



Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship

Aimee Meredith Cox

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In *Shapeshifters* Aimee Meredith Cox explores how young Black women in a Detroit homeless shelter contest stereotypes, critique their status as partial citizens, and negotiate poverty, racism, and gender violence to create and imagine lives for themselves. Based on eight years of fieldwork at the Fresh Start shelter, Cox shows how the shelter's residents—who range in age from fifteen to twenty-two—employ strategic methods she characterizes as choreography to disrupt the social hierarchies and prescriptive narratives that work to marginalize them. Among these are dance and poetry, which residents learn in shelter workshops. These outlets for performance and self-expression, Cox shows, are key to the residents exercising their agency, while their creation of alternative family structures demands a rethinking of notions of care, protection, and love. Cox also uses these young women's experiences to tell larger stories: of Detroit's history, the Great Migration, deindustrialization, the politics of respectability, and the construction of Black girls and women as social problems. With *Shapeshifters* Cox gives a voice to young Black women who find creative and non-normative solutions to the problems that come with being young, Black, and female in America.

Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship Details

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From Reader Review Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship for online ebook

Sara Salem says

Amazing. Feel very emotional having finished it.

Shelby says

Aimee Cox is incredibly self-reflexive in her book. She allows these girls to teach her, instead of remaining an untouchable observer. Cox's "Shapeshifters" brings a human face to the economic disaster that is Detroit, showing us how young black girls survive and thrive in uncertain circumstances.

Rafael Munia says

Despite the low rating, it is not that I disliked this book.
It is just that I see it as weak anthropology.

It reads as a very interesting diary, as we read about the experience of the author and the girls that comprise her list of informants. The stories are fun, interesting, and written in a very caring way.

So I wouldn't say I dislike the experience of reading it. That being said, as an anthropological work, it really didn't earn its spot as a good work.

It doesn't really engage with theory as much as it should, and when it does, it conceptualizes what I would pretty much consider a very common device of the everyday human experience (the act of shifting oneself according to the situation and how you wish to be perceived by the group you are talking to) as somehow a uniquely "black girl" strategy of resistance. And even then, for something that holds the title of the book, you would think she would give this concept more importance, but that never happens.

In conclusion, a good enjoyable read as story telling, not really a good read as ethnographical work...

Darnell Moore says

Black girls are often written about as subjects in texts —subjects (and not complex human beings) who maintain the ability to articulate their lived experiences, to read the world, to analyze the range of structural conditions that shape their lives. Cox, a cultural anthropologist whose ethnographic prose is as gorgeous as it is deft in its analyses, centers Black girls from Detroit and Newark in her texts as livable beings who, along with her, co-articulate a theory of Black girlhood and becoming. It's an ethnographic text, a choreographed dance between critical theory and embodied practices of survival, that is long overdue. It's a text all readers within the academy, and without, should read.

Mike Mena says

I highly recommend this to anthropology students (undergrad-phd). This is the kind of informant centered approach we should all learn to do.

It is also gut wrenchingly sad, funny, inspiring...all without sensationalizing black girlhood. Absolutely accessible to any reader but offers insight up to phd level. Buy this one.

Brinlie Jill says

I really liked this entire book until it came to the ending where they had their dance performance. I know it was trying to express that all of the girls needed room to figure out their identity but I felt like this was not that interesting and was probably the weakest way she could have ended this book. She should have ended it with the kidnappings or with the 'bleach' section. Or even with the part about the high school girls standing up for themselves was bigger news than the rapes -that part I'll remember and taught me something. Their dance performance? Not so much.
