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Civics on the Move: The Politics of Latinx Civic Integration

By
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Throughout the U.S., Latinx communities represent a growing and critical segment of local, regional, and national electorates, but they are underrepresented at the polls. Their political disengagement stems from their historical sociopolitical marginalization and a lack of investment in their political integration. To foster more civic engagement among Latinx students, we propose recognizing their communities' past and present "lived civics," which are the actions that address community concerns but are often forgotten or not considered as political. The conception of lived civics that we propose provides a road map for fostering Latinx agency and political efficacy, and our "civics on the move" framework aims to strengthen democratic institutions, ensuring that they represent the needs of this critical segment of the U.S. population.

Keywords: Latinx politics and history; lived civics; emancipatory pedagogies

Whenever men and women straighten their backs up, they are going somewhere, because a man can't ride your back unless it is bent.

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., April 3, 1968

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Every electoral cycle, political pundits lament the state of Latinx political engagement by accusing Latinx communities of apathy, disinterest, and outright laziness, as if, to use Dr. Martin Luther King's quote above, Latinx communities, with backs still bent, have nowhere to go. But what if the definition of civic engagement was broader, encompassing more than just voting behavior, and including any collective activity Latinx community members engage in to solve a community problem? What would Latinx political engagement look like then? And what does this viewpoint imply for U.S. civics education, Latinx students, and the future of our democratic institutions? In this article, we argue that a more capacious and critical account of civics in the United States will help us recognize the rich array of past and present Latinx civic participation and help us empower our students to address pressing civic issues.

Building on the "lived civics" scholarship (Cohen, Kahne, and Marshall 2018; Santiago, de los Ríos, and Gutiérrez 2021), we understand Latinx lived civics as encompassing all actions that sustain Latinx life and address community concerns, values, and goals. This expansive definition of civics includes everyday forms of community sustenance and empowerment, such as transnational monetary remittances, cultural and linguistic affirmations and celebrations, religious associations, and various mutual aid networks. Lived civics is thus not limited only to civic behaviors more traditionally associated with political campaigns. Instead, it is a collection of informal and formal practices that have direct and indirect political significance to Latinx communities and to broader social structures inside and outside the U.S. We understand Latinx lived civics as more expansive, and still inclusive of, the behaviors that political pundits often associate with civic engagement. Latinx communities, we argue, can leverage existing forms of community empowerment to effect political change in the U.S. One contemporary example comes from Latinx students, especially young women, who turn coming-of-age celebrations (*quinceañeras*) into family- and community-based voter registration drives. The celebration itself requires significant community participation, mutuality, and solidarity, and thus it represents a form of lived civics among participating community members. As Latinx students are teaching us, it can also facilitate more political behaviors as it moves into new spaces, such as the celebration's network entering electoral realms by way of newly registered voters.

A Latinx lived civics framework, in other words, attends to how people live culturally across a range of settings and how people build civics repertoires as they "move" across a range of practices and concerns. With this broader definition of civics, we identify a thriving Latinx civics in both the past and present, and we stress its value for Latinx communities in articulating and achieving political demands in the present and in the future. We also identify the historical and contemporary role of social and political inequality in shaping U.S. civic participation and recognize that Latinx communities' everyday forms of political engagement are, in part, a response to these social and political inequalities. Making visible this shared collective organization and history and using it to engage students in the movement building already happening in their

communities we see as the most effective way to develop young people's sense of civic agency and to teach them how to engage the U.S. democratic system.

We recognize that there are numerous arguments about the goals of civics education broadly defined and, in particular, with regard to marginalized communities. Some argue the need to tie Latinx civic and political identity to a broader national identity—a more assimilationist approach. Others argue for the importance of balancing unity and diversity (Banks et al. 2001) or advance the notion of a civic social contract in which youth recognize the “mutual rights and obligations binding citizens with their polity” (Flanagan et al. 1999, 155). A common goal across these views is reaching the ideal of *e pluribus unum*. Our focus on Latinx lived civics, instead, requires us to trouble commonplace conceptions of *e pluribus unum* and to note the inherent limitations of past conceptions of peoplehood and politics in the United States. We are pushing back against an *unum* that flattens out meaningful differences within and across groups and erases the histories of Latinx people and other minoritized groups. We are similarly committed to lifting the rich diversity and variance in what it means to be and enact *Latinidad* and to highlighting the hierarchies that shape and reflect Latinx experience, history, and social and political life. In so doing, we aim to contribute to a future *unum* that honors its *pluribus* and is committed to an inclusive and diverse understanding of Latinx and American belonging.

This article is organized in four parts. The first provides a synthesis of what we see as the key scholarship on civics education and Latinx political engagement. The second provides an historical overview of Latinx lived civics and stresses the need for relational, intersectional, and transnational accounts if we are to account for the diversity of Latinx experiences, relationships, and politics. The third elaborates our definition of Latinx lived civics and its role in seeing, validating, and fostering Latinx communities' agencies. The fourth provides recommendations for readers interested in fostering and engaging civic learning spaces with Latinx and non-Latinx students.

Background

The public school system in the U.S. was designed to promote literacy and overall academic achievement and to foster the development of an informed and engaged citizenry (Tyack 2001). Currently, 40 state constitutions mention the importance of civic literacy, and 13 of them state that a central purpose of their educational system is to promote good citizenship, democracy, and free government (Gibson and Levine 2003). This role for schools is especially important for foreign-born Latinx youth or those who are children of first-generation immigrants.

In addition, every electoral cycle, tens of thousands of newly naturalized citizens or their 18-year-old U.S.-born children become eligible to vote. Schools comprise one of the few institutions that can facilitate their political incorporation. A study looking at the impact of the KidsVoting program, for example,

showed that Latinx student participation in this civics-oriented curriculum led to increased participation not only among the students but also among their parents (McDevitt and Kioussis 2006). Thus, schools could serve as critical engines of civic engagement not only for second-generation Latinx youth but also for their first-generation parents, and investments in school-based civic engagement efforts could have tremendous positive ripple effects on political engagement within Latinx communities.

Scholarship has also looked more specifically at how learning environments support civic reasoning and discourse. The National Academy of Education's Committee on Civic Reasoning and Discourse commissioned a report designed to help schools "better prepare students to examine and discuss complex civic, political, and social issues by ensuring that the curricula, pedagogy, and learning environments that they experience are informed by the best available evidence and practice. This includes identifying opportunities to learn from well-established areas of interdisciplinary research on human learning and development, as well as current exemplars of instruction" (Lee, White, and Dong 2021, 4). They define *civic reasoning* as the ability to "think through a public issue using rigorous inquiry skills and methods to weigh different points of view and examine available evidence" (Lee, White, and Dong 2021, 1). They conceptualize *civic discourse* expansively to include how students "communicate with one another around the challenges of public issues in order to enhance both individual and group understanding. It also involves enabling effective decision making aimed at finding consensus, compromise, or in some cases, confronting social injustices through dissent" (Lee, White, and Dong 2021, 1).

This framework asks educators to understand that civic education and development requires attention to the intersection between individuals' life experiences and their local contexts and how that intersection might affect their sense of place and power within the civic sphere. The report also asks that student learning be framed as active and about engagement rather than about memorization or traditional definitions of civic knowledge.

Similarly, we join others in calling for a broad definition of civic learning. Rogers et al. (2020, 1) define civic learning as "a process through which young people develop the knowledge, skills, and commitments to interact effectively with fellow community members to address shared problems. It includes preparation for both civic engagement (or practices seeking to promote the public good through non-governmental organizations and informal community work) and political engagement (or activities aiming to influence state action through formal avenues such as voting, lobbying, petitioning, or protesting)." This broad framing is different from how "civics" or "U.S. government" is often conceptualized and taught in U.S. public schools. For example, the state of California's Department of Education History and Social Science Standards (1998) "emphasize historical narrative, highlight the roles of significant individuals throughout history, and convey the rights and obligations of citizenship." Using a knowledge-based framework, the official state standards emphasize students' ability to know about important historical figures and understand their rights and responsibilities. Drawing from Rogers and colleagues, however, we stress that civic

education also needs to activate students to engage in collective action on behalf of themselves and/or their communities.

Using a related framework, Kahne and Sporte (2008) explore the relationship between civic education and civic commitments among urban youth in Chicago's public schools. Using survey data, Kahne and Sporte controlled for classroom civic learning opportunities in multiple subject areas, school supports for students' academic and social development, students' involvement in extracurricular activities, their demographic and individual characteristics, neighborhood and family civic context, and their prior civic commitments. They found that neighborhood and family contexts, particularly whether parents discussed current events with children, were strongly related to students' civic commitments. Conversely, demographic characteristics and school supports had little impact. Civic learning opportunities and service learning had a sizable impact; that effect was larger than that of any other measure in the study, including students' prior commitments to civic participation, and remained robust even after controlling for neighborhood, family, and school characteristics. Given the uneven distribution of civic learning opportunities—with low-income students, students of color, and low-performing students having less access (Kahne and Middaugh 2008; Torney-Purta and Wilkenfeld 2009)—Kahne and Sporte argue that their findings suggest that “schools appear able to help lessen the participatory inequality that exists in our civic and political life” (2008, 755).

For Latinxs, this body of research is critical. Although nonprofit organizations and some political entities, such as unions and advocacy groups, engage in voter mobilization during elections, their efforts rarely reach all eligible voters and often do not focus on low-propensity voters, many of whom are Latinx (García Bedolla and Michelson 2012). Additionally, there is no institutional structure within U.S. politics that is designed to systematically socialize new members into the polity. Political socialization studies from the 1960s and 1970s suggested that this socialization process often entailed a transfer of party identification and political attachments from parents to children (Jennings and Niemi 1968; Niemi and Jennings 1991). But because children in recent immigrant families often serve as the translators and public interface for parents, the socialization process today likely moves in the opposite direction (Wong and Tseng 2007). Again, we see how schools could play a critical role in developing the civic commitments and engagement of Latinx immigrants and their children.

In our view, schools and community organizations can play this critical role by reframing how they conceptualize and teach civics. We advocate for a broad definition of civics that recognizes the centrality of students' cultural identities (Lee, White, and Dong 2021) and makes the politics of everyday interaction visible and transformatively meaningful to participants. This definition of civics also highlights students' community-based knowledges, concerns, and interests; and it recognizes the wide array of Latinx lived civics already occurring in local, national, and transnational contexts. In “Historicizing Latinx Civic Agency and Contemporary Lived Civics,” the scholars Maribel Santiago, Cati V. de los Ríos, and Kris Gutiérrez identified a wide range of such lived civics, including coming-of-age celebrations that served as voter registration drives, informal, but

consistent changes to daily activities to escape immigration authorities, and Latinx students' translingual and diverse digital spaces and campaigns (Santiago, de los Ríos, and Gutiérrez 2021). Without accounting for civics as taking place in the everyday, they argue, we miss opportunities to *see* the range of civic activity in Latinx communities, redefine what counts as civics, and expand the complexity and boundaries of Latinx politics.

Lastly, political engagement is not value neutral nor the same for all groups. Instead, it must be understood within the context of a group's history, lived experiences, and opportunity structures. To become politically engaged, eligible voters from marginalized communities need to establish a counternarrative—one that says, “people like me” can engage in politics and that engagement can make a meaningful difference in their lives (Dawson 1994). Among Latinxs, García Bedolla (2005) found that an alternative view of Latinx history is critical to the development of this counternarrative. A one-size-fits-all approach to civics ignores the role that history and power play in the cognitive and sociocultural interactions that are key to political engagement (García Bedolla and Michelson 2012).

A more holistic approach, in contrast, one that is sensitive to history and students' everyday lived experiences, will effectively shift students' sense of power and purpose in the political realm. Below, we provide some examples of the types of approaches we see as being effective and the core values we see as crucial to their success.

Expanding Our View of Latinx History

As a first step, our civic reframing requires a conceptual turn: making the politics of everyday interaction visible and transformatively meaningful to participants. Our view of lived civics (Santiago, de los Ríos, and Gutiérrez 2021) sees people's everyday experiences as critical to understanding the different spaces, places, and practices in which civics is reimagined, enacted, and iterated (Cohen, Kahne, and Marshall 2018). A broad definition of civics is not only more effective for seeing Latinx political engagement but also more historically accurate. Historians of Latinx communities have long stressed actions we understand as lived civics in their accounts of Latinx agency and impact on U.S. society. In the process, they trace a more dynamic and transnational perspective of Latinx history than is usually presented in educational spaces. What is key, we argue, is how we lift up and retell these histories and what we learn from them to enact social change.

Though Latinx historians have not used the exact language of “lived civics” in their scholarship, they nonetheless show how presumably nonpolitical behaviors contested, reframed, and/or facilitated the behaviors typically understood as civics (Paiz 2023). More specifically, historians of marginalized and racialized communities argue that the traditional understanding represented only the visible portion of a much larger civics in which the greatest mass of action, what we term *lived civics*, often existed out of sight. This lived civics, furthermore, did not exist

only in one space, such as a nation or a single social category. Instead, it existed between spaces or in spaces layered on top of each other, such as the late-nineteenth-century radical political cultures built by Caribbean migrants in the spaces between the U.S. and home countries or the sediment-like development of ethnic Mexican communities in the Southwest that emerged after the U.S.-Mexico War (Hoffnung-Garskof 2019; Lozano 2018; Sanchez 2021). In these hidden, intermeshed locations, Latinx communities shaped their lives and engaged multiple polities through everyday actions, such as transnational migration; participation in mutual-aid societies and religious organizations; and/or the development of labor, leisure, and cultural networks. Often erroneously labeled as “noncivics,” these actions allowed for community well-being and self-definition and provided the material for future contestation. In a fascinating study, historian McNamara (2023) traces two generations of working-class Latina activists that built a thriving leftist and anti-Jim Crow politics in Florida’s Ybor City before World War II.

Latinx historians have focused on lived civics, in part, because citizen- and race-based exclusions have historically limited Latinx access to the franchise and other forms of formal political participation (Gutiérrez 1995; King 2002). These included U.S. imperialist violations of Latin American sovereignty through interventions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as incorporating Puerto Rico as a U.S. territory, hollowing Cuban independence with the Platt Amendment, and repeatedly invading Caribbean and Central American countries prior to World War II—all of which reinforced nineteenth-century racialized discourses about Latin American political instability (Gonzalez 2000; Ortiz 2018). In the U.S. itself, these exclusions included housing and education segregation, employment discrimination, language repression, and repeated racialized removals, such as the deportations of Mexicans throughout the twentieth century and Central Americans and Haitians since at least the 1980s (Cornejo Villavicencio 2020; Frymer 2017; García Bedolla and Hosam 2021). For Latinx communities, U.S. civic spaces (such as local governments) usually represented a source of marginality, not political and cultural inclusion. It was these spaces that allowed for rampant police abuse and bureaucratic social harms via public health departments and school districts (Briggs 2003; Chávez-García 2012; Molina 2006). Additionally, popular racist depictions—such as the eugenics-driven lament about Latinx women’s sexual proclivities and their families’ sprawling size—and neglect or hostility from the two major political parties were commonplace (Briggs 2003; Frymer 2010, García Bedolla and Hosam 2021; Pycior 1997).

How did these communities fare in the face of such conditions? They created mutual aid societies to provide support in the case of emergencies and unexpected deaths (Gutiérrez 1995). They created schools to teach histories and languages (Lozano 2018). They formed sports leagues and created religious institutions and networks (Alamillo 2006; García Bedolla 2005). They recalled and romanticized their home countries and shaped the latter’s regional and national politics, often in opposition to U.S. imperialist policies. They joined labor unions, led wildcat strikes, and protected themselves from racist, proemployer vigilante violence. They published newspapers and political pamphlets. They

petitioned consulates, built alliances with other Americans of color, and migrated repeatedly—from their home countries to the U.S., within various regions in the U.S., and/or in a back-and-forth cycle that negotiated multiple social relations and fostered hybridized cultures (García Bedolla and Hosam 2021; Ortiz 2018).

These everyday forms of community sustenance and resistance played a critical role in Latinx lives and U.S. political cultures. At the end of the nineteenth century, for example, non-white Puerto Ricans and Cubans in New York and Florida created learning societies that fostered labor unions and radical politics in both the U.S. and the Caribbean (Hoffnung-Garskof 2019). In the early twentieth century, Latinx baseball players from the Caribbean used their ambiguous position in U.S. racial structures to test, stretch, and weaken baseball's color line, thereby facilitating the eventual integration of the sport (Burgos 2007). Also in the early twentieth century, ethnic Mexican farmworkers built thriving communities despite discrimination and participated in a variety of leisure activities (Alamillo 2006; García Bedolla 2005) that fostered the community ties that served as the foundation for strikes and civil rights organizing from the 1930s to 1950s. Latinx historians have found similar dynamics throughout the U.S., as discussed above.

Critically, in stressing the value of Latinx lived civics, historians have noted a past of social, cultural, and political heterogeneity (García Bedolla and Hosam 2021). The latter was embedded in and constituted by multiple hierarchies and enacted and contested across local, national, and transnational geographies (Beltrán 2010). There was no single Latinx subject, and there remains no privileged position for recounting a general Latinx history. A history of Latinx lived civics means paying attention to Latinx diversity, inequalities, and transformations.

Latinx lived civics' long, diverse, and transnational history also spurred the arguably more visible forms of post-World War II Latinx political engagement, especially the rise of the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements in the 1960s and 1970s (Krochmal 2016; Sanchez 2021; Song-Ha Lee 2014). For instance, a key component of the Chicano movement included the California-based United Farm Workers (UFW) movement, a union that fought for better working and living conditions and, in the process, made farmworker visions and actions a critical component of local and state politics (Paiz 2023). Critically, UFW farmworkers traced their unionism to experiences *outside* traditional labor organizing, drawing instead from a vibrant collection of histories, spaces, and actions that we understand as lived civics. These included sports leagues, religious networks, community aid groups, and cultural organizations. Farmworkers then reframed their lived civics to encourage UFW membership and democratize rural California.

This dynamic—an effervescent lived civics that, despite marginalization, facilitates community life and a creative reframing that moves this civics into formal political contestation—continues to shape present Latinx community life (La Fountain-Stokes 2009; Márquez 2013; Rosas 2019). Consider the scholarship of the sociologist Leisy J. Abrego, the ethnographer Floridalma Boj Lopez, and the

historian Lorgia García Peña. Abrego (2014) shows how Salvadoran women immigrants in the late twentieth century served a critical role in U.S. and Salvadoran political economies while fighting for greater social opportunities for their families and communities, thereby shaping both U.S. and Salvadoran societies. Boj Lopez (2017) highlights Mayan youth migrants and their use of cultural artifacts to name their Indigenous experiences across multiple settler-colonial societies, especially the U.S. and Mexico, challenge limited notions of *Latinidad*, and foster political power across nations. García Peña shows how Dominican cultural workers, especially women, engage, challenge, and transform the racial boundaries of *Dominicanidad* by centralizing Black experiences in the Dominican Republic and the U.S. (García Peña 2016). Though covering a diversity of experiences, these scholars demonstrate how Latinx communities pulse with lived civics and how they reframe those civics to encompass their transnational, multiracial, and intersectional experiences.

This history, we believe, has deep implications for how we conceive of and teach civics in the U.S. The early twenty-first century saw valuable attempts to document and teach Latinx history in the public education system; and although these efforts face considerable opposition, educators continue to incorporate Latinx histories into their classrooms. As they do, we encourage a history that centers Latinx lived civics. Once we see civics as more than exercising the franchise or memorizing the number of members in the U.S. Congress, we can identify the past actions that sustained communities and negotiated social relations across broad geographies. These included the actions of women, migrants, non-citizens, children, queer people, Indigenous people, Black people, and other people of color. To identify these, we need intersectional, transnational, and relational accounts that centralize Latinx heterogeneity (Beltrán 2010). The exploration of Latinx communities' complexities and agencies speaks also to the broader social dynamics in the U.S. and are of deep value to Latinx and non-Latinx residents alike.

Our Reframing: Latinx Civics on the Move

To provide a concrete illustration of what such a reframing of Latinx civics today would look like, we begin with an example from a long-standing, 15-year designed project that brought high-school-aged youth with migrant farmworker backgrounds from across California to a prestigious California university campus to participate in a rigorous and innovative academic program. Every morning during the month-long Migrant Student Leadership Institute (MSLI), the program's residential and instructional staff would accompany 100 students along Bruin Walk from their residential halls on the hill to their classrooms on the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) campus. The long corridor that served as a main pathway to the buildings that housed the MSLI's instructional courses, Bruin Walk was a place of social congregation and the space where a range of university social, cultural, political, and educational clubs distributed information and solicited membership and engagement. It could also be a place of social

displacement, a racialized space in which high-school-aged youth from migrant farmer backgrounds would experience racial taunts, ridicule, and chants of “illegals, go back to where you came from!” The trek across campus under such circumstances would invoke a range of emotions—outrage, anger, fear, and psychological pain.

Yet this collective movement of Brown bodies also became an occasion to collectively problem solve and to begin the process of becoming historical actors who could rewrite and enact new social and academic futures (Espinoza 2003; Gutiérrez, Becker, et al. 2019; Gutiérrez, Higgs, et al. 2019). It is important to note that this movement across racialized space became an opportunity for these students to negotiate everyday dilemmas experienced by people from nondominant communities, to push against the intentions of systems that constrain movement and people’s legitimate right to place, to develop new tools to resist local and historical raced and spatialized inequities—and to move toward new identities as historical actors (Gutiérrez 2020).

Heads held high and walking in unison, the MSLI participants moved silently, confidently, and with dignified purpose in a kind of rehearsal for future events in which they would need to navigate the demands required when “moving” while Brown. Thus began their apprenticeship in new forms of learning, including not conceding space—an important developmental task that youth, such as the MSLI participants, face every day. Their task was to make sense of these past and present microaggressions, reenact them in *Teatro del Oprimido* (*Theatre of the Oppressed*; Boal 1979), and examine their meaning through embodied cognitive activity and sociocritical analyses of texts and critical dialogue. In short, they reframed their movement through the problematic space of Bruin Walk by a collective straightening of the back, as MLK so eloquently put it, and thus reclaimed space and their relation to it (Gutiérrez 2020).

The MSLI program was designed to redefine and expand who could successfully matriculate into the University of California system by engaging youth in an historicized educational approach to academic preparation. An analysis of program matriculation data, for instance, showed that, each year, almost all 100 participants applied to a college, with 50 percent applying to the University of California; of these, 85 percent were admitted, most to Berkeley or UCLA (Jaramillo and Nuñez 2009; Nuñez and Jaramillo 2004). MSLI participants also increased their civic participation and began to view themselves as historical agents—that is, people engaged agentically with their social futures by learning about their history and employing sociopolitical analysis to reframe that history as a resource to support their engagement. The process of becoming conscious historical actors required the youth to negotiate everyday dilemmas, as we saw above, and use them to push against the intentions of systems and their designers. The pedagogical implications of the MSLI program include the importance of empowering youth to develop analytical tools to work through and reshape the historical and political dimensions of their future as young adults.

At first sight, readers may not recognize this walk down Bruin Walk and its various interactions as a form of civic action. But we insist otherwise. Because it was embedded within a range of pedagogical practices and discourses, this daily

act enabled students to rework their identities and relationships to multiple spaces, critically identify past and present social relations, and participate in a collective effort to improve their lives and the lives of others. Like the MSLI students, we understand civic life as engaging with history to imagine new social futures—a key pedagogical move involved in the process of “becoming conscious historical actors” (Espinoza 2003; Gutiérrez 2008, 154). We argue that by “seeing” these students’ actions as political resistance—as civics—we expand our understanding of Latinx political engagement and the ability for everyday acts to have long-standing, transformative impacts on youth.

We argue, too, that any action needs to be contextually grounded and *meaningful* for the participants. That is, it needs to affect quotidian community concerns in a way that makes sense to participants. As an example of what we mean, consider the approach taken by the political director of the Riverside and Coachella, California, offices of a national Latinx-focused political organization. His organizing philosophy “AHUY” stands for *Anger/Agitation, Hope, Urgency, You*. *Anger/Agitation*: The organizer’s job is to identify what motivates the individual, such as family, schools, crime, lack of respect, and so on. *Hope*: Without a plan, the organizer is merely agitating, and the people who have become engaged will eventually lose hope. For example, if parents are not happy with their child’s school, they can get active in the parent committee that makes decisions over school funding, or they can organize to elect a school board member who wants their child to succeed. *Urgency*: To get things moving, the organizer must charge the issue with utmost urgency. *You*: We cannot rely on others to do the work; each of us as leaders must take responsibility for doing the work. Rooted in contextually grounded meaning making, the AHUY model requires the organizer to meet the community members where they are, find out what is most important to them and their community (agitate), help them develop a counternarrative (hope) that things can change and in the near term (urgency), and propose a plan that is believable and achievable (you).

As examples of “lived civics,” MSLI and AHUY call attention both to the ways that people live and enact civic life in their everyday movement within and across spaces and to the rich forms of learning that take hold in that movement. In this article, we wish to lift the learning that takes place in the everyday context of lived civics, all those actions and narratives that manage, contest, sustain, and/or reimagine social realities. To truly see the lived civics enacted by Latinx and other minoritized people, we propose the concept of “civics on the move.” Through this lens, we can see the ways that the combined forces of history, politics, and culture shape contemporary civic life. As we have seen in the case of the migrant students at UCLA, lived civics are realized in everyday forms of resistance that are then moved into formal political life; walking with dignity through a racialized space was a collective act of resistance, especially in its reframing of what it means to participate freely in civic life and holding the past as a resource for present and future action.

Lived civics is thus historicized civics grounded in the material lives of Latinx people across historical time and, at the same time, based in people’s everyday practices. Understanding the civics developed and enacted within and across the

broad range of practices in which Latinx people participate, *civics on the move* results in a more accurate and relevant civics—one that attends to the sociohistorical dimensions of civic life and the diversity of experience and agency of Latinx communities. Lived civics captures how people live culturally across a range of settings and attends to how people build civics repertoires as they “move” across a range of practices. By focusing on lived civics, we argue, we can centralize a diverse *Latinidad* and foreground marginalized Latinx voices.

Classroom Implications

As noted earlier, schools can play a critical role in the political socialization of Latinx students and their families and, in the process, democratize governmental institutions in the U.S. In this article, we suggest three main steps to make this happen.

Broaden “civics” to include and validate “lived civics”

Lived civics are the actions that exist outside formal political structures but still name and shape the social worlds of diverse communities. These actions include intergenerational ethnic and linguistic sustenance, as well as social and cultural activism, often through new technologies. Transnational and intersectional, these actions reflect the various forces (including agents) shaping Latinx identities, hierarchies, and politics.

Centralize students’ and communities’ lived civics

With an expanded definition of civics, we can no longer argue that Latinx communities are not politically engaged. Instead, we emphasize the broad spectrum of intergenerational, transnational, and intersectional lived civics in Latinx communities and, to encourage student civic agency, urge educators to recognize these civics in a variety of spaces, including history, art, and science classes. The focus should remain on students’ local communities to make civic activity visible and more meaningful for them.

Use activism to reframe stories and bridge lived formal civics

Elsewhere, we have argued that when community-based organizations activate community members to engage *other* community members, they foster emancipatory pedagogical spaces (García Bedolla and Silva 2022). Key to this effort is the organizer’s ability to articulate new narratives that demonstrate the community’s power and agency and that inspire civic action. In short, this ability can be used to leverage a community’s past and present lived civics to build social and political actions. By inviting students into a lived civics framework, the

classroom can thus translate students' lived civics into a student-led and community-based activism.

Though recognizing present political limits, the steps above note that teachers from multiple disciplines can engage Latinx and non-Latinx students in necessary, valuable, and ultimately energizing civic learning. The significant lack of Latinx representation on school boards, for example, impacts education policies and learning opportunities (García Bedolla 2012). Students can study and impact this underrepresentation by asking, Why does this lack of representation exist? What are its implications for school policies and student learning? What lived civics (past and present) can be leveraged to facilitate reform?

The steps here do not begin with an *a priori* end goal; nor do they aim to foster a static civic ideal. Rather, they challenge us to broaden our civics definition to centralize Latinx students' lives and to see their communities' resilience and efficacy across multiple spaces and timescales. These steps can be adopted in all classrooms and in spaces outside schools. They can also be practiced through multiple mediums, such as college summer programs, community organizations' AHUY strategy, and farmworkers' strikes. This is to say, we stress process and location, with both working to center Latinx students and their communities to develop counternarratives that reframe their sense of place and purpose within U.S. democracy.

Lastly, in emphasizing Latinx students' lived civics, we are also calling for centering the social, cultural, and political differences and inequalities inherent to any people. Latinx communities are multiracial and encompass different national origins, classes, genders, sexual orientations, and civic statuses. The counternarratives critical for Latinx civics will only be meaningful to students if these new narratives embrace that internal heterogeneity and address its myriad political implications. We would do well to welcome and grow from embracing those differences, to pause mindfully in the transitory space implied in the phrase *e pluribus unum*. In doing so, and in welcoming and speaking from both a Latinx and U.S. *pluribus* perspective, we may avoid constructing a future American *unum* that flattens this diverse reality. This difference-oriented practice is also of deep value to non-Latinx students for the U.S. of the early twenty-first century continues to define itself through its distinct but intersecting pasts—often in shared spaces. In the process, we may even be able to fully address the social, cultural, and political inequalities and limitations of our past and present worlds.

Conclusion

The challenges of teaching civics in a substantive and meaningful way are myriad, both from teachers and for the schools in which they work. Politics and ideology underly the positioning of both teachers and students, and schools are increasingly wary about civic education: teachers may fear raising "political" topics for fear of parents' or administrators' responses. This dynamic was true even before recent polarizing events and has only intensified with them. And although studies

have shown that teachers' beliefs affect what they see as important for students to learn in reference to civics, a 2021 study (DiGiacomo et al. 2021) found that civics teachers in a racially diverse school district lacked a shared understanding of what civic education was for and what the appropriate methods for teaching it were. Perhaps not incidentally, the researchers observed that these teachers also suffered from a lack of professional development in the subject. In sum, a host of factors—the politics inherent in teacher preparation, teachers' relationships with administrators, schools' relationships with parents—all compromise the ability of schools to effectively prepare students for democratic citizenship.

Schools are a key site of civic development and integration, and we believe that our transnational, intersectional, relational model—one rooted in a more comprehensive and expansive understanding of Latinx agency and history—could maximize the strengths that Latinx students bring to the classroom and to their communities. It focuses on making their collective agency, past and present, visible and meaningful. It also helps them to see fellow community members as powerful historical and political agents and provides them with the sense that their group is worthy of pride and of engagement, all of which are factors that have been shown to foster Latinx feelings of political agency and efficacy (García Bedolla 2005). Such an approach, so starkly different from how civics is approached in classrooms today, may well hold the key to fostering Latinx agency and political efficacy—and strengthening our democratic institutions.

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