



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN  
UNIVERSITY**

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

---

Volume 43  
Issue 4 December

Article 11

---

2016

**Review of *Dreams and Nightmares: Immigration Policy, Youth, and Families*. Marjorie S. Zatz and Nancy Rodriguez. Reviewed by Xiafei Wang.**

Xiafei Wang  
Ohio State University, wang.3933@osu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

---

**Recommended Citation**

Wang, Xiafei (2016) "Review of *Dreams and Nightmares: Immigration Policy, Youth, and Families*. Marjorie S. Zatz and Nancy Rodriguez. Reviewed by Xiafei Wang," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 43 : Iss. 4 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol43/iss4/11>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN  
UNIVERSITY**

Marjorie S. Zatz and Nancy Rodriguez, *Dreams and Nightmares: Immigration Policy, Youth, and Families*. University of California Press (2015), 202 pages, \$85.00 (hardcover), \$39.95 (paperback).

As a "nation of immigrants," the United States attracted people from every corner of the world to pursue their dreams. However, the complicated economic, political and cultural concerns, and immigration policies, particularly the ones targeting undocumented immigrants, have always been controversial in the United States.

This book is of broad relevance to the current debate and future immigration policy reforms. Marjorie Zatz and Nancy Rodriguez conducted a comprehensive social analysis of the effects of immigration policies and practices on immigrant youth and families during the Obama Administration when comprehensive immigration reform was absent. From a systemic lens, the authors present us with the mechanisms through which immigration policies influenced the lives of immigrant youth and families; meanwhile, the structural mechanisms that mitigate and exacerbate the vulnerabilities of this population were also explored to inform meaningful future reforms.

The first chapter briefly reviews the context of contemporary U.S. immigration policies and practices. After 9/11 the Department of Homeland Security replaced the Department of Justice to take charge of immigration affairs, shifting the focus of immigration policy and practice from due process and equal protection requirements to law enforcement and deportation. The increasing tensions between the Obama Administration and the predominantly Republican Congress dimmed the prospects for comprehensive immigration. Finally, the alarming number of unaccompanied minors flooding into the U.S. to seek family unification since 2011 has reached crisis levels.

In the second chapter, the authors demonstrate that the Obama Administration finally resorted to prosecutorial discretion for balancing the competing goals of public safety and family unification. Prosecutorial discretion, in the form of policy memos providing guidelines to prioritize detention and deportation resources on truly serious offenders, was intended

to protect the immigrant community. The most successful case of it was Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). In chapter 3, the authors present evidence showing how DACA made a difference for young adults who came to the U.S. as children (dreamers), ranging from alleviating their fears of being deported to providing them with access to college education, driver's licenses, and work authorization. However, certain predicaments faced by mixed-status families still remained, due to the limited application of DACA and its nature of administrative relief.

On the other hand, prosecutorial discretion failed to decrease the number of deportations, and parents of children who are U.S. citizens accounted for a large percentage of the deported population. Chapter 4 explores the traumatic experience parental detention and deportation has had on children. These negative effects were exacerbated by the interweaving of the criminal justice system, child welfare system, and immigration enforcement agencies—that is, multiple systems with contrasting cultures, goals, and perspectives. As a result, some family-oriented procedural improvements have been advanced by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Women's Refugee Commission, Consular Officials and state laws to ameliorate harms affecting youth and ensure the children's best interests.

Chapter 5 describes the experience of unaccompanied minors entering into the U.S. The protective structural mechanisms, such as resources provided by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, and certain initiatives based on the best interests of children are identified; on the other hand, the problems of lack of legal representation, system stressors, and the limited use of prosecutorial discretion are demonstrated as the mechanisms worsening the conundrum of unaccompanied minors. Finally, the authors summarize their main findings, providing the implications for future research on immigration, race and mass incarceration, and transnational family formation, as well as related policy recommendations.

Using the overarching theme of prosecutorial discretion is an innovative and thoughtful approach to examining immigration policies and practices. For one thing, the implementation of prosecutorial discretion exerts strong but distinct

influences on those three types of immigrants: DACA recipients benefited from prosecutorial discretion, while undocumented parents were threatened due to the flexibility of it (the expansion of the types of deportable serious offenses, e.g., DUI), and unaccompanied minors were constrained by the limited use of prosecutorial discretion. For another thing, the emphasis on prosecutorial discretion reflects the reality that the present U.S. immigration practices are largely relying on executive orders rather than legislative actions. However, the authors are optimistic that using prosecutorial discretion can achieve the balance between the guarantee of public safety and the promotion of family unity and humanitarian causes.

The authors' systemic perspective is highly valuable. By examining the policy processes from multiple systems, the authors reveal the complexities of immigration practices in order to propose reasonable and concrete policy recommendations. For example, by situating the immigration of unaccompanied minors into the context of the deteriorating social-political environment in Central American countries, the authors provide the rationale to define this phenomenon as a humanitarian crisis and legitimize the recommendation of granting prosecutorial discretion to gang-affiliated youth from those countries. Moreover, by bringing the criminal justice system, child welfare and immigration enforcement systems together into discussion, the authors are able to identify the issues that hinder the goals of family unification and children's best interests, including timeline colliding and spatial incoordination, as well as the segregation between federal and state governments. In general, this book is a combination of informative resources, rigorous social science research, and is well written to boot!

*Xiafei Wang, Ohio State University*

Daniel Sullivan, *Cultural-Existential Psychology: The Role of Culture in Suffering and Threat*. Cambridge University Press (2016), 295 pages, \$110 (hardcover).

The field of social psychology has for decades provided much of the theoretical knowledge base for social work. Social