

# Introduction

*One way to undertake a historically rich inquiry into American citizenship is to investigate what citizenship has meant to those women and men who have been denied all or some of its attributes, and who ardently wanted to be full citizens.*

—Shklar, 1991

**SANDWICHED BETWEEN THE WORKING-CLASS** immigrant neighborhoods of Chinatown and the Tenderloin, and bordering the downtown financial district, San Francisco's Nob Hill is home to some of the city's most elegant condominiums and to spectacular views of San Francisco Bay. The neighborhood that once flaunted the palatial homes of the Big Four California railroad financiers is now filled with exclusive hotels, condominiums, and the Episcopal Cathedral.<sup>1</sup> Crouched among them, near the intersection of the California and Powell Street cable car lines, sits the Masonic Auditorium, its marble steps and massive Corinthian columns signaling monumental status. Both history and locale have linked the white auditorium with the nineteenth-century magnates whose wealth was created by the labor of Chinese, Irish, and Mexican railroad workers.

One summer morning in 1996, Ximena Monreal and I entered the Masonic Auditorium, up the marble stairs and between the massive columns. We were late, and the new citizen naturalization ceremony was about to begin. We strode briskly to the community group's volunteer table, where the coordinator told us that our help was needed to register voters, but first one of us should help hold up the banner announcing what we were doing. Ximena volunteered—a bit nervously—and soon found herself on stage with another woman, each holding the end of a twenty-foot banner reading “Congratulations New Citizens! Register to Vote Today!” As the volunteer coordinator made a brief statement from the stage explaining our purpose, a dozen volunteers and I held stacks of voter registration forms over our heads, walked up and down the aisles, and called out in English, Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, and Vietnamese, “Register to vote!”

Looking up at Ximena, who appeared confident before the crowd of 1,800, I wondered if the audience would have been surprised to know that this petite mother in her early twenties was herself an undocumented immigrant from Guatemala, unable to understand most of the English being spoken on stage. Ximena was volunteering at the ceremony in part at the suggestion of her immigration attorney, who suggested that her residency application would be stronger if she had some community service activities demonstrating the good moral character that the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) demanded of petitioners for legal permanent residence. A few weeks before showing up to help register voters, she had traveled to the office of *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* (MUA), a local community organization of Latin American immigrant women, to ask for a letter attesting to her good standing in the community. Staff members responded that, of course, they would help her in any way they could, but first she would have to do something for them to bear witness to. They told her about the naturalization ceremonies and voter registration campaign, which she thought would fit well into her work and child care schedules.

After the ceremony, Ximena told me how good it had felt to help register other immigrants to vote and how she looked forward to coming back again. At a women's group meeting shortly thereafter, I listened as she dynamically conveyed to the other women how the ceremony itself was very interesting, and that the actual experience was not as scary as she had imagined it would be. Ximena succeeded in encouraging other women to participate, and we went back to register new citizen voters at these ceremonies every other week for several months.

Earlier in 1996, a presidential election year, Congress had passed legislation limiting public benefits to noncitizen residents. Soon after, the Clinton administration had authorized extra funding to the Immigration and Naturalization Service to address the enormous backlog of applications for naturalization. More than one million new citizens swore their oaths of allegiance that year at ceremonies like the one Ximena and I attended.<sup>2</sup> Each of them received a letter of congratulations on White House letterhead with President Clinton's electronic signature.

The San Francisco INS office allowed the nonprofit Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Services, of which *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* was a part, to register voters inside the auditorium. INS officers incorporated the dispersal and collection of voter registration forms from new voters, as well as

their guests, into the program itself. States and localities also began promoting citizenship drives because immigration and welfare eligibility changes threatened the social services they could provide low-income immigrants.

By October 1996, this coalition of immigrant groups, service providers, and state agencies had registered over twenty thousand voters at the San Francisco ceremonies and in door-to-door campaigns in San Francisco, San Mateo, and Sonoma counties, all of which have high numbers of Latino residents. According to the San Francisco county registrar of voters, 78 percent of these new voters cast ballots in the November 1996 elections, compared to the 62 percent voter turnout for San Francisco overall. Newly registered voters living in the city's most heavily Latino neighborhoods turned out in even greater numbers (82 percent in the Excelsior District and 85 percent in the Mission).

In August, I wondered whether conservative legislators were aware of the huge numbers of citizens being naturalized and the increasing number of immigrant citizens who were motivated to register to vote for the first time. By fall, it seemed that they had caught on. The Republican majority in the U.S. Congress passed legislation requiring more extensive FBI background checks on naturalizing immigrants, which drastically slowed the rate of naturalization. Within a year, the INS was again reporting eighteen-month backlogs for eligible permanent residents waiting to take the naturalization oath. New fingerprinting requirements further slowed the visa application process at U.S. consular offices around the world, while increased income requirements for residents sponsoring relatives for immigration further limited migrants' legal entry. The short-lived experiment in reemphasizing the naturalization part of the Immigration and Naturalization Service's charter was over, and California found itself with the highest number of immigrants, but also the lowest rates of naturalization, of any state.<sup>3</sup>

My visit with Ximena to the Masonic Auditorium was memorable because it was our first experience with registering voters at the naturalization ceremonies, and also because of the conflicting emotions it raised for me as both researcher and U.S.-born white citizen. I found the ritual swearing of allegiance to be disconcertingly powerful. New citizens must forswear all loyalty to their nation of birth, even though it is not illegal for U.S. citizens to hold passports from other nations and neither the State Department nor the INS seeks to enforce that clause of the oath. Speeches alternated between celebrating the history of immigration to the United States and emphasizing that, in the words of the white-haired, black-robed INS judge who presided, "After

today, you will never be the same. You will be an American.”<sup>4</sup> I was simultaneously moved by the speakers’ rhetoric and repelled by my susceptibility to it, knowing as I did how shallow such speeches felt in the context of national efforts to restrict immigrant rights and social welfare benefits for all Americans.

I wondered what the event meant to the Asian elders I could see in the auditorium, several of whom looked to be in their eighties or nineties. Two of these new citizens were hunched over in wheelchairs at the back of the auditorium, with their family members helping them hold up their hands for the oath. I had not noticed them filling out voter registration forms. Perhaps, I thought, they had been moved to naturalize by that summer’s immigration reform legislation, which eliminated Social Security benefits, Medicaid, and food stamps for noncitizens, even long-term permanent residents who for years had contributed toward these benefits through their payroll taxes.<sup>5</sup> Lynn Fujiwara has documented immigrant communities’ panic, but also their successful political mobilization, in opposition to aspects of the welfare reform legislation called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 (Fujiwara, 2005).

Long after staff members wrote a letter in support of her successful application for legal residency, Ximena continued participating in *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* and encouraged her peers to engage in more public political actions. Ximena had found the women’s group for the most self-interested reasons: the state’s requirement of good moral character and a recommendation from her immigration attorney. Yet by her own account, her experiences there transformed her sense of her relationship to the United States. Because she was the mother of a U.S.-born child, this transformation had implications for her son as well as for Ximena.

Ximena told me that her main motivation for legalizing her immigration status was to be able to see to the well-being of her eighteen-month-old son, since she and his father—also undocumented—had separated. Even though Ximena hoped to someday return to Guatemala to live and had already made sure to register her son’s Guatemalan citizenship at her consulate, she wanted to make sure she could continue living in the United States with him, legally and with the proper work permits. Because his father was Mexican, she also hoped someday to register her son with the Mexican consulate. When she came to the United States to work, she had anticipated neither falling in love nor having a child and ending up a single mother struggling to make ends

meet as a low-wage restaurant worker. She was conscious of the power of citizenship to convey rights and saw part of her responsibility as a parent as making sure her child could claim a legal right to study, live, or work in any of these countries if necessary.

Ximena was clear about the importance of citizenship, even if she might never be able to obtain it for herself. Although there are multiple “legal” immigrant statuses, to obtain the right to naturalize, an immigrant must first obtain lawful permanent resident (also known as LPR or green card) status and then wait five years to apply for naturalization. Depending on factors such as nationality, date of immigration, and initial and subsequent visa statuses, an immigrant might wait twenty years to qualify for naturalization.<sup>6</sup> The English-language requirement, naturalization exam, and rising application fees all pose additional burdens, particularly on low-income immigrants with low literacy rates in their native language.

### Anthropology and Cultural Citizenship

At the turn of the twenty-first century, with the global realignments after the end of the cold war and the rapid dominance of neoliberal policies in both northern and southern countries, immigrant Latino/as face particular obstacles in claiming their rights and gaining recognition as contributing members of U.S. society. Members of the Inter-University Project on Cultural Studies first used the term *cultural citizenship* to describe the processes through which “a subordinated group of people arrives at a common identity, establishes solidarity, and defines a common sense of interests” (quoted in Benmayor, Torruellas, and Juarbe, 1992, 72). Cultural citizenship as an analytic frame offers an important position from which to highlight the situation of certain groups of citizens who, though formally entitled to full legal political rights, are socially recognized neither as first-class citizens nor as contributors to the vernacular meanings of citizenship as it plays a role in day-to-day life in the United States. “The concept of cultural citizenship allows us to see the notion of rights as it is defined not by the legal code but by the cultural foundations and practices of people themselves, in their own philosophical and political terms” (Benmayor, Torruellas, and Juarbe, 1992, 73).

The idea that anthropology or ethnography might contribute to understanding citizenship is relatively new. Precisely because of the cultural notion that citizenship is a governmental rather than a social domain, citizenship studies have traditionally been the terrain of sociologists, political scientists,

historians, and legal scholars. Sociologist T. H. Marshall (1964) elaborated one of the first post-World War II theories of citizenship, linking the development of citizenship ideals to earlier shifts in economic and political structures. Contemporary British and U.S. perspectives on citizenship are often rooted in a critique of Marshall's assumptions about universal and unilineal development of citizenship rights and who belongs in the modern nation-state (Hall and Held, 1989).<sup>7</sup> They suggest that ethnic diversity and globalization represent the central issues around which new citizenship theory will emerge (Turner, 1990, 222).

Marshallian assumptions about individual needs and rights versus collective interests and structures undergird many formulations of citizenship. The individual and collective dichotomy is also reflected in the distinction between private and public social spheres common to Western European and North American cultures. The idea of citizenship as an essentially public, political domain dates back at least as far as Enlightenment notions of the clear division between a rational, male, civic-minded citizenry and the emotive, female domestic world that male citizens both control and receive comfort from. With the elaboration of the modern nation-state, imperial capitalism, and Victorian social ideals, this ideological division became entrenched and eventually invisible through the cultural common sense about citizenship in the United States (Collier, 2000; M. Rosaldo, 1980).

The emergence of ideas about cultural citizenship is part of a broader set of discussions about the inadequacies of traditional citizenship forms and politics that emerged at the end of the twentieth century. The combined effects of economic and political globalization, devolution of industrial welfare states, and the postcolonial, civil rights, human rights, and feminist movements led to proposals for more process- and practice-oriented approaches to understanding citizenship (Brubaker, 1989; Taylor, 1994; Turner, 1990, 1993; Somers, 1993). Some political philosophers, sociologists, and anthropologists sought out new ideas about citizenship based on the experiences of people historically excluded from either formal or substantive first-class status. The subject positions theorized in this literature include women (Barbalet, 1988; Pateman, 1989; Orloff, 1993, 1996; Walby, 1994; Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1994; Lister, 1997), people of color and diasporic communities (Hall and Held, 1989; Dagnino, 1994; R. Rosaldo, 1994; Ong, 1996; Flores, 2003; Flores and Benmayor, 1997; Rosaldo, Flores, and Silvestrini, 1993; De Genova and Ramos-Zayas, 2003), lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) people (Herrell, 1996; Berlant, 1997; Bell and

Binnie, 2000), and transnational migrants (Brubaker, 1989; Shklar, 1991; Mouffe, 1992; Soysal, 1994; P. Clarke, 1996; Bhabha, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1999; Goldring, 2001). In some cases, renewed academic concern with citizenship focused on liberal defenses of inclusion (Kymlicka, 2001), while others promised more radical challenges to global political economic systems of inequality (Lowe, 1996, 33).

Contemporary studies of U.S. citizenship situate cultural norms and practices of citizenship within the relationships of power and inequality that circumscribe American politics and society. Some argue that the internal contradiction in citizenship between the ideology of democracy and actual exclusions of groups from political rights dates back to ancient Athens (Shklar, 1991). Both Aristotelian and modern U.S. republican ideas about citizenship are products of societies in which slaves, women, and male laborers were excluded from the political class. When the economic and political life of the United States was predicated on the enslavement of 20 percent of its population, “black slavery and racial caste served as the floor upon which white, ethnic, and gender struggles could be diffused and diverted,” as Cornel West notes (1994, 156). U.S. political culture included an ideology of citizenship that linked the right to vote with the right to labor for wages, while defining good citizenship as public political participation in local and national issues through public meetings and voluntary organizations contributing to the public good (Shklar, 1991, 5). From the beginning, this meant that, at different times and to differing degrees, people of color, the poor, and women have been excluded from the definition of the U.S. citizenry.

Notions of cultural citizenship integrate this history of the exclusivity of citizenship in different ways because they are neither uniform nor unified. However, they do share the impulse to reformulate the concept of citizenship at the turn of the twenty-first century, when people, capital, and productive processes span national boundaries, where national, ethnic, and sexual minorities, women, and postcolonial subjects demand consideration as citizens in their own right. Until recently, the field of citizenship studies focused on formal definitions and expressions of citizenship, rather than on people’s everyday lived experiences. The fieldwork for this book took place in the context of growing political opposition to efforts by traditionally excluded citizens and noncitizen immigrants to claim civil and political rights as well as access to public benefits and resources—what Marshall (1964) would call “social rights.”

No matter what other differences they espoused, the principal theorists of cultural citizenship in anthropology represented it as processual rather than

simply as a static bundle of rights and entitlements. For Aihwa Ong, cultural citizenship is “a process of ‘subjectification,’ in the Foucauldian sense of self-making and being-made by power relations that produce consent through schemes of surveillance, discipline, control and administration” (1996, 737). For Renato Rosaldo, “[c]ultural citizenship is a process by which rights are claimed and expanded . . . the manner in which groups claim cultural citizenship may very well affect a renegotiation of the basic social contract of America. So-called new citizens—people of color, recent immigrants, women, gays, and lesbians—are not only ‘imagining’ America; they are creating it anew” (1994, 62). Both Rosaldo and Ong draw on British cultural studies of citizenship, specifically those of Stuart Hall and David Held, who define citizenship in terms of belonging, rights, and entitlement in a given society and assert that “issues around membership—who does and who does not belong—is where the politics of citizenship begins” (1989, 175). The concept of cultural citizenship is ethnographically productive for anthropologists entering the terrain of citizenship studies because it provides a frame of reference to study people’s experiences and interpretations of their own political, cultural, and economic position in the United States in the context of relationships of power, the U.S. state, and other groups in society. Rosaldo, Ong, and Hall and Held all emphasize the perspectives of immigrant and diasporic communities as critical for reformulating citizenship, suggesting that the framework of cultural studies of citizenship holds great promise for new approaches to studying immigrant lives and the politics of diversity in contemporary societies like the United States and Britain.

This book proceeds from the premise that citizenship is a process defined not only by the culturally and historically constituted legal institutions of power politics and the state nor even by what has been traditionally recognized as political participation and civic engagement (Asen, 2004). This more dynamic notion of citizenship emphasizes that questions of subjectivity and affect in the daily struggles, collective analyses, and diverse expressions of resistance to inequality of subordinated citizen-subjects are necessary for a robust understanding of citizenship institutions and practices. The women I interviewed challenged their political marginalization as low-income, non-English-speaking women and the dehumanization of terms such as *illegal* and *alien*. In doing so, they embodied claims against the legitimacy of cultural, administrative, and legal obstacles that prevent full social and political participation of immigrants in U.S. life. Their experiences may be seen as part of the



dynamic and contested set of institutions, practices, and ideas that constitute U.S. citizenship. These women recognized the power of the state's monopoly over citizenship as a legal status, and those who had not naturalized never referred to themselves as *ciudadanas* (female citizens). However, they did represent themselves to me, to their children, and to one another as legitimate, if not legal, claimants to the rights, privileges, and obligations of citizenship in the United States. This strength of conviction, gained in large part through the peer support of other immigrant women and political struggle with one another and with other poor and immigrant communities, was striking, and led me to consider in greater depth the role that collective grassroots organization and motherhood played in forging their sense of citizenship.

Considered together, the topics of immigration, citizenship, and motherhood stand at the center of contemporary debates over inclusion and exclusion—who really belongs and is a fully entitled member of U.S. society, and who is not. In this book, I aim to understand the specific social processes through which citizenship and motherhood were mutually constituted in the lived experiences of one group of Latin American immigrant women, the members of the *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* grassroots community organization in San Francisco, California. While immigrants and women continue to be marginalized with respect to the exercise of full citizenship rights in the United States and in the local community of San Francisco, the members of this immigrant women's organization had a great deal to say about the terms of their membership in their adopted local and national communities. Economic subordination, domestic violence, and racial, cultural, and linguistic discrimination were all issues that the women examined in their stories without dividing them into discrete categories of individual, family, or community issues.

The book can convey only some of what I learned from the women I met in San Francisco. The main focus is what they told me about the individual and collective processes through which they came to claim rights and exercise responsibilities for themselves, their families, and *la comunidad*—by which shorthand they referred to the community of Latin American migrants and their U.S.-born and/or U.S.-raised children, but that other times included all of San Francisco as their community.

*Mujeres Unidas y Activas* comprised two hundred members and five staff people between 1996 and 1999, when I conducted the bulk of this research. They graciously welcomed me as a student and a collaborator able to provide

translation, interpretation, and transportation. When I moved to the East Coast, I maintained contact with the group and with several members through regular visits, letters, children's birthday and holiday cards, and phone calls. Since returning to live in San Francisco permanently, I returned to more regular contact with current and former group members; I keep in touch with those who are no longer active members when we run into one another grocery shopping, at our children's schools, at church, or at other public events. In the fall of 2007, I was honored to be asked to begin a two-year term as part of the member-led *mesa directiva*, or board of directors, which was constituted after the organization became its own 501(c)3 nonprofit in 2006, and which is a remarkable body in and of itself.<sup>8</sup>

Rather than argue that because MUA members were unique individually or collectively (which of course they were), and therefore that their narratives of citizenship and motherhood were exceptional, I found that this group articulated an important and concentrated set of ideas about how the immigrant women came to feel a sense of belonging and entitlement and a positive vision for themselves and their children as members of U.S. society. Their narratives of individual and collective pride constituted a powerful counter-discourse to the derogatory, xenophobic rhetoric historically directed at working-class and poor immigrants. At times their stories also offered critiques of dominant American ideologies of individualism, consumerism, and competition, while making claims based on more universal ideals of social justice and human rights.

Through the experience of collective support, discussion, training, and political engagement that MUA offered, the women I interviewed came to see their individual stories as part of broader collective experiences with political implications. While many of the women I spoke with first arrived at the group with ideas of motherhood centering around the care and nurturance of children, they described how their notions of their duties as mothers had expanded to include advocating for their own, their children's, and other immigrants' interests with respect to health care, social services, the law, and education. This sense of motherhood included a claim not only of belonging in their adopted city, but also a claim that they and their children were entitled to certain rights and services and to respect. These women, their experiences, and their analyses indicated productive ways to bridge feminist theories of the social construction of motherhood (Collier and Yanagisako, 1979; Yanagisako and Delaney, 1995) with the aforementioned new perspectives on the subjec-

tive and cultural aspects of citizenship (Hall, 1990; Ong, 1996; R. Rosaldo, 1994).

Although hegemonic norms of race, immigration status, gender, and language excluded them from first-class citizen status, the women's experiences and interpretations of community participation and what it meant to belong and to be entitled to rights and services constituted important examples of the contemporary theory and practice of American citizenship. Their language and collective struggles attended to the gendered underpinnings of the state-defined realm of politics and rights, as well as to the everyday ways in which men and women actively shaped the terms and scope of their rights and their entitlements. This book therefore offers a gendered analysis of how social belonging and political agency, the disciplinary forces of nation-states, and individual women's personal experiences and ideas shape the meaning and content of political belonging in their lives. In particular, stories focus on understanding the changes in their sense of self and their relationships with their local community, friends, and family after joining an immigrant women's organization. In so doing, they foregrounded issues of subjectivity, affect, and trust so often elided in discussions of citizenship and political engagement (Asen 2004; Hardy-Fanta, 1993; Kivisto, 2001; Quayson, 2005). The women discussed in this book, along with their words and actions, do not illustrate social theory, but rather constitute immigrant women as active participants in the remaking of what it means to be a full political and social member of U.S. society.

### Citizenship Talk, Citizenship Theory

On-the-ground discourses of subjectivity and personal transformation such as those the women shared with me in this research constitute cultural citizenship stories because they engage women's struggles over and relationships with personal and familial issues and women's political participation and rights. Gloria Anzaldúa regards such narratives as *teorías*, or intersubjective and multilayered social theories that can "reflect what goes on between inner, outer and peripheral 'I's within a person and between the personal 'I's and the collective 'we' of our ethnic communities" (1990, xxv.). The immigrant women cited here, while excluded de jure and de facto from full citizenship, offer examples of the effective mobilization of liberatory aspects of liberal democratic discourse, while maintaining a critical distance from its exclusionary neoliberal roots. Such processes are fraught by the imbalances between official and