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[Vol. 9 No. 3 \(2015\): Complicating the Politics of Deservingness: A Critical Look at Latina/o Undocumented Migrant](#)

[Home](#) / [Archives](#) / [Youth](#)

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Neither Sinners nor Saints: Complicating the Discourse of Noncitizen Deservingness

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Abstract

This article explores how non citizens, primarily members of the 1.5-generation, experience and rhetorically contest deservingness. We argue that deservingness is constructed through multiple sources including the media, immigrant rights movements, and the law, resulting in a binary of good/bad migrants that does not fully capture the lived experiences of noncitizens. Drawing from three distinct qualitative projects examining the lives of 133 noncitizens, we demonstrate structural conditions underlying divergent experiences of “illegality” and “deportability” (De Genova, 2002). We further complicate the discourse of migrant deservingness through an explication of the commonalities of a range of noncitizens, including DACA recipients, the formerly documented, undocumented migrants, and deportees, highlighting their humanity and worthiness in the process.

 PDF

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[Vol. 9 No. 3 \(2015\): Complicating the Politics of Deservingness: A Critical Look at Latina/o Undocumented Migrant Youth](#)

Section

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Language

[Español \(España\)](#)

[English](#)

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[For Readers](#)

[For Authors](#)

[Make a Submission](#)

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