Informal Citizenship: A Theory of Undocumented Activism

Alexander Kirkpatrick

Political Science Department Honors Thesis

April 7, 2014

Thesis Advisor
Michaele Ferguson || Political Science

Committee Members
Katie Oliviero || Women & Gender Studies
Janet L. Donavan || Political Science
Abstract

Unable to use existing social movement theories to describe a type of undocumented activism I have witnessed in contemporary demonstrations of the immigrant rights movement, this thesis builds a new theory of activism called “informal citizenship.” By reviewing a first-person account of an enactment of informal citizenship, I argue that this activism doesn't incorporate the typical reform-oriented goals outlined by major social movement theories but rather seeks “self-transformation” through declaring belonging to a community at which the activist doesn't have legal citizenship. I distinguish informal citizenship from existing movement theories by arguing that social movement studies hasn't described a self-transformative activism since it narrowly defines the role of movements as either political or cultural reform: attempting change exterior political or cultural entities, placing the power to implement a transformation into these entities and thus outside the ‘self.’ To further theorize informal citizenship I review four additional demonstrative case studies to argue that the activism establishes a public citizenship through its orientation towards a public good and facilitates a sense of dignity, agency, and world-shaping capacity within the activist through its self-authorized, nonsovereign, and democratically impatient qualities. In conclusion I will argue that informal citizenship poses implications for both undocumented immigrants and other social movements since the theory describes a new method of political membership and community empowerment.
Table of Contents

Introduction 4

Chapter 1: Beyond Reform: The Challenge that Informal Citizenship Presents for Social Movement Literature

1) Attempting to Change the ‘Self’: What’s Missing In Social Movement Theory? 10

2) Targeting the State to Change: Political Reform as the Central Strategy of Social Movements 12

3) Petitioning Society & Culture to Change: Social Movement Strategy as Cultural Reform 18

Conclusion 25

Chapter 2: Characteristics of Informal Citizenship 28

1) Oriented Towards a Public Good 30

2) Political Freedom 36

3) Self-Authorization 40

4) Democratic Impatience 44

5) Self-Transformation 50

Conclusion 55

Conclusion: Informal Citizenship As Political Membership And Community Empowerment 57

References 64
Introduction:

Though it may have gone unnoticed by the crowd and the media, at the 2013 AFL-CIO National Convention this past September I experienced a demonstration of undocumented activism that transformed my very understanding of citizenship. Amidst a crowd of several thousand delegates and labor activists filling the Los Angeles Marriott convention center, headliner Elizabeth Warren called for diversity and the formation of partnerships which could bring new relevancy to the AFL-CIO’s steady decline. I attended the conference as a journalist intending to cover the United Front, a California coalition of over 100 immigrant rights organizations, who sought to protest the AFL-CIO’s support of immigration enforcement measures tacked on to the House’s version of comprehensive immigration reform. Instead, what transpired was not a typical protest, but a demonstration that spontaneously drew over fifteen undocumented immigrants from the crowd to confess their lack of citizenship and courageously tell their migration narratives.

Unlike the many speakers who had previously addressed the delegates at the convention, the immigrants stepping up to the podium had no scripted notes or well crafted-bullet points. It became clear that these activists weren’t all members of the United Front, but individual audience members attending for unrelated reasons.

In what soon became apparent, the undocumented immigrants were not trying to sway the vote by playing on the emotions of the delegates. Nor were the immigrants ostensibly aware that their voice mattered to the proceedings taking place, and the vote that would be tallied afterwards. They wanted to tell their personal stories, and in doing so, a more compelling drama was revealed. Like the speakers who had preceded them onto the dais, the undocumented immigrants were calling for change, and indeed a change was in the making. Only the change I was witnessing was not on the part of voting delegates. The transformation that was taking place in front of me was to the immigrant speakers themselves. In the process of telling their personal stories, the immigrants were acting similarly to the delegates speaking their minds. I was witnessing a phenomenon that was so compelling and meaningful that it couldn’t be ignored. My heart was racing, and I felt both impassioned by their performance and fearful of their vulnerability in undergoing such a public display. Undocumented immigrants, without union credentials or legal status beyond their mere presence in the U.S., were assuming rights and
responsibilities accorded U.S. citizens. Could these activists, in fact, be considered “informal” citizens? And if so, what were the implications?

What precipitated the impromptu gathering of immigrants onto the stage was a United Front coalition member telling the story of how her undocumented father migrated to Los Angeles from Mexico and spent thirty years organizing undocumented workers in San Francisco’s Bay Area. Her disclosure of his undocumented status shook me, and I felt a sudden and overwhelming sense of concern. My discomfort became anxiety when the speaker’s father suddenly stood up behind me, pushed through the crowd, and joined his daughter on stage.

What was going on? Did she want him to be arrested? Before I could fully digest what was taking place, someone else in the audience stood up, a young man wearing the AFL-CIO colors. He too approached the stage, and took his turn at the microphone.

Unlike the father and daughter already on the podium, he wasn’t even a member of the United Front. Rather, he was a union member whom the AFL-CIO had tasked to rally support and enroll new members from among the undocumented workers in the community where he lived. Now he too was declaring that he was an undocumented immigrant. Paradoxically, he was a recruiter for the very members of his community who, by virtue of their undocumented status, couldn’t be recognized as legitimate participants at the convention.

Listening to him and the others who took the podium that afternoon made me experience a wide range of emotions. I was both inspired by their courage and fearful that their visibility at the convention would result in detention, job loss, or deportation. I was also thinking of my own undocumented friends and extended family members, and how activists such as those at the podium could potentially impact their lives. Captivated by what was taking place, I moved towards the stage, camera and voice recorder in hand.

The vast majority of union delegates had by now lost interest in the uninvited speakers taking turns in front of the microphone. Yet this didn’t stop what soon became a procession of undocumented audience members leaving their seats and coming onto the stage. One after another, ranging in age from their early teens to middle age, they shared their migration stories and what led them to become community organizers. I was simultaneously confounded and impressed by their courageous display of activism. Compelled to try and understand why these activists would risk deportation to tell their stories, I followed two of the youngest speakers when
they left the stage, took them aside, and conducted the first of what became a series of interviews.

As I soon discovered, the personal stories these activists had to share—compelling though they were—were not nearly as significant as the fact that they had chosen to relate their stories on stage, and further, that the act of sharing their story had a profoundly transformative effect upon them and myself. They felt liberated, as if a burden had been lifted. Equally significant to me, their decision to speak was spontaneous. Unlike the activist protesters I interviewed before, such as those carrying placards and posters outside the convention, these activists didn’t have a specific agenda or clearly defined objective in stepping forward. Rather, seeing their brothers and sisters on stage—coming out, so to speak—compelled them to do the same. Perhaps they had felt like a citizen their whole lives, but yet the very act of coming up on stage constituted a new form of community belonging.

I left the convention pondering the significance of what I seen and heard. Although these speakers clearly had certain common interests, such as attempting to reform labor unions and the country’s immigration system, the more important thing connecting them together was a sense of solidarity, a willingness to join or participate in the community building process. Further, they were demonstrating something that I had never witnessed, felt, or experienced at an immigrant rights protest, or at least noted in scholarly literature on social movements. By giving voice to their undocumented status they were displaying a type of belonging expressed in official citizenship status.

Could the undocumented immigrants who took the stage be considered a community? Did their impromptu remarks constitute an actual protest demonstration? Does expressing ones undocumented status, making oneself vulnerable to deportation, somehow create courage or confidence that spreads to others? Does the performative aspect of the activism they exhibited facilitate this transformation? Is this type of action seen in other immigrant rights demonstrations?

This project will attempt to answer these and other questions by examining the demonstration of undocumented activism I witnessed at the AFL-CIO alongside other contemporary immigrant rights protests. I will challenge existing theories of politics and social movement strategy and posit an alternative theory rooted in self-transformative activism. In the process, I will reach beyond the typical goals of social movement theory by adopting a strategy
that focuses not on the external political and cultural targets of the activist, but on the transformation of the actors themselves.

Normally in dissertations such as this, social movements are understood as an attempt to change existing social and political institutions to petition inclusion, equal rights or fair treatment. The type of undocumented activism I will describe is different in that an action is performed that presupposes that actor’s belonging to a community. In other words, the undocumented activists I have witnessed are not simply asking for citizenship, their actions are a declaration that they already have it, however informal that may be.

As with other social movement studies that conceptualize theories of activism from within the perspective of social and political reform, there is a need to theorize this new type of activism to account for the demonstrations that are already being enacted by undocumented activists. In this paper I will present a theory based on undocumented activism as a form of “informal citizenship.” I will further examine this theory in a larger context of other contemporary demonstrations by undocumented activists, and show that the theory is new, and not one already accounted for in existing social movement literature.

The first chapter will explore the body of social movement literature to argue that informal citizenship isn’t already a theory in current concepts of movement strategy. I will argue that the prevailing method of describing activism is through a model of either political or social reform. Specifically, I will show that reform is not informal citizenship since informal citizenship addresses internal targets, whereas reform targets external ones. Informal citizenship places its authority to make change in the hands of the actors themselves, whereas reform relies on the state or society exclusively. Further, informal citizenship’s desired effect is focused on transforming and empowering community members and actors whereas reform attempts to alter existing social or political institutions. In conclusion, the first chapter will attempt to show that social movement literature cannot adequately account for informal citizenship and that we are in need of a new theory of undocumented activism.

In chapter two, I will build a theory for informal citizenship from the ground up. I will draw on four separate examples of undocumented activism and compare these alongside theories in political philosophy and migration scholarship to conceptualize informal citizenship’s essential qualities. In five sections, I will argue that informal citizenship (1) is oriented towards a public good, (2) facilitates political freedom, (3) is self-authorized as opposed to state-
authorized, (4) takes on an impatience for justice, and (5) transforms the actors and their communities. This chapter will distinguish informal citizenship from legal or state-granted citizenship and argue that this theory of activism must manifest itself as a public political action as opposed to a private or individual one.

To make my case, I will employ the methodology of immanent (critical) theory, which is a technique of political philosophy that does not simply posit a normative theory on how the world should be, but rather develops a theory out of political events already taking place. Therefore, I selected informal citizenship’s essential qualities by reviewing case studies of contemporary immigrant rights demonstrations in the U.S. and drawing upon similarities in their activism.

In the final conclusion to this thesis, I will discuss the implications of informal citizenship for undocumented immigrants and for social movements as a whole. Though I will argue that informal citizenship is not a theory of activism expressed in all undocumented immigrant action, it can be a model of activism that immigrants use to express citizenship and public belonging that doesn't require state approval. Moreover, I will suggest parallels between informal citizenship and demonstrations from other social movements, to argue that the theory can reach beyond actions limited to the immigrant rights movement. I will argue that the concept of being “undocumented” can mean more than just failure to have credentials that can be carried in one’s wallet or purse, but that it can impact one’s life in a myriad of ancillary profound ways that are also relevant to the discussion. Informal citizenship can thus be considered a theory of activism by undocumented immigrants to affirm their public belonging, but also by other groups to express their citizenship or belonging to a space in which they are unauthorized, undocumented, or unwanted.
Chapter 1

Beyond Reform: The Challenge that Informal Citizenship Presents for Social Movement Literature

This chapter explores the wide body of social movement literature to show that existing definitions of what constitutes politics and activism fails to account for informal citizenship. I will argue that social movement theory as a whole has studied activism and movement strategy as a process of political or cultural reform—namely, that social movements seek to improve, expand, and restructure existing political and cultural systems. Reform approaches do not fully express the type of activism I witnessed at the AFL-CIO convention, since reform focuses on external targets, attempts to make changes to these outside entities, and thus places the power to implement change into hands of those in the audience. I will argue that the type of activism I witnessed was not oriented towards external targets but was rather internal, targeting the ‘self’ in order to elicit a self-transformation. This places the authority to implement change not in the hands of an external audience—politics or culture—but rather in the hands of the actors themselves. Finally, I will suggest that we need a new theory of what constitutes activism: a means or methodology for describing a type of undocumented activism whose purpose is self-transformation and isn’t concerned with the external goals of reform.

The first section will further my investigation of social movement theory by analyzing how the undocumented activism at the AFL-CIO convention was targeting the ‘self’ and thus can’t be described by reformist strategies that attempt to change external political and cultural targets. The rest of this chapter will review social movement theory, arguing that the field’s major theories fall within political or cultural reform, and thus can’t account for a type of self-transformative activism. The next section will focus solely on theories of political reform, describing the development of social movement theory from the 1950s onwards and arguing that the field predominantly understands activism within the terms of political reform. The third section will review more contemporary social movement literature and political strategies that focus on cultural approaches. However, these theories still describe a type of “reform” since they focus on external cultural targets, and therefore don’t reflect the type or quality of activism I am attempting to describe. In conclusion, I will acknowledge counter-arguments and demonstrate that, despite their inherent difference, not only are current social movement theories inadequate,
the field’s focus on reform makes us misread enactments of informal citizenship as merely strategies of reform.

1) Attempting to Change the ‘Self’: What’s Missing In Social Movement Theory?

By targeting social or political systems, reform approaches to social movement strategies fail to describe the type of declaration of belonging that were made by the undocumented activists at the AFL-CIO convention. Where political reform seeks to target the change of state and government, and social reform targets the change of cultures, social systems, and norms, the undocumented activism I witnessed was targeted towards the ‘self.’ By coming out and admitting their undocumented status and telling their migration narratives, the activists weren’t simply trying to reform the polices of the AFL-CIO, influence the democratic party to push immigration reform, or reshape the way in which the audience perceived them, but rather their actions represented a form of self-transformation. Namely, instead of transforming society or the government, their actions attempted a transformative process that sought to empower the actors themselves.

This type of action isn’t captured by reform, since reform is more concerned with changing systems outside the self. Not only is the target and orientation of the undocumented activist’s action different, but also their action has a different purpose. Where political reform seeks to implement changes to political systems and social reform attempts to change culture, this activism’s desired outcome was intended more as a process of personal empowerment. I observed that the undocumented speakers I interviewed had different attitudes and feelings after they spoke publicly; perhaps it was the feeling of being on stage that lead to this sense of transformation, yet the two activists I interviewed had a racing heart-rate, hastened speech, and an air of confidence when they spoke. Maybe, the transformation that they experienced was facilitated by coming out as “undocumented” and gaining a sense of dignity, agency, and courage that comes with speaking within and influencing a space in which they weren’t formally allowed to belong.

Though these transformative powers may develop out of social and political reform, it is not their central purpose. Although it is still unclear if each enactment of informal citizenship will provide the same type of self-transformation, reviewing social movement literature gives me
the confidence to argue that both the purpose and target of this type of activism isn’t captured by the literature.

Also, the authority to implement change or transformation is different in reform than it is in the activism I witnessed. For political reform, it is the state and the political system as a whole that ultimately holds the authority to implement the desired changes for which social movements are lobbying. Likewise, it is society that has the authority to implement the change of cultural reform, since it is the social audience that decides new or reformed identities, perceives an action in a particular frame, or becomes compelled by an emotional appeal. However, the example of undocumented activism at the AFL-CIO places the authority of transformation solely in the power of the actors. Though their actions may be stopped by the police or authorities, left unheard, or given negative responses, it is the very act of declaring ones belonging and coming out as undocumented that facilitated the self-transformation. Thus, the power to implement change is located within ones capacity to act, and not in the hands of their political or social audience.

Moreover, reform differs from this example of undocumented activism since it takes on a different temporality. Reform inherently takes time since a social or political audience must accept a movement’s grievance. However, the type of activism I witnessed placed its transformative power in the act of declaration itself. Change is implemented when the action takes place and not when the audience chooses to accept or acknowledge the claim.

What is missing from social movement literature, then, is a theory that can incorporate a form of activism that is oriented towards the ‘self’ instead of existing political or social systems which places the authority to implement change in the power of the actors instead of their audience, and that has its purpose solely aimed at establishing a new sense of self instead of reforming or changing politics and culture. Is this theory already described in existing social movement literature? Even if the field only views movement strategies as reform, is informal citizen reducible to these theories? The next two chapters will embark in a review of the field’s theories in order to both show the field’s focus on reform and that these reform-oriented strategies can’t capture the theory of activism that aims to target the ‘self.’
2) Targeting the State to Change: Political Reform as the Central Strategy of Social Movements

From its roots in middle 20th century scholarship, the field of social movement studies and political reform oriented theories fail to account for self-transformative activism. Both the early scholarship and the central theories of the field view social movements as primarily targeting the state to instigate changes to policy or the governmental structure. This second section will attempt to show that the social movement theories that have emerged from this scholarship cannot account for informal citizenship since they narrowly view movement activism as a process of political reform. By showing how this political reform conception of movement activism fails to recognize informal citizenship, I will distinguish between the two by emphasizing whom the addressee is, who has the authority to implement change, and what may be the desired political outcome.

This section as a whole will analyze political reform by reviewing the development of social movement theory in chronological order. I will begin with an analysis of theories of structural functionalism and pluralism, in particular two post-WWII period accounts of American social and political life that have social movements embedded into their analysis. By interpreting movements as oriented towards political reform, I will show how these theories laid the groundwork for social movement studies as a dedicated field of scholarship. Next I will review social movement studies from the perspective of the political process model, arguing that this theory is the field’s paradigmatic explanation for the role of social movements. Last, I will argue that even though the pioneering work on social movements acknowledges its role in bringing about social change—instigating public awareness of social justice issues—theorists primarily viewed the goals of social movements as ultimately targeting political systems and policy, and thus are still unable to reflect a type of self-transformative activism.

Structural Functionalism:

As one of the first postwar social theories to incorporate social movements into its analysis, structural functionalism narrowly viewed movement activism as an infrequent and ineffective form of signaling the government that political change is necessary, and therefore can’t account for a self-transformative perspective (McAdam 2012). This theory not only conceptualizes movements as targeting the state, but also views the purpose of activism as
simply signaling to the state that political change is necessary. Talcott Parsons, in *The Social System* (1951), developed a view of modern society as ordered, structured, and generally conflict free (Parsons 1951). This concept of structural functionalism described the American political system as a finely tuned machine, where all of its institutions or “mechanical parts”—the economy, the family unit, and the government—worked together to achieve a functional equilibrium (Parsons 1951). Social unrest, and consequently social movements, was not seen as an institutional component of this machine, but rather as a rare exception outside the proper functioning of American politics.

Even though Parsons was by no means a “scholar” of social movements, his concept of structural functionalism provides insight into the role of social movements within politics (McAdam 2012). Namely, social movements signaled to political leaders that the “machine” (the polity constructed out of its independent institutions) was not representative of their cause (Parsons 1951). In order to achieve proper political functioning and return to the conflict free equilibrium, and thus to stop the social unrest movements cause, political leaders would consequently respond to the movement’s demands. Thus, within structural functionalism, social movements targeted the state and political institutions in order to bring about direct and specific policy change. Moreover, the authority to engender political reform lays in the hands of politicians and the state. Structural functionalism saw movements as holding the conflict-free equilibrium hostage, and say, in essence, that social unrest will continue until the state adopts the movement’s desired reform.

 Structural functionalism imagines movements as directly targeting the government in order to signal that a change is needed within political institutions, and thus places the authority to implement this change in the hands of official and leaders. Though Parsons generally saw social movements as infrequent events, his view of structural functionalism views their role as a catalyst of change or reform. When the political “machine” no longer functioned properly, social movements gave leaders insight on how to guide the system back to equilibrium (Parsons 1951). Though social movements represented a machine malfunction, in which social unrest would hinder other institutions from functioning at maximum capability, they also provided a political opportunity for the “machine” to change—grease for wheels, so to speak. Social movements, then, occurred when institutional avenues for reform, through voting and implementing policy, would not bring about the desired change. In Parson’s view, however, politics stressed order and
consensus, and social movements were the exceedingly rare exceptions that brought about conflict and nontraditional reform.

**Pluralism**

As another dominate political theory of the postwar era, pluralism also fails to incorporate a goal of self-transformation by viewing movements as analogous to political interests lobbying the state for specific reforms (McAdam 2012). The pluralist model viewed power within politics as decentralized. It was not concentrated within the hands of a few elites, but rather dissipated and spread out among a myriad of competing interests. Robert Dahl, in his book *Pluralist Democracy in the United States* (1967), maintained that there was not a single group of powerful political leaders that had enough “resources” to achieve their goals (Dahl 1967). Instead, a wide distribution of political power was spread among many groups, interests, and organizations that would force leaders to compromise. Dahl writes, “Because one center of power is pitted against another, power itself will be tamed, civilized, controlled and limited to decent human purposes” (Dahl 1967, 24). Dahl’s pluralist model of politics stresses an open and responsive political system in which political actors have the opportunity to challenge competing sources. This pluralism results in a taming of the political system in which one powerful minority group cannot control or coerce the majority.

However, Dahl’s model of pluralism presents a central dilemma for social movements: if the political system is responsive to political reform through formal means, then why are social movements necessary? If formal politics offers enough opportunities for all political actors to make change within political systems, as Dahl suggests, then social movements are seemingly unnecessary, ineffective, and perhaps even unexplainable. Just as structural functionalism places social movements outside the institutionalism of the political “machine,” pluralism defines social movements as rejecting the proper channels of political reform. Dahl does not so much suggest that social movements disrupt the political equilibrium, as structural functionalism does, but rather that social movements must integrate into formal political structures that challenge the order to bring about change (Dahl 1967). Social movements, under the pluralist model, are just another political interest lobbying for their desired reform.

Similar to structural functionalism, pluralism vests the authority to implement change directly in the hands of the state and its institutions. Though Dahl conceives of political power as
less centralized than Parsons, he still views political authority as resting in the hands of formal political institutions. Social movements are merely another interest trying to influence the system. Under Dahl’s pluralism, then, movements must not instigate social unrest but rather strategically work within systems to effectively petition traditional reform. Thus, pluralism suggests that social movements seek to target state institutions and politicians to in order lobby and advance specific goals.

**Social Movement Studies**

Though Pluralism and Structural Functionalism’s lack of consideration of how social movements exist outside formal political system gave way to the development of social movement studies as a specialized field, social movement studies still theorized movement strategy as a process of political reform and are unable to account for a self-transformative activism (Goodwin et. al. 2012; McAdam 2012; Tarrow 2011). The wide spread of social unrest of the 1960s and 1970s dismantled the theories of structural functionalism and pluralism that stressed a political model of equilibrium, consensus, compromise, and non-conflict. These previous models posited social movements as exceedingly rare alternatives to a generally effective and stable political process of reform. Yet, the emergence of the civil rights movement, the second wave of the feminist movement, and a large anti-war movement, and student protest movements shattered the conceptual framework of these theories. Though these political models functioned modestly well for the American white middle-class in 1950s, they failed to explain the widespread inequality that was exposed by the emergence of large social movements in 60s and 70s. These movements showed that reform through formal institutions was not possible for a large majority of Americans (ethnic minorities, women, progressive students, in particular) and thus social movements functioned to combat the oppressive power of the state (Goodwin et. al. 2012; Jagger 2000; McAdam 2012; McCarthy and Zald 1973; Tarrow 2011).

These social movement theorists broadened the role of social movements to account for the widespread social unrest of their era. However, conceptualizing their role within the paradigm of political reform, they viewed the target of movements as still oriented towards the state. Instead of simply petitioning policy change from the government, the view put forth by Parsons and Dhal, these social movement theorists began to understand the purpose of movements as trying to reform political institutions to gain more equitable political rights for
marginalized groups. Though this interpretation complicates the postwar theory’s notion of the state’s authority to implement change, since these movement theories broadened the role of politics to include the power of constituents and the broader public, these theories still ultimately vested political power in the hands of the state. In the following section I will argue that the predominate theory in social movement studies, the “political process model,” still uses the fundamentally inadequate assumption that movements are seeking nothing more than political reform.

**Political Process Model**

By viewing social movements as a central part of the political process in which movements petition the state to include marginalized groups, the political process model still doesn’t describe a self-transformative activism since the theory views movements as aiming to reforming politics to be more inclusive. A new group of social scientists, what can reasonably be considered the first real social movement “scholars,” began to develop new theoretical explanations for what was increasingly viewed as widespread political unrest. Social movements, to these scholars, were simply a different form of politics. Since these fringe groups did not have access to the formal avenues of reform, disruption was their preferred method to bring about political change. William Gamson, in his book *The Strategy of Social Protest* (1975), argued that these unrepresented political actors are “outside the polity” since the participants lack the basic opportunities to influence “the decisions that affect them” (Gamson 1975, 140). Protest, then, serves as a political strategy to become recognized, to influence policy decisions and become included as full political members. Gamson broadens the pluralist and structural functionalist view of politics to include social movements as a part of politics, a method for unrepresented members of the polity to gain a voice. He writes, “Rebellion, in this view, is simply politics by other means. It is not some kind of irrational expression but is as instrumental in its nature as a lobbyist trying to get special favors for his group or a major political party conducting a presidential campaign” (Gamson 1975, 138). Where pluralism and structural functionalism defined social movements as expressions of rare extremism, political process positions social movements as a central method through which groups make political change.

movement reform strategy as a central part of politics. Tilly explored how the state facilitated political protest opportunities for movements; threats from undesirable policy, in other words, were catalysts for movements to take action and reform the state in their particular vision. McAdam emphasized this concept of political opportunities, dubbing social movements as a “political process,” to argue that the structure of government itself enables social movements to arise since all voices can’t be represented within formal halls of government (McAdam 1982; Tarrow 2011).

This political process model of social movement studies, as it can be termed, emphasizes broad political systematic schemes of inequality and political repression. Today it is still used in accounts of social movements (Diani 2003; Goodwin et. al. 2012; Jagger 2000; McAdam 2012; Skrentny 2002; Tarrow 2011). Other major theories of social movements mostly focus on the inner dynamics of movement mobilization and recruitment. The political process model is still the preeminent lens through which to view movements since it focuses on the interaction between political action and broad systems and structures. It highlights how movements interact with and shape the world as opposed to other theories that focus on how movements emerge, develop, and recruit members (McAdam 2012; Tarrow 2011). These theories of social movements, such as “resource mobilization” discussed by John McCarthy and Mayer Zald in *The Trend of Social Movements in America: Professionalization and Resource Mobilization* (1973), cannot be conceptualized as reform since they largely focus on the inner-workings of movements instead of their strategic actions and engagements. Here, McCarthy and Zald argue that seeking political change is not the only dynamic of movements, but rather that movements also function as socially orientated entrepreneurs who take advantage of economic opportunities to refine or adapt their internal organizational structures goals to meet their needs as they arise (McCarthy and Zald 1973).1

The development of social movement theory, growing out of critiques of pluralism and structural functionalism, has largely emphasized the goal of social movements as one of political

---

1Resource mobilization falls outside the scope of my reform-oriented argument since it focuses on the inner dynamics or a movements organizational structure instead of their outward actions and strategies (McAdam and Tarrow 2000; McAdam 2012). Resource mobilization, however, is not a counter-argument to my thesis on reform, but rather it is a popular theory within movement studies that attempts to understand the inner-workings of movements instead of how movements shape or influence the world. Thus, I am arguing that the political process model is still the predominant in social movement studies to explain the role movements in political and social life.
reform. Theorists have positioned social movements within the larger context of political processes by viewing movements as catalysts for the inclusion of unrepresented voices within our political system. The 1960s and 1970s provided scholars with insights into how political contention and social unrest can function as a central institution of politics; scholars began to study social movements as part of governance instead of an alternative to it. Though the purpose of movements was reconstituted from the early postwar theories—where structural functionalism and pluralism defined movements as intending to formally lobby the government—the political process model viewed the social unrest of movements as a central part of politics that attempts to give political power to marginalized groups. Thus, both the older and more contemporary conceptions view movements as oriented towards the state.

However, the field’s emphasis on movements as confined to the realm of politics gave way to another shift in the field that attempts to understand the role of movements within a social and cultural context. By reviewing the shift in social moment literature toward a cultural approach in the next section, I will continue to argue that social movement strategy, political or cultural, has been theorized as reformative and thus lacks the ability to recognize self-transformative goals of activism.

3) Petitioning Society & Culture to Change: Social Movement Strategy as Cultural Reform

With a narrow focus on politics the “new” social movements theorists of the 1980s, 1990s, and today have attempt to describe the movement’s cultural dynamics, yet their theories still describe a type of reform that fails to reflect self-transformation. As postwar social movement theorists working from the political process model broadened the scope or context within which social movements functioned as a central part of politics, these “new social movement theorists” have broadened our understanding of movements by including cultural approaches (Polletta 2008; Tarrow 2011). This section will review the cultural and social perspective within social movements studies to argue that this approach is still a process of reform and won’t account for a theory of informal citizenship. These “new” social movement theorists have largely argued that social movements do not only have a political agenda targeting formal political reform, but movements also use cultural strategies to instigate social change. As I will attempt to show by the end of this section, although these theorists have broadened the role of movements to incorporate social and cultural dynamics, these theories still cannot account for
what I witnessed at the AFL-CIO convention since cultural reform still focuses on changing external targets and places the authority to implement change into these outside audiences.

By examining three central “new” social movement theories—identify formation, action framing, and emotion appeal—this section will argue that these cultural approaches are still processes of reform: they target existing cultural or social systems in order to petition a desired change. Moreover, I will argue in this section that these movement strategies are processes of social reform by emphasizing each strategy’s target: who has the power to implement change in each case, and how their desired goals figure into the equation. I will show that even though the their target authority, and desired outcome is different than those encompassed in previous theories of political reform, new social movement theories still embrace a reform approach that targets external sources.

“New” Social Movement Theory: The Need For A Cultural Approach

“New” social movement theories still fail to account for self-transformation since their theories of cultural change place the authority into cultural and social sources that our outside the control of the actor. Instead of analyzing movements through broad political structures, such as political opportunities and systems of class oppression, these new social movement theorists emphasize the importance of cultural contestation as a source of social change (McAdam 2012; Polletta 2006; 2008). Movements, in other words, are not only interested in negotiating their roles within the process of politics and government, they also seek to contest social norms, redefine group identities, and alter public perceptions (Tarrow 2011). These “new” social movement theorists recognized the need for developing new theories to account for the cultural strategies the movements were using. By reviewing three central movement strategies of cultural change—identity formation, action framing, and emotional appeals—I will show that although these cultural theorists have recognized movements as going beyond the realm of politics, they still describe the central mechanism of movement strategy as reform.

The early “new” social movement theorists argued that cultural reform is integrally tied to political reform, and that though cultural objectives can function separately from political goals, implementing political reform also requires cultural reform. Theorist Ann Swidler, writes, “The enduring accomplishments of social movements are transformations in culture—in the legitimacy of specific demands, but also in the general climate of public discourse” (Swidler
1995, 34). Swidler questions the underlying logic of social movements as one focused on formal policy objectives and instead leans towards a cultural process approach that views social movements as catalysts of social awakening and cultural reform. Swidler further writes, “Since most movements lack political power… they can reshape the world more effectively by redefining its terms rather than rearranging its sanctions” (Swidler 1995, 34). Here, Swidler critiques the fundamental assumption within the political process perspective that social movements can sustain concrete and lasting reform through changing policy and restructuring “sanctions.” In other words, simply changing a law doesn't guarantee that a group or movement will be treated with respect, dignity, and recognition from society as whole.

Instead of focusing on policy, Swidler suggests that movements can more effectively achieve their goals by negotiating the “terms” in which society and culture constrains, limits, and restricts their power to influence their surroundings and fully participate in the world (Swidler 1995). Even though Swidler doesn't offer a strategic prescription for social movements to enact cultural change, her work outlines the essential connection between public perception, social discourse, and social movement strategy (Swidler 1995). If movements can change how people perceive their messages, identities, and goals, then society will be better prepared to enact more formal (legal and political) reform in the future. Swidler, however, diverges from the movement theorists of her time to show how cultural reform is not only a necessary prerequisite for state-oriented change—a stepping stone of political reform—but that culture is often the ultimate target of social movement strategy.

In the next three subsections, I will show that three main theories of cultural change movements employ a reform perspective. Each of these theories view movements that are not necessarily targeting the state for change, but rather movements that are oriented towards changing culture, social norms, and social systems. Likewise, these cultural approaches do not place the authority to implement change in the hands of the state. Rather, society has the authority or obligation to make change, and thus transformation is dependent upon the acceptance of others instead of the authority of one’s own actions.

**Identity-Formation**

One central strategy of cultural reform posited by social movement theorists is ‘identity-formation,’ the process of reworking group identities and boundaries to fight cultural and social
inequalities. Changing and reworking group identities, however, still relies on reforming social perceptions and therefore doesn't account for the internal targets of self-transformation. Francesca Polletta, in “Culture and Movements” (2008), argues that the challenge of incorporating culture within the study of social movements “has been to award culture a substantial role…without treating activists as strategic dopes or ideological dupes” (Polletta 2008, 79). Her observation questions the prevailing political interpretations of social movements as culturally naïve and state-oriented in order to show that movements have actually succeeded through effectively and strategically targeting cultural beliefs, perceptions, and rules. One central cultural strategy advanced by new social movement theorists is the formation of collective identities and the reworking of social identity boundaries (Tarrow 2011).

Sidney Tarrow draws from the work of Charles Tilly to argue that “movements must often struggle to politicize the meaning of identities and to activate boundaries” to publically create a collective identity and answer the questions, “who are we, who are you, and who are they” (Tarrow 2011 144; Tilly 2005). Here, identities serve as boundaries within our imagined social order separating “us” from “them.” Social movements seek to redraw these lines of separation by challenging dominant cultural attitudes and redefining the relationships between groups on either side of the boundary. As Tilly argues in *Identities, Boundaries and Social Ties* (2005), the strategy of transforming collective identities begins with creating and retelling the socially constructed stories and cultural myths that usually function to strengthen cultural bonds and relationships within subgroups and minorities but conversely separate that group from the larger constituency. Identities such as “citizen,” “woman,” and “homosexual” all reside within relationship to other identities and groups and are reinforced through culturally constructed boundaries, stories and social norms (Tilly 2005). Social movements, as Tarrow and Tilly suggest, would not simply break down these boundaries but rather strategically rework the relationships between groups on either side.

Identity formation, then, is constructed through a simultaneous process of both celebrating a group’s commonality with the majority as well as emphasizing its differences (Bernstein 1997). For example, Mary Bernstein shows that the Lesbian and Gay Movement transformed the identity of homosexuality by commemorating the group’s differences as well as suppressing them. Bernstein writes, “The cultural barriers to acceptance of homosexuality and the challenge of self-acceptance for lesbians and gay men require cultural struggle…cultural
transformation through sexual liberation” (Bernstein 1997, 532). Bernstein shows how the Lesbian and Gay movement have recently abandoned a strategy of “sexual liberation”—emphasizing an acceptance of deviant sexuality and differences from a strait majority—towards a more narrowly homonormative approach that focuses on similarities between the group and the general public; for example, the desire to legally marry (Bernstein 1997). Bernstein theorizes that the strategy of forming collective identities functions through a simultaneous process of both celebrating and suppressing differences in identities, through both forming group solitary and petitioning for social acceptance.

Drawing on the work of these “new” cultural social movement theorists (Polletta 2006; 2008; Tarrow 2011; Touraine 1981), Berstein sketches the three central dimensions of “identity” in social movement action: identity for empowerment, identity as a goal, and identity as a strategy. Social movements, she shows, can form collective identities as a mode of empowering or mobilizing a marginalized group to publically or politically act; movements also can see identity as a goal in itself, in which their action is centered towards constructing, framing, and maintaining a specified public perception; and last, movements can use identity strategically to gain social recognition or enact other broader challenges to social norms and dominant culture (Bernstein 1997).

The goal of these multiple approaches to identity-formation function in a similar fashion as reform. Movements mobilize around identity in order to bring forth specific changes to the cultural norms, to the boundaries that define group identities, and to empower their community by petitioning acceptance. Identity as a form of empowerment, however, doesn't function in the same way as self-transformation. Forming group identities, within Berstein’s conception, functions only as a form of empowerment through challenging culture and demanding acceptance. Here, the empowerment is not gained through the performance of the action, or from the action itself, but rather the empowerment comes from social acceptance. In other words, a group would reform or change their identity to challenge particular norms or to strategically gain acceptance from the public—though it may facilitate empowerment, this strategy is still oriented outwards and doesn't describe a self-transformative type of activism with a solely internal target. Moreover, identity formation is oriented towards culture and society, and places the authority to implement change into these realms by reworking the social constructions of identity.
Even though identity claims have political consequences and involve politics, since political institutions help construct identities, the strategy of forming collective identity is ultimately a cultural process. Polletta writes that identity-based social movement strategies have highlighted the interaction between “structural trends and cultural schemas” (Polletta 2008, 89). Identity serves as a process of cultural development that triggers protests and as a system of cultural change that centers “movements' aims and impacts” (Polletta 2008, 82).

**Action-Framing**

Action-framing, another central strategy of cultural reform within “new” social movement studies, attempts to frame movement actions with a prescribed ‘spin,’ but still cannot account for self-transformative activism since change is implemented only when an external audience accepts the message of a ‘frame.’ Social movement theorists have largely studied how movements “frame” contentious actions to instigate cultural change and reform public perception. David Snow and Robert Benford in “Frames and Cycles of Protest” (1992), argue that the strategy of “framing” movement actions helps to construct a simplified interpretative story that sums up complex issues for the general public (Snow and Benford 1992). Movement framing is analogous to how a journalist or politician would selectively pick and choose their words to place a particular “spin” on their story. Benford and Snow write that movements use frames to “underscore and embellish the seriousness and injustice of a social condition or redefine as unjust and immoral what was previously seen as unfortunate but perhaps tolerable” (Snow and Benford 1992, 137). Frames serve as a process of “making meaning,” where movements strategically communicate their “grievances” in such a way that would effectively alter the audience’s previously held beliefs or perceptions (Tarrow 2011, 144).

Doug McAdam further developed the concept of “dramaturgic framing” in his studies of the civil rights movement to show how participants strategically choose action sites and forms of protest that would elicit non-democratic responses by the state (McAdam 2000, 117). In effect, this type of framing would expose the state’s coercive power. Since democratic polities rest on the consent of the governed, their non-democratic resistance to social movements would delegitimize their authority and reveal how they maintain consent through forceful means. Even though these protests were state-oriented, the framing strategy was culturally targeted. The non-violent civil rights protests in Birmingham during the early 1960s, for example, which led to
media coverage of Black protesters being beaten, jetted with high-pressured fire hoses, and bitten by police dogs, exposed to the general public the horrors faced by African Americans. The movement’s conscious and strategic staging—a nonviolent demonstration turned into police brutality and mayhem—defined the movement as “good” and the system as “evil,” “oppressive,” and undemocratic (McAdam 2000, 127).

Even though the civil rights movement had direct policy objectives in mind in their strategic choice of nonviolent “dramaturgic framing” in Birmingham, the essence of the action was cultural and social: it not only reconfigured the public’s perceptions towards the movement, but also reformed how society viewed African Americans as a whole. Tarrow writes in *Power and Movement* (2011), “Social movements are deeply involved in the work of “naming” grievances, connecting them to other grievances, and constructing larger frames of meaning that will resonate with a population’s cultural predispositions” (Tarrow 2011, 144). The strategy of framing enables cultural reform by exposing the connection between a movement’s “grievances” and social norms, public perceptions, and cultural beliefs. Like identity-formation, the strategy of framing places the authority to implement change into the audience of the action. By contextualizing a movement action, they are attempting to ‘spin’ the action in such a way that it changes the perception of the group and their messages. The “change,” however, ultimately is implemented when the audience tacitly agrees to accept their interpretation.

**Emotional Appeals**

Emotional appeals, the last major cultural strategy of social movement studies, function as cultural reform by attempting to use pathos to influence an audience in favor of a specific change. This strategy cannot account for the internal mechanism of self-transformation since, similar to forming identities and framing action, emotional appeals target external sources and place the source of change within those realms. Thus, movements use pathos to manipulate their audience’s emotions to incite a type of cultural reform. Moreover, the ways in which these grievances transform into public action, or translate into actual change or reform, is through the work of emotion and affect. Change and transformation ultimately derive from emotion by convincing the audience to adopt a particular perspective, opinion, or accept a particular grievance.
Emotional appeals function as reform by placing movement’s grievances into broader social and cultural claims (Gould 2009; Polletta 2006; Taylor 1995). In Verta Taylor’s analysis of movement strategy within feminist organizations, she argues that emotions compel the public to mobilize, to believe in a cause, and to influence social discourse and cultural attitudes. She writes, “emotions may be a site for articulating the links between individual protest and larger cultural and structural processes, for it is emotions that provide the ‘heat,’ so to speak, that distinguishes social movements from dominant institutions” (Taylor 1995, 233). The strategy of using emotions—of adopting actions that incite feelings of love, hatred, anger, or disgust, for example—recognizes that the public is not only composed of rational “thinking” actors but these actors are deeply “feeling” human beings. By making demonstrations and claims emotional, social movements appeal to a human sensibility. They can translate grievances into touching arguments that take hold as lasting change. Emotions help the broader public discover the reasons underlying the message, convincing them that its cause is worthwhile.

All three major strategies of cultural change employed by “new” social movement theorists—forming identities, framing actions, and emotional appeals—function as a form of cultural reform by targeting social systems and placing the authority to implement change into the hands of a public audience. Each of these strategies intends to make changes to existing cultural and social systems. For identity formation, the strategy attempts to rework the boundaries and social constructions of identities. Action-framing, likewise, attempts to place a particular ‘spin’ on the ways in which movement action is performed in order to convince an audience of a particular message. Lastly, emotional appeals attempt to strategically convince an audience of a position or message by relaying a grievance in an emotional manner. Like political reform, social or cultural reform functions to change existing systems and places the authority to implement the change into these realms. However, these reform attempts don’t fully describe what I witnessed the AFL-CIO convention. What is missing from these reform approaches is a language and methodology to describe a type of activism oriented towards the ‘self.’

Conclusion:

This chapter reviewed the breadth of social movement literature in order to show how the enactment of informal citizenship poses a challenge to the social movement study of reform minded theories. What I saw at the AFL-CIO conference was not reducible to a type of reform
since the actions were targeting the ‘self,’ purposed towards self-transformation, and thus placed
the authority of transformation within the capacity of their actions. The action was also not a
type of reform since it took on a different temporality. The change was implemented through the
action itself and did not rely upon reforming, changing, or waiting for acceptance from external
sources.

Social movement literature, no matter what form it takes, is stubbornly focused on
reform. In the second section, I analyzed the conception of social movement studies from
postwar theories that viewed the role of movements as a function of political reform. These early
theories viewed movements as a rare exception to the proper functioning of politics, and these
scholars argued that movements merely served as signals to the state that political change must
be enacted in order to return to a conflict-free politics. Next I showed how social movement
studies developed into a dedicated field of study, and I argued that the field’s predominate
theory, the political process model, though broadened the postwar conceptions of movements to
view movement’s role as an integral part of political systems, could still not account for self-
transformation since it targets the state through political reform. In the third section, I attempted
to show another shift in social movement literature from a focus on political reform to “new”
social movement theorist’s emphasis on cultural reform. Here, I argued that the three main
“new” social movement theories of cultural change—forming identities, framing actions, and
emotional appeals—still fail to describe self-transformation since they target social audiences to
change their cultural believes, norms, and perceptions.

However, if a social movement scholar were to take my seat at the AFL-CIO convention,
they would most likely interpret the display of undocumented activism as a strategy of reform.
For a political reformist, their declaration of belonging could be interpreted as a function of civil
disobedience targeting the AFL-CIO and the state to push forward immigration reform.
Specifically, the activist’s migration narratives might be described by the scholars as a strategy
to highlight the political need for reforming the immigration enforcement system as well as
function to petition legal inclusion for undocumented immigrants. For a cultural reformist, their
narratives could be seen as a form of emotional appeal and identity-formation to convince their
audience to reform their perceptions of undocumented immigrants in a positive light. Likewise,
the activist’s strategies of “coming out” as undocumented could be seen as a form of action-
framing in order to elicit a negative response from the audience and therefore expose to the media the unfair treatment of undocumented immigrants.

Whether or not the activists had reform goals in mind doesn't negate the thesis of informal citizenship. In other words, enactments of informal citizenship may be enacted simultaneously within reform strategies, but they don’t require the latter to be successful. Though the undocumented activists may have had political or cultural reform goals, they also engaged in self-transformative activism that went beyond reform. Namely, informal citizenship poses a challenge to social movement literature because its actions may be easily interpreted as a reform strategy. Yet, the purpose, target, and authority to implement change for informal citizenship is widely different from reform. Therefore, we need to move beyond social movement theory to explain the self-transformative activism that I witnessed. Reducing their action to mere reform is to ignore the whole range of the action’s causes and effects. Namely, that settling for political or cultural reform dismisses the benefits of self-transformation. Through this chapter I have provided a glimpse of informal citizenship and established its challenge to political and cultural reform. The next chapter will build the theory from the ground up. I will deepen my analysis of the theory by discussing four more case studies of informal citizenship, and draw on theories in political philosophy and migration scholarship to clarify the theory’s outwardly discernable qualities.
Chapter 2
Characteristics of Informal Citizenship

With no theory to describe a self-transformative undocumented activism, I will create a theory of informal citizenship from the ground-up. This chapter attempts to define informal citizenship by drawing on case studies of immigrant rights demonstrations that illustrate a type of political action not addressed in social movement theory. Juxtaposing these case studies with contemporary political theory and migration scholarship, I will try to show commonalities that reveal the transcending as well as transformative power of informal citizenship.

In five sections, I will show that demonstrations of informal citizenship have five distinct qualities: an orientation towards a public good, facilitating political freedom, self-authorization, an impatience for justice, and self-transformation. I demonstrate these qualities by drawing out similarities between an extensive number of immigrant rights protest case studies; I am featuring only the case studies that best exemplify these questions and express diverse manifestations of informal citizenship. Though not every quality is apparent in quite the same way in each demonstration of informal citizenship, these qualities are its foundation. They distinguish informal citizenship from reform and other types of public political action or social movement strategy.

In other words, these qualities are essential to define informal citizenship, but are expressed differently in any given manifestation or example. They can be used to construct a theory of informal citizenship as a public political action that challenges state authorization (through self-authorization), national sovereignty (through expressing political freedom in public), the passive status of citizenship (through acting toward a public good), the political virtue of patience (through acting with democratic impatience), and the indignity of undocumented anonymity and illegality (through its self-transformative process).

Further, this chapter will employ the methodology of immanent (critical) theory, which is a technique of political philosophy that does not simply posit a normative theory on how the world should be, but rather develops a theory out of political actions already taking place. Therefore, this chapter will define the theory of informal citizenship and its various qualities by investigating case studies of undocumented activism through a novel and unique perspective.
Contextualizing Informal Citizenship In Migration Scholarship

Throughout the second chapter, I will be theorizing the qualities of informal citizenship by drawing on existing philosophies of citizenship and political action from contemporary migration scholarship. Beside my analysis of undocumented activist case studies, these qualities are theorized by building off of similar theories of immigrant belonging and non-legal citizenship. The second chapter, then, does not theorize informal as an entirely unique theory of undocumented activism, but instead brings together bits and pieces of migration scholarship in order to articulate the theory in one place. Placing their theories together, the scholars discussed in the following page have examined similar notions of informal citizenship in their investigations of immigrant activism and migration politics. Here, I will show how informal citizenship is both grounded in and builds off of this literature.

Linda Bosniak, in her book *The Citizen and the Alien*, alludes to type of informal citizen by challenging the typical separation between “citizen” and “noncitizen” in the context of “alienage.” It is not enough to possess formal or legal citizenship, Bosniak argues, but rather citizenship requires a type of normative cultural and political competency—citizenship is not only a mere status rather is constituted between who is and isn’t an ‘alien.’ Bosniak writes, “to posses the legal status of citizenship is to enjoy citizenship only in the most formal and nominal sense. The true and full enjoyment of citizenship requires much more” (Bosniak 2005, 87). Citizenship in this sense is a form of active democratic engagement and “self-governance,” in which belonging extends beyond state or cultural registers to create a type of foreignness or alienage that divides citizens and non-citizens in an informal sense: even status citizens, here, may be unable to attain the highest democratic and citizenship privileges out of their alienage or difference (Bosniak 2005, 87; 134). For Bosniak, citizenship entails a participatory roll that works to challenge the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in territorial, communitarian, and political senses. Here, inclusion does not simply entail formal status but also requires active political engagement.

Where Bosniak views foreignness as a means to challenge exclusionary and narrow conceptions of citizenship, Bonnie Honig reimagines the challenge of immigrant inclusion to ask: “What problems might foreigners solve for us? (Honig 2001, 4).” In her theory of “democratic cosmopolitanism,” Honig reconceives citizenship as not simply a measure of “myth,” in which the foreigner is either to be assimilated or excluded, but rather citizenship is a
“practice in which denizens, migrants, residents, and their allies hold states accountable for their definitions and distributions of goods, powers, rights, freedoms, privileges, and justice” (Honig 2001, 104). Like Bosniak, Honig imagines citizenship as an active form of political engagement outside formal state boundaries. Undocumented and immigrant activism, then, would function as a practice of gaining informal rights and privileges by challenging cosmopolitan registers beyond the state. For Honig, legal or formal citizenship perpetuates a mythicized immigrant, and it is through a type of cosmopolitan activism that the immigrant can work towards a non-juridical (informal) citizenship.

Yet, how could undocumented immigrants enact informal citizenship if their activism requires formal authorization? In other words, how could informal citizenship exist without first possessing formal citizenship? In Michaele Ferguson’s view of democracy as a forum of political freedom, in which democratic subjects express their freedom through public political activism, informal citizenship would not require state authorization. Ferguson argues that within a democratic protest there exists a sense of “self-authorization,” or rather that protests show that the authorization to act comes from the actors themselves and not from an external authority or the state. The presence of other formal citizens and immigrants (or simply other undocumented immigrants) helps authorize actors to partake in protests. This “self” authorization (understanding the self as the demos or political actors themselves) doesn’t require the state’s permission. Therefore, undocumented immigrants have a means of expressing political freedom within a space at which they don’t formally belong. Self-authorization alludes to a type of informal citizenship by conceiving of democracy beyond the state, by imagining political action as the nexus of democratic belonging and not requiring a status, an identity, or a nationality as prerequisite to action. Conceiving of citizenship and democratic activism outside the requirement of legal citizenship, these scholars help contribute to a theory of informal citizenship. I will expand upon these scholar’s theories, alongside others, throughout the second chapter to articulate informal citizenship as a form of undocumented activism.

1) Oriented Towards a Public Good.

I call informal citizenship, “citizenship,” because it shares legal citizenship’s ideal quality of being orientated towards the good of the public. By analyzing a recent immigrant rights demonstration made up of over 100 immigrant women activists alongside the political
philosophy of Michale Walzer, I will argue in this section that an essential quality of informal citizenship is the actor’s orientation or motivation for public good. I will argue that this quality is essential since undocumented activists constitute themselves as “informal” citizens by taking on the ideal political responsibilities of citizenship, despite not having formal status. First, I will highlight the protest’s social and political intent to argue that informal citizenship is directed towards a ‘public’ that does not only include official members of the state, but also local, regional, and transnational communities. Second, I will explore Walzer’s conception of citizenship as a commitment to fight for a “common good” to show that citizenship isn’t only a passive membership but rather is constituted through participatory action. Third, I will show that Walzer reserves this participatory citizenship for only legal or status citizens, and argue that informal citizenship allows us to see a more expansive and fluid notion of citizenship that conceptualizes the public good beyond state-bound communities.

While forming a circular human chain on a busy intersection in front of Capitol Hill on September 12, 2013, more than 100 female immigrant-rights activists were arrested for protesting what they deemed to be inadequate protections for families in the House’s proposed comprehensive immigration reform bill (Hincapie 2013). After holding hands and blocking traffic for approximately 30 minutes, D.C. police handcuffed the activists and removed them in vans from Capitol Hill. Among the diversity of family specific grievances they wished to convey to Congress, the protestors sought to draw attention to the fact that 75% of all immigrants in the U.S. are women and children, that they have insufficient access to health care and legal employment, and that deportations can result in their naturalized children being placed in foster care.

The immigrant protesters included community leaders, mothers of DREAMERS, grandmothers, and low-wage workers. Almost all of the protesters belonged to the immigrant rights organization, “We Belong Together,” and almost half of the activists present were undocumented. In solidarity with the immigrant protesters, Terry O’Neill, the president of the National Organization for Women, and Linda Meric, the executive director of the women-rights group 9to5, were also arrested in the choreographed demonstration (Hincapie 2013).

---

2 DREAMERS are undocumented youth activists that fight for the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors).
Pramila Jayapal, the co-chair of “We Belong Together,” remarked in a press conference a day later that the demonstration’s purpose was to highlight the “courage and contribution of immigrant women every single day” (We Belong Together 2013). She said, “They make the economy work, hold their families together, contribute to their communities, and yet they have to live in the shadows and have to live with the burden of a broken immigration system” (We Belong Together 2013). Jayapal’s remarks suggest that the demonstration’s purpose went beyond simply petitioning congress to change their proposed immigration legislation. Namely, the purpose of demonstrating was to induce social reform by attempting to reframe the identity of immigrant women and highlight their “daily contributions.”

However, it was not the protest’s direct social and political goals that demonstrated the action’s informal citizenship. Rather, it was the undocumented activist’s fight for the public good that expressed the demonstration’s informal citizenship quality. Despite their lack of legal status, these undocumented protestor activists acted as “informal” citizens by displaying a commitment to fight for a common good beyond their private or individual interests. By taking on the ideal political responsibilities of a citizen without having legal membership under the state, the activists questioned the meaning of citizenship and its formal and legal qualifications. Yet, the activists were not just narrowly fighting for the “good of the country” or for the benefits of status citizens. Their public advocacy targeted a broader non-state centered ‘public’ or ‘common.’ Namely, the demonstration was oriented towards local, national, and transnational communities, not just Congress and the D.C. police.

By petitioning for immigrant rights and protections these activists fought for the good of their local immigrant communities. They also sought to benefit a national community by advocating for undocumented immigrants across the country, women, families, and our ‘economy.’ Moreover, the activists also targeted a transnational community by advocating for the human rights of immigrants and women in general—even those that don’t currently reside in the U.S. Their orientation towards a public good went beyond a commitment to the state or country that compels us to widen our definition of community and what the word ‘public’ actually means. These activists were expressing a form of citizenship that is not bound to the state, but is rather oriented towards the public good in a more informal and fluid way.

Michael Walzer’s conception of citizenship as constituted through a commitment to a public good, helps us to see the activist’s actions as exemplifying a type of “citizenship” through
participation. In his essay, “Civility and Civic Virtue” he argues that what citizens have in common is a purely political commitment to benefiting other citizens. It is not our ethnic, religious, or ideological commonality, but rather our shared democratic responsibility to fight for the good of other citizens. Citizenship for Walzer is participatory and grounded in a common commitment of “sharing” the “republic.” Despite the differences between individual citizens, the foundation of Walzer’s understanding of citizenship rests in the actions or performances of its citizens. As Walzer maintains, our citizenship is a shared “Americaness” based upon the common values of democratic participation (Walzer 1992, 95). Playing off of the motto on the U.S. seal, “Out of Many, One,” Walzer writes, “E. Pluribus Unum is an alchemist’s promise; out of liberal pluralism no oneness can come. But there is a kind of sharing that is possible…” (Walzer 1992, 100). In other words, what we share in common is a duty to our polity and to one another as fellow citizens. Citizens are more than merely residents or habitants since they take on a political allegiance and commitment to share and shape the polity alongside their peers. For Walzer, citizenship goes beyond a passive qualification, but is rather an active mode of political engagement.

Walzer translates a commitment to a public ‘good’ to mean a citizen’s commitment to defend and further core and common values—even though these values may differ among individual citizens. It is the action of fighting for the values itself that constitutes citizenship. Within America’s liberal conception of citizenship, Walzer writes, “There is too little sense of a common good. And yet all the groups…share a common political space, whose safety, healthfulness, beauty, and accessibility are collective values” (Walzer 1992, 10). He adds that these values aren’t preserved and advanced through a passive status, but rather “Only citizens can defend these values—and only citizens who participate in a larger politics will be fully capable of such a defense, that is, both committed to it and competent enough to make it a success” (Walzer 1992, 10). What turns a person into a citizen, Walzer argues, are “public causes and effects” in which fighting for a common good goes beyond individual benefit and private goals (Walzer 1992, 98). Fighting for common values may align with a citizen’s individual interest, but it is the citizen’s commitment to the broader ‘public’ that defines their belonging. Ultimately, citizens belong to the demos out of a commitment to actively engage public causes, and not their cultural, national, or ideological similarity to other citizens (which Walzer argues is how we typically understand citizenship in the western tradition).
Walzer’s conception of citizenship as a participatory commitment is readily apparent in the previously cited “We Belong Together” demonstration. Activists sought multiple goals that not only include benefits to their own families or other immigrant women, but the ‘good’ that might come to many other local, national, and transnational communities. In the press conference following the release of the protesters a day after the demonstration, Jayapal remarked, “It was a moment of complete power and togetherness as we claimed that intersection…there was this surge of power through this circle as we showed Congress what it looks like to have courage and to act for the good of millions of people across the country” (We Belong Together 2013). The day before, just moments before the activists proceeded to march into the intersection to form a circular bond, an undocumented mother stood up to pledge what amounts to an oath of allegiance to the country, in part saying: “I am getting arrested today because I have a moral responsibility to advocate for all our communities” (We Belong Together 2013). She further claimed that she had a duty to protect this “nation” and future generations of immigrants by making history through just civil disobedience.

Though their remarks were directed toward a state-based conception of a “public” by arguing for the good of the “nation” and “country,” their actions were not simply targeting a state-bound public. Given that many of these activists were undocumented—not official members of the state—they were broadening the definition or limitations of what it means to belong. Paradoxically, they were expressing a commitment, a citizenship, for a state to which they didn't officially belong. In one interpretation, their actions may be understood as fighting for inclusion into the polity. My claim of informal citizenship reads their actions instead as a commitment to the good of both status citizens and undocumented immigrants residing in the US and abroad. Thus, they were expressing a citizenship with communities both within the US territories and internationally. However, informal citizenship is not necessarily a world-citizenship or transnational citizenship. It is a citizenship unbound by conceptions of nation states and instead focuses on a belonging to various community registers. Not every action of informal citizenship is a fight for the good of the same community, but rather informal citizenship fights for the good of a ‘public’ that isn’t confined or defined by state-authorized conceptions. Since undocumented activists don’t have the right to belong in the nation state, their
public activism and enactments of informal citizenship express a commitment and belonging that is not only directed at the nation-state.³

Even though Walzer’s conception of participatory citizenship has helped me conceptualize citizenship beyond a passive status, his theory is still anchored in the nation-state paradigm. For Walzer, residents become citizens through participatory engagement, but only after they are officially given authorization from the state. Walzer’s notion of “public” then is narrowly limited to the nation state and those that legally reside within it. Moreover, within Walzer’s conception of citizenship, the government has the right to control immigration and place barriers between citizens and “strangers” or foreigners. He argues that through political participation and founding a shared government, the people themselves create the potential to control their borders and establish the qualifications for citizenship. In the book Spheres of Justice, Walzer writes that citizens have the right “to make [their] own admissions policy, to control and sometimes restrain the flow of immigrants” (Walzer 1983, 39). He furthers asserts that “the primary good that we can distribute to one another is membership” in our shared polity, and citizenship “is a good that can only be distributed by taking people in,” or, equally, refusing to incorporate them (Walzer 1983, 29).

Within Walzer’s theory of citizenship, a citizen’s duty to the common good is analogues to a duty to the wellbeing of her country or nation, but this duty doesn't extend to “illegal” immigrants, “strangers” or outside communities. Walzer writes, “People who do share a common life have much stronger duties” to each other, and accordingly, citizens have stronger duties to one another than they do to outsiders (Walzer 1983, 33). Though Walzer argues for a participatory democracy in which every citizen is invested into and embodies a duty towards a common good, he does not extend this commitment to “strangers” or those that are present without authorization. Conversely, informal citizenship doesn't require its actors to have state approval in order to act nor is its commitment to a common good limited to the state.⁴

³ The irony that undocumented activist’s lack political rights yet fight for the public good, suggests that informal citizenship is not only targeting inclusion to nation-state communities but instead express belonging to local, regional, national, and transnational communities.

⁴ In defining her theory of “democratic cosmopolitanism” political theorist Bonnie Honig makes a similar critique of Walzer’s theory of active citizenship. In understanding how undocumented immigrants mobilize, she argues that though Walzer was right see citizenship as attained through people acting together for a common good, this often excludes those who aren’t legitimate in the eyes of the state. Instead, she argues for a democratic “cosmopolitanism” where “actions are generated out of a sense of solidarity that may be located on any number of registers—local, national, or international” (Honig 2001, 103).
Walzer’s theory of citizenship, then, is not informal citizenship. Rather, his theory helps to describe the mechanism by which noncitizens become citizens. In both Walzer’s case and informal citizenship, citizenship is achieved through public action oriented towards a common good. Walzer’s theory is reserved for the good of the country or nation, whereas informal citizenship acts for the good of a broader “public.” Informal citizenship demonstrates a meaningful bond and belonging between the actors and their larger political community. It doesn't rest upon official membership, but rather is determined through participation. It is a type of citizenship based on the member’s actions and commitments instead of the recognition or acceptance of other formal citizens.

Informal citizenship may not contain as clear-cut a conception of duty as Walzer’s citizenship (duty to the wellbeing of a country), but it still includes a type of commitment. Namely, it is a commitment to benefit the good of many publics, where its actors may or may not stand to benefit from their actions. The undocumented activists exemplified this commitment by risking detention and deportation to fight for the good of many communities, both within and outside the U.S. The protest demonstrated a citizenship and a belonging to these various ‘publics,’ even if they didn't have official government recognition. By being oriented beyond state-bounded publics, informal citizenship rethinks traditional conceptions of citizenship and belonging. It imagines a citizenship of other political actors and communities (not confined by national boundaries) and is defined by meaningful active political participation that benefits these political members and publics.

2) Political Freedom

Enactments of informal citizenship enable nonsovereign political freedom by expressing the actor’s world-shaping capabilities despite of her lack of state-authorized freedom. Drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt, this section will argue that actions of informal citizenship facilitate a nonsovereign political freedom that is different from a state authorized or rights-based freedom. First, I will use immigration scholarship to argue that the essential elements of political freedom are the freedom of “movement” and the capacity to act in public. Second, I argue that the risk of deportation pushes undocumented immigrants into the “shadows,” hindering them from “moving” or taking part in public participatory action. Third, I will explain Arendt’s conception of “nonsovereign” political freedom and argue that the
enactment of informal citizenship conveys this nonsovereign freedom since undocumented activists are publically shaping the world. Last, I will distinguish state authorized political freedom from informal citizenship’s nonsovereign freedom, arguing that the former is a freedom granted from the government whereas the latter is defined as an individual’s capacity to take part in public political action.

Legal or formal citizenship does not only encompass one’s political rights and national belonging, it authorizes the freedom for an individual to occupy public space, legally participate with other citizens, use public benefits, and travel freely in and around the polity. Citizenship, thus, is not only a passive mode of membership but also an active from of authorization that controls and limits whoever can and can’t live within its demarcation. Then, undocumented immigrants are also unauthorized immigrants. Without permission to work, live, and belong within the territory of the U.S., their residence is conditional. Undocumented immigrant’s deportability—the fact that they will be removed from the state if their ‘illegal’ presence is found out—robs them of their political freedom. Linda Bosniak writes, “Only status citizens can count on it [their presence] unqualifiedly…In the case of the undocumented, it is…the very fact of their hereness that renders them deportable” (2006, 139). It is citizenship’s function of deportation that reaffirms the state’s sovereignty over its residents and polices one’s ability to partake in their daily life. In other words, it is not only a lack of rights or paperwork that keeps undocumented immigrants working and living within the ‘shadows,’ it is their deportability that restrains them from life in public. This results in undocumented immigrants being unable to partake in a common or political life since their public ‘movements’ translate into potential harm and danger.

Out of a vulnerability to deportation and detention, undocumented immigrants can’t become involved in politics. They can’t join public actions since they can’t freely or publicly move within the polity. They become completely subject to the state’s sovereignty and its regime of deportation renders them politically invisible. Nicholas De Genova writes, “Nation-state sovereignty and citizenship has become the conventional determinant of an individual’s liberty to move into, out of, or across various national…spaces” (Genova 2010, 7). Genova argues that the most essential condition of politics—movement and the freedom of movement—is premised upon a state’s sovereignty. The ability to move gives humans the capacity to become involved in the world around them. Without movement, people are invisible to the larger community and uninvolved with the outside world. Hannah Arendt writes that the freedom of movement is “the
freedom to depart and begin something new and unheard-of or as the freedom to interact in speech with many others and experience the diversity that the world always is in its totality…it is rather the substance and meaning of all things political” (Arendt 1958, 234).

The very essence of political freedom is the freedom of movement or the ability to publicly engage in shaping the world with others. Genova writes that the freedom of movement “is inseparable from that still more basic human power which is generative of the very possibility of social life, namely, our capacity to creatively transform our objective circumstances” (Genova 2010, 39). If political freedom is premised upon an active engagement with the world, an ability to shape democracy alongside fellow citizens, then undocumented immigrants lack political freedom since they are subjected the state’s sovereignty and its deportation regime.

Enactments of informal citizenship, however, bypass state sovereignty by ‘moving’ publically and shaping the world despite the risk and lack of authorization. These actions demonstrate that the actors indeed do have freedom, even if the state denies it. They are facilitating freedom by their active participation instead of being granted freedom from the state. In this, informal citizenship expresses the very core meaning of freedom by acting in a world shaping capacity. This does not mean that informal citizens hold the same freedoms as formal citizenship, such as protection from deportation, guaranteed rights or permanent residence, but rather informal citizens are expressing an innate human freedom—the freedom to move and shape the world.5

This expression of freedom is what Arendt calls “nonsovereign” freedom. Arguing against the assumption that freedom is gained through sovereignty, Arendt maintains that sovereignty, “the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality” (Arendt 1958, 234). What she is saying is that shaping the world with others requires acting in concert, and thus we lose our sovereignty to the unpredictability and plurality of political action. Even though Arendt fervently argues for the importance of state rights and formal citizenship in her critique of human rights,6 she does not locate political

5 Though legal protection from deportation is not the goal of informal citizenship, many times enactments of informal citizenship result in individual actors gaining legal amnesty, protection from detention or deportation, or a pathway to formal citizenship. Perhaps, it is informal citizenship’s ability to highlight one’s innate and human freedom that pushes the public and government to recognize their right to formal citizenship. This is similar to what Hannah Arendt refers to as the “right to have rights” (Arendt 1968).
6 Arendt’s critique of human rights follows from The Origins of Totalitarianism and On Revolution into much of her work. She argues that human rights are unenforceable and toothless “promises,” and thus all humans must have a
freedom in the state sovereignty. Instead, she argues that political freedom is only facilitated through political action itself. Arendt is not arguing for a type of informal citizenship since she advocates for formal citizenship. However, her analysis of political freedom as “nonsovereign” creates a potential for stateless or undocumented actors to gain freedom. Arendt further writes, “No man can be sovereign because no man, but men, inhabit the earth—because of man’s limited strength… [it] makes him dependent upon others” (Arendt 1958, 234). Our freedom, then, does not arise out of the seclusion of inaction, but rather out of making public relationships with others by acting together.

Informal citizenship’s nonsovereign freedom rethinks traditional conceptions of political freedom. Though we typically understand freedom as an individual right granted from the government, Arendt helps us to see that political freedom develops out of our public actions. Since our public political actions facilitate building a common political world, it is our actions that create a space for freedom. Though for formal citizenship this ‘space’ of freedom is controlled by territorial borders, granted through visas, and enforced through immigration quotas, informal citizenship forms a space without borders, where its actors express their freedom through action alone. Though Arendt believes in building lasting political institutions supported through constitutionally protected rights and membership, her notion of nonsovereignty invests the potential for freedom within political action itself and not within the power of state or authority.

This type of freedom, Arendt argues, may vanish the very moment when political action stops. Therefore, this type of freedom only exists within the confines of action, and doesn't guarantee informal citizens any lasting rights, privileges, or protections. Overall, informal citizenship expresses political freedom since it shows that its actors have the capacity for political action and participation, that they indeed do contain the freedom of movement and the ability to shape the world despite having been denied that potential to do so. In this, informal citizenship expresses a different kind of freedom than the freedom of formal citizenship. It is a freedom that demonstrates an innate and inherent human ability to shape the world.

formal membership under a state in order to have true rights. Despite this critique Arendt maintains that a passive membership isn’t enough, rights require active political participation to facilitate freedom.
3) Self-Authorization

As expressing belonging to publics beyond the state, enactments of informal citizenship are self-authorized and don’t require state permission. This section will analyze an immigrant rights mobilization from 2009, in which activists facilitated a two-month long public summer school for immigrant youth in a Los Angeles park. I will argue that by their actions, informal citizenship derives its authorization to act politically from the actors themselves as opposed to the state or government. First, I will adopt political theorist Michaele Ferguson’s definition of “self-authorization” in order to distinguish it from state authorization. Second, I will show that the summer school mobilization was a self-authorizing enactment of informal citizenship since its members and participants authorized themselves when the state denied them authorization. Lastly, I will argue that the process of self-authorization is a plural action that requires multiple actors to authorize each other through intersubjectively expressing political freedom and agency, as opposed to a single person giving herself authorization.

Informal citizens derive their authority to politically act in public from the actors themselves, regardless of their citizenship status. This means that informal citizenship doesn't require authorization from the state, approval from other citizens, or public support to be enacted. Rethinking traditional sources of democratic authority, Michaele Ferguson theorizes a similar conception of political authorization. In a chapter epigraph in her book Sharing Democracy, Ferguson quotes the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective: “Authority is received originally from another human being who is in a position to give it, who has the authority to give it. But she cannot have it if the person who needs to receive it does not acknowledge it in her” (Ferguson 2012, 137). Extrapolating upon this conception of authority we can re-imagine the authority of the state to control the freedom of undocumented immigrants.

Undocumented immigrants are unauthorized in so far as they acknowledge the state’s sovereignty over their lives. Though detention and deportation remain real and powerful threats from the state, by consciously limiting public appearances and participation undocumented immigrants are acknowledging the state’s power to authorize them. This does not mean to suggest that undocumented immigrants are at fault for their vulnerable status—in fact, I am suggesting the opposite. This notion of authority can empower undocumented immigrants to gain a sense freedom that disregards the state’s sovereignty over them. Instead of waiting for
authorization from the state to take part in political life, undocumented immigrants and citizens alike hold a potential to participate in the world regardless of any other’s approval.

Similar to Arendt’s conception of nonsovereign political freedom discussed in the previous section, Ferguson’s theory of political authorization embraces “the nonsovereign capacity each of us has to shape the world in which we live” (Ferguson 2012, 137-138). Though the state may affirm undocumented immigration’s lack of political rights and freedoms through policy and immigration enforcement, by the very action of publically taking part in politics immigrants are affirming to one another each person’s authority to act.

Either through a protest or other forms of political demonstration and activity, Ferguson defines this process of affirming ones nonsovereign authority as “selfAuthorization.” She describes a self-authorizing action as an “intersubjective authorization: each of us acting in public authorizes the other, confirming and demonstrating for the other that we all have political freedom, that we all have the capacity and the right to shape the world in which we live” (Ferguson 2012, 156). This action is ‘nonsovereign’ since it doesn't acknowledge the sovereignty or supremacy of the state to deny it permission—it is not a collective sovereignty, “the rule of the people by the people,” but rather a nonsovereignty, “the intersubjective sharing of authority by plural subjects” (Ferguson 2012, 129). Though a mutual public sharing of politics—manifested as the iconic protest, a cacophonous public occupation, or a myriad of other public-oriented political actions—immigrants and citizens (documented or not) can display their and one another’s authority to act with each other. No matter the content, purpose, or goal of each person’s public action, simply sharing the world intersubjectively (actively “communicating” and “interpreting” the world to one another) allows each person to authorize the other: by expressing my freedom to act I am creating space for you and others to express their freedom alongside me (Ferguson 2012, 9).

Ferguson’s theory helps us to read expressions of informal citizenship as self-authorizing. We can read the demonstration of immigrant women in the first section as a plural sharing of democracy where the presence of legal citizens made it safer for undocumented immigrants to appear in a public protest. The group of activists as a whole authorized undocumented immigrants since they created the space for anyone and everyone to express their authority to act. Protesting side by side allowed the group to move beyond each individual’s immigration status to instead allow for a plural expression of freedom: Namely, that
undocumented immigrants constituted themselves part of the demos since they too had the agency to shape democracy.

The immigrant rights actions of the People’s Assembly for Popular Education and Liberation’s (PAPEL) 2009 summer school program in Los Angeles have also exhibited informal citizenship’s self-authorization. In light of the Los Angeles Unified School District’s (LAUSD) budget shortfall in the spring of 2009, resulting in the cancelation of all summer school classes within Los Angeles County, PEPEL organized over thirty LAUSD off-duty teachers alongside community organizers to provide free summer school classes in the downtown Vista Hermosa public park from the beginning of July through the end of August (KPFK 2009). The founder of the Southern California Immigrant Rights Coalition—one of the largest grass roots immigrant rights organization in California—Martine Terrones began PEPEL to support immigrant youth through education reform (PAPEL 2009). Hundreds of undocumented youth and naturalized children of undocumented parents had no means to fight the district’s educational policies that were denying them summer school, and thus PEPEL sought to bring together immigrant communities to provide public education for themselves (KPFK 2009). In light of the county denying youth summer school, PAPEL took it upon itself to educate their communities. In other words, when the state denied authorization to Los Angeles communities to become educated, PAPEL authorized the community to educate itself.

Parents, teachers, and immigrant organizers created over forty courses spanning elementary through high school curriculum that included French, documentary filmmaking, Latin American history, philosophy, college prep, math, English, and urban studies. Modeled after the civil rights movement’s “freedom schools” that sought to achieve social and political equality for African Americans by creating free and alternative schooling, PEPEL’s summer school program was conceptualized not only as substitute LAUSD courses but also to empower immigrant communities through teaching material that is often unavailable to immigrant youth (KPFK 2009; PAPEL 2009). Through a month long campaign to encourage youth to register and community members to participate, in which their efforts were publicized on local Spanish-speaking news networks, Southern California National Public Radio stations, and through direct community outreach outside LAUSD offices, PEPEL stated that their central objective was to empower immigrant communities to “proactively participate in the educational development of its youth, and integrate popular education into the sectors of the community that are socially,
economically, culturally, and politically marginalized by the constraints of traditional schooling” (PAPEL 2009).

Even though PEPEL’s actions sought to activate immigrant communities and reform local education, their publicized occupation of a public park with a coalition of hundreds of citizens and undocumented immigrants represented a self-authorized enactment of informal citizenship. Beyond PEPEL providing immigrant youth with an essential resource, their public actions celebrated each organizer and participant’s political freedom. Their schooling was ‘public’ in the most meaningful sense: by organizing hundreds of immigrants and activists regardless of citizenship status, their actions allowed for an intersubjective authorization that publically displayed each member’s authority to act. Moreover, their actions were self-authorizing since they embraced a nonsovereign approach to political actions by publically acting despite member’s vulnerability and deportability. Even though many of the participants, volunteers, and parents were unauthorized, undocumented, and noncitizens, they acted as if they already had the permission to occupy public space to educate their community.

PAPEL’s summer school shows that informal citizenship can extend to plural and public political actions beyond formal protests. Enactments of informal citizenship are not only typical political demonstrations, but can also manifest into other actions that express an actor’s nonsovereign capacity for political action. Since formal citizenship (including legal permanent residence) is the only state-authorized means for undocumented immigrants to engage in politics, informal citizenship activates an authority within and between undocumented immigrants to take part in shaping their political landscape.

Moreover, these actions show that the self-authorizing process requires more than just one person. By shaping the world in public, actors authorize each other and acknowledge each other’s freedom and agency. This type of authorization is a ‘self’ authorization since it empowers a freedom from within the demos themselves. This does not mean that a single actor can authorize herself, but rather authority is developed out of actors acknowledging it in one another. One cannot give oneself political authority since the activity of politics implies plurality and requires others to act collectively. Then, self-authorization is a horizontal authorization—as opposed the state having a top-down authorization. It doesn't establish sovereignty from the

---

7 Though Ferguson imagines protests as the paradigmatic expression of democratic freedom, she also invites us to extend her theory to democratic political action as a whole (Ferguson 2012, 161).
outside in, but rather it is nonsovereign where authority is shared across political actors. Through self-authorization, informal citizens have agency from the state and express a freedom to act even when they are bound or confined by their vulnerable status.

4) Democratic Impatience:

Actions of informal citizenship reflect a democratic impatience, since they refuse to wait for incremental and piecemeal reform and political compromise. This section will argue that informal citizenship is enacted out of an impatience for immigration reform and amnesty and reflects a refusal to endure the suffering and vulnerabilities of undocumented life. First, I will draw on Mario Feit’s characterization of Martin Luther King Jr.’s theory of democratic impatience to describe the impatience of informal citizenship. Second, I will describe a recent immigrant rights demonstration in which undocumented activists self-deported themselves and publicly re-entered the country, to argue that it represented the impatience of informal citizenship by demanding change in the present tense instead of waiting for future reform. Third, by showing how these activists assisted other undocumented detainees, I will argue that the democratic impatience of informal citizenship helps to instill a ‘sense of possibility’ and political freedom to other undocumented immigrants.

Though the immigrant rights movement is in many ways different from the civil rights movement—in that a petition for inclusion into a country differs from rights claims that fight for equity within a political system the petitioners formally belong—Martin Luther King Jr.’s professed impatience for political and social equity reflects a similar impatience the immigrant rights movement has for citizenship. The impatience for racial equality or for citizenship is not simply an unwillingness to wait for just reform and policy to be passed, but rather is an unwillingness to endure the suffering and vulnerabilities that persist in the interim of political compromise. The steady, incremental, and long-term fight for African American’s legislative and social equality have shown us that reform takes time. In his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” King writes that if ‘you’ were to only see firsthand the suffering of African Americans, “then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience” (King 1964, 84).
In the eyes of King, waiting patiently for full social and political acceptance was analogous to unjust suffering. To wait patiently, in other words, was to place the power of social and political change into the hands of others. Drawing on King’s work, political theorist Mario Feit writes that the civil rights movement’s impatience is an inherent democratic virtue that embodies an urgency for equity and a refusal to endure suffering in the name of unforeseen change. Feit argues that democratic justice is naturally impatient, where political compromise and piecemeal reform “puts off to the future what should be fully realized in the present” (Feit 2013, 7). A democratic impatience is different than other types of impatience since it is aimed at facilitating and accelerating democracy. Comparing the civil rights movement to the American and French revolutions, King, in *Why We Can’t Wait* writes, “a submerged social group, propelled by a burning need for justice, lifting itself with sudden swiftness, moving with determination and a majestic scorn for risk and danger, created an uprising so powerful that it shook a huge society from its comfortable base” (King 1964, 16). Democratic impatience is not simply an impatience to pass immigration reform or an impatience with political procedure, but rather informal citizenship takes on King’s notion of impatience to “proclaim the unendurability of their [undocumented immigrants] oppression” (Feit 2013, 7).

Democratic impatience, moreover, reflects the temporality of informal citizenship. It approaches undocumented activism with an unwillingness to comprise and an accelerated vision of justice. Thus, informal citizenship positions the delay, comprise, and that status quo of politics as its enemy and seeks to implement justice in the present tense. Therefore, informal citizenship doesn't have the same timeline as social and political reform. By ignoring typical political procedure, informal citizenship avoids the gradualism of reform and attempts to escape the inevitable suffering that would continue in its duration.

Moreover, informal citizenship’s democratic impatience is aimed at overthrowing the status quo since waiting for formal amnesty implies further suffering of the vulnerabilities of undocumented life. Even though King argues that the civil rights movement’s democratic impatience is just since African Americans inevitably deserve equality out of their “American birthright,” I argue that undocumented immigrants can make an equally powerful claim of belonging (King 1964).

As I have discussed in the previous sections, informal citizenship is not oriented towards belonging to only the “state,” but rather constituting a citizenship to “publics” that include local,
regional, national and transnational communities. Thus informal citizenship’s impatience is not
aimed at accelerating the speed by which undocumented immigrants will obtain national
inclusion, but instead it is impatience with the suffering that is endured while having to wait for
reform. Given that many undocumented immigrants claim the United States as their ‘home,’
informal citizenship is impatient with the anonymity and vulnerability of having to hide in ‘the
shadows.’ Since informal citizenship also makes a claim of belonging by fighting for the good of
‘publics,’ it takes on impatience with the illegality of residing at one’s ‘home.’ Likewise,
informal citizenship’s impatience is democratic since it fights for a vision of political justice that
views undocumented immigrants as full members of their political communities.

Last July, nine undocumented Mexican-born American youth activists dressed in caps
and gowns attempted to cross into the United States on the Arizona-Mexico border (Corella
2013). These college-age immigrant rights activists and members of the “DREAMERS”—some
of whom had been admitted to graduate programs in California universities—were attempting to
gain asylum and residency as well as national attention in order to show the Obama
administration the failure of the contemporary immigration system (Shourd 2013). These
activists were American in every way except for their status: brought to the U.S. as children, they
grew up without knowledge of their unauthorized residence (Mateo 2013). Applying for college
financial aid or a driver’s license was the first time many of these activists found out they didn't
have legal citizenship (Mateo 2013). The activists experienced the contradictions of their
undocumented status by not being allowed to live in the only place they knew as ‘home.’ Later
known as the ‘Dream 9,’ they knew that if they crossed the border into Mexico to perform their
stunt they might never be allowed back home; or worse, they might be stuck in pretrial detention
for months, or even a year, before immigration courts determined their fate (Dem 2013). Despite
the risk, within days of crossing into Mexico from Arizona’s Nogales Port of Entry, they
returned to the border in caps and gowns, hand-in-hand, holding claims for asylum, chanting
‘undocumented and unafraid’ and demanding reentry into the United States (Shourd 2013).

The Dream 9 were subsequently arrested by border control agents and sent to Arizona’s
Eloy detention center for holding while the federal government scheduled a trial (Dem 2013).
They were held for two weeks. Lulu Martinez and Maria Peniche, two of the youngest activists,
were held in solitary confinement for ten days. Eventually, all were released back to their homes
in the U.S. after immigration asylum officers found that all nine of the activists “had credible
fear of persecution in their birth country,” and thus could not be immediately deported (Dem 2013). Though each activist is still awaiting his or her final asylum trial and decision, a process that could take years to finalize, they are currently authorized to live and work in the US before their trial (Dem 2013).

At first glance the Dream 9 do not seem to comfortably fit into the category of impatience. Their deliberate performance aiming to provoke the state and reveal their contradictory status took months to plan. Their demonstration also sought to incite political debates in Washington and begin national conversations around immigration reform. Hence, this strategy does not overtly embody the impatience for justice and disregard for political compromise that King outlined throughout his memoirs. It seems to embody just the opposite. This strategy seems to fit neatly into the political reform approach to activism outlined in the first chapter of the thesis: Namely, the Dream 9 were attempting to lobby the government through performance activism to fight for both their individual amnesty and citizenship and consider the reasons why the nation as a whole should reform their immigration system.

However, if we read the Dream 9’s actions as more than just a desire for political reform, but also as a declaration of their citizenship that presupposes their public belonging, we begin to see a democratic impatience. Their demonstration represented an enactment of informal citizenship since the activists entered the U.S. as if they already belonged as full members of their communities. Instead of illegally crossing the border out of sight of immigration enforcement officers or waiting patiently within Mexico for an authorized asylum claim or student-visa, the Dream 9 entered the U.S. as if they already had permission. This does not only exemplify their self-authorization or express their political freedom, but it also shows a democratic impatience since the Dream 9 refused to suffer the indignities and vulnerabilities of undocumented or exiled life.

The Dream 9 were impatient waiting for the state to offer them protection and a safe status, since waiting implied the illegality of a second-class life susceptible to deportation, detention, and a myriad of other vulnerabilities (Dem 2013). Patience, in other words, only breeds further patience and compromise. Even if their impatience would not help them gain political ground or convince politicians to pass reform, it expresses the activist’s dire urgency for justice and exposes their immediate incompliance with oppression of their undocumented status.
A week after being released from Eloy, twenty one year-old Dream 9 activist Luis Leon remarked in an interview with NPR, “We had no other choice. I mean, we tried everything. We had been waiting for so long for any kind of help… we [had] no more time to wait” (Dem 2013) Leo furthered, “Every year, there are students who graduate from high school and yet, they can't continue their career. They have to stay in the shadows. They have to fear. We can't wait no more…” (Dem 2013). By simultaneously crossing the border to the U.S. legally and illegally, the Dream 9 took on a risk of detention and further deportation that exemplified both an impatience for waiting on “help” as well as an impatience for having to stay in the ‘shadows.’ Their actions also represented and signified the impatience of other immigrants. Though it was the Dream 9 acting, their message of impatience was strengthened by expressing the impatience of their immigrant rights movement as a whole, encompassing both their communities and families, along with other deported immigrants.

The democratic impatience of informal citizens is expressed in an unwillingness to accept half-hearted political comprise or reform that doesn't provide the vision of justice the activists seek. In lieu of being unable to pass compressive immigration reform, President Obama implemented DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), a discretionary status that defers deportation and temporarily authorizes undocumented immigrants who arrived within the U.S. as children and have pursued an education to work and live in the U.S. Even though all nine of these activists could have successfully petitioned a claim for DACA, the act wouldn't authorize them as full citizens. Simply, DACA protects them from deportation in the short term, and puts off their removal to some future date. Hence, DACA represented a temporary Band-Aid on the larger and deeper wound the immigration enforcement system has created in undocumented communities. Moreover, DACA attempted to appease youth activists by giving them a temporary solution to a longer-term problem. A democratic impatience expresses dissatisfaction with this type of political compromise because it slows down the progress towards justice by deactivating communities. The Dream 9, likewise, expressed democratic impatience and dissatisfaction towards DACA by self-deporting (or by remaining departed), and publicly crossing the border back into the US. This disqualified each activist for DACA protection by “breaking the law” and ‘illegally’ crossing the border.

Feit writes that the power of impatience develops out of a discontent with political appeasement and reverence for activism. He writes that democratic impatience “activates citizens
because it builds on a form of knowledge that is profound precisely because it does not get
distracted by an emphasis on nuance, subtlety or complexity” (Feit 2013, 11) In other words,
reform simply provides incremental steps towards justice together with a hope for a more just
future. Even though progress may gradually be made in the interim, injustice still continues until
the desired change is ultimately implemented. Likewise, informal citizenship rejects the cruelty
of having to wait for reform and the lack of agency that develops out of having to rely on the
state to implement justice—especially when informal citizenships doesn’t give one the right to
elect representatives and officially influence the system.

So far, I have argued that informal citizenship expresses democratic impatience in two
distinct ways. First, that it expresses an unwilling to continue enduring the suffering of
undocumented life by waiting on official amnesty, and second that it signifies a dissatisfaction
with political comprise and reform since the power to implement change is vested in the hands of
a state of which they have no right to belong. I also suggested that informal citizenship signifies
an impatience in not only the actors themselves but of the their communities, families, and other
immigrants.

However, I see that the Dream 9 expresses a democratic impatience in yet another way:
informal citizenship’s impatience helps to instill a sense of ‘possibility’ for justice for those
witnessing the action or involved second-hand. Likewise, the civil rights movement’s actions did
not only benefit the lives of the activists that participated. Their actions instilled hope for a better
future for the African Americans that witnessed the activism. Quoting King, Feit writes that
while the civil rights movement “would certainly have long-term benefits, King believes that
they ‘would immediately transform the conditions of Negro life’ by infusing African Americans
with a sense of possibility” (Feit 2013, 23). Beyond the future effects of the action,
demonstrations of civil disobedience instantaneously instilled within others the possibility that
African Americans could take control over their own future.

While being held in detention, the Dream 9 helped to instill this ‘sense of possibility’ for
other inmates. Though I am sure the Dream 9 inspired immigrants and exiles nationally and
internationally, we can see a direct impact of the Dream 9’s impatience through their activism
within the walls of detention. Two of the activists, Lulu Martinez and Maria Peniche, were
placed in solitary confinement for the last 10 days of their stay, ostensibly for providing a free
legal hotline and informal legal advice for fellow detainees, as well as inspiring their peers to
“chant and speak out against injustices that were happening in the detention center.” At one point the two activists along with other detainees were creating commotion during lunch, Lulu and Maria were sent to the SHU (Solitary Housing Unit). The Dream 9 was able to inspire the other detainees by expressing an impatience for their current undocumented and detained status.\(^8\) Moreover, their dissatisfaction with the status quo of the immigration enforcement system spread to the other detainees and influenced them to join-hands and express informal citizenship together.

By instilling a sense of possibility and hope in those that witness the impatience of informal citizenship, activists are able to share their sense of belonging with others. Their impatience expresses a shared urgency that focuses on the need for change in the present tense. The impatience does not simply target the need for lawmakers to implement justice, but rather it is oriented towards the actors and their fellow immigrants. By acting with impatience toward enduring continued suffering and waiting for reform, the actors can empower themselves by showing that they have agency enough to implement their own change. Also, their democratic impatience expresses the justice behind their actions by showing others their need for empowerment and reveling their unwillingness to suffer any longer. This empowerment expresses urgency for freedom to others, who may also be inspired to act.

5) Self-Transformation

Informal citizenship is a self-transformative activism by facilitating a new sense of self for the actor. By recounting the story of an undocumented immigrant who successfully petitioned prosecutorial discretion by publically telling her migration narrative to the US Congress, this section will argue that informal citizenship invests in its actors a new and more dignified sense of self. First, by describing the immigrant’s narrative I will argue that informal citizenship is self-transformative precisely because it empowers the actor to escape the indignity of their undocumented anonymity and illegality. Second, I will argue that informal citizenship demands dignity since it gives voice to the actor’s opinions and dreams and makes them known and present to the public. Lastly, I will argue that informal citizenship does not require garnering the

---

\(^8\) Many other DREAMERS share the strategy of activating other detained immigrants. In some cases, DREAMERS detained themselves on purpose to provide legal services to those that didn't have access to them in detention. One instance was covered by an episode of This American Life, in which a DREAMER assisted detainees in Florida by being locked up on purpose: http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/498/the-one-thing-youre-not-supposed-to-do
positive respect of others to facilitate self-transformation, but rather the action simply needs to be recognized by the public.

This was the case of Clarisa Garcia, whose five-month transformation I witnessed for myself.9 I first met Clarisa during an interview for my documentary radio program last April.10 She was, at the time, a sixteen-year resident of Denver and an undocumented immigrant from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, with three children and a husband. In November 2011, she had been pulled over by the Denver police for driving with her high-beams headlights on and arrested for driving without a license. Even though her husband, who was sitting in the passenger seat (slightly intoxicated), had a legal license, the police detained her through Colorado’s late SB-90 law—which required police to check the immigration status of each arrestee, and report them to national immigrant enforcement (ICE). After a night in jail, she was transferred to Denver’s immigrant detention center and only later released under an injunction that required immigration officers to check on her at her home until her final deportation hearing. I contacted Clarisa through the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC) with the intention of recording her story as a way of exposing the shortcomings of the Colorado ‘show me your papers’ law. Before our interview, she had been to court three times and was scheduled for her final removal hearing within one month of my April broadcast.

Clarisa’s silence consumed the first ten minutes of our meeting. With her children sitting in an adjacent room, I took Clarisa’s hands in mine and told her that her story would be safe with me—that her words could not incriminate her, and my telling her story could only help her case. After a few more minutes of silence, she summoned the courage to speak. She told me a story she had never before shared—not with the public or with her family—of how she grew up in rural Mexico, escaped the indentured servitude of a border maquiladora, and immigrated to save the life of her first-born son. She said, “I feel ashamed to share my story because I broke the law” (Public Sense Radio 2013). Clarisa spoke as if our interview was a confessional, and every word of her narrative was physically and emotionally wrenching for her. However, her mannerisms and attitude transformed throughout the course of our interview. After about an hour, she stopped crying and her voice took on a sense of confidence. She invited her eldest son

---

10 Clarisa’s story can be heard on the Public Sense archive (approximately 15 minuets long): https://soundcloud.com/publicsense/episode-7-envisioning
into the room, and though she previously didn't want him to know her personal story, told both of us about her arrest and the possibility that she might have to immigrate back to Mexico in one month.

Our interview finished with the sad reality that Clarisa’s final removal hearing would send her back to Juárez, and that this might be the last time we met. After airing the story the following week, I received a call from Clarisa informing me that she felt “empowered” hearing her voice on the radio. The same day she began a campaign to lobby Colorado’s immigration enforcement to file prosecutorial discretion, a legal execution that would withdraw Clarisa from removal proceedings and temporarily authorize her to live in Colorado. Over the next two weeks, she participated with CIRC by speaking at several public demonstrations in which she shared her migration and arrest narrative. She also encouraged the public to call ICE on her behalf—which resulted in many people, including myself, advocating on her behalf to ICE’s Colorado director. The following week, she raised money to fly to Washington D.C., accompanied by her family and an advocate from CIRC, and told her story in front of a Congressional committee.\footnote{Congress’s committee was organized by two Colorado senators who heard Clarisa’s story directly (Asmar 2013).} She spent her last weeks before her removal hearing speaking at events and demonstrations in Denver. Though I couldn't attend her court date in person, I read the press reports immediately following her case: “Clarisa Mesta Allowed to Stay in the U.S. After Speaking Out About Her Deportation Case” (Asmar 2013). Clarisa had successfully petitioned her claim for prosecutorial discretion.

By publicly coming out and telling her story of migration and detention, Clarisa transformed her sense of self. Her transformation didn't only come as a result of gaining discretion or garnering positive public support. She gained a sense of agency, dignity, and courage by no longer being anonymous. She transformed from someone without control over her deportation to a political agent who believed in herself enough to tell her story in front of Congress, the Denver public, and her deportation judge. The important point is that her transformation actually began during our first interview together. The shame and illegality she felt initially telling me her story became courage. It wasn't simply Clarisa’s ability to convince others of her deservedness to remain in the U.S. that was the agent of her transformation. Rather, by the act of telling her story, she discovered a wide range of emotions that included, first and

\footnote{Congress’s committee was organized by two Colorado senators who heard Clarisa’s story directly (Asmar 2013).}
foremost, a sense of dignity. In essence, she convinced herself that she deserved to remain in the U.S.

We can see through her story that informal citizenship has the potential to transform the actor’s sense of self. By declaring she belonged in Denver, she found herself truly becoming a member of the community in ways she had not previously belonged. By telling her story, she was no longer an anonymous undocumented immigrant, weeks away from deportation, but rather a dignified community member unwilling to accept removal. Her transformation, moreover, was not marked by the act of changing her official or legal status (though she was successful in doing so), but instead, she was transformed by the performative act of telling her story. Though self-transformation may be represented differently in every case of informal citizenship—not necessarily by telling a story, but through the empowering act of public protesting, for instance—each enactment will signify a type of transformation. The illegal identity of undocumented immigrants thus is reconceived, both in the participants’ mind and in the communities with whom they interact. By no longer being anonymous to others, by “coming out of the shadows,” informal citizens put a name, face, and story behind their immigration status.

Karen Zivi in her book, *Making Rights Claims*, discusses a similar process of self-transformation through political action. Even though Zivi discusses transformation as it occurs in groups claiming political rights, which is different from the enactment of informal citizenship, since the latter is not petitioning formal inclusion under the state but rather claiming ones belonging to boarder conceptions of public spaces, her writing still illuminates the process of informal citizenship’s self-transformation. She writes that through the process of claiming rights “we constitute our individual identities as well as our political communities in a paradoxical process that expands the conception of personhood by drawing attention to previously unauthorized conceptions of personhood” (Zivi 2013, 83). Namely, it is through the process of claiming itself, or declaring belonging, that conceptions of personhood can change. Though making rights claims is oriented towards petitioning a new conception of personhood for the state, informal citizenship is only concerned with transforming the “self”: the actors involved and their communities, despite what the state may think.

Zivi suggests that one facet of claiming rights is gaining a sense of agency. She writes, “It is in the process of making claims to others in public that…subjects recognize themselves, at least implicitly, as already embedded in a community, as shaped by it but also able to shape it”
Similarly, Clarisa’s enactment of informal citizenship transformed the way in which she recognized her own agency and political capabilities. The process of declaring her belonging through story telling portrayed Clarisa’s ability to shape and influence the world. Perhaps, Clarisa was empowered by recognizing that she was already deeply connected to her community. The process of enacting informal citizenship helped transform her personhood by recognizing her own potential to shape the world—a potential she was only able to see once she acted in public. Though Zivi is concerned with gaining agency in respect to how persuasive a rights claim may be to the general public, I understand the transformative power of informal citizenship more as the capability to persuade and empower the self. For informal citizenship, developing agency is the result of acting in public, and is unconcerned with whether or not others recognize the informal citizen as a free agent. Therefore, by the action of enacting informal citizenship one develops a sense of agency by recognize her inherent potential to shape the world.

Alongside gaining a sense of agency, informal citizenship is transformative by investing the actor with a sense of dignity. Throughout Christina Beltran’s account of the 2006 nationwide May Day and Immigrant Rights demonstrations within her essay “The Borders of Resentment: Hannah Arendt, Immigrant Action and the Space of Appearance,” she argues that the immigrant participants redefined their illegal status by demanding public recognition and dignity. She writes, “These gatherings were politically significant less for the policy issues discussed and the agendas constructed than for their demands for recognition, fair treatment, and human dignity” (Beltran 2008, 13). In other words, the demonstrations were less about demanding specific legislation then they were about coming out in public by claiming a sense of dignity and belonging. Beltran writes, “In attempting to escape the indignity of anonymity, immigrants were attempting to give voice to their opinions, dreams, and desires” (Beltran 2008, 12). She argues that protests were about dignifying undocumented immigrants with the same sense of personhood as formal citizens by demanding the public to hear their ‘opinions, dreams, and desires.’

Though similar to Zivi, Beltran argues for a notion of transformation that requires the recognition of others. Beltran reads the immigrant rights demonstrations as ‘demanding’ dignity.

---

12 The 2006 May Day protests drew over 1 million participants across the nation and are considered one of the largest protests in U.S. history (Kirkpatrick 2006).
However, I see informal citizenship’s transformative ability as not dependent upon others accepting a demand, but rather more as an action that facilitates a sense of dignity out of simply acting in the public presence of others. Whether or not Clarisa received positive responses from her story telling events, her actions gave her a sense of dignity by escaping anonymity and constituting herself as a human being with a world shaping potential. As well, informal citizenship is not concerned with demanding dignity from the state. Though state recognition may be a result of informal citizenship, it isn’t a requirement. Instead, informal citizens gain a sense of dignity by stepping outside their prescribed roll of “undocumented immigrant”: they express a sense of self dignified and are courageous enough to place themselves in the public eye, despite the risks.

By analyzing Clarisa’s story we can see informal citizenship’s self-transformation as facilitating a sense of agency and dignity for the actor. The transformation develops out of acting as an informal citizen, and does not rely or depend upon the positive reactions of others. However, self-transformation does require the informal citizen to act within a public forum since it establishes the actor’s potential to shape the world. Through enacting informal citizenship one transforms by recognizing his or her inherent political capacity, dignity, and agency.

**Conclusion:**

The theory of informal citizenship now looks a tad fuller. Though each case study focuses on a single characteristic of informal citizenship, each of these examples embodies all of the theory’s qualities. Enactments of informal citizenship are oriented towards the benefit of the public beyond just nation states; they facilitate a nonsovereign political freedom, are self-authorized by the actors themselves and not by the state or general public, the action’s impatience for justice strengthens the actors and inspires their communities by expressing an unwillingness to endure suffering, and they are self-transformative by instilling the actors with a sense of dignity and agency.

Informal citizenship is unlike social and political reform because it takes the power to implement change out of the hands of the state or society and places it solely within the actor and her capacity to publicly shape the world. Therefore, informal citizenship is not targeted towards the state or society exclusively, but is instead oriented towards the “self”: towards the actors enacting informal citizenship and the communities in which they have solidarity. Thus, informal
citizenship invites us to redefine the meaning of success. Its purpose is not to successfully influence policy, change political institutions, or garner public support and affection, but rather to transform the ‘self.’ This could translate into empowering the actors involved by creating the opportunity for them to recognize their inherent dignity and agency, but it could also help transform their communities by instilling a sense of ‘possibility’ that leads others to act as informal citizens. As a theory of activism, informal citizenship creates the potential for undocumented immigrants to both empower themselves by declaring their public belonging, as well as empower their community by modeling their transformation.

Each of these case studies suggests that informal citizenship is contagious, that by empowering the ‘self’, others become empowered to act. Clarisa’s journey has shown us that self-transformation is possible even for an immigrant who was entirely stripped of her agency and dignity by being detained under threat of deportation. Likewise, PAPEL expressed the political freedom to authorize its membership and to educate their community. Alongside PAPEL, the Dream 9 and the activist women in D.C. portrayed informal citizenship’s focus on fighting for the public good. Who knows if these activists influenced each other directly? Does it matter? Simply by theorizing informal citizenship as a mode of undocumented activism, we are given the tools to recognize it in other demonstrations. Perhaps, by changing the way we understand undocumented activism we can fully comprehend the extent of informal citizenship’s transformative power.
Conclusion

Informal Citizenship As Political Membership And Community Empowerment

Thus far I have analyzed five case studies of contemporary immigrant rights demonstrations in order to develop a new theory of undocumented activism that isn’t reflected by existing social movement theories. By reviewing the breadth of social movement studies, I have shown that the field’s reform-oriented theories failed to describe the undocumented activism I experienced at the AFL-CIO conference. Since political and cultural reform targets external audiences, intends to transform exterior social and political entities, and thus places the authority to implement change into these audiences, they fail to describe a type of undocumented activism that seeks self-transformation. Unable to find theories to describe the activism I was witnessing first-hand, I was motivated to build a theory from the ground-up. To do so, I drew on four additional case studies of undocumented activism alongside political theory and migration scholarship to argue that informal citizenship is (1) oriented towards the good of publics unbound by nation-state conceptions, (2) facilities a nonsovereign political freedom, (3) self-authorized, (4) impatient for justice, and (5) self-transformative.

Now that we have the language and theories to recognize informal citizenship in demonstrations of undocumented activism, what are the theory’s implications? Why should we care about informal citizenship?

This thesis was not only motivated out of a desire to describe the powerful activism I witnessed in my involvement with the immigrant rights movement, but also my deeper motivation to become involved in immigrant rights was born out of a desire find an alleviate of the shame and vulnerability my undocumented friends and extended family members experience. Even though I personally see them as integral members of our community, they remain politically invisible. Moreover, by viewing the transformative power of informal citizenship by courageous undocumented AFL-CIO activists, I felt a potential for their activism to help fight the shame, indignity, and fear of being undocumented. As a result, I have identified two major implications of informal citizenship for undocumented immigrants and their communities. First, informal citizenship can offer undocumented immigrants a pathway to political membership that confers some qualities of formal citizenship—dignity, agency, and a world-shaping capacity—without the need for state authorization, waiting for immigration reform, or amnesty. Second,
enactments of informal citizenship don’t only help to transform the actors involved, but informal citizens also transform their communities by creating a space in which members may feel safer to enact informal citizenship themselves.

**Informal Citizenship as Political Membership**

Through enacting informal citizenship, one becomes an informal citizen. Thus, it is not only a theory of undocumented activism but it is also theory of citizenship. Enactments of informal citizenship conceive of political membership as an active form of participation seeking to benefit the actor’s “publics.” Here the space of membership is un-bound by nation-state territories and instead views the ‘public’ as consisting of local, regional, national, and transnational communities. Informal citizenship is a type of “citizenship” since its enactment seeks to declare a belonging to a space (not necessarily belonging solely to the nation) and constitute membership by benefiting the greater good of that public. Likewise, the membership is “informal” because it doesn't guarantee legal citizenship under a state, doesn’t bestow any constitutional qualities upon its members and it isn’t authorized by any formal nation.

This doesn't mean that everyone is an informal citizen; to gain membership requires the enactment of informal citizenship and its five essential components laid out in the second chapter. Therefore, this membership isn’t a passive status, but rather it is a active membership into a new sense of ‘self.’ By enacting informal citizenship the actor experiences the self-transformative benefits of recognizing themselves as belonging to multiple communities. The benefits of membership, thus, are not rights, protections, or negative liberties—as status citizens may have—but rather informal citizens benefit from the transformative power of constituting a sense of belonging, and gaining the dignity, agency, and world-shaping ability that comes along with being a citizen. Undocumented immigrants are deprived of these benefits since they lack the ability to belong as formal citizens and they lack the freedom to express their world shaping capabilities out of fear of deportation.

Informal citizenship attempts to build a pathway to citizenship by providing undocumented immigrants a self-authorized means of constituting themselves members. Though it is extremely risky, enacting informal citizenship enables undocumented immigrants a type of membership that confers some essential qualities of formal citizenship—agency, dignity, and
world-shaping capacities—without the need to fight for reform, inclusion, or state approval, which would inevitably take time and require discriminatory approval and compromise.

By arguing for a new theory of citizenship by this form of activism, I don’t mean to suggest that undocumented immigrants don’t need formal citizenship. In fact, it is necessary for true immigrant justice for immigrants to gain formal inclusion and rights. However, informal citizenship conceptualizes a method to garner some benefits of citizenship in the interim. This also doesn't mean to suggest that informal citizenship’s eventual goal is formal citizenship, but rather that it can empower undocumented immigrants in the present when they don’t have any access to justice.

**Informal Citizenship as Community Empowerment**

Informal citizenship can imagine the ‘self’ as including their communities. The benefits of informal citizenship, then, can extend beyond the actors involved by facilitating community empowerment. Though I have discussed Ferguson’s theory of self-authorization in terms of actors authorizing each other—by expressing my political freedom I am creating the opportunity for you to express your freedom alongside me, thus we authorize each other to act in concert—but I also believe self-authorization could imply or make manifest a type of community authorization. I don’t view this type of community empowerment focusing informal citizenship on an external audience, but rather imagine the ‘self’ as extending to the community—by enacting informal citizenship I am both transforming myself and my community, without appealing for acceptance to an external political or cultural audience. Thus, I am suggesting a community empowerment for only those publics that are in solitary with the undocumented activist. But, what would this community authorization or empowerment look like?

Enacting informal citizenship would not transform a community of undocumented and immigrant allies into informal citizens, since I have extensively shown that the political membership of informal citizenship is reserved for the actors alone. Yet, by declaring one’s belonging and affirming ones dignity, agency, and world-shaping capacity, they are perhaps extending the authorization or invention for their community members to do the same. By modeling their transformation in public, informal citizens are making it safer for others to join them in their expression of belonging. Informal citizens can in turn exemplify their nonsovereign
capacities for action to their community, and empower that community by instilling a potential for others to affirm their belonging.

**Implications for Informal Citizenship and other Social Movements:**

Enactments of informal citizenship can also be seen in social movements other than the immigrant rights movement. One implication of informal citizenship as a theory of undocumented activism is that the concept of being ‘undocumented’ can mean more than just lacking formal citizenship, but it can extend to other forms of unauthorized or unwanted statuses. Informal citizenship could be used by these marginalized groups to express their citizenship or belonging to a space in which they are unauthorized or unwanted. As a theory of self-transformation, then, informal citizenship offers social movements a means to instill actors with a new sense of self without requiring external acceptance and approval.

For example, we can recognize many similarities between the strategy of “outing” or “coming out” for the gay rights movement and the enactment of informal citizenship for undocumented activists. Though the shame of undocumented status and sexual shame may function differently as forms of oppression, regulation, and stigma, the strategy of publicly declaring one’s hidden identities facilitates a performative and transformative effect for the actors themselves that goes beyond simply petitioning an outside audience for acceptance. Michael Warner in his book *The Trouble With Normal*, discusses the strategy of outing for the gay rights movement in terms of facilitating a sense of dignity that is targeted towards the speaker and doesn't require an acceptance of others to be transformative. For Warner, coming out is a process of affirming one’s sexuality to the world, and through this affirmation one sees themselves as embedded into their community and dignified through that connection. Warner writes that dignity “is inherent in the human. You can’t, in a way, not possess it. At worst, others can simply fail to recognize your dignity” (Warner 2000, 36). In this way, “coming out” as gay or as other types of deviant sexualities is similar to the enactment of informal citizenship since it facilities a new sense of self for the actor by escaping anonymity in the face of shame and vulnerability.

Beyond just the processes of self-transformation, informal citizenship and “coming out” also share a function of community mobilization. Though I haven’t proven the extent to which informal citizenship can encourage community members to become informal citizens, I have
suggested that there is a potential for community mobilization through empowerment. Coming out of the ‘shadows’ as undocumented may make it safer for others to do it as well. Likewise, Warner suggests that through ‘outing,’ the indignity of deviant sexualities may paradoxically express a ‘human’ dignity by mobilizing others to publicly come out as well. Namely, dignity is facilitated through mobilizing others to come out together. Warner writes, “If sex is a kind of indignity then we’re all in it together. And the paradoxical result is only when this indignity of sex is spread around the room, leaving no one out, and in fact binding people together, that it begins to resemble the dignity of the human” (Warner 2000, 36). Here, “coming out” functions as a form of community empowerment and mobilization by expressing a shared solitude in risking the vulnerability of publicly declaring one’s deviant sexuality.

‘Coming out’ and enacting informal citizenship similarly place the authority to implement change into the hands of the actors and not their audience. Their purpose, likewise, is to facilitate a new a dignified sense of self and create a safer space for others to come forward. These similarities suggest that the enactment of informal citizenship is not only for undocumented immigrants but could be used as a form of activism by status citizens as well. Though investigating informal citizenship in other movements is not within the reach of this thesis, this project has laid the groundwork to do such a study. Perhaps, the truly transformative power of informal citizenship will not be fully seen until we recognize it in multiple movements. By drawing out the theory of informal citizenship from the immigrant rights movement, I hope to expand the reach of social movement theory to incorporate the dynamics of self-transformative activism.

**Improvements and Future Research Directions:**

To enhance my investigation of informal citizenship, it would have been helpful to not only show how the theory is unaccounted for in social movement literature but also include a review of citizenship studies and political and democratic theory. In the chapter on political and democratic theory, I would attempt to distinguish informal citizenship from other conceptions of participatory citizenship. Specifically, I would analyze Hannah Arendt’s concept of ‘the right to have rights’ alongside Jacque Ranciere’s theory of “dissensus,” in which both question the validity of human rights and suggest alternatives for stateless migrants to secure rights and protections. Though each theory attempts to empower the stateless migrant towards a type of
political autonomy and agency, I would argue that neither conception could account for informal citizenship since they both target the state.

Moreover, my chapter on citizenship studies would attempt to distinguish informal citizenship from other theories of stateless citizenship. I would explore Aihwa Ong and Renato Rosaldo’s conceptions of ‘cultural citizenship’ and Karma Chavez’s notion of ‘differential belonging,’ which both discusses a form of citizenship that attempts to establish belonging by redrawing cultural boundaries and norms. Though these theories imagine a form of belonging beyond the state, I would argue informal citizenship is a form of membership that is not oriented towards cultural structures but is rather interested in empowering the ‘self.’ Likewise, where cultural citizenship may entail social assimilation, differential belonging requires tolerance and social acceptance. Informal citizenship disregards these cultural registers all together and instead focuses on self-transformation.

Also, if my project had a longer timeline I would conduct undocumented immigrant ethnographies to gain a clearer insight into the impacts of informal citizenship and self-transformation. Though I witnessed firsthand the transformations at the AFL-CIO conference and throughout Clarisa’s journey, my arguments for informal citizenship as political membership and community empowerment could be strengthened with a larger number of case studies and interviews.

**Final Thought:**

Moving from a view of activism as reform towards a self-transformative activism leaves us to question both the costs and benefits of informal citizenship. Is enacting informal citizenship worthwhile, given the extreme risks involved? Where does informal citizenship leave the activist in regards to justice? The discernable benefits of informal citizenship are subjective and self-oriented, and cannot be measured with the same paradigm of success as we may find in political and cultural reform. But this doesn't mean that informal citizenship isn’t worth the risks. Informal citizenship’s most radical potential may rest in the transformative power of expressing one’s vulnerability. Paradoxically, by placing everything on the line, by coming out in public and potentially putting oneself in line for deportation, one can find strength in agency, dignity, and self-determination. Declaring one’s sense of belonging and membership in society in the face of such risk may indeed be the greatest and most profound expression of citizenship. The
alternative is to embrace the unpredictability and silence of anonymity. Neither delivers what true citizenship conveys, but informal citizenship has the benefit of being proactive. Empower and transform yourself, and you increase the likelihood of doing the same for your community.
References:


Feit, Mario, “‘…our legitimate and unavoidable impatience’: King on Democratic Time,” 2013. Work in progress.


Galindo, Rene. "Repartitioning the National Community: Political Visibility and Voice for


