to transcend marginalization; whether the Latino culture helps young people work hard for their families and for a better future; and how the connections and disconnections among work, family, and school constitute formative processes that shape the cultural identities of Latino youth. One of the most extensive studies of barrio youth available, *Sueños Americanos* concludes with a discussion of social justice education for Latino youth and how this educational approach meets their academic needs while providing opportunities for self-determination and community activism.

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