Introduction

Mapping the Place of Latinas in the U.S. Media

If the 1980s was, as media marketing professionals declared, the decade of the Hispanics, then Latinas have so far owned the new century.¹ Demographic shifts along with the globalization of deregulated media markets have dramatically increased the number of Latina/o media outlets, advertising dollars, and focus on Latina/o audiences.² For instance, while overall U.S. advertising revenue declined sharply after the September 11 terrorist attacks, spending on advertisements in Latina/o media has steadily increased, although it still remains a small segment of the overall market.³ In particular, advertising and marketing professionals have increased their focus on 18- to 34-year-old Latinas, who are often portrayed by the media as avid consumers of everything from baby diapers to mascara.⁴ I begin this book by reaffirming the claim that Latina performers, producers, and audiences are thus an essential part of global media culture.

Along with an increase in media and cultural visibility, there has emerged a vibrant field of scholarship, Latina/o Communication Studies, so named by Angharad Valdivia in her 2008 book by the same title.⁵ I situate myself within both Latina/o studies and media studies to answer Valdivia’s provocative questions: What are the contemporary politics of media representations about Latinas/os? And what are audiences asking the media to do in their representations? Throughout the book, I map out the symbolic value assigned to Latinas in a media landscape that remains simultaneously familiar and strangely new. Latina lives continue to be represented through media archetypes and tropes that have existed since the birth of popular film in the early 1900s, yet the new century also has opened more complex representational spaces. Latinas are political advocates, global figures, and producers of their own media stories. I unpack the representational stakes by turning to online audience discussions and blogs about mainstream media depictions of Latina bodies. Through online audience writings about Latina media repre-
sentations, I chart the complex demands on ethnic women’s bodies to stand in for their specific ethnic communities and serve the economic imperatives of globally integrated media industries.6

In particular, I document the lives, bodies, and voices of Latinas in the mediascape by engaging in a series of case studies. First, I examine newspaper and television news stories about the Elián González custody case (1999–2000) to understand the changing ethnic, racial, and gender roles that Cuban women played in the controversy. My focus then moves to analyzing celebrity tabloid coverage of Jennifer Lopez (2002–2004) to study Latina sexuality and identity and its surveillance in popular culture. The following two case studies shift attention to mainstream media produced by the iconic Latina celebrity Salma Hayek. I explore the production and reception of Mexican identity in the art-house movie *Frida* (2002) and the global production of Latina multiculturalism in the television series *Ugly Betty* (2006) to illustrate the powerful constraints surrounding representations of Latina lives. The book ends by turning attention to Hollywood depictions of and public discourses about domestic Latina labor and Latina immigration amid the anti-immigration backlash by analyzing Jennifer Lopez’s *Maid in Manhattan* (2002) and Paz Vega’s *Spanglish* (2004). Together the case studies provide a fertile terrain for charting the changing representational geography of U.S. and global media productions—a mediated terrain where racially ambiguous but ethnically marked feminine bodies sell everything from haute couture to tabloids, and where the lives of ethnic women are the focus of news, media gossip, movies, and online audience discussions. Ethnicity, and specifically minority female ethnic sexuality, can be savored, commodified, packaged, and safely distributed for the consumption of audiences throughout the world.

That said, I move away from a simplistic representational analysis of media stereotypes toward a more complicated discussion of the English- and Spanish-language media as global institutions that contribute to popular knowledge about ethnicity, race, and gender.7 Underlying my study of the growing demand for multicultural women, their cultural labor, and their stories is recognition of the tumultuous context of a decade defined by increasing tensions about immigration and the associated changes in demographics, both of which are often perceived as threats to established definitions of U.S. citizenship and nation.8 Examining the tension between the culture industry’s demands for ethnic female sexuality and the continuing backlash against ethnic and racial minority women, *Dangerous Curves* positions Latina bodies in the media landscape as both culturally desirable and socially contested, as consumable and dangerous. Thus, the following questions guide the book:
What is desirable and consumable about these women? Under what representational conditions are Latinas depicted as socially acceptable, culturally dangerous, or politically transformative to specific audiences? What are the limits, possibilities, and consequences of Latinas’ contemporary global marketability?

Defining the Cultural Dynamics of Latinidad

Studying the symbolic value and cultural reception of Latinas in the United States first demands a careful discussion of the term Latinidad. To carry out the goals of this book, I build on Frances Aparicio’s work and my collaborative scholarship with Angharad Valdivia, both of which conceptualize Latinidad as a social construct that is shaped by external forces, such as marketing, advertising, popular culture, and the U.S. Census, and internally through the individual subjectivities and communal cultural expressions of people who identify as Latina/o. For example, the advertising industry’s consistent use of the traditional large family, the color red, heat metaphors, tropical settings, and salsa music to signify Latina/o identity and culture is an external force that shapes how Latinidad is understood by audiences. At the same time, in his book Next of Kin, Richard T. Rodríguez argues that the familiar trope of the close-knit patriarchal Latina/o family as a signifier of Latina/o identity is also an important representational tool for queer Chicana/o artists. Critiques of the Latina/o family through independent film and video allow queer Chicana/o artists to reclaim Latinidad and reimagine their lives as central to the viability of the community. Latinidad thus becomes rearticulated internally through the experiences of queer Chicana/o cultural producers.

While I contribute to the scholarship of Arlene Dávila and Charles Ramírez Berg by examining the signifiers of Latinidad that efficiently communicate stereotypical and archetypical gendered, racialized, and national identities to audiences, my study of Latinidad also focuses on the popular signifiers of Latinidad that may be equally embraced by Latina/o audiences as an opportunity to explore shared and divergent subjectivities. As Aparicio contends, “This approach allows us to rethink the ways in which national categories of identity have limited and elided the new forms of identity formation emerging in Latina/o communities as a result of interlatino affinities, desires, and conflicts.” To acknowledge that desires and conflicts exist within and across Latina/o national groups recognizes there are actual and perceived differences and similarities among Latinas from various national,
economic, and social backgrounds. The *Frida* case study, for instance, documents conflicts by audiences in the United States and Mexico engaged in competing constructions of Latina, Mexican, and Chicana identity. Thus, one of my objectives throughout the book is to explore audience sense-making about Latinidad through online discussions and blogs (Web logs) to understand emerging contemporary Latina identity positions and realities. Consequently, I analyze media depictions of and audience responses to Latinidad to study the cultural conditions that make Latina identity globally consumable and to interrogate the social and political consequences of increased media visibility for Latina/o communities.14

**The Ethnoracial Dimensions of Latinidad**

At this point, I want to recognize that my conceptualization of Latinidad assumes an ethnoracial Latina/o identity. In his discussion of contemporary Latina/o identity, Silvio Torres-Saillant argues that “in the current discursive atmosphere surrounding the debate on race and ethnicity no existing knowledge or truth claim commands such authority that it can categorically prohibit the fusion of race and ethnicity as a unit of analysis.”15 My work in this book suggests that the mainstream media fusion of ethnicity and race into a Latina/o ethnoracial identity is unstable with sometimes converging and competing definitions of ethnic and racial performances of Latinidad. That is, media signifiers of Latinidad rely on the production of familiar ethnic characteristics that communicate national origin through the use of language, dress, or music, such as the use of Spanish or salsa music to signal Latinidad. At the same time, media signifiers of Latinidad depend on phenotypic racial markers such as facial features, hair texture, and skin color. While at times the ethnic and racial signifiers of Latinidad may work in concert with one another, such as media representations of Salma Hayek as Mexican and brown, at other times they may contradict our commonsense assumptions about Latinidad, such as white Cameron Diaz’s more recent identification as Latina.

Ethnicity and race are therefore slippery markers of Latinidad, and ethnoracial readings of identity may be transformed over time. For example, the Elián case study shows transformations in the ethnic and racial identity of Marisleysis González over a period of six months. While Marisleysis occupied the ethnic category of Cuban, she enjoyed the privileges of her assumed whiteness. However, as the media began portraying her as irrational and emotional, Marisleysis became associated with Latina brownness and was
relegated to a marginalized identity more defined by the racialized discourse of the anti-immigration backlash toward Mexicans. The book's case studies thus demonstrate that the complex interplay between ethnicity and race in mainstream U.S. media representations of Latinidad must also be examined through the cultural, social, and political process of racialization. Regarding the relationship between racialization and the production of ethnoracial Latina/o identity, Torres-Saillant argues that:

ethnoracial ontology lies firmly at the core of the construction of Americanness. In their foundational statements, the early ruling elites imagined the United States as a white, European-descended, monolingual nation, leaving outside the contours of Americanness those segments of the population that diverged from the imagined profile.\(^6\)

Therefore, the process of racialization through which groups—regardless of physical appearance, ethnic identity, or national origin—are categorized as different or outside the dominant U.S. classification of social identities is significant for studying depictions of Latinidad, Latina/o identity, and U.S. national identity in the media.\(^7\)

Given the history of Spanish and U.S. imperial conquest in Mexico, Latin America, and the Spanish Caribbean, contemporary mainstream media performances of Latina beauty and desirability—of marketability—enter a complex space. The Spanish colonizer’s tolerance for interethnic marriage among the European colonizers, enslaved African, and indigenous populations resulted in social norms more tolerant of miscegenation.\(^8\) Even as the ideology of racial mixture and democracy is celebrated among many Latinas/os, whiteness and white notions of beauty (blanqueamiento) still reign supreme, as most clearly exemplified in the representational privileging of lighter-skinned Latinas on television programs produced in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela, among other countries.\(^9\) Additionally, Arlene Dávila argues that contemporary U.S. media constructions of Latina identity, beauty, and desirability—often driven by U.S. Latina/o marketing and advertising firms—are also informed by colonial hierarchies of raced and gendered bodies that privilege whiteness over blackness.\(^10\) Most often, mainstream media constructions of Latinidad racialize Latinas/os as brown in relation to whiteness and blackness. As a result, contemporary U.S. media often depict Latinas/os as not quite white but rarely black, instead occupying a panethnic identity space of racially ambiguous and commodifiable brownness. Through analyzing the ethnic and racial signifiers of Latinidad in relation to one another, I
document how the media’s production of Latinidad is racialized through the dominant Western ideology of racial binaries and racial hierarchies.

In doing so, the book contributes to the scholarship that recognizes Latinidad as an identity construct that always is only partially completed. Scholars such as Valdivia, María Lugones, and Néstor García Canclini have theorized Latinidad as a hybrid identity space. In other words, Latinas/os may embody multiple and simultaneous ethnic and racial affiliations (American, Nuyorican, Afro-Puerto Rican, Chicana, and Latina). Latinas/os may also be ambiguously coded as ethnic and racial, providing for a more flexible performance of identity that does not always cohere to commonsense biological definitions of ethnicity or phenotypic definitions of race. Indeed, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, many Latinas/os opted out of the binary U.S. race game by claiming a racialized otherness. Almost 48 percent of those who identified as Hispanic or Latina/o categorized themselves as white, even though many do not meet the dominant racial phenotypic notions of U.S. whiteness. More than 48 percent identified as “some other race” or “two or more races”—opting out of the Census’s long-standing racial categories altogether. The Census figures confirm previous studies that Latinas/os are engaged in an oppositional process of racialization by moving toward more racially flexible identities that are not overdetermined by phenotypic definitions of whiteness or stigmatized associations with blackness. As Tomás Almaguer suggests, “In this regard, racialization is not simply a unilateral process imposed by the state but also reflects the Latino population’s active engagement with its own culturally determined understanding of race.” Latina/o ethnoracial identity challenges dominant U.S. definitions of ethnicity and race. Thus, in this book I situate Latinas depicted in the mainstream media as women who constantly jostle one another for position within and against established U.S. racial formations that put whiteness at the top and foreground ethnic homogeneity over ethnic specificity.

Consequently, Dangerous Curves examines the ethnic and racial instability that surrounds media performances of Latinidad both as a symbol of potential transformations in identity and as an economic rationale for the global circulation of ethnically and racially ambiguous women. Mainstream media constructions of ethnically and racially ambiguous Latina bodies hold the potential to rupture commodified representations of Latina authenticity, hierarchical identity classifications, disciplining binary logic, and essentialist definitions of identity. Ethnic and racial ambiguity and sexualized Latina exoticness are equally central to media industry efforts to use multicultural accents to sell products and programming to global audiences. Women are
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thus a key element of mediations about Latinidad going back to the nineteenth century. Although heteronormative black, Latino, and Asian masculinity remains threatening to the U.S. patriarchal and racial order, Latina, Asian, and multiracial women often perform a safe yet exotic sexualized femininity because of their racial and ethnic ambiguity.27 Mainstream media constructions of Latinidad in the United States depend on this unstable ethnic and racial space—not white and not black but ambiguously and unsettlingly brown.

**Gendering Latinidad in the Global Media Landscape**

Shrinking national borders and an accompanying intolerance for ethnic and racial difference demand safe intellectual spaces to do, as Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan call for, feminist work across cultural and academic borders.28 The hypervisibility of ethnically and racially ambiguous Latina bodies in the media is illustrative of demographic shifts and global media transformations, but this celebration must be tempered. The speed and accessibility through which media images travel and are consumed demand that we thoughtfully question the media content we consume and consciously reflect on our expectations of the media. Given the anti-immigration context in which contemporary representations of Latinas are consumed in the United States, it is particularly important to think through the media’s relationship to the public conversation about citizenship and national identity. One of my guiding arguments is the significance of the mainstream media’s construction of Latinidad to affirming traditional notions of the United States as a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant nation by setting up Latina/o identity and culture as inherently exotic, foreign, and consumable.29

I turn now to a more comprehensive discussion about the political, ethical, and theoretical implications regarding the media’s ethnic and racial homogenization of Latinidad. First, I am ultimately concerned with the consequences surrounding the increased mainstream commodification and visibility of Latinas and Latina lives. This book focuses specifically on the mainstream media because they are the most widely circulated in the United States and abroad.30 Even though the digital revolution has decreased production costs throughout the world, U.S.-based media conglomerates remain one of the primary producers and distributors of entertainment and news content.31 Explaining the importance of the mainstream media in studying Latina/o popular culture, for instance, Michelle Habell-Pallán and Mary Romero argue it is “highly likely that heightened media visibility, counted

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with the growth of Latino populations throughout the nation, is contributing to the anxieties about who or what Latinas and Latinos are and their status within the nation.” It is precisely the “heightened media visibility” of Latinas in news and entertainment that I carefully interrogate by studying the media most audiences are likely to be exposed to inside and outside the United States.

Second, I conceptualize mainstream media as a set of social and institutional practices that produce ways of understanding social identities (race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class). Throughout these case studies I think of mainstream media as a generally cohesive discourse about Latinidad. My application of the term discourse, as Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace explain it, is grounded in a Foucauldian approach. They note that “Among critical discourse theorists such as Foucault, the term ‘discourse’ refers not to language or social interaction but to relatively well-bounded areas of social knowledge.” The popular media, which are widely distributed and globally consumed, effectively work to create a discourse about Latinidad.

The media’s role in the creation of a discourse about Latinidad and Latina/o identity and culture is particularly significant because most audiences live and play in highly racially segregated spaces. Nancy Signorielli and Larry Gross, members of the Cultural Indicators project, reported decades ago that most of what audiences learn about people who are different from them is through the popular media. Audiences rely on the media to teach them about ethnic and racial communities with whom they do not regularly interact. Consequently, the media behave as a broad and accessible repository of cultural and social knowledge for audiences. For example, Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis’s famous study of audience readings of The Cosby Show during the 1980s illustrated the significant role the television program played in reinforcing preexisting audience attitudes about race, affirmative action, and black poverty, particularly for white middle-class U.S. audiences with limited intercultural interactions. Likewise, I argue the omnipresent circulation of media images about Latinas becomes part of the cultural ecology that influences general attitudes and beliefs about Latinas and, more importantly, their symbolic status within the nation.

Third, the symbolic values assigned to and associated with Latinas in news, film, and television are informative of preexisting hierarchical social relationships and in turn inform contemporary social and political realities. That is, popular media about Latinas cohere as a discursive regime that supports/colonizes and disrupts/ruptures particular ways of understanding the intersections of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and class. In a Foucauldian
sense, mainstream media discourses about Latinidad can therefore be explicitly and at times subversively pleasurable and simultaneously productive, albeit tenuously, of dominant power structures. Indeed, Dávila argues:

The challenge is thus not only to recognize the blurred nature of mass-mediated culture’s genres and messages and to point to their variable and unintended modes of public consumption, but to recognize that in a context where nothing escapes commodification, commercial culture cannot be easily reduced to sheer pleasure or commercial manipulation, but must be considered as constitutive of contemporary identities and notions of belonging and entitlement.

In sum, the guiding assumptions of this book call into question the embedded power relations in the media’s privileging of particular performances of Latina identity while also highlighting moments of dissonance that contribute to the production of potentially transformative Latina/o social formations for audiences. To explore both sides of this dynamic, I employ two theoretical concepts: symbolic colonization and symbolic rupture.

Symbolic colonization is an ideological process that contributes to the manufacturing of ethnicity or race as a homogenized construct. It is the storytelling mechanism through which ethnic and racial differences are hegemonically tamed and incorporated through the media. What is of interest in my discussion of symbolic colonization is the ways in which media practices reproduce dominant norms, values, beliefs, and public understandings about Latinidad as gendered, racialized, foreign, exotic, and consumable. Racial formation theory suggests that the meanings assigned to race and racial groups are part of a historically unstable, continuous process intricately connected to political and social structures. Studying symbolically colonizing media documents the mainstream media’s participation in the racial formation of Latinidad. Throughout this book I study the visuals, language, and narratives employed by the media to represent Latinidad as an ethnoracial construct located within dominant racial formations.

The second concept, symbolic rupture, turns attention to online audience reception of the mainstream media. Symbolic rupture points to the process of interpretation that allows audiences, including myself, as cultural readers to disrupt the process of symbolic colonization. To explore symbolic ruptures, I analyze audience discussions of the media in blogs and online discussion boards, paying close attention to points of agreement with or opposition to representations of Latinidad. My discussion of symbolic ruptures through-

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out the book ultimately documents how audiences negotiate uncomfortable transformations in the social and cultural terrain surrounding U.S. national identity, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality. For instance, blogs about Marisleysis illustrate how her racially ambiguous body comes to be coded as ethnic outsider and foreign threat while tabloid news stories about Jennifer Lopez code her as as sexually desirable, ethnically and racially ambiguous, and equally threatening to dominant ethnic and racial formations. Blogs about Lopez in turn speak to multiple audience readings that both reaffirm dominant racial formations and symbolically rupture dominant public understandings about gender, ethnicity, and race. The book therefore turns to journalistic and online audience discussions to grapple with the potential for symbolic ruptures within mainstream media depictions of Latinidad.

Symbolic Colonization and the Gendered Production of Latinidad

Media discourses that symbolically colonize Latinas as safe, homogenous, and globally consumable depend on a set of institutionalized media practices otherwise known as gendering or genderization. Lucila Vargas’s study of mainstream news practices and coverage of Latinas/os illustrated that Latinas/os are sexualized, feminized, and racialized through the gendered verbal and visual language of the mainstream media.

This womanish construction of Latino news is achieved not only by downplaying strong masculine Latino voices, but also by relying on “common sense” associations and metaphors that link Latinos to woman as sign, and thus to qualities that a patriarchal capitalist culture regards as unworthy.

The gendering of Latinidad presupposes that femininity and masculinity are interconnected with class, sexuality, race, and ethnicity as a system of social signification. Within the mainstream media Latinas are often gendered as feminine through language about their assumed fertility, sexuality, domesticity, and subservience, among other characteristics. The femininity of Elián’s mother, Elisabet Brotons, is confirmed in the media through discussions of her self-sacrificial act to save him from communism.

Gendering is particularly interconnected with racialization as both work together to create a media discourse of Latinidad as Other. A white Latina, for example, may be read as nonwhite because of her national origin, as is Colombian-born Shakira, or because of her accent, as is Mexican-born Hayek. Both women, who are multiethnic and appear to be phenotypically
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white, are gendered and racialized outside whiteness by the media because of ethnic markers that are commonly associated with U.S. Latinas or Latin America as foreign and exotic. Women who can negotiate ethnic markers (national origin, language, or racial phenotypes) commonly associated with U.S. Latinas or Latin Americans, such as the European-born Penélope Cruz or the “all-American” blond, blue-eyed, California-born Cameron Diaz, may tenuously maintain their claims to whiteness. Together, gendering and racialization produce media discourses that racialize the feminine Other (Shakira and Salma Hayek) and genderize the racial and ethnic Other (Elisabet Brotons)—usually positioning Latinas as ethnic women who exist outside whiteness.

The gendering and racialization of Latinidad is central to symbolic colonization as it contributes to the dissemination of media discourses that present Latinas as homogenized docile bodies. By invoking the concept of “docile body,” I am borrowing from Foucault’s discussion of social bodies, such as the military or, in this instance, the media, that serve the interest of governance or maintaining governmental stability. For Foucault, the concept of governance is concerned with more than the state’s civil institutions—schools, hospitals, prisons, and the military, among others. By invoking the concept of governance, I am borrowing from Foucault’s discussion of social bodies, such as the military or, in this instance, the media, that serve the interest of governance or maintaining governmental stability. For Foucault, the concept of governance is concerned with more than the state’s civil institutions—schools, hospitals, prisons, and the military, among others. Bratich, Packer, and McCarthy remind us of the important role culture and cultural institutions, as “a set of reflections, techniques, and practices that seek to regulate conduct,” perform in maintaining governance.4 With regard to the case studies in this book, I propose the corporate-owned mainstream media contribute to the governance of the state by circulating a disciplined and homogenized discourse of Latinidad. The media become, as Foucault suggests, a method for disciplining the ethnic, racial, and gendered body: “These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed on them a relation of docility-utility, might be called ‘disciplines’.” Through the media’s commodification of gendered constructions of Latinidad—usually grounded in racialized representations of ethnicity—Latina bodies are disciplined into docility. The global media consumption of Latinas, made possible through the gendering and racialization of Latinidad, depends on the representation of Latinas from diverse national backgrounds as similar and familiar docile bodies.

However, as Susan Bordo reminds us, for Foucault “modern power (as opposed to sovereign power) is non-authoritarian, non-conspiratorial, indeed non-orchestrated; yet, it none the less produces and normalizes bodies to serve prevailing relations of dominance and subordination.”43

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Jennifer Lopez’s beauty choices regarding her weight, hair color, and hair texture signal a conscious decision to work within dominant media practices about the performance of ethnicity, race, and gender. Nevertheless, as Valdivia points out in the case of Rosie Perez, an actor’s decision not to or failure to participate in dominant media practices can be devastating. Perez has cited her accent and her weight as the key reasons for her marginalization within Hollywood. Individuals participate willingly and unwillingly in the disciplining of selves. Latina celebrities’ refusal or desire to lighten and straighten their hair or to transform their bodies to be more profitable, successful, and consumable illustrates the complex nature of docility and discipline.

Therefore, throughout this book I document how the media’s gendering and interconnected racialization of Latinidad consistently draw upon Latina bodies and those signifiers (children, domesticity, fertility, powerlessness) associated with them. By doing so, I extend the work of Myra Mendible, who argues that cinematic representations of the Latina body have historically mandated docile subjection:

Since the early nineteenth century, her racially marked sexuality signaled a threat to the body politic, a foreign other against whom the ideals of the domestic self, particularly its narratives of white femininity and moral virtue, could be defined. At the same time, the Latina body offered a tempting alter/narrative: an exotic object of imperial and sexual desire.

Feminine nonwhite bodies are central to the biological, cultural, and social reproduction of the nation and as such must be disciplined in the interest of maintaining governance. Within contemporary mainstream media, Latinas remain a key component of the nation-building project or, as Benedict Anderson so eloquently termed it, the “imagining of the nation.” Media discourses about Latinas inform the national imaginary about citizenship and the nation and are in turn defined by the imagined nation. News coverage of Latina immigrants coupled with depictions of Latina domestic workers in Hollywood movies point to ongoing cultural negotiations over the imagined nation brought on by demographic changes through immigration. Postcolonial media theorist Usha Zacharias writes that “cultural studies-related feminist scholarship on nationalism in many ways traces the uneven hegemonic signatures that write the symbolic bodies of women into the nation and the symbolic nation into women.” Within the context of the United States and its continuing involvement in regional imperialism and globalization, the
mainstream media production of docile Latina bodies is essential to how the nation imagines itself.

For Latinas, it is the gendered media practices that surround sexual exoticness, racial flexibility, and ethnic ambiguity that position them as globally consumable docile bodies subject to the erotic and voracious gaze of the United States. Through dialect coaches, exercise, and dieting, among other bodily practices, Latina actors are expected to display a familiar hyperfemininity and exotic sexuality that always exists in relation to normative white heterosexuality. While some Latina performers such as Eva Longoria voluntarily subject themselves to some forms of bodily discipline, others such as Selena, who was rumored to have undergone liposuction, have been pressured to engage in dietary practices that are at best unhealthy and at worst deadly to attain mainstream success. Each individual body has its symbolic value or worth relative to national discourses of beauty and desire, and some bodies are more vulnerable to discipline and more potentially valuable than others. As such, Latinas embody the twenty-first-century project of discipline, productivity, and docility through the ways in which class, race, ethnicity, and gender intersect in media discourses about them.

Through strategies of surveillance and self-surveillance, the ethnic and racial differences between contemporary Latina public figures are blurred by media discourses that reinforce Western racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual normative standards of femininity, domesticity, beauty, and desirability—of global marketability. The contemporary media gendering of Latinidad maintains the relationship between women as nature and the Platonic binary ideal of masculine/mind over feminine/body. Because the essential male body and the essential white body traditionally have held the most symbolic worth, representations of Latina beauty and desirability in the media translate into the privileging of Latina whiteness over Latina blackness and Latina femininity and heterosexuality over Latina masculininity and queerness. Within this schema, European Penélope Cruz is more beautiful, desirable, and consumable than Afro-Cuban Rosario Dawson, as Valdivia has documented in her work on the Europeanization of Latinidad. Stories about the hyper-heterosexual Puerto Rican Jennifer Lopez are easier to tell and sell than those about queer Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, whose life story was reimagined in the movie *Frida* by emphasizing her heterosexuality. In other words, the gendering of Latinidad depends on the production of docile Latina bodies palatable to global capitalist demands for exotic sexuality, racial flexibility, and socially acceptable femininity while increasing the economic, social, and political subjugation of those same ethnic bodies. Ultimately, the gen-
dering of Latinidad privileges a Latina sexuality that is heteronormative; a Latina ethnicity that is universal; and a performance of racial identity that is not quite white but never black. The gendering of Latinidad reproduces the dominant U.S. hierarchy of social identity that helps maintain the position of white male heterosexual elites who are the primary, but not exclusive, producers of mainstream news and entertainment.53

Although, as Anderson argues, the socially constructed borders of the imagined nation are malleable, I propose that its ability to accommodate ethnic and racial foreigners is limited. The symbolic colonization of Latinas and Latinidad within the mainstream media is therefore caught between two forces. On the one hand, Latinas are associated with desirable femininity, domesticity, and the heteronormative family. On the other hand, their ambiguity and sexuality are simultaneously constructed as racial and sexual threats to the national body. For instance, Elián’s cousin Marisleysis is initially represented in news stories as appropriately feminine, domestic, and white ethnic, yet her hyper-emotional and defiant attitude along with images of her curvaceous femininity and consumable heterosexuality eventually push the socially acceptable boundaries of Latina ethnoracial identity. She is duly disciplined by the news coverage and audiences for her political, gender, and racial transgressions. The tensions regarding the disciplining and popularity of Latinas throughout the mainstream media weave together the empirical analysis of this book.

**Hybrid Latina Bodies and the Production of Symbolic Rupture**

But what happens when popular discourses about the nation and national identity are challenged by docile bodies that not only expand but redefine the very borders that contain and/or exclude them? As Foucault contends, power is both repressive and productive, and as such I propose that symbolic colonization depends on a double-edged sword of media practices. While the gendering of Latinidad disciplines the performance of Latina identity in the media, the difficult-to-categorize ethnoracial identity of some Latina bodies challenges dominant definitions of nation and citizenship. Depending on the situation, America Ferrera is American, Honduran, and Latina; Jennifer Lopez is white, black, and brown; and Salma Hayek is Mexican, Lebanese, and American. The contemporary popularity of Latina actors and characters on and off the screen is a testament to the marketability of Latinidad as well as a space of potential discomfort for audiences. Thus, through the case studies I explore the visibility of Latina characters, Latina actors, and Latina
experiences in the mainstream media as creating moments of social and cultural dissonance. Indeed, Aihwa Ong suggests that it is the “struggles over representations that are part of the ideological work of citizen-making in the different domains of American life.” It is precisely the points of difference, disagreements, and incongruities between audiences that signal the process of imagining the nation.

Therefore, building on Ellen McCracken’s arguments regarding the mainstream marketing of Latina authors, I call for an equally nuanced understanding of mainstream media production and reception:

Crucial social antagonisms rupture the commodified surface of these minority women’s narratives. . . . Rather than romanticizing ethnic groups as either autonomous or co-opted, a middle ground is necessary in which ethnic groups can be understood as an integral part of capitalist structures while at the same time producing cultural truths not consumed by these structures.

As desirable and consumable subjects, Latinas perform/sell the authentic exotic Other for audiences of diverse linguistic, racial, ethnic, and national subjectivities. However, the fluid cultural, ethnic, and racial heritages of public figures such as Sonia Sotomayor are never quite assimilated or socially accepted, thereby threatening to rupture the dominance of historically established ethnic and racial categories pivotal to U.S. national identity and discourses of citizenship. Always on the margins of whiteness, Latinas also exist outside blackness. The racialized dimensions of Latina ambiguity mean they can never be fully incorporated into a nation obsessed with racial fixity. Jennifer Lopez can be a Latina hip-hop diva or Boricua salsera but not Affleck’s white lover. She can perform whiteness (The Wedding Planner) and blackness (the music video “Love Don’t Cost a Thing”), but she must occupy an ambiguous racialized space between them in mainstream media discourses about her private life and in audience debates over her identity.

As a set of media practices that reproduce dominant norms, values, and beliefs about Latinidad as foreign, exotic, and consumable, symbolic colonization is not a direct, linear, or totalitarian ideological process. Audiences will not always read the gendering of Latinidad in negative or repressive ways. Rather, representations that depend on docile and disciplined depictions of Latinidad are continually negotiated by both media producers and their audiences. The same representations that are repressive are potentially productive of oppositional identity formations. Because media culture is never
entirely homogenous and at times may contradict the demands of global capitalism, media discourses about Latinas may actually result in symbolic ruptures that destabilize dominant definitions of nation, citizenship, and ethnic, racial, and gender identity. For example, some Latinas’ ethnic and racial multiplicity can result in an undisciplined point of cultural resistance for the audiences who consume mainstream popular culture. Fans of *Ugly Betty* celebrate the universal message of ethnic assimilation and acculturation on the program as much as they cheer the potentially transformative queering of Latina identity and Latina families. They find their own complicated identities ultimately affirmed by the media. The range and diversity in audience responses to gendered media representations of Latinidad reaffirm the long-proved observation that we are social creatures for whom meaning-making is always informed by the social, political, and cultural context in which we live and not the intentions of the producers.

The contemporary popularity of Latinas provides an opportunity for studying gendered and racialized constructions of Latinidad within cultural industries invested in reaching larger and more profitable multicultural and transnational audiences. Since it is precisely the multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds of global Latina figures that are particularly desirable or appealing to audiences, throughout this book I explore audience interpretations of Latinidad in the media. In claiming these multiracial and multiethnic women, some online audiences destabilize dominant U.S. ethnic and racial classifications of nationhood and citizenship. As María Lugones reminds us, maintaining governmental power does not depend on violence for its strength but instead draws on its ability to discipline and normalize through discourse. Thus, the way some audiences make sense of the identity of the Latina figures in this book unsettles established categories of identity and offers potential moments of social, cultural, and political rupture. For instance, the *Frida* audience debate over the ethnic and national identity of Salma Hayek points to the difficulty in defining Latinidad, Latina identity, Mexican identity, ethnicity, and race. While some audiences read Hayek as Latina, Chicana, or Mexican, others did not. The visibility and positive reception of ethnically ambiguous and racially flexible Latina bodies contribute to rupturing binary and essentialist definitions of U.S. racial identity. Multinational media conglomerates can harness the performances of exotic Latina bodies to sell their programming to audiences across national borders, but they cannot control interpretations of the images and stories audiences consume. Paz Vega’s whiteness and ethnically ambiguous look allowed her to perform a socially acceptable immigrant Mexican identity in *Spanglish*, but
her “Spanish accent” became a source of conflict for some U.S. Latina/o audiences who read it as European and therefore inauthentic. Media industries unwittingly disseminate an unclassifiable difference that cannot be easily controlled, as audience negotiations often reveal.

Case Studies of the Latina Body in the U.S. Media

I explore the symbolic colonization and symbolic ruptures embedded in media discourses and audience readings about Latinas and Latinidad through a comparative media studies approach. The case studies in this book move through newspapers, television news broadcasts, ethnic and racial minority newspapers, tabloids, magazines, film, and television programs. To map out the Latina body in the U.S. media requires tracing it across the entire mediascape—fact and fiction, news and entertainment. My analysis of media representations looks across the page and screen to see how audiences interpret the depictions of Latinidad discussed in the book. I complement my contextual study of the media text by studying mediated audience receptions in such spaces as blogs, Web sites, online discussion boards, and letters to the editor. Finally, the full cultural, social, and political impact of symbolic colonization and symbolic ruptures cannot be evaluated when confined to one ethnic-specific U.S. Latina/o group. As such, the case studies weave together media depictions of Cuban, Mexican, and Puerto Rican women to think through the consequences of globally produced and consumed media that homogenize Latinidad through the practices of gendering and racialization.

I begin by looking at mainstream and ethnic news discourses of Latinidad through the record-setting coverage of the Elián González international custody battle. The first case study focuses on news stories about the lives, voices, and bodies of Cuban women, specifically those of Elián’s mother (Elisabet Brotons), his cousin (Marisleysis González), and his grandmothers (Raquel Rodríguez and Mariela Quintana). The Elián case study documents the mainstream media storm surrounding his custody case through an analysis of how Cuban motherhood, womanhood, and femininity were used to convey a melodramatic and compelling story. By studying national English-language television news, English- and Spanish-language newspapers, and minority newspapers, the Elián case study examines the gendering of U.S. Cubans through stories focused on U.S. Cuban domesticity, religiosity, and irrationality. I explore transformations in U.S. Cuban claims to exceptionalist discourses of ethnic whiteness by illustrating their symbolic colonization into racialized brownness and ethnic foreignness. Through language that
situated U.S. Cuban identity within popular Latina/o tropes of tropicality, emotionality, and irrationality. U.S. Cubans were symbolically colonized and positioned outside normative definitions of U.S. citizenship. Both the mainstream and ethnic media (not including U.S. Cuban media outlets such as El Nuevo Herald) participated in the symbolic colonization of U.S. Cuban identity or Cubanidad—demonstrating that symbolic colonization is not limited to the English-language mainstream media. Mainstream news outlets, African American newspapers, and Latina/o newspapers produced a gendered and racialized discourse about U.S. Cuban exiles that reaffirmed the changing racial status of exiled Cubans from privileged white ethnics to marginalized brown Latina/o immigrants.

Chapter 2 continues the focus on news by examining coverage of Jennifer Lopez’s body, sexuality, and ethnic and racial identity in U.S. tabloids (People, Us Weekly, Star, In Touch, National Enquirer). In particular, it explores Lopez’s performance as a racially flexible, sexually exotic, and ethnic docile body. Through careful discursive analysis, I document the tabloids’ celebration of Lopez’s marketable, ethnically ambiguous, and racially flexible body (not white but not black), as well as the turn against her for disrupting established U.S. ethnic and racial categories through her interethnic relationship with one-time fiancé Ben Affleck. Like the Elián case study, the Lopez saga shows that even as Latina bodies move across racial and ethnic categories, those categories are inevitably stabilized through symbolically colonizing media narratives. In both case studies, the ethnic and racial markers that exist outside whiteness and blackness create Latina bodies that are both economically productive/useful and culturally threatening. Given the complicated and tenuous position of Puerto Ricans within U.S. discourses about the imagined nation, I tease out the contemporary symbolic status of Puerto Ricans specifically and Latinas more generally in the tabloid coverage of Lopez. To do so, I contextualize the tabloids’ gendering of Lopez against tabloid coverage of other celebrities such as Beyoncé Knowles, Jennifer Garner, and Julia Roberts. The case study concludes by analyzing audience readings of the tabloid coverage through celebrity gossip Web logs (blogs) and discussion threads responding to them. My analysis of blog postings and discussion boards indicates that some audiences reaffirm the tabloids’ conservative racial ideologies while other audiences embrace Lopez as a multicultural symbol of ethnic pride. Rather than focusing on Lopez’s cinematic and musical performances, I document how tabloid stories, as part of media discourses about Latinidad, symbolically colonize Lopez by producing a docile Latina/Puerto Rican body that is disciplined for her racial, sexual, and physical transgressions.
The next three case studies shift from news as entertainment to television and film as important elements of the public sphere. In the third case study, I focus attention on Salma Hayek and her production of *Frida*. I first discuss the movie’s performance of ethnic authenticity through its symbolic colonization of Mexican identity and the gendering of Latinidad. The case study then turns to U.S. Latina/o and Mexican media audience negotiations over the movie’s construction of Mexican ethnicity to further explore the limits of producing a consumable ethnic identity and the potential for symbolic ruptures over the mediation of Mexican and Latina identity. Audiences must negotiate the global demands for a consumable feminine Latinidad. Such was the case for U.S. Latina/o media, Mexican media, and online audience receptions of *Frida*. In particular, Mexican newspaper and IMDb (Internet Movie Database) audience discussions about Salma Hayek and *Frida* demonstrate the problematic nature of globally commodified media representations of gendered Latinidad and the limits of symbolic colonization by highlighting alternative constructions of ethnic and racial Latina/o identity. The *Frida* case study exemplifies the double-edged sword of symbolic colonization by analyzing the convergences and divergences among online audiences, Mexican newspapers, and mainstream English-language and U.S. Latina/o media discourses about Hayek and the movie.

The production of synergistic programming and use of cross-promotion strategies by media conglomerates encourage the development of shows and personalities that can easily move across multiple audience demographics. The fourth case study explores the cultural politics surrounding one such program, ABC’s 2006 prime-time hit *Ugly Betty*. Mainstream entertainment coverage, audience blogs, and online discussion boards about the show provide insight into the hypervisibility of Latinidad as central to the future growth of global cultural industries. While the show’s use of the personal and professional lives of two young second-generation Mexican women potentially disrupts popular conceptions of Latinas, their difference is ultimately contained through an emphasis on universal deracialized story lines dealing with love, family, beauty, and social acceptance. Thus, *Ugly Betty* illustrates the ways in which Latinas embody media industry efforts to use ethnic difference, racial ambiguity, and multicultural accents to sell products and programming to global audiences. However, the program’s queer story lines and performance of working-class ethnic femininity symbolically ruptures the show’s more homogenized construction of Latinidad. Readings of online audience and fan responses reveal nuanced negotiations surrounding the commodification of Latina panethnicity as a global multicultural product.
Representations of Latina work within the mainstream media serve the interest of a global state that economically benefits from the feminization of transnational migration and labor while also allowing media industries to tap into multiple ethnic, racial, and national audiences. The final case study examines the political dimensions of cinematic representations of Latina femininity and gendered Latina labor in the movies *Spanglish* and *Maid in Manhattan*. As cinematic constructions of Latina migration and labor grounded in the gendering of Latinidad, the movies erase the diverse, sometimes violent trajectories of transnational Latina immigrants and workers. Both movies depoliticize Latina work within the cultural sphere during a period of nativist backlash against immigration, pointing to the political consequences of symbolic colonization in media discourses about Latinidad. Mainstream media representations of Latina labor are cleansed of anti-immigration/imperialistic economic discourses and rearticulated through safer, historically familiar, and more comfortable representations of Latina domesticity and hyperfemininity. Such media omissions are significant because when the U.S. southern border is identified as a potential site of terrorism, the nostalgic imagery surrounding cinematic representations of Latina migration and labor contributes to the symbolic colonization of Latinidad by erasing the anti-immigration backlash that informs contemporary U.S. culture and politics.

Together the case studies map the media discourses about Latinas and Latinidad that circulate through a broad range of media genres (film, television, news, blogs, and Internet discussion boards) and media industries (mainstream, Latina/o, and ethnic non-Latina/o). Ethnic women have become the body of choice to inform and entertain multiple global audiences. As a result, it is critical to explore the role of the mainstream media and their audiences in disciplining, controlling, and contesting media discourses about Latinas and Latinidad. *Ugly Betty* and *Frida* illustrate the nuanced complexities of performing and selling an authentic Latina identity for global audiences. Representations dependent on the symbolic colonization of Latinidad through gendering are peppered throughout the media landscape in the news coverage of Elián, the publicity tour for *Frida*, the tabloid coverage of Jennifer Lopez’s relationship with Ben Affleck, the entertainment news coverage of *Ugly Betty*, and the romantic comedy representations of Latina labor in Hollywood. Woven together, the case studies provide an intellectual space to think through the oppositions between the social, political, and cultural threat of Latinidad in the contemporary United States and the global demand for ethnically ambiguous and racially flexible yet authentic Latina bodies.
I also examine online audience readings of the representational politics surrounding Latinidad to disturb my potentially totalizing interpretations of symbolic colonization. As such, I recognize that audiences do not exclusively consume one medium in isolation from others, and in the virtual age of the Internet and multimedia technology, they often consume more than one medium simultaneously. Indeed, in the case of Latina/o audiences, the Pew Hispanic Center has found that Latina/o media consumption is multiversed, spanning across the English- and Spanish-language media.60 Blogs and discussion boards allow audiences from diverse gender, class, ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds to collaboratively produce alternative ideological spaces to interpret and reaffirm oppositional identity formations.

Together the case studies point to the contemporary production of Latinidad as a mediated form of social, political, or economic capital. Mainstream media discourses about Latinas are indicative of the complex and complicated issues surrounding U.S. ethnic and racial classifications.61 Lopez explicitly embraces her racial flexibility and Nuyorican (New York Puerto Rican) identity as a sellable marker of her panethnic Latina identity and the multicultural U.S.-Puerto Rican experience. Frida Kahlo, who existed before the label was created, is often treated as an iconic representative of Latinidad. And Salma Hayek, America Ferrera, and Paz Vega, all of whom once resisted identifying as Latinas, are benefitting from the media industry’s fascination with Latinidad. Indeed, Hayek’s and Ferrera’s conflicted relationship with identifying as Latinas speaks to the vexed nature of the term much less its mediated representation. Throughout the early part of her career, Hayek privileged her Mexican and Latin American identity over associations with the racialized U.S. term Latinas/os. On the other hand, Ferrera, who grew up in a predominantly white Los Angeles community and school district, did not identify with or cultivate social or political relationships with Latinas/os or Chicanas/os until later in her adult life. Yet, both women have become contemporary media symbols of U.S. Latinidad. The case studies thus challenge and explore the efficacy and stability of Latinidad and Latina/o identity within media discourses of ethnicity and race. Rather than elide the cultural distinctions that exist among Jennifer Lopez, Salma Hayek, and Frida Kahlo or erase the problematic questions surrounding the ethnic and racial identification of Jessica Alba or America Ferrera as U.S. Latinas, this book engages media discourses about Latinidad through specific media case studies to explore the complex contemporary cultural terrain of Latina identity during a period of great public anxiety about changing definitions of citizenship in the United States and abroad.