



We Are the State!: Barrio Activism in Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution

Cristobal Valencia

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Chavistas are the local leaders and activists in Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution, working to establish democracy through government-sponsored social missions, community self-governance, and popular collectives. *We Are the State!* tells the story of their grassroots activism. In perspectives gleaned from participant observation with barrio residents in workplaces, communal kitchens, city-wide forums, and grassroots meetings and assemblies, as well as family and recreational events, anthropologist Cristobal Valencia vividly recounts tensions between activists, local officials, and the wealthy opposition.

The author offers an anthropological analysis of the state, social movements, and democracy as lived experiences of the poor, gendered, and racialized residents of two parishes in Caracas, Venezuela, and Afro-Venezuelan communities nearby. Ethnographic research reveals the shift in relationships of power and the evolving political practices among the Chavistas, the Chávez government, and the opposition. Examining the subjective experiences of barrio residents in everyday processes of state formation, this book provides a new perspective on the Chavistas, arguing that they are a broad-based social movement and driving force behind a revolution struggling to transfer state power to organized civil society.

Through his intense engagement with the constantly changing social, political, and economic dynamics, Valencia dramatically challenges top-down understandings of the state and power in Venezuela. He shows the unequal relationships between sectors of civil society, and he shows state formation as a process enmeshed in the struggles for social justice, demonstrating that the state is a sociopolitical entity that acts through civil society, rather than above it.

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