

# FOCUSING ON YOUTH IN THE AMERICAS

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**Cuban Youth and Revolutionary Values: Educating the New Socialist Citizen.**

By Denise F. Blum, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011. Pp. ix + 274. \$55.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780292722606.

**The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Perón to Videla.**

By Valeria Manzano. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. Pp. xiii + 338. \$34.95 paper. ISBN: 9781469611617.

**Citizens in the Present: Youth Civic Engagement in The Americas.**

By Maria de los Angeles Torres, Irene Rizzini, and Norma del Rio. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013. Pp. xiv + 164. \$80.00 cloth. \$25.00 paper. ISBN: 9780252037658.

**Troubling Gender: Youth and Cumbia in Argentina's Music Scene.**

By Pablo Vila and Pablo Semán. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011. Pp. viii + 217 \$27.95 paper. ISBN: 9781439902677.

The subject of youth has received renewed attention through recent books that look at issues facing young people in Argentina, Cuba, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States from the 1950s to the present. The subject is approached through investigations of dominant discourses in cultural and political history as well as countercultures. This essay provides a brief introduction to the books that will unearth their intellectual roots, place them in geographic and historical context, and review each volume's methods and arguments.

In *The Age of Youth in Argentina*, historian Valeria Manzano analyzes the subject of youth in the context of the cultural climate of the twentieth century. She draws on the work of the French cultural and political historian Jean-François Sirinelli and takes particular interest in his discussion of the contribution young people have made to the reconstruction of political culture and the recreation of the principles, languages, and opinions accompanying it.<sup>1</sup> Contesting the notion of social order in revolutionary politics introduced by American historian Lynn Hunt, who associates the balance of power and authority in the French revolution with the relationship between fathers and sons,<sup>2</sup> Manzano argues that the youth in the Peronist movement defined themselves in opposition to familial tradition and paternal authority.

1. Jean-François Sirinelli, "Éloge de la complexité," in *Pour une histoire culturelle*, ed. Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli (Paris: Pluriel, 1997), 437–438.

2. Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). For a detailed discussion of familial order in revolutionary politics see the introduction, p. xii, and chapter 1, pp. 8, 14–15.

Educational anthropologist Denise F. Blum conducts her research for *Cuban Youth and Revolutionary Values* mainly in the island's secondary schools by observing classrooms. She considers schools as the pivotal locales for examining cultural transformation, the effects of social programming, and the legacy of the 1959 revolution. Her ethnographic study discusses the reproduction of culture in educational systems, a notion introduced by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, which refers to education's crucial role in the transmission of cultural values from generation to generation.<sup>3</sup> Taking an approach firmly grounded in Brazilian cultural studies, Blum also employs the work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire when discussing the relationship between education and consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

Sociologist Pablo Vila and anthropologist Pablo Semán collaborate across disciplines to produce the ethnographic study *Troubling Gender*, which examines the sexual roles of women and men in the Argentinian public sphere. They reject the traditional view of female sexuality as defined only through its relation to the masculine and thus initiate a discussion of gender politics based on a new type of female sexual autonomy. With references to Bourdieu and the Polish sociologist Bauman, they interpret *cumbia* lyrics as a means by which women have succeeded in negotiating their own sexual autonomy. The British sociologist Anthony Giddens also appears to be influential in this study, particularly his ideas regarding plastic sexuality.<sup>5</sup>

Maria de los Angeles Torres, Irene Rizzini, and Norma del Rio combine approaches drawn from political science, sociology, and psychology in order to address the civic engagement of young people in the Americas. The influence of the Argentinian anthropologist Néstor García Canclini is clear, particularly in the notion of hybridity within big cities, where identities tend to be more diverse.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, ideas developed by Bauman figure prominently. Specifically, the authors refer to Bauman's claim that hybridization is more characteristic of the upper and middle classes, whose members usually have the economic ability to relocate and travel in a globalized world, whereas lower classes are more firmly attached to their local environment and as a result face "spatial segregation, separation and exclusion."<sup>7</sup>

These books move their readers through various historical periods and national contexts. In Argentina the period from the Perón government to the military dictatorship (1950 to 1970), appropriately called by Manzano "the age of youth," was a time when young people stood against the authoritarian regime

3. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage, 2000).

4. Blum draws on Freire's discussion of how consciousness inserts people into the historical process. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia do oprimido*, 17th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1978), 3.

5. Giddens understands plastic sexuality after the advent of modern contraception in terms of a tendency for women to seek pleasure as a form of self-therapy, without privileging the need for reproduction or the male experience. Vila and Semán refer to the same phenomenon without explicitly using the term. Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 1–2.

6. Néstor García Canclini, "Diferentes, desiguales o desconectados," *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, no. 66–67 (2004): 113–133.

7. Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 3.

and struggled for democracy and revolution. It was a moment when new practices of social and family life were embraced and young people started performing a significant role in the public sphere, thus rejuvenating Argentinian culture. Manzano disagrees with the view of Sirinelli and other historians that youth is tied to the concept of generation even when it is seen as a product of a cultural process.<sup>8</sup> However, Sirinelli exerts some positive influence on Manzano's research by serving as an inspiration for her assertion that mass culture in Argentina was transformed into a juvenile culture. This new juvenile culture was linked, among other things, to the introduction of rock music and the emergence of the counter-culture in the 1950s, when young people initiated new practices of consumption and leisure. Some youths were seen by adults and by conservative Argentinian society as degenerate or prone to moral disorder precisely as a result of their involvement with rock music. A wide swathe of the young generation from this era, especially the more politically active individuals, "disappeared"<sup>9</sup> in the 1970s during the Argentinian military dictatorship, a tragedy that marks the end of the "age of youth" (19).

After the 1950s, revolutionary ideas began to exert a strong influence on students and young people, as elucidated in Blum's analysis of Cuba. The Cuban revolution sparked new ideas and feelings, future aspirations, and cultural changes. In Cuba, youths were regarded as the most important generation because they were expected to engage in the revolution and help with the education of new socialist men and women. According to Blum, many students were subjected to a type of "personality training" in an effort to transform them into socialist citizens.<sup>10</sup>

In Argentina the 1960s and 1970s saw alternative forms of gender relations creating a "sexual revolution" or a shift in mainstream views of morality and decency, which until that point had involved exerting strict censorship and control over the female body. Previous notions of absolute and eternal love were replaced with ideas of free love and sexual autonomy, according to Vila and Semán; desire and sexuality became a significant part of the identities of young people from diverse social backgrounds.<sup>11</sup> Sexuality came to be regarded as a source of pleasure and part of the identity of Argentinian women as well as men, who discovered diverse ways of relating to their bodies.

Torres, Rizzini, and Del Rio argue that despite these social changes, the media often depicted young people as politically passive, apathetic, and dismissive

8. Sirinelli understands the notion of generation as a product of culture, not of specific political events. Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les baby-boomers: Une génération (1945–1969)* (Paris: Hachette, 2003), 55–56.

9. Dictators in fact killed them. See the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP), *Nunca más: informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre la desaparición de personas*, 5th ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1999).

10. Blum seems to utilize the notion developed by Bourdieu that every institutionalized educational system reproduces cultural arbitrariness and the political power system. Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, 54.

11. This specific discussion draws on Bauman's notion of liquid society, which is understood in terms of preference for a more flexible, or fluid, lifestyle characteristic of postmodern society, rather than one reliant on fixed and durable ties such as family and love. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

of civic engagement. To counter this stereotype they looked at alternative youth movements that questioned the conventional understanding of political activism, traditionally confined to electoral participation or political party activities. Their study considers youth engagement with media and the Internet as forms of engagement in politics, denoting influences of the research carried out by García Canclini in Mexico, which found that most young people use digital technology to communicate with their peers regardless of their social background (around 50 percent were from the lower segments of society).<sup>12</sup> The historical context of this research was the democratization process taking place across the Americas, especially in the past twenty-five years, marked in Brazil by events such as the impeachment of President Fernando Collor de Mello in 1992 and election of Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva from the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT) in 2002.

Turning now to a closer examination of each volume in the collection we find a marked contrast between the two books on youth in Argentina, which focus on very different time periods and approach their subject using distinct methodologies. Manzano’s *Age of Youth in Argentina* offers a view of sexuality, rock and roll, student participation in politics, and the experiences of a range of young people living together in alternative Argentinian communities. Manzano suggests that the Argentinian urban youth—mostly from Buenos Aires—including both the middle and working classes, were the most significant factor generating social change during the second half of the twentieth century. As young people became more active in pushing for change, their participation in politics became radicalized. Unlike some of the cases analyzed by Bourdieu, they were not simply “inheritors” (67) satisfied with the status quo passed on to them by the previous generation but rather were the “first generation” to assume responsibility for modernizing their society.<sup>13</sup> They were the protagonists of a social rebellion and the vanguard of a social revolution. Manzano argues that the consequent change in attitudes toward politics, sexuality, and cultural values allows us to associate the notion of youth with the notion of “Argentinian cultural modernity” (69). Young people are considered a focus of analysis, and the author is particularly interested in seeing how they are perceived and understood and how their voices are communicated in archive materials and interviews.

In Argentina, the 1960s saw more widespread political action than had the 1950s, which may be attributed in part to the increasing numbers of students in secondary and higher education. This new youth activism mostly began in schools and colleges but was then redirected to the streets. The Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires, became very engaged in the political and sexual revolutions under way. Students were deeply affected by the Cuban Revolution. They were divided into two umbrella groups, the revolutionaries and the reformists, both of which were heavily influenced by ideas such as national-

12. Néstor García Canclini, “Los jóvenes no se ven como el futuro: ¿Serán el presente?” *Revista Pensamiento Iberoamericana*, no. 3 (2008): 8.

13. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *The Inheritors: French Students and Their Relation to Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 15.

ism, Marxism, imperialism, and modernization.<sup>14</sup> Members of these groups were unified or divided according to their political beliefs and circumstances. According to Manzano, some students of the *Tendencia Anti-Imperialista Universitaria* were very conscious of their personal responsibility in terms of liberating the country, an attitude that was radically different the “transitory irresponsibility” theorized by Bourdieu.<sup>15</sup>

Through an examination of contemporary films and magazines, Manzano discovered a profoundly negative representation of young people in the 1960s and 1970s. They were portrayed as an angry generation that needed to engage in activism in order to overcome their frustrations. Some magazines created an alternative negative portrayal of youth as inactive and maintained that only a minority of youth was politically engaged. Due to censorship and social repression<sup>16</sup> in Argentinian society during the 1960s, magazines of the sixties were very cautious and prudent when dealing with the topic of sexuality. Manzano finds that these negative images of youth changed in the mid-1960s, and the old ideas concerning crisis, frustration, inactivity, and perversion were replaced by notions of a new and modernized youth.

One of the factors that contributed to the many changes in youth behavior in the 1960s and 1970s in Argentina was the introduction of rock music, which brought along a new culture and fashion. Tight pants and miniskirts challenged the old traditions and caused a measure of scandal in society.<sup>17</sup> Rock and roll influenced a number of Argentinian bands that had previously only sung in Spanish but now began to sing in English as well. The music industry was trying to reach as wide a section of society as possible by marketing rock music not only to the “rebels” but also to families. Visiting nightclubs became a common form of leisure and caused new habits and patterns of behavior to emerge.

More recently, traditional notions of sexuality have been subverted and sex has become a theme frequently discussed in Argentinian popular culture. *Cumbia villera*, a combined style of music and dance developed in Argentina in the 1990s,<sup>18</sup> has become very popular in twenty-first-century Argentina. Cumbia explores sexuality and engenders new attitudes toward female-male relations. This musical trend is of interest to Vila and Semán in their book *Troubling Gender*, in which the authors present cumbia villera as a powerful influence in the creation of an

14. Manzano sees similarities with the May 1968 movement in France discussed by Sirinelli, referring to connections between the students and working classes, in universities and factories. Jean-François Sirinelli, *Mai 68: L'événement Janus* (Paris: Fayard, 2008).

15. Pierre Bourdieu, “Youth Is Just a Word,” *Sociology in Question*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage, 1993).

16. Despite mentioning Michel Foucault’s seminal study *The History of Sexuality* in the general bibliography, the book does not provide a meaningful engagement with the “discourse on modern sexual repression” discussed by Foucault. Michel Foucault, *A History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1985).

17. Pierre Bourdieu’s notion that a group’s taste in music, fashion, and entertainment is defined in competition with other groups related to them has clearly influenced Manzano’s discussion. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 60.

18. A variation of the cumbia originated in Colombia.

oppression-free society. Vila and Semán discuss the characteristic satirizing of certain social attitudes such as sexism, repression, and hostility, mainly through bodily gestures. Cumbia music and dance subvert the notion of masculinity as the center of the male-female relationship by making fun of it. The authors argue that the attitudes of young girls toward cumbia is currently challenging sexist social norms in Argentinian institutions and allowing females to actively express their sexuality. This trend is linked with Bauman's discussion of female emancipation in the bedroom, including the reproductive sexual act and notions of loyalty in postmodern societies worldwide. This is a particularly appealing side of the research because it demonstrates consideration for the impact of dance on social behavior and the formation of moral principles.<sup>19</sup>

The traditional tension between the sexes is present in cumbia and involves a process where males and females identify themselves with the lyrics in different ways. At face value, cumbia seems to reaffirm male domination because the man leads the dance. However, according to the authors, the complex of sexuality and gender relations requires a more careful examination. In reality cumbia denies universal male and female roles by illustrating that the relationship between males and females is not eternal, not equal, and still involves an imbalance of power.

In cumbia women do not identify themselves with the contents of the lyrics but rather, through performance and play, create a satiric engagement with the songs. Women use the dance to mock the lyrics and thus to validate their sensuality as an act of value inversion.<sup>20</sup> The female relationship with cumbia is sharply contradictory and the dance itself involves moves designed to "tease" the male dance partner. The melody, harmony, and rhythm of the songs convey more meaning about the role of a woman's relationship with her body than do the lyrics.

Instead of regarding cumbia as a demonstration of disrespect toward women due to the songs' lyrics, the authors urge us to take a deeper look at the female dance moves in cumbia and consider the sexualized body language and expressions of eroticism on the faces of the dancers. Instead of adopting passive roles without any outward pleasure, women in cumbia are interpreters of their own performance. Although the female characters in cumbia convey passive roles presented in the sexist discourse of the lyrics, female dancers claim to sing the songs only "to make fun." Semán and Vila's analysis considers not only what the lyrics say but also how the dance is performed, which presents an interesting point for discussion in the social sciences. The lyrics of cumbia are, in fact, supposed to act as one side of the dichotomy implicit in the female role in cumbia villera. Women tend to reject the lyrics because they regard them as disrespectful; however, they perform the dance and sing the songs in order to mock them, refusing to play the female role the lyrics suggest. For these authors, this mockery is an important way (and perhaps the only way) women can actively participate in the cumbia movement.

19. Zygmunt Bauman, "On Postmodern Uses of Sex," *Theory, Culture and Society* 15, no. 3 (1998): 26.

20. Vila and Semán also discuss female engagement with cumbia in terms of their social position and cultural background, which could be related to Bourdieu's work on diverse art practices and their links to the multiple modes of culture acquisition. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 3.



Shifting our focus to the Caribbean, Blum's *Cuban Youth and Revolutionary Values: Educating the New Socialist Citizen* investigates how the Cuban revolutionary process was constructed, understood, and accepted. Blum also explores the Cuban government's rejection of traditional capitalist values such as individualism, consumerism, and egocentrism, and its adoption of practices to create a new type of socialist seen as responsible, altruistic, hard-working, patriotic, and benevolent. The foundations of the new society were based on the work-study principle, which was influenced by the teachings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, as well as José Martí, who was considered a national hero and whose ideas also resonated with Argentine Che Guevara. Blum is also interested in discovering how the older generation received and developed the new educational system. This research strategy is compatible with the Cuban government's position on education, seen as a tool for social change that could alter people's minds and hearts.<sup>21</sup> In order to ensure that socialist ideas and morals were well absorbed by the citizens, the government needed motivated and conscientious<sup>22</sup> children on their side. Young people were seen as vehicles for the implementation of new values. Hence, the government invested much effort in youth education as part of its program to ensure future generations of Cubans remained supportive of socialist ideals. The government combined revolutionary concepts with a pedagogical style of schooling designed to transform personality, culture, and society and initiated a widespread literacy education campaign to integrate people and encourage them to participate more actively in society.

When focusing on the analysis of Cuban politics Blum pays particular attention to emotional factors as well as economic, social, historical, and geographical ones. She believes that patriotism and passion for political causes are significant factors concerned with governability and legitimacy when analyzing both the private and public spheres. She sees affection and passion as having played a crucial role in the revolutionary government in Cuba when it was faced with the task of promoting communist consciousness. Thus she attempts to highlight the significance of the way in which the positive emotions and affectivity of teachers, parents, and education officials were harnessed and encouraged by the Cuban government.

The language utilized for educational purposes was infused with rhetoric aimed at reinforcing the notion of stability in Cuba and creating a sense of belonging for its citizens.<sup>23</sup> It is significant that Blum considers the effects these educational practices had on shaping people's minds. After all, a unified ideology,

21. Blum shares some ideas with Erving Goffman, who argues that an establishment, which could be understood here as a school, influences cultural activities, customs, and tastes as well as moral values. An establishment can also be seen in political terms because "each participant could ask for actions from other participants, enforcing these demands, exercising command and using sanctions." Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956), 153.

22. Freire, *Pedagogia do oprimido*, 3.

23. This notion of stability could be related to the work of the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, and, more specifically, to his ideas of simulacrum as a mode of production and reproduction of reality. Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 2.

which could only be achieved through the formation of citizens who shared the same vision of the revolution, was crucial for the unity of the country. Leaders therefore mobilized local resources and put various educational plans into action in order to win the hearts and minds of the Cuban people. They also organized activities such as parades, excursions, meetings, and other projects as part of this grand scheme.

In her discussion about faith, the author states that there is a Manichean myth, a polarization of values surrounding Cuban politics that acts as type of religion. The aim of this binary discourse is to create a sense of a perpetual threat to the country in order to maintain unity within Cuban society, thereby creating support for the revolution and its leaders. This threat was represented by the United States, especially in the first decade of the revolution, and functioned within a duality that juxtaposed capitalism and the United States against Cuban society and its citizens. This approach is particularly innovative in the social sciences because it considers the dichotomy, the contradiction, and, at the same time, the “dialogism” intrinsic to political discourses.<sup>24</sup>

The economy did not thrive in this new socialist nation, and in the 1970s and 1980s the government started to restrict the number of students in universities and pre-university courses. Bureaucracy and government control created a strained relationship between youth and the state, and this began to damage the image of the perfect socialist society. In the 1980s, the government tried again to focus on youth, supporting the Young Communists group. However, at the same time they tried to introduce a program of economic austerity, which reversed the economic reforms of the previous years and restricted the working opportunities available to young people. From this moment on, the government would face a deep financial and economic crisis, mainly as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had provided Cuba with substantial aid and trade on generous terms.

In the late 1990s and 2000s, it became even more difficult for the government to maintain an effective educational system. The economy of Cuba was not large or stable enough to provide adequately for schools and universities or to stimulate the employment market for graduates, and the government recognized that this was in part due to its own mistakes. Many programs were then developed in schools to reestablish the values of the revolution such as equality, anti-imperialism, collectivism, and personal responsibility. To re-create this revolutionary vision, the government focused on young people once again and endeavored to rebuild the civic conscience of the new Cuban generation attracted by modernity and capitalism, a group the government perceived to be moving away from that which it called “authentic Cuban.”

Whereas Blum employs a single case study, Torres, Rizzini, and Del Rio offer a cross-national comparison of young people’s engagement with political activism

24. The idea of dialogism is central to the work of the Russian literary critic and cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin points out that every discourse has a dialogic property, a phenomenon that orientates and gives structure to speech in internal dialogue that symbolizes the inherent interaction between the I and the Other evident in the very structure of language. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist; trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 279.



in Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, and Chicago. Motivated by the increased participation of youth in presidential elections in Latin America and the pro-immigration reform in the United States, *Citizens in the Present: Youth Civic Engagement in The Americas* aims to deconstruct stereotypical images of young people spread by the media. For instance, young immigrants tend to be viewed by members of mainstream society as freeloaders or criminals.<sup>25</sup> Based on interviews with young people aged fifteen to twenty-four, the study compares and contrasts social phenomena in metropolitan cities across the Americas, justifying cities as a locus of study on the grounds that the majority of politically active young people live in urban areas.

Focusing not only on large-scale projects initiated by young people to change Mexican society but also on small projects considered to have had significant impact, Del Rio disagrees with the traditional belief that only provocative programs on a grand scale have the power to bring about social change. She looked for organizations in Mexico City that were trying to improve the lives of young people in communities with limited resources. She spoke directly with young activists, seeking narratives and testimonies that would help to explain their origins, influences, and the nature of their engagement in politics. She learned that Mexico City was shaped by the active participation of its youth.<sup>26</sup> In a city in which the level of violence is very high and drug dealing, organized crime, and human trafficking are common, activism can be quite a challenge and usually involves dealing with discrimination and the stereotypes many young people face in society.

Coauthor Rizzini examines Rio de Janeiro, where young people have been engaged in causes for a more just society. These causes have also involved participation in a series of movements, such as the push for direct presidential elections in 1989 after a long period of dictatorship. The Brazilian government has demonstrated concern for young people because of their large numbers, and governmental offices were created to deal with youth issues. Rizzini confirms that violence is a major problem, and indeed the number of black and brown young people decreased in Rio de Janeiro between the years 1993 and 2003 due to homicides. Although the education system has been improved in recent years under the Workers' Party government, with 95 percent of the children attending elementary school, there remains a significant wealth gap between black and white young people. Generally, the distribution of income in Brazil is very unequal and many young people in Rio de Janeiro live in slums without any opportunities for personal and economic development.<sup>27</sup>

The research revealed that the majority of politically engaged young people in

25. For a similar study that seeks to overcome traditional attitudes and create a more diverse perception of young people, see Philip Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage, 1962). Here he examines how childhood has been experienced and imagined throughout history.

26. In the discussion about the active participation of young people here and in the in the preface of the book, the authors seem to be influenced by notions of *vita activa* and active engagement proposed by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 17.

27. Throughout this study Bauman's notion that justice in global society is not a result of common sense, but of a process of negotiation, figures prominently. Bauman, *Globalization*.

Rio de Janeiro attend school and make up only about one-third of the total number of young people. Most poor young people participate in community activities organized by churches, which are considered a place to escape street violence. Religion and altruism as well as education seem to serve as a motivation for young people to engage in political activism, and most of them, both from the middle and working classes, seem to be involved in trying to improve their society.

In Chicago, with its communities of immigrants and neighborhoods divided according to ethnicity and race, many organizations have encouraged youth involvement in activities to improve communities and schools. As described by the volume's third coauthor, Torres, politically engaged young Chicago residents are vocal in their belief that the government should provide better services to communities that really need them, and they are very critical of politicians who aim to impose control over young people's lives.

Families, schools, and peers traditionally have been the main sources of influence fostering the engagement of youth in politics. However, according to Torres, it was uncommon at the beginning of this century for the families of Chicago's young people to encourage their political activism for reasons ranging from potentially exposing illegal immigrants within the family to diverting attention from their schoolwork. Even though family support is not now a common factor, some young people have parents who encourage them to discuss political ideas at home and respect their views. Other parents motivate their children to be involved in politics and activism. In many cases, however, institutions such as schools and community organizations have played a fundamental role in influencing these young people in their activism, as Blum's work shows. In schools, for instance, one of the main problems facing student activists is the fact that they are not involved in decisions affecting the student body. In Chicago, religion did not play as significant a role in the engagement of young people as it did in Rio de Janeiro. Meetings with young people from other communities also seem to have had significant influence. By contrast, most active young people did not regard taking part in elections as a particularly important part of their activism.

Discussion of female activism is also pertinent in this study. Torres found a link between awareness of gender discrimination and political activism and suggested that young females tend to view their gender as the most important part of their identity. She also discovered a link between awareness of race discrimination and activism. Immigration is also a popular concern, and many young people have been engaged in activities intended to guarantee higher education for students regardless of their immigration status.<sup>28</sup> Other young activists manifested antiwar attitudes and expressed concern about war's impact on young people.

Collectively the books reviewed here give us a broad spectrum of viewpoints and ideas concerning young people in the Americas from the 1950s to the present, emphasizing young people's increased engagement in politics and counter-

28. This study about inequality in a city such as Chicago seems to corroborate Bauman's research findings that inequality in the globalized world is growing fast, not only across the Third World, but also within the countries in the developed world. Laura Greenhagh, "A face humana da sociologia: Entrevista com Zigmunt Bauman," *O Estado de São Paulo*, April 30, 2008.

cultural movements. Interdisciplinary approaches have produced studies highlighting diverse viewpoints, discussing youth images in the media and the political engagement of young people in different art forms such as music, cinema, and dance. The participation of young people in politics is a recurring topic popularized by youth-driven political demonstrations in the region's democratic societies. Reactions to discrimination and stereotyping seem to be significantly linked to the involvement of young people in social movements, especially those who face violence and gender or race prejudice. Immigration is also revealed to be an issue of concern to young people in the United States, especially among Latinos.

Studies of educational systems and institutions not only demonstrate the role of young people in improving their societies but also explain the connection between education and increased youth involvement in activism and politics. The reviewed books consider the active roles of young women, especially when they take control of their own bodies as in the case of the Argentinian practice of *cumbia villera*.

Finally, these studies confirm that young people across the Americas face myriad obstacles that they have had to overcome in order to become thinking and acting political subjects. Gender inequality, as part of a collection of wider social and racial issues, still largely determines the lives of many young women, and broader discussion of its history in relation to youth activism would be beneficial. Education is another formative experience in young people's lives, which can influence the course of their development and the choices they make. The literature on youth would benefit from clearer articulation of the connections between education, youth activism, and politics. Narratives of the experiences of young people in different social locations also merit research because they can potentially help us establish connections between counterculture, music, and identity formation, thus opening the way for progressive interpretations of dance as well. In this way we can consider the wide set of issues with which young people are confronted and create as full a picture as possible of the factors that influence their formative decision making.