Introduction

*Media, Gender, and Immigration*

Migration throws objects, identities and ideas into flux.
—Kobena Mercer, *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*

In February 1984, Madonna released the single “Borderline” from her first, eponymously titled album, and by June, it became her first top-ten hit on the Billboard Hot 100. Soon in heavy rotation on MTV, the two-sequence video depicted Madonna struggling to choose between two men and two worlds. Her desire for her Latino lover and his multicultural working-class world conflicted with her desire for celebrity, which was offered by another suitor, a white male photographer. Filmed in an urban Latina/o neighborhood, or barrio, in Los Angeles, and directed by Mary Lambert, the video juxtaposed the colorful world of the Latino boyfriend and his multiethnic break-dancing entourage, who hung out on rooftops and in bodegas and pool halls, with the drab, sanitized, colorless world of the photographer, with his luxury sports car and private studio space—its classical statues standing in for Euro-American high culture—and his offerings of champagne and bottled water. The photographer offered Madonna an escape from the barrio through modeling, and under his tutelage she achieved cover girl status. But Madonna desired the younger, more attractive Latino man. And the Latino boyfriend’s inconsistent behavior—he alternately embraced, rebuffed, and once literally pushed her away—was a reaction to Madonna’s own ambivalence. Ultimately, Madonna chose the multicultural world of her Latino boyfriend. And with “Borderline,” Madonna became a pop sensation by pushing the borderlines of Reagan-era standards of respectability.

In the video, the appeal of the multicultural world was conveyed by images, spectacle, and interwoven narratives. The scenes with the photographer were shot in black-and-white, the barrio in full, vibrant color. Madonna’s urban, edgy clothing, messy hair, dramatic make up, piles of costume jewelry, and a punk studded belt signified her connectedness to the multicultural world. The Latino boyfriend and his posse were likewise decked out in urban street fashion, including studded belts, track suits, and bandanas; the photographer
wore a neutral palette. In one scene, Madonna sported a denim jacket with “boy toy” emblazoned on the back, the self-applied label an ironic contrast to the world of modeling that she ultimately rejected by trashing the photographer’s studio, notably spray-painting X’s over the genitals of his nude male statues. Thus Madonna countered the photographer, and spectator, with the “possibility of a female sexuality that was independent of patriarchal control, a sexuality that defied rather than rejected the male gaze.”

Via the song lyrics and Madonna’s role as protagonist of the video, spectators were positioned to identify with this independent woman’s preference for the working-class Latino lover who was “pushing [her] love over the borderline.” After Madonna’s dalliance with the photographer, she attempted to return to the Latino, and he initially rejected her. The borderline she sang of, which was perhaps also a euphemism for orgasm, was the borderline of her patience with her Latino lover’s inconsistency. His rejection pained her, too. Although the Latino initially pushed her away and could not offer her the capital that the photographer had at his disposal, Madonna wanted the younger man. With this video, Madonna “present[ed] herself both as an alluring sex object and as a transgressor of established boundaries.”

The nuanced gender and race politics playing out in the video surfaced in the conditions of its production as well. The song was written and produced by Reggie Lucas and remixed by Madonna’s then-boyfriend, John “Jelly Bean” Benitez, who was of Puerto Rican descent. But it was Madonna, an Italian American woman, who received acclaim for—and the lion’s share of profit from—“Borderline,” which was substantial. That year, the song reached number ten on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, was certified Gold, and in the years since, it has been covered by several artists and continues to chart in “Best of” lists, while Madonna’s early work has sparked much interest and debate in the culture at large and among academics.

“Borderline” was significant not only because its then-controversial representation of an interracial relationship and female sexual assertiveness signaled a career-making moment for Madonna, but because the video played out—and played with—struggles over immigration, gender roles, and multiculturalism that were at the forefront of American politics in the 1980s, and continue to shape U.S. politics to this day. How and why those struggles surfaced in all arenas of American culture, from the floor of Congress to MTV, is the focus of this book. Douglas Kellner observes that “media culture is a contest of representations that reproduce existing social struggles and transcode the political discourses of the era.” This book will examine many examples taken from TV, film, and print media—alongside the rhetoric of politicians and pundits—which speak to the themes of immigration, gender roles, and
multiculturalism, and it will analyze them especially in the context of immigration legislation and congressional debates.

In the United States—the quintessential “nation of immigrants”—pluralism is celebrated as a national value, yet the diversity that immigrants carry over the border has been perceived as a threat to the complexion, economy, and unity of the nation, making immigration a perpetual topic of debate. From the political cartoons and plays of the late nineteenth century to the blockbuster films and blogs of today, tensions over immigration and American identity have surfaced in various media and been hashed out on the congressional floor and in the culture at large. Amid increasing immigration from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia in the 1980s, the language and common imagery of immigration debates were transformed. In Reagan’s America, the circle of who was considered American seemed to broaden, reflecting democratic gains made by racial minorities and women, and that broadening was increasingly visible in the daily lives of Americans via TV shows, films, and popular news media. Yet that broadening was circumscribed by gendered and race-based discourses, such that immigrants were either feared and censured or welcomed exclusively as laborers. A discordant combination of gatekeeping and welcoming emerged, making immigration crucial to the rising neoliberal project. This book argues that the gender and racial formations that cohered and were contested through 1980s immigration discourses in law and popular culture inaugurated the paradigm for neoliberal immigration, or what I call “neoliberal crossings.” As such, 1980s immigration discourses are a crucial but understudied aspect of the development of neoliberalism.

The specifics of these debates are what make them neoliberal. Beginning with his election in 1980, Ronald Reagan, “one of the most popular presidents of the twentieth century”11 set out to revolutionize America with deregulation of the economy, privatization, and the Cold War globalization of American capitalist democracy, as well as to placate a polity suspicious of the presidency and government in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate. Gender and racial politics were also in flux, with the period seeing a conservative backlash against the gains of feminism and hysteria and homophobia surrounding the AIDS crisis12—exemplified by the “family values” movement—as well as reactions to the gains of the civil rights, black power, and Latina/o social movements—exemplified by attacks on affirmative action, opposition to bilingual and multicultural education, and increasing pushes for privatization and its rhetorical correlate, “personal responsibility” (that is, the notion that the individual rather than the state is responsible for meeting even one’s most basic human needs, such that failure to do so is the fault of the individual alone rather than the result of structural inequalities such as racism, sexism,
and the like). This depoliticized notion of personal responsibility also crystallized around “family values.” Yet the insights and gains of feminism and the struggles to displace white supremacy could not be ignored: they affected lawmakers and resonated in popular culture, as indicated by the meteoric rise of unconventional, boundary-pushing entertainers like Madonna, Cyndi Lauper, Michael Jackson, and Prince.

While Madonna showed America the pleasures of barrio culture and transgressing borderlines, lawmakers attempted to remedy an undocumented immigration crisis that was attributed primarily to immigrants from Mexico. Soon after the 1980 Mariel Boatlift, involving masses of Cuban refugees, a series of immigration measures were introduced in Congress. But it was only after five years of heated bipartisan debates and numerous joint congressional hearings—highly unusual in immigration debates—that the U.S. Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, the first comprehensive immigration reform since 1965. IRCA, sponsored by conservative and flagrantly nativist Senator Alan Simpson (R-WY), ushered in new sanctions for employers of undocumented workers, cut welfare, and increased border security, while also including an amnesty program widely praised as a democratic watershed for the undocumented. Thus with the new law, “multicultural” immigrant men and women seemed to be embraced, even as they were disciplined in the same breath. The law delineated the legal paradigm for neoliberal crossings, while concurrently negotiations of neoliberal ideologies were taking shape in popular culture.

As Asia and Latin America, and especially Mexico, came to dominate immigration, a new national narrative was popularized. The quintessential American success story became that of the white ethnic immigrants (Irish and eastern and southern European) who arrived at the turn of the twentieth century and in the midst of poverty and discrimination created a better life for their children with nothing but hard work and plucky determination. According to the new “nation of immigrants” narrative, immigrants earned access to American equal opportunity through hard work and adherence to respectable heterosexual “family values.” Since these self-reliant immigrants succeeded, so too, the narrative went, could anybody. America was indeed a land of opportunity and abundance, for the personally responsible.

In the popular and media culture of the 1980s, inclusion was framed as multicultural and sometimes feminist, giving rise to a spate of popular new TV shows and films that featured lovable white ethnic immigrant characters such as Italian Americans Sophia Petrillo (Golden Girls) and Tony Micelli (Who’s the Boss?), and Balki Bartokomous, who emigrated to Chicago from the fictional Mediterranean island Mypos (Perfect Strangers), along with
spectacles like the celebration of America as “mother of exiles” at the Statue of Liberty centennial in 1986. News media also positioned the United States as the exceptional nation where women from patriarchal cultures—often in the “third world”—could be truly empowered and free. White ethnics provided the initial model for this discourse, featuring “empowered” white ethnic women like the “Material Girl” Madonna, who forged a career by shaking up the borderlines of white ethnic “nation of immigrants” discourse and feminine respectability. The 1990s saw the opening of the Ellis Island Museum and the Latinization of American pop culture, epitomized by the rapid rise of stars such as U.S.-born Latinas Selena and Jennifer Lopez, which showed what was available to and for worthy immigrants. While neither Selena nor Lopez is an immigrant, both were sometimes cast as such, and both self-consciously tapped into common salutary immigration discourses and were celebrated along those racialized lines. The circle of inclusion seemed to continue to broaden.

But when immigrants deviated from the dominant value system—like ostensibly fecund, teenaged welfare-abusing Mexican American mothers in the film *Mi Vida Loca* (1994) or criminally inclined Cuban refugees, like the hyperviolent Tony Montana, antihero of the film *Scarface* (1983)—they were rendered undeserving of everything from social services to residence in the United States and even to sympathy itself. Similar images proliferated in news media, with representations of Latino drug smugglers, dealers, and users, and promiscuous, welfare-draining Latina mothers, which tended to conflate important distinctions between, for example, the undocumented immigrant and the native-born American, and contributed to a general sense of an “immigration crisis” that originated south of the U.S.–Mexico border. Meanwhile, recurring stories about immigration indicated that punitive legal action (such as border militarization, welfare restriction, deportation) was not racist or sexist, but necessary to preserve the fiscal and moral health of the nation-state. These two conceptions of immigration—“nation of immigrants” and “immigration emergency”—surfaced repeatedly with various twists, turns, and embellishments in law and media beginning in the Reagan years, and continued to be the dominant modes of thought and expression about immigration until September 11, 2001, brought “terror” to the forefront of immigration politics.

Ultimately the consensus needed to pass IRCA was hard-won, given conflicting interests that crossed party lines and made for strange-bedfellow alliances that have become characteristically neoliberal. Free-market Republicans like Reagan supported amnesty measures for Mexican migrants not for humanitarian reasons, like some Democrats and activists, but because
cheap Mexican immigrant labor was profitable. The amnesty provision tied applicants to their employers during a long waiting period, making applicants vulnerable to abuses, and included the Seasonal Agricultural Worker (SAW) program for temporary laborers. This pro-immigrant labor stance was controversial in the context of recession and the highest unemployment rates since the 1930s, as it suggested a lack of concern for native laborers; organized labor opposed amnesty on the basis of labor competition.

But the most urgent fears of an “immigration emergency” pivoted on gender and racial politics. Nativist organizations like the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) and lawmakers like Simpson argued that family reunification provisions should be cut to curtail waves of “Hispanic” immigrants, because their family configurations and “culture” conflicted with American “family values.” “Hispanic,” “culture,” and “family values” are mystifying terms that erase how power operates through intersecting categories of race, gender, sexuality, and other axes of identity. First, people of Latin American descent—Central or South American, immigrant or native-born U.S. citizen—are lumped into the same general category of “Hispanic” or Latina/o, despite significant differences among these groups. For example, though often associated with immigration in popular discourse, Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, and Mexicans, who have historically inhabited the areas that became California and the southwestern U.S. became “immigrants” and then “undocumented” only through a series of territorial appropriations and restrictive immigration laws.

Scholars working at the intersection of Latina/o Studies and Queer Studies have produced important work on this problem of terminology. In 1992, Ana Maria Alonso and Maria Teresa Koreck wrote about how the federal government, alongside Hollywood and multinational corporations, produced and circulated discourses that fashioned a new subject in response to the discovery of a new consumer and voting bloc in the 1970s and 1980s: “Hispanics.” Racial/ethnic category definitions on federal tax and census forms also fixed the meaning of “Hispanic” in relation to “black” and “white”: white and black persons were “not of Hispanic origin,” while “Hispanic” was applied to “persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish cultural origin, regardless of race.”14 “Hispanics” were conglomerated, despite the claim of racial differentiation within the description, and defined in terms of their differences from blacks and whites. The term simultaneously homogenized people of Latin American origins as a coherent group, and “whitens” Hispanic identity by linking it to Spanish heritage while erasing African and Indian heritage. Prominent Latina/o Studies scholars continue to problematize the more contemporary term meant to denote
Latin American origins, “Latina/o,” which became prevalent in popular culture, media, and marketing in connection with the “Latin Explosion” of the 1990s. Like “Hispanic,” the term “Latina/o” continues to “lump all difference among Latinas/os into an undifferentiated pile,” erasing the “different historical and lived experiences” among Latinas/os. Yet it is often the preferred term that many scholars utilize for the sake of critical clarity in examinations of Latinas/os as a racial formation. The gender distinction, like the term Latin@s, which is also preferred by some scholars, indicates the importance of consistent attention to gender difference as a vector of analysis. Alonso and Koreck also asserted that categories of sexual orientation (homosexual, heterosexual, and so on) are culturally specific rather than universal; applying them to Mexicans and Chicanos creates silences that have resulted in the prevalence of AIDS among Mexican men who engage in homosexual behavior. Lionel Cantu, Jr., arguing that sexuality shapes processes of migration and incorporation and that the socioeconomic transitions of migration shape the formation of identities, showed how terms such as “gay” and “queer” are problematic because they are not used by Mexicans as an identity label. He used such terms only as analytical tools.

Asian American Studies scholars have likewise examined both the dangers and the productive possibilities of a panethnic or diverse national-origins group identity. On one hand, the lumping together of Americans of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, and Vietnamese origin erases the different histories and experiences among Asian Americans. On the other hand, as Yen Le Espiritu shows, large-scale group affiliation under the identity “Asian American” has allowed for collective action that has effectively challenged racism. Like the term “Latina/o,” the term “Asian American” is also preferred in many scholarly analyses of Asian Americans as a racial formation.

Following the work of these scholars, I use terms such as “Latina/o,” “Asian American,” “heterosexual,” and the like only as analytical tools to denote what are in fact fluid, unsettled categories, and I tease out the erasures that such terms accomplish. How and why erasures around Latina/o identities—in comparison to contemporaneous Asian American and especially white ethnic identities—were part and parcel of the coherence of neoliberal crossings will be explored throughout this book, which adds a comparative dimension to Latina/o Studies scholarship on terminology and processes of racialization and sexualization. Moreover, comparative analysis shows how discourses about migration were central to the erosion of the welfare state and the transformation of multiculturalism to support that process; that is, comparative analysis reveals how migration was essential to the cohesion of neoliberalism in the 1980s.
The New Right commitment to “family values” solidified in the 1970s as a response to what is often viewed as “second-wave” feminism and the civil rights movement and was central to the dismantling of the welfare state. The “family values” narrative conflated the patriarchal bread-winning nuclear family, traditional Christian morals, and opposition to abortion with “good” mothering but also with “good” American citizenship. Working women and single mothers—many of whom were of color—and the extended kinship arrangements common among immigrants became un-American, and the AIDS crisis and its early attribution to gay men added a layer of urgency. “Family values” discourse rationalized economic and social policies that appeared to be race-neutral but that actually impoverished people of color and immigrants primarily from Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean.

The conservative backlash of the 1980s and its cohesion in opposing Mexican immigration was also fueled by the gains of Latina/o social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, including multicultural education and bilingualism. A number of legal victories, such as *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which overturned legal segregation in schools, and the *Hernandez v. Texas* (1954) ruling, which gave Mexican Americans and other historically subordinated groups equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment, permitted Latinas/os to gain unprecedented rights. The 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Act allowed Latinas/os to participate directly in politics. Mexicans and other Latinas/os built lobbying organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), and United Farm Workers (UFW). Latinas/os participated in mass actions such as the Chicano public school student “Blow Outs” in 1968 (when ten thousand Mexican American students and allies demonstrated for educational equality in Los Angeles), national grape boycotts, and the Chicano Moratorium, a series of protests and marches that called attention to the fact that in the Vietnam War, Chicanos were recruited and died in battle at greater rates than other racial groups. Radical activity also flourished among groups such as Raza Unida, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, and the Young Lords, as well as in Areito, a magazine created by Cuban refugees who aimed to establish relations with Cuba. A model of internal colonialism developed to address the intersections of race and class in the United States, and academic studies on Latina/o politics were published.

Between 1965 and 1975, the Chicano Movement, or El Movimiento, which was initially radical, came to utilize a liberal framework to fight for rights. This often more militant phase of Mexican American political struggle exerted new political influence both through Raza Unida and within the...
Democratic Party and formed numerous lobbying and social organizations. Significantly, the most prevalent thread of protest took the form of ethnic nationalism, employing the trope of a traditional heteropatriarchal family, called La Raza (“the race”), in order to unify Mexican Americans. Ethnic nationalism also countered the stereotype of the Mexican “illegal alien.” Men and women had prescribed roles in the ethnic nationalism schema: the symbolic mothers of La Raza, women were relegated to the domestic sphere. Alicia Schmidt Camacho has noted that this was heterosexist and drew on Cold War nationalism that viewed as threatening migrants and immigrants from Latin American countries where communist activity was prevalent. The trope was thus more divisive than unifying. While the La Raza trope actually complements “family values” ideology (and highlights the centrality of “family” in debates), Chicano Power and new political clout of Latinas/os alarmed conservatives.

Multicultural education was similarly unpalatable to the Right. Ethnic Studies and Women’s Studies classes, programs, and departments developed throughout the civil rights era and into the late twentieth century. Campus activism, the Chicano Movement, and other civil rights and feminist groups were key to this sea change, which sought to empower and enfranchise women and people of color via the education system. Given the new hegemony of civil rights-era liberalism, opponents of multiculturalism argued that their opposition was fueled not by racism, but by a desire to salvage a dangerously fractured national unity. (Ironically, this same argument about harming unity with “difference” is what rationalized the subordination of women and erasure of immigrants within the Chicano Movement.) Opponents averred that national identity needed to be defended against “ethnic and racial pride.”

Anti-bilingualism rhetoric was comparable: although Spanish speakers represented only 7.3 percent of the U.S. population in 1985, fears about growing “Hispanic” populations coalesced with lobbies to establish English as the official national language on the grounds that official multilingualism was culturally divisive and detrimental to U.S. national heritage and unity. In 1986, California, which was home to a substantial Spanish-speaking population, was the first state to amend its constitution to “preserve and enhance the use of English” through Proposition 63. Six similar federal bills were proposed in 1987. Importantly, in the early 1980s, English Only/Official English resolutions were part of the first round of legislation that became IRCA. English Only efforts also focused on the alleged divisiveness of “cultural” difference and rhetorically cast non-English speakers or bilingual persons as “foreigners” and un-American. This turned non-English speakers into a highly vulnerable
workforce, insofar as their options for employment were severely restricted by English Only rules.

Given these “multicultural” factors, family reunification and immigration threatened to increase the already substantial Latin American immigrant population and increase the political clout of Latinas/os. Otto Santa Ana has shown that dominant metaphors for Latinas/os in mainstream media in the 1990s, casting them as invaders, animals, parasites, and diseases, blurred the lines between Latinas/os and immigrants and framed all as threats to the nation.\textsuperscript{29} As I will show, such discourse that treated immigration as a powerful, damaging force became ubiquitous in the 1980s. It is not a coincidence that this attitude developed on the heels of the Chicano Power and Latina/o social movements, as demand for immigrant labor increased and the Latina/o population rose; rather, it responded to these changes.

Concerns that unrestricted family reunification would disrupt the nation were also directly related to changes in global capital. Historically, solicitation of migratory male workers and prevention of marriage lessened the social and biological costs of immigration. In the 1980s, however, more immigrants were women\textsuperscript{30} from Latin America and Asia. This change was largely a result of poverty created by U.S. imperialism,\textsuperscript{31} as well as increases in domestic and service industry jobs for which immigrant women were preferred. For instance, the late 1960s marked the beginning of a transition to the increased migration and settlement of Mexican women and whole families,\textsuperscript{32} which coincided with an economic crisis in Mexico and the growing availability of service jobs.\textsuperscript{33} Desire to limit family migration and women’s migration is also part of what Claudia Sadowski-Smith calls the “illegality spiral,” the series of restrictive immigration laws that began in the nineteenth century and “targeted the non-elite segment of each new immigrant group through differential forms of racialization.”\textsuperscript{34} Initiated to address Chinese and European immigration, the illegality spiral later transformed Mexicans into the quintessential undocumented immigrants. During World War I, when border crossing cards were introduced for Mexican residents, individuals and families who were previously able to freely migrate for seasonal work were rendered “illegal.” During World War II, when Mexicans became the most important source of unskilled labor, the U.S. government recruited Mexican labor through the Bracero Program, and because many did not qualify for the program (which favored single men), undocumented immigration increased; Mexicans were “transformed into quintessential indocumentados,”\textsuperscript{35} or “wetbacks.” Mexico, in an effort to retain citizen workers for the industrialization of agriculture that was simultaneously occurring, supported binational border enforcement and thereby contributed to this transformation. For in-
stance, beginning in 1945, U.S. Border Patrol agents began deporting undocumented Mexicans, and Mexican officials forcibly relocated them, often to areas of labor shortage. When the Bracero Program was suspended, as in 1949 and 1953, the Mexican government positioned military on the Mexico–U.S. border to keep Mexican citizens from emigrating. By the 1940s, policymaking in the United States shifted to focus almost exclusively to undocumented Mexican immigration. This set the stage for the collapsing of people of Latin American origins—immigrants and U.S. citizens—into the “illegal alien” in the public imagination.

In the late twentieth century, with the increased migration of women and families and in the context of this older illegality spiral, new efforts to reduce the social and biological costs of immigration focused on reproduction and child-rearing, and immigrants were accused of disproportionately high birthrates that drained public resources, thereby threatening the economy, “family values,” Americanism itself. Meanwhile, men of Latin American origins were stereotyped as criminals. Both constructions drew on the earlier construction of the Mexican (always already) “illegal alien.” The “immigration emergency” was therefore a gendered as well as racialized affair that made family reunification, welfare cuts, border security, and other punitive measures seem to be logical and rational—rather than part of ongoing governmental efforts to control unskilled immigrant labor, and/or arising from rote nativism. These restrictive measures eventually became “commonsense” matters that conservatives and liberals like President Bill Clinton could get behind.

Sexism and racism were further cloaked by a politics of comparison. As Philip Kresdemas has noted, in matters of immigration under neoliberal governance, some people are protected and nurtured, while others are “subjected to disciplinary techniques designed to stimulate maximum productivity, but with much less concern for the welfare of the individual.” In political debates and popular culture, Latin American immigrants were pathologized, while white ethnic immigrants were romanticized. Tropes of immigration in the 1980s—ranging from celebratory “nation of immigrants” discourses to damning accusations of threat from fecundity, lack of respectability, laziness, and criminality—negotiated not only conflicting positions on immigration, but also broader economic, gender, and racial upheavals. Regardless of differing relationships to histories of slavery, colonization, and imperialism, and strides made for women’s rights, only those who adhered to the white ethnic model were deemed worthy of inclusion. As Matthew Jacobson shows, white ethnicity was formed in response to civil rights movement identity politics and the social justice gains of people of color; the 1980s iteration of white ethnic “nation of immigrants” identity/discourse that rendered personal re-
sponsibility heroic continued to respond to those gains in ways that were used to support a nativist agenda without seeming racist or nativist. Comparative politics made devaluation of certain immigrants seem logical.

These differing imaginings of immigration intertwined and supported one another, such that the value system of the “nation of immigrants” was framed as endangered by the “immigration emergency,” and represented the fusion of progressive and conservative ideologies that made oppressive neoliberal cultural politics come to seem like “common sense.” Neoliberal theory originates in the classical liberalism of the eighteenth century, in which “political ideals of ‘liberty’ were harnessed to economic ideas of the free market.” As agrarian and later industrial manufacturing privileged classes formed, a slave ship captain could proclaim his commitment to “liberty” while selling slaves; the hard work of free white men was universalized freedom. The neoliberal nation-state rooted government in free market entrepreneurial values like competiveness, self-interest, and decentralization, according to the theory that “social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions” across the globe. Globalization was imbued with the logic that integrating markets universally increased individual freedom and progress. Yet as immigration polemics and a host of other examples indicate, the ideal of the “the free possessive individual engaging with others through market transactions” circumscribes “freedom” and “liberty” along racialized and gendered lines.

Reagan, the “great communicator” who left office in 1989 with a 70 percent approval rating, facilitated the neoliberal redefinition of American “common sense.” Along with deregulation of the economy, privatization, liberalization and integration of global markets, consumerism, and an increase in Cold War defense expenditures, Reagan nurtured a sense of American exceptionalism. His patriotism was based on traditional family values, optimism, economic expansion, and celebratory consumerism. Framing the United States and capitalism as moral and “free” in contrast to the “evil empire” of the Communist Soviet Union, he championed and the notion that the reasonable and capable individual rather than the government was the proper locus of social responsibility.

A complex negotiation of race and gender politics was also central to the Reaganite neoliberalization of “common sense.” While Barry Goldwater was the last Republican presidential candidate to run on an overtly anti–civil rights platform, Reagan appropriated civil rights–era antiracist discourses to serve his national narrative of ascendance while enabling endemic racism and sexism. On one hand, race was coded through the language of rights, taxes, crime, drugs, and welfare. On the other hand, some people of color were visibly included or represented in media, various professions, and even
the government. The Reagan administration also spearheaded the backlash against second-wave feminism (in its opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment [ERA]), but sexism too was similarly reframed to complement the more inclusive political climate. Thus, while Reagan staunchly opposed the ERA and worked to dismantle affirmative action, he noted that there were several women and people of color in his administration (much as Mitt Romney did when asked about women’s equality in the second 2012 presidential debate). Likewise, Reagan nominated black American Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. But hiring a few women here, a few black Americans there—tokens—did not add up to the structural equality that feminists and civil rights activists were fighting for, and the tokens themselves sometimes advanced neoconservative agendas. Thomas surely benefited from affirmative action, but like other Reaganites, he was committed to dismantling the welfare state, and as the Anita Hill sexual harassment scandal showed, he was no friend to women. Such tempered neoconservatism became a core of neoliberal projects.

To be clear, neoconservatism here means a combination of the liberal theory of free markets and limited government as ensuring individual liberty with the exercise of state power to support a highly patriotic and traditionally moral national imaginary. One important element in this mix was a post-Vietnam anticommunism characterized by the unilateral use of military power to further national interests. Reagan dramatically increased defense expenditures to protect America from the Soviet Union and international terrorism. The historic high point for U.S. defense spending was in 1987, when it hit $456.5 billion (in projected 2005 dollars)—quite a jump from Reagan's first two years in office ($325.1 billion in 1980 and $339.6 million in 1981). The bulk of the increase was for procurement and research and development programs, including the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), the infamous “Star Wars” program. In a restart of the arms race, SDI was meant to protect the country from Soviet nuclear attack with a defensive missile shield based in outer space. Intrusive foreign policy had its domestic parallel in government regulation of the citizenry to protect “public security and traditional morality” in such a way that superseded concern for individual rights, as reflected in the “family values” movement. Early neoconservatives also rendered a harsh critique of the New Deal and civil rights legislation, holding that “at best, society (and government) can offer only opportunity and incentive” and that accordingly, “big government” and especially social services, public programs, and affirmative action bred “dependence and poverty.”

To advance these neoconservative moves, Reagan, “during his first four months in office, met with members of Congress about 70 times.”

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Reagan provided an enduring model for U.S. neoliberal projects. Neoliberalism itself first developed after World War II, when European intellectuals critiqued statism and especially social engineering and the welfare state. Freeing the market from governments was framed as the solution to the danger of totalitarianism and what would ameliorate workers’ dependence on the state. In the United States, these ideas became part of public debate after President Lyndon Johnson expanded New Deal welfare programs with his War on Poverty; there was a pejorative association of “liberalism” with Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal social welfare policies, which allegedly “intervened in the ‘personal liberty’ of the contract between equals.”

“Big government” increasingly came under fire as a cause of rather than a solution to economic and social problems. With the 1980 election of Reagan, theory became practice.

The core aspects of neoliberalism involve modes of government rooted in entrepreneurial values; policies that result in the deregulation of the economy, liberalization of trade, and privatization of state services; and the theory that consumerist free trade will bring unprecedented prosperity to both the “developed” and “developing” world.

In Europe this is often considered “liberalism” in contrast to statism, while in the United States it is more directly connected to what is considered “conservativism,” though neoliberalism actually—and necessarily—combines elements of various “isms.” More specifically, although neoliberals and neoconservatives shared a commitment to free markets, and while some neoliberals have embraced aspects of neoconservatism such as “family values” and a strong military, for neoliberals, freedom and a “hands-off” attitude were defined by globalism, less intrusion in the lives of the citizenry, and neoliberals were often ostensibly committed to socially progressive values. The linking of conservativism and neoliberalism (which Margaret Thatcher also successfully did in the United Kingdom) emblematizes what Stuart Hall has articulated so well, that ideology works best by connecting contradictions that are often visceral. The linking of free market ideology with conservative attachments to “nation, racial homogeneity, Empire, tradition” worked, and neoliberal ideology appropriated and reframed those attachments so that they seemed progressive, or “necessary,” given one crisis or another.

In the United States, Reagan combined neoconservatism with “modern” and seemingly broadminded sensibilities, particularly with consumerism and embrace of celebrity culture. This made him attractive to a wide cross-section of the American public and cultivated a sense of unity even as individualism, self-sufficiency, a “wild west” (laissez-faire, deregulated) Wall Street, and consequent intense consumerism became the new normal. Ironically, FDR’s “em-
bedded liberalism” created the stage for Reaganite neoliberalism. The welfare state incorporated the working classes into the economy, which facilitated consumer demand and the increasing commodification of society. This was likely not lost on Reagan, especially given that he idealized FDR even as he attacked “big government.” Reagan personified and popularized a sense of national confidence that had been lost in the 1960s and 1970s; he facilitated the conservative reorientation of mainstream America, alongside and within his implementation of neoliberal policies. He was astutely moderate.

Reagan’s embrace of consumerism, celebrity culture, and “modern” sensibilities was also a slippery slope. Reagan, a former actor, peppered his speeches with allusions to pop culture, notably referring to the hit movie Back to the Future (1985) in a State of the Union address. Reagan and his wife, Nancy, hosted glittering state dinners, inviting many of their old Hollywood friends, and drew scorn for their spending on clothing and new White House china. And Reagan sometimes missed the mark completely, as when in a 1984 campaign speech he heralded Bruce Springsteen as the voice of the new America, even as Springsteen’s then hit song “Born in the U.S.A.” critiqued Reagan’s America. Characterized as the “ferocious cry of an unemployed Vietnam veteran” and as a “working-class howl,” it contains lyrics such as

Down in the shadow of the penitentiary  
Out by the gas fires of the refinery  
I’m ten years burning down the road  
Nowhere to run ain’t got nowhere to go.

Reagan embodied the contradiction underscoring neoliberalism: “the capitalism and consumerism he helped unleash threatened to destroy the ideals he seemed to most cherish,” in that selfishness, self-interest, and materialism, rather than altruism and commitment to the common good—the nexus of his patriotism and exceptionalism—were the order of the day. In the 1980s, Americans were spending more on homes, clothes, and food, and increasing media coverage of the wealthy led to more competition and envy; TV shows like Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous, and businessmen like Donald Trump and Lee Iacocca became celebrities simply for becoming wealthy. In Reagan’s America, consumerism became a value too.

In the 1980s, as the neoliberalization of domestic and foreign policy kicked into high gear with privatization, new free trade agreements, and structural adjustment policies (SAPs) in the global south, and with appropriations of feminist and multicultural discourses blended with Cold War rhetoric of America’s exceptional benevolence, America appeared more multicultural
and gender-equitable than ever before. Yet as David Harvey notes, “redistributive effects and increasing social inequality have in fact been such a persistent feature of neoliberalization as to be regarded as structural to the whole project.” Along similar lines, in an article analyzing the “catastrophic consequences” of neoliberalism following the financial crisis of 2007–2008 in order to make a case for radical rethinking on the Left, Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey, and Michael Rustin point out that the people most harmed by neoliberalism and who have received the burden of solving the crisis are, of course, groups already vulnerable and disenfranchised: working people, the poor, people of color, women, single parents, the disabled and mentally ill, students, and the young unemployed.

Unnamed in this list are immigrants, though the authors do mention that the international migration that neoliberalism engenders provides the new free global workforce. Showing how and why discourses of immigration were at the center of rising neoliberalism—and how and why certain immigrants were, like other marginalized populations, blamed for and expected to fix a host of financial and social ills—is the focus of this project. While some scholars, such as Christina Gerken, zero in on immigration discourses in the 1990s and after as properly neoliberal, the 1980s set not only the stage but also the paradigm for what followed. Hall, Massey, and Rustin define neoliberalism as the system of “global free-market capitalism . . . that has come to dominate the world in the three decades since 1980.” I argue that the immigration discourses that took shape in the 1980s were of vital importance to the coherence—and maintenance—of the global hegemony of neoliberalism. In order for the Left to do the radical rethinking that Hall, Massey, and Rustin call for, this piece of the puzzle is necessary, for discourses of immigration that emerged during the Reagan era and held sway until 9/11 constituted a significant but understudied rhetorical force that powerfully masked and/or rationalized the racist and sexist social relations that structure neoliberalism.

Law and culture are not separate but rather interrelated spheres that shape people’s lives and relationships to power. A host of 1980s films, TV shows, and commercials participated in the emergent conversation about neoliberal crossings and helped to form its lasting contours. Madonna’s early work is particularly relevant. While “Borderline” was not about immigration per se—there is no overt immigration narrative or any signifiers of immigration, as there is in “Like a Virgin”—the video nonetheless engages contemporary debates about immigration, feminism, and multiculturalism, and both “nation of immigrants” and “immigrant emergency” discourses can be traced in it, as can the way that white ethnic identity responded to Latina/o identity.
First, the video was filmed in a Los Angeles barrio, visually conveyed by a California license plate on the photographer’s car and its urban industrial setting in which the only place of business is a Mexican/Salvadoran restaurant and pool hall boasting a sign in Spanish, where the multicultural crew hung out. Historically and into the present, barrios are the result of specific local, state, and federal plans that have created racial segregation, substandard schooling and housing, and severely limited socioeconomic mobility. At the same time, barrios are important settlement communities for new arrivals and include social and economic networks and resources that often transcend local and national boundaries. The Mexican barrio in Los Angeles was formed in the aftermath of the Mexican-American War and the transformation of Los Angeles into an “Anglo” city via laws and policies that stigmatized Mexican residents and relegated them to barrios in cities and to colonias (unincorporated settlements along the U.S.–Mexico border) in rural areas. For many, Los Angeles was ground zero of the immigration crisis, so the video’s setting itself is connected to immigration polemics. Yet the mainstream public narratives about Mexican immigrants conveniently failed to consider the history of the Mexican-American War, formation of barrios, and transformation of Mexicans into immigrants. A 1985 Time article christened L.A. the “New Ellis Island” and “America’s Uneasy Melting Pot” because the city was being “flooded” by Asian and Latin American legal and undocumented immigrants who were not “melting” into the American pot. In the same issue, an article on “Losing Control of the Borders” anxiously reflected on the proposed IRCA bill, given the “flood” of Mexican immigration. Madonna’s video is about the relationship between a white woman and Latino man in the new/uneasy Ellis Island/melting pot, and features what many nativists like Alan Simpson feared: a colorful multicultural “nation of immigrants” in which the barrio is favored. It is not just that Madonna rejects the white male photographer in favor of the cooler multicultural entourage, but that he is outnumbered by them.

While some have celebrated Madonna as a radical maverick (which is also the name of the record company she launched in 1992 and sold in 2004), just as many have passionately criticized her. Early in her career, the commotion was about the legibility of her performances as rebellions against the confines of Catholic womanhood. In “Like a Virgin,” the title track of her second album, released in 1984, Madonna challenged the pure, virginal ideal of premarital heterosexual womanhood enshrined in mainstream Catholic ethics and overtly deviated from the ultimate ideal of Catholic femininity, her namesake, the Virgin Mary—the Madonna. The song reached No. 1 on the 1984 Billboard chart, where it remained for six weeks, and was certified
Gold in 1985; the song and video continue to surface today in “Best of” lists. In the video, Madonna portrays a sexually experienced and assertive young woman pretending to be virginal (hence the “like” in the title) for her own pleasure. The song and video challenge traditional femininity, “family values,” and religious ideals with direct recourse to white ethnic immigration: the video features her emigration by boat from New York City to Venice, Italy, where she writhes around in a gondola while sporting crucifix necklaces and romps in a palace wearing a white wedding dress. The Catholic imagery is not subtle, and in the 1980s, this sinfully subversive representation of female sexual agency met with outrage from conservatives, who felt that it promoted premarital sex and pornographically defiled religious imagery.

Paul Smith and Lisa Frank, editors of the anthology *Madonnarama: Essays on Sex and Popular Culture*, assert that the “crucial ingredients” of Madonna’s 1992 photography book *Sex*—what made it popular—are “sex, race, power, and capital.” These ingredients soon became her signature, while in early videos such as “Borderline” and later in “Like a Prayer” (1989), interracial relationships are the vehicle through which Madonna challenged gender norms.

Bell hooks argues that at the start of Madonna’s career, she claimed and represented a transgressive whiteness that was “other than, different from the mainstream, more connected to folks marginalized by race or sexual practice. For a time, Madonna seemed to desire to occupy both a space that is different and a space that is familiar.” Hooks connects this to “her personal history as a dark ethnic from an immigrant background.” The notion of white ethnic identity as “different” from mainstream whiteness is conveyed in “Borderline” through Madonna’s identification with and preference for the multicultural entourage, aesthetic, and barrio. It is also part of Madonna’s off-screen, off-stage identity.

The descendant of Italian immigrants, Madonna Louise Ciccone has her own “rags-to-riches” story, which was ascendant when “Borderline” was released. According to this story, after growing up in Detroit and briefly attending the University of Michigan on a dance scholarship—in keeping with “nation of immigrants” and neoliberal norms—Madonna landed in New York City in 1977 with just thirty-five dollars and with self-reliance, determination, and hard work, went from struggling dancer to “overnight” success. In reality, however, she studied dance, modeled, and worked low-paying jobs, barely surviving until friends convinced her that she had a good voice. Her experiments with disco and pop caught the ear of a disco DJ who helped land her a deal with Sire Records in 1982. Sire reportedly paid her $5,000 per song for several singles, which found moderate popularity on dance and R&B stations, led many to believe she was a black artist, and convinced the com-
pany to finance a full LP. The result of her plucky fortitude and hard work (complex racial politics and confusion notwithstanding), *Madonna* the album made her famous. “Borderline” was thus part of Madonna’s personal “nation of immigrants” story at a moment when that story was both navigating and reinventing white privilege in the context of multiculturalism and feminism.

In *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post–Civil Rights America*, Matthew Jacobson shows that in the 1960s and 1970s, in response to civil rights discourses and victories among people of color, the white “ethnic revival” cast white ethnic immigrants and their descendants as the victims rather than the perpetrators of racism, as well as inaugurating the national narrative of the hardworking Ellis Island immigrants who pulled themselves up by their bootstraps in order to succeed. This immigrant variation of the classic liberal ideal was the blueprint for the 1980s neoliberal version of the “nation of immigrants” trope. The ethnic revival was initially formed in connection with progressive multicultural and feminist projects; as Jacobson demonstrates, second-wave feminism, dominated by white ethnic women, attempted to establish a sense of common struggle with women of color and recent immigrants on the basis of shared patriarchal oppression and the history of white ethnic immigrants’ poverty, tenement life, and social marginalization, while also trying to distance white ethnics from the legacy of slavery and racism. “Borderline” (and other popular culture texts that will be addressed in later chapters) took up that notion of commonality by imagining coalitions among immigrants and people of color and white ethnic women and portraying them as allies in parallel struggles for social justice, or at least as fellow travelers in a quest for empowered coolness and sexiness. But this progressive narrative was quickly appropriated by neoconservatives to rationalize privatization and opposition to affirmative action and proved useful in nativist and “colorblind” or ostensibly race-neutral attacks on Latin American, Asian, and Caribbean immigrants as freeloading exploiters of America’s welcome to immigrants.

Along these lines, “Borderline” offers spectators an alternative to the status quo: it imagines an interracial romance and valorizes multiracial, working-class urban subculture at a time when nativists were convinced the United States was in the throes of an “immigration emergency” that was pouring over the Mexican border. “Borderline” celebrates what nativists and “family values” proponents feared: a white minority figure happily and willingly immersed in a multicultural and perhaps Spanish-speaking or bilingual working-class majority. Adding insult to injury, that white minority figure is an independent woman who makes her own choices about love and capital, rejecting mainstream values.
At the same time, however, traces of the neoconservative appropriation of ethnic revival discourse and feminism may also have been transcoded in this video. White ethnics were celebrated as the quintessential models of assimilation and self-sufficiency for immigrants and minorities at a moment when people of color were fighting for and gaining rights at unprecedented levels. This formulation occluded the slavery, colonialism, and ongoing disenfranchisement that people of color contend with by presenting America as democratic and equal for those willing to work hard enough and made it possible to frame whites as a minority unfairly embattled by multiculturalism in an equal system. Madonna, the white ethnic woman, is the only person in the video with an opportunity to move up; her choice to reject that opportunity and return to the working-class multicultural world is presented as liberating, but what about those who do not have the choice? That the liberating choices were not available to everyone does not register in the video, just as the ways that gender and race circumscribe access to an ostensibly exceptional American “freedom” are elided in classic liberal and neoliberal discourses. Moreover, it is a white person—white privilege—that renders the barrio “cool,” and this too is part of an older history of colonization and white appropriation of the cultures, practices, and spaces of people of color.

There is also the matter of race, gender, and violence. The Latino man shoves Madonna when she returns to him after her dalliance with the photographer; thus the video includes a stereotypical representation of Latino machismo, or exaggerated masculine pride often conveyed in dominance and chauvinism. The stereotype of Latino violence, specifically against a white woman, is not central to the plot nor is it lingered over, but racially inflected machismo is visible. In the context of debates over an immigration emergency that heated up over the issue of immigrant violence following the Mariel Boatlift, and given the concurrent heavy circulation of media images of violent men of color, that brief shove is not something that can or should be ignored.

The stereotype of Latino violence that “Borderline” touches on has long circulated in American cinema. Dramatizations of Mexican male violence toward white women began in silent-era “greaser” films such as *Licking the Greasers* (1910) and *Guns and Greasers* (1918). Later films such as *Bordertown* (1935), *The Lawless* (1949), and *Trial* (1955) were based on accusations of interracial rape and/or crimes of passion. Similarly, *West Side Story* (1961), the first major film and play about Puerto Ricans in the United States, established a stereotype of Puerto Rican males as violent gang members.

In *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, Patricia Hill Collins argues that popular cultural images of black sexuality
perpetuated black subordination. These images reimagined racist, sexist stereotypes in ways that complemented (appropriated) civil rights discourses of antiracism. Latinos are also subject to such “controlling images.” In the 1980s and 1990s, controlling images of Latinos proliferated with films such as *Scarface* (1984), about the rise and fall of a Cuban immigrant drug dealer, *American Me* (1992), about the rise of the Mexican American mafia in California prisons between the 1950s and 1980s, *Carlito’s Way* (1993), about the unsuccessful effort of a Puerto Rican criminal to lead a law-abiding life, and *Fort Apache, the Bronx* (1981), about the struggle of white policemen fighting crime in a Puerto Rican Bronx neighborhood.

“Borderline” is much more playful than these films, and Madonna likely meant to pay homage to Latino urban culture: its multiculturalism and her proximity to it are cool, fun, and sexy. And Madonna’s off-screen romances with Latinos continued for decades. Nevertheless, the video not only hints at Latino violence against a white woman, but also does so in such a way as to mitigate some of the feminist punch of the video in that Madonna’s allegedly empowered “choice” is that of a violent man.

Recuperation of the status quo is also evident in the video’s conditions of production. Madonna received the lion’s share of the profit and fame from the video and song, in contrast both to her then-boyfriend, “Jelly Bean” Benitez, who remixed the song, and to the Latino actor in the video. Decades later, it is only Madonna who is a household name. In his study tracing the marginalization of Latinas/os in media industries in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Hector Amaya notes that “labor discrimination is one of the most efficient means used in neoliberal governmentality to constitute unequal citizenship experiences.” Stratified citizenship experiences within media industries begin at the level of the labor rights of Latinas/os, which have been eroded since the 1970s, when corporations transformed 1960s efforts for labor equality (via the Equal Employment Opportunity and affirmative action [EEO/AA] measures) into the neoliberal standard of self-regulation. For Amaya, a striking example of this change is in the way that diversity came to connote not racial justice but rather profitability. This became common in the 1980s, and Madonna’s video celebration of diversity was certainly profitable for her, the white ethnic woman, at a moment when the white ethnic was enshrined as the model American citizen. Thus “subversive play” was not necessarily social intervention, but a commodification of diversity as subversion—turning it, and herself, into a product—that made Madonna a wealthy woman. She was embracing rather than rejecting the consumerism central to Reaganism and rising neoliberal projects.
In this sense, the mainstream backlash against multiculturalism and feminism, along with mainstream racial, gender, and immigration politics, also made their way onto the small screen of the video’s narrative, visual codes, and conditions of production. “Borderline” visibly engages Reagan-era immigration debates, as well as broader concerns about feminism, multiculturalism, and the welfare state, and sets up a gendered dialectic between white ethnics and Latinas/os that became increasingly significant in immigration politics. As such, “Borderline” suggests that in the context of neoliberal governance, culture is the politics of immigration by other means.

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With an interdisciplinary Cultural Studies methodology that draws from critical legal studies, feminist theory, queer theory, comparative critical Race and Ethnic Studies, and Media Studies, I bring to light the previously understudied role of immigration discourses in the 1980s in the hegemonic development of neoliberalism, contribute to an ongoing conversation in American Studies and Cultural Studies about the relationship between law and culture, and offer a fresh perspective on the formation of contemporary American identity. Taking seriously the Cultural Studies axiom that “culture is politics by other means,” I consider overtly political speech and expression in direct conversation with patterns of assumption and logic produced, promoted, consumed, and negotiated in the culture at large. Importantly, given that the connections among public policy, pop culture, and media are uneven and asymmetrical and that neoliberalism is a “complex, contradictory cultural and political project,” this study of law and media discourses is likewise uneven and asymmetrical. As Lisa Duggan observes, “developing analyses of neoliberalism must ask how the many local alliances, cultural projects, nationalist agendas, and economic policies work together, unevenly and often unpredictably, rife with conflict and contradiction, to redistribute the world’s resources upward—money, security, healthcare, and mobility; knowledge and access to communication technologies; leisure, recreation, and pleasure; freedom—to procreate or not, to be sexually expressive or not, to work or not; political power—participatory access to democratic public life, and more . . . in short, resources of all kinds.”

With close attention to “coexisting, conflicting, shifting relations of power along multiple lines of difference and hierarchy,” I trace recurring tropes, narratives, and images about immigration (or images coded as such) in order to evaluate the development of cultural scripts through which questions of immigration, American identity, and labor are explored in relation to rising U.S. neoliberalism.
Close analysis of the law is essential to this task. In her magisterial article, “Is There a Cultural Studies of Law?,” Rosemary Coombe asserts that the law creates and diffuses certain forms of power that “constrain and enable agency in social life”; law is central to the cultural conditions of producing everyday life, and what happens in everyday life—what is usually considered “culture”—impacts the formation of law and legal discourse. Developing Coombe’s important project in their introduction to a special issue of Cultural Studies titled Cultural Studies and/of the Law, which aims to explain “the efficacy of the law despite of [sic] and because of the cultural contradictions of neoliberal capitalism,” editors Jaafar Aksikas and Sean Johnson Andrews note that “culture itself is one of the primary resources of law,” and law itself is a cultural phenomenon.

Joining this conversation about culture, the law, and neoliberalism, I look at how and why what counted as American “common sense” in general, and especially in relation to immigration, was intertextually reframed in law and culture, which was rather fitting under the tenure of a president who first achieved national prominence as a film star. The structure and methodology of the book reflects this inseparability of law and culture. Primarily through comparative discourse analysis, I focus on language, tropes, and imagery about immigration in law-making and popular media, which gave authoritative accounts of immigration. Thus my study also further develops a Cultural Studies project that analyzes and situates media as part of larger social, cultural, and economic contexts, including the production, distribution, and consumption of texts.

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Two theoretical approaches shape my inquiry: Cultural Studies views of media as complex primary sources, and intersectionality. First, I analyze popular media as a primary source alongside the materials that are typically the focus of immigration studies: the congressional record, texts of bills, presidential papers, and immigration records. Benedict Anderson importantly demonstrated that print media is crucial to the formation and reproduction of nationalism or a national imagined community. Since the mid-twentieth century, various kinds of media have been major agents of entertainment, information, and socialization. While today this is even more pervasive, given the Web, smartphones, MP3 players, e-book readers, and so on, in the 1980s more “traditional” media—film, TV, and print media (magazines and newspapers)—permeated daily life, competing with and/or augmenting older social institutions such as the legal system, education system, family, and religion, and thus helping to produce “the fabric of everyday life, dominating
leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities." As groundbreaking critical discourse analysis (CDA) scholars have shown, text and language in media can powerfully reproduce social domination; "as systems of communication, [media] are better able than other social institutions to produce and circulate images and messages that consumers use to construct knowledge and values." 

As Cultural Studies scholars have also noted, media are inherently polysemous sites where battles over meaning and values are fought. Negotiation is fostered by the commercial logic of mass media (it is designed to be popular and "relevant" to consumers); the inevitable disruptions intrinsic to hegemony given that it is produced rather than natural or given; and by the "wild card" of audience reception: stereotyping and marginalization in media may acculturate viewers to the status quo. Media representations may also galvanize members of social groups to protest via boycotts and to take control of media production to create their own images; they may engender a more moderate response; or they may produce some combination of these reactions. Stuart Hall observes that the meaning of media is always somewhat circumscribed, since its production structure results in an encoded text that is decoded by audiences. That is, what consumers see is shaped by who writes, produces, and distributes media, and given that most media receive revenues from advertising, what consumers see is also shaped by what sells. So the economic and ideological location of media often results in a "preferred reading" that reproduces the dominant values of a society. More recently and in the context of the kind of media monopoly that Ben Bagdikian warned against in 1983, Hall, Massey, and Rustin argue that "Corporate ownership of the dominant sectors of the media gives capital sway over the means and strategies of representation. . . . [Corporate interests] function as the primary definers of reality. Contrary views have a more fleeting visibility." Consequently, "neoliberal ideas seem to have sedimented into the western imaginary and become embedded in popular 'common sense.' They set the parameters—provide the 'taken-for-granteds'—of public discussion, media debate and popular calculation." The "sedimentation" of neoliberal ideas about immigration discourses is my focus, while I also keep in mind that, as Lawrence Levine argues, the "process of popular culture" must be understood "not as the imposition of texts on passive people who constitute a tabula rasa but as a process of interaction between complex texts that harbor more than monolithic meanings and audiences who embody more than monolithic assemblies of compliant people."

Therefore, while media present particular, industry-supported, and often conservative views of immigration, gender, and race, media also open up
spaces for alternatives. The complexity of this is evident in the specific—and uneven—history of media in relation to U.S. immigration. In *Immigration and American Popular Culture: An Introduction*, Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick note that popular culture “has long been an important collective processing site for questions concerning the politics and ethics of immigration,” both given immigrants’ involvement in producing as well as consuming popular culture and because popular culture helps to define significant moments in immigration history. Many scholars have shown how popular culture has promoted fear of and panic surrounding immigrants. Film and literature at the turn of the twentieth century were often explicitly xenophobic. Linda Rosa Fregoso, for example, details the maligning of Mexican and Mexican American women as promiscuous criminals in silent film, and others have shown how Asian and white ethnic immigrants were similarly slandered in early twentieth-century popular culture. Fear and panic resurfaced in the “alien invasion” films in the 1980s and 1990s, such as the blockbuster *Alien* (1979) and its three sequels. In *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*, Mike Davis argues that the prevalent theme of “alien invasion” and filmic representations of disasters in Los Angeles indicate white racial anxiety and fear of dark races. In *The Latino Threat*, Leo Chavez takes up the ongoing currency of that theme and those representations in the media.

Immigrants also produced texts that are considered quintessentially “American,” without an explicit trace of immigrant identity; ironically, immigrants have created versions of unadulterated Americanness that nativists held dear. At the turn of the twentieth century, at the height of xenophobia toward eastern and southern European immigrants, immigrant and first-generation Jews formed and headed the major Hollywood production companies such as Universal, Paramount, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Columbia, Warner Brothers, William Fox, and Samuel Goldwyn. The men behind these companies, which created Hollywood, an emblem of American ingenuity and a primary generator of American culture, were Yiddish-speaking immigrants or their sons, who were born into poverty in either Europe or the United States. Thus, not surprisingly, the involvement of Jewish immigrants in early Hollywood production has been a focus of anti-Semitism.

Another example of the immigrant imprint on the formation of a “pure” American identity is the work of Italian American director Frank Capra. In films such as his Depression-era trilogy *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), and *Meet John Doe* (1941), white male protagonists epitomize an American ideology of individualism, social responsibility, and democratic ideals. Capra himself emphatically wanted to leave his
immigrant roots behind. After visiting Italy in 1977, he remarked, “Who the hell cares where you were born? . . . You know that colored guy? That *Roots* thing? He’s full of shit. I hate the word roots, people are so proud of their roots it’s sickening.” Thus, regardless of whether they have embraced it, white ethnic immigrant filmmakers and producers have lived proto-“nation of immigrants” narratives by successfully producing American culture, and in their respective media productions, they have not only reflected but also formulated what counted as American culture.

Other scholars have focused on media as a means for assimilation. Historians have shown that in the early twentieth century, film often helped immigrants acclimate by exposing them to the norms of daily life and showing them how to navigate their liminal position between two cultures, while literary scholars such as Werner Sollors have showed how literature and especially works by immigrant authors have had similar results. The idea of pop culture as an agent of assimilation and negotiation was taken up in some 1980s media such as the sitcom *Perfect Strangers*. Balki (Bronson Pinchot), a white ethnic immigrant who arrives on the Chicago doorstep of his unsuspecting distant cousin, carries knowledge of America based entirely on popular culture. He often flubs his references and their meanings, providing comic relief. For example, Balki expresses admiration of his new country by enthusiastically proclaiming it, “America, home of the Whopper,” a mash-up of a Burger King slogan and a line from the national anthem.

Pop culture has also introduced the plight of immigrants to American spectators, and pop cultural texts have critiqued xenophobia and racism. The alternative to *Scarface* came in films such as *El Norte* (1983) and *Born in East L.A.* (1987). The former, a drama directed by Gregory Nava, follows the arduous undocumented migration of two indigenous Guatemalan youths. Seeking relief from ethnic and political persecution during the Guatemalan Civil War, the two are sympathetically depicted as seekers of the freedom that, true to the neoliberal narrative of ascendance, only America can offer. The latter, a comedy directed by and starring Cheech Marin, of Cheech & Chong stoner film fame, follows the repeated attempts of Rudy, a Chicano citizen, to return to his home in East L.A. after being mistaken for an undocumented Mexican and deported. The film’s title, an intentional nod to Bruce Springsteen’s “Born in the U.S.A.,” likewise critiques America—in this case, by showing through comedic satire how Mexican men are unfairly treated as aliens, regardless of citizenship status. These two films are not enduring cultural icons like *Scarface*, but such films do humanize Latin American immigrants and Latinas/os and indicate that the “immigration emergency”—and the dominant “nation of immigrants” narrative—is only part of the story of neoliberalizing America.
Finally, Rubin and Melnick also chronicle how immigrant culture(s) that were imported along with immigrants, as well as those that were formed in the United States when immigrants encountered American culture (such as Zoot Suits among young male Latinos in the 1940s and the development of Jamaican reggae in the South Bronx in the 1970s) have imprinted American culture. Immigrants continue to remake American culture, as indicated by the Latinization of American pop culture in the 1990s. Thus, in any analysis of immigration in the self-proclaimed “nation of immigrants”—especially in the 1980s, when media became integral to daily life—it is necessary to look at popular culture: without it, the picture is incomplete.

My second primary theoretical approach is intersectionality. I follow woman of color feminists’ use of intersectionality in order to understand the intertwined and overlapping construction of gender and other components of subjectivity such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, body size, and nationality, which collectively place individuals in differing positions of power and privilege, oppression and violence. Black feminist legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw, an early proponent of intersectional analysis in legal studies, interrogated the Anita Hill–Clarence Thomas controversy to demonstrate that “the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and to show how these discourses tend not to be represented within either feminist or antiracist efforts.” As Crenshaw shows, caught between the dominant trope of rape advanced by feminists and the dominant trope of lynching advanced by Thomas’s antiracist supporters, the respective race and gender dimensions of Hill’s experience were erased. Queer feminists of color have also employed intersectionality to account for erasures that follow when a universal understanding of “woman” or a particular race is the starting point for progressive scholarship and theory. Here, This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color was path-breaking. Concerned with the erasure of women of color and especially queer women of color in feminism, as well as the invisibility of women in race studies, the 1981 anthology bridged a gap between feminist studies and race studies by considering intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class in their historical specificity.

Similarly, Latina/o Studies scholarship focuses on the intersectional and specific dimensions of Latina/o experiences. While mine is a comparative racialization project that brings into dialogue Latina/o Studies, Whiteness Studies, and Asian American Studies scholarship, the work of Latina/o Studies scholars such as Elena Garcia, Gina M. Perez, Cecilia Menjivar, Alicia Schmidt Camacho, Rosa Linda Fregoso, Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Patricia Zavella, Arlene Davila, Maria de los Angeles Torres, and Cristina Maria
Garcia, to name only a few, and of scholars of Latinas/os and media, such as Angharad Valdivia, Isabela Molina-Guzman, Leo Chavez, Hector Amaya, and Otto Santa Ana, is vital to analysis of 1980s immigration discourses and thereby foregrounded in my work as well. My comparative approach also contributes to this body of scholarship by showing that several connected gendered racial projects—particularly the politics of comparison between white ethnics and Latinas/os—made immigration key to U.S. neoliberalism.

My method of inquiry, informed by Cultural Studies/Media Studies scholarship and intersectionality, is discourse analysis and the production of authoritative accounts; these necessitate examining “the social practices both in which that production is embedded and which it itself produces.”117 Gillian Rose’s approach includes Discourse Analysis I (DAI) and Discourse Analysis II (DAII). DAI interrogates modes of talk and text, and DAII interrogates the social and historical context of texts. Following Rose, I examine the rhetorical and visual structure of tropes in specific legal and media texts, analyzing “how a particular discourse describes things . . . in how it constructs blame and responsibility, in how it constructs accountability, in how it characterizes and particularizes.”118 Additionally, I interrogate “the cultural significance, social practices, and power relations” in which discourses are embedded.119

More specifically, I focus on the major tropes of immigration, valuation, and devaluation, inaugurated in the early 1980s under the two broad categories of “nation of immigrants” discourse and “immigrant emergency” discourse, and analyze them dialectically. Using DAI, I examine the specific language and imagery used in laws and law-making processes to value and devalue immigrants. For instance, following the work of scholars such as Teun A. van Dijk, who argue that the way that lawmakers talk about immigration and civil rights can powerfully contribute to negative views of minorities,120 I ask, how were value and threat defined, implied, negotiated, particularly in terms of gender and race? In direct dialogue with the language of law and law-making processes, I examine popular121 television shows, films, commercials, and news media that feature immigrants or immigration themes.122 I consider a text’s topic, along with its narrative and visual structure, in relation to its form and format. How are characters linguistically and visually coded as immigrants, citizens, “illegal aliens”? If the story or text is not directly “about” immigration, how is an immigration story signified? Are different narratives told/shown about the value of immigration in relation to the “nation of immigrants”/”immigrant emergency” themes? I also interrogate texts’ production. With DAII, I link close analysis of language and imagery with power relations to uncover why texts mobilize discourses of immigrant de/valuation around gender and race.
In sum, the different threads of immigration discourse I bring together, and the unevenness of the connections between legal shifts and popular culture (and the unevenness of neoliberalism itself) in the context of the United States in the late twentieth century necessitates my interdisciplinary Cultural Studies methodology. Such methodology is an intellectual and political commitment to intervene in and transform concrete social conditions.

Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of the 1980 Mariel Boatlift. Media coverage was initially positive, framing President Jimmy Carter’s welcoming of Cuban refugees as an example of America’s benevolent generosity in stark contrast to the cruelty of a Communist regime. Yet when news broke that the Mariel Boatlift included refugees who had been released from Castro’s prisons and mental health facilities—and as refugee numbers grew beyond initial estimates—the media spectacle became alarmist. News media and popular culture, like Brian DePalma’s Scarface (1983), made it clear that the United States was under siege in an “immigrant emergency” that originated south of the border, manifested itself in gendered ways, and necessitated action. This chapter explores, in conversation with media, the proposed solution, the Immigration Emergency Act (IEA) of 1982, which would have given the president unilateral powers in the face of a vaguely defined “immigration emergency,” and situates these developments in immigration history.

Chapter 2 opens with discussion of The Perez Family (1990), a romantic comedy film about a group of Mariel refugees who pretend to be a family to increase their chance of remaining in the United States. I then turn to family reunification in the early debates around IRCA. While family reunification has been the primary focus of immigration policy since 1965, in the context of the “immigrant emergency,” some lawmakers viewed Asian and Latin American immigrant families as threats to American “family values” and the economy. I trace backlash against second-wave feminism as it arose in “family values” rhetoric. Crucial to this facet of neoliberal cultural politics are the sympathetic representations of white ethnic immigrant families and the other dominant trope of neoliberal crossings, the “nation of immigrants” narrative, which I trace in television shows such as Perfect Strangers and The Golden Girls. Both represented white ethnic immigrants as industrious additions to the nation who overcame poverty with nothing but hard work—that is, according to the typical liberal narrative. Such families were sometimes queer in that they were comprised of a single gender, or were non-nuclear, thereby subverting “family values” in some ways. At the same time these families, which I characterize as “near queer” (if “queer” is understood to mean fluid, progressive, transgressive politics of gender, sexuality, and other intersecting modes of subjectivity and identity), adhered to norms of the white ethnic
bootstrap narrative that privileged hard work and heterosexual romantic relationships and tended to erase or gloss over both the racial politics affecting Asians and Latin Americans and the global forces underscoring immigration. As such, near queer families reflected and created a flexible neoliberal narrative of “personal responsibility” that only seemed progressive.

Chapter 3 begins with a discussion of the framing of the Statue of Liberty as the “mother of exiles” during the 1986 centennial celebration of “Liberty Weekend,” as a striking example of Reaganite appropriation of multiculturalism. This chapter intervenes in and develops the rich body of leftist feminist scholarship on welfare: I show that that Reagan-era immigration discourse was crucial to the establishment of a neoliberal welfare regime. IRCA welfare cuts and later laws that elaborated upon its precedent minimized the social and economic costs of Latin American and especially Mexican-origin immigrants’ reproduction and family formation while exploiting their labor. Pathologizing Latin American immigrant and Latina mothering was at the center of this neoliberal project, as was a politics of comparison. American popular culture delineated a hierarchy of maternity. While films like *Lonestar*, *Mi Familia*, and *Real Women Have Curves* featured condemnatory portrayals of Latina mothering (and such portrayals proliferated in news media), often blatantly imperfect white ethnic immigrant mothers were idealized in shows such as *The Golden Girls*. While representations of Asian immigrants are more difficult to find, films like *Joy Luck Club* exoticized Asian mothers, placing them between white ethnic and Latin American immigrant and Latina mothers and thereby engaging the “model minority” discourse that rationalized the erosion of the welfare state, while bolstering the ostensible inclusivity of the “nation of immigrants” trope. I argue that language and policy about welfare inaugurated in the IRCA debates and in racially coded media representations of immigrant mothers established the paradigm for welfare discourse that was realized in two bastions of neoliberal welfare policy: California’s Proposition 187 of 1994 and the U.S. Congress’s Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996.

Beginning Chapter 4 with analysis of the Genesis song and video for “Illegal Alien,” I show how and why Latin American immigrants and Latinas/os were criminalized in media, policy debates, and law, particularly given the simultaneous expansion of the prison-industrial system. The 1983 song, with its refrain of “It’s no fun / Being an illegal alien,” was supposedly a light satire about the struggles of undocumented immigrants that actually played up every extant stereotype of Mexicans. At the same time, romanticized Italian American mafia families in films like *The Godfather* trilogy and *Goodfellas* provided a sharp contrast to media alarm—the continuation of the “immi-
grant emergency”—over unmarried Latino gangbangers in films like *Colors* and *Fort Apache, the Bronx*. This was largely accomplished by portraying Latina/o family and gender arrangements as dysfunctional deviations from “family values,” which contrasted the romanticization of the white ethnic crime family. Meanwhile, in martial arts films like *Shanghai Noon* and the *Rush Hour* series that made Asians more visible in pop culture, Asian men were cast as exotic and often family-less crime fighters and thus again occupied a place between Latin American immigrants and Latinas/os and white ethnics. Focusing on increased border control and punitive immigration law that functioned increasingly like criminal law, as well as on racialized tropes of immigrant criminals in media, I assert that racially disparate discourses of immigrants and crime produced, justified, and negotiated racist and sexist social relations for neoliberalizing America.

Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of Jennifer Lopez’s buttocks—a memorable symbol of the explosion of Latina/o pop culture in the 1990s—and there I link the celebration of Latina/o culture and especially Latina bodies to democratic rhetoric surrounding IRCA’s amnesty program and show how they erased the material realities of immigration, sexism, and racism. Nuyorican (New York–born, of Puerto Rican descent) Lopez is not an immigrant (nor were many of the most prominent stars), yet she and other Latina/o stars were rhetorically framed as immigrants in the media in a celebratory manner. Two seemingly contradictory strains of “nation of immigrants” discourse affectively (and thus effectively) portrayed America as the globally exceptional guarantor of democratic rights and equal access to economic mobility. Both race-neutral immigrants and explicitly racialized immigrants who succeed based on hard work were regarded as quintessentially American. With the former strain, “overlooking” race and gender was cast as multicultural and feminist; with the latter, tokens of diversity like Lopez embodied American inclusivity. This neoliberal elaboration on the prototypical immigrant bootstrap story suggests that anyone—specifically, a Latina woman—can be successful if she takes personal responsibility and works hard enough . . . and is sufficiently curvaceous. Much like amnesty, the Latinization of popular culture was steeped in language of enfranchisement. Yet immigrant laborers continued to be exploited, Mexican Americans continued to be disproportionately poor, women were excluded from the amnesty program, the celebration of Latina stars’ curves was inseparable from the colonial history of articulating racial difference through the hypersexualization of women, Latina/o stars were rhetorically framed as immigrants—that is, foreigners or outsiders—and gendered anti–Latin American immigrant sentiment increased. And of course the only valuable immigrant was one who took per-
sonal responsibility for him- or herself. I argue that with a cosmetic rather than redistributive equality, both “nation of immigrants” strains powerfully masked the exploitation and violence that are constitutive of neoliberalism.

The concluding chapter begins with a discussion of the creative, professional, and advocacy work of Junot Diaz. I then examine the legacy of Reaganite neoliberal crossings and their more recent iterations. I consider white ethnic female pop artists like Gwen Stefani and Lady Gaga, who have continued Madonna’s tradition of negotiating racial, gender, and sexual social norms, and establish the ongoing significance of the paradigms inaugurated in the late twentieth century: President George W. Bush’s lobby for an amnesty/guest-worker program based on the IRCA model in the midst of post-9/11 restrictions on immigration and civil liberties, Obama administration struggles for immigration reform in relation to labor and terrorism, and overtly racist laws such as Arizona’s SB 1070. These collectively show that the issues underscoring Reagan-era immigration have not been resolved, nor have the major tropes been entirely abandoned even as the “War on Terror” following 9/11 altered immigration discourse. Identifying continuities in legislation and media, I aver that nation-based rights are worthless under neoliberalism, given that the system and immigration itself is by definition transnational and unequal, and I make a case for queering immigrant rights in law and culture to obviate the lingering hegemony of de/valuing immigrants on the basis of personal responsibility, hard work, and adherence to conventional gender and sex roles. That is, I make a case for rejecting the paradigm of neoliberal crossings.

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Curtis Marez observed that “migration is not a marginal, temporary feature of life in the U.S. but rather a permanent part of it.”\textsuperscript{125} Along similar lines, Chicana poet and novelist Ana Castillo noted, “From the beginning of time, the human being, just like all nature, has migrated to where it could survive. Trying to stop it means one thing only for the species: death.”\textsuperscript{126} The necessity of migration is also a structural feature of neoliberal projects: both immigration and neoliberalism are by definition transnational. Hannah Arendt famously stated, “Sovereignty is nowhere more absolute than in matters of emigration, naturalization, nationality, and expulsion.”\textsuperscript{127} Taken from \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}, which examined Nazism and Stalinism as emblematic cases of governance systems that attempted to control every aspect of public and private life, this statement suggests that immigrants are especially vulnerable to totalitarian exercises of power: they are liminal in a system in which nations grant rights. Arendt wrote prior to the coherence
of neoliberalism, but her statement is nonetheless salient: neoliberal projects coerce migration in ways that are always already exploitative and sometimes even deadly, because immigrants lack rights in a system that profits from their surplus labor. Moreover, differential gendered racialization through immigration discourses guarantees that certain groups remain marginal even when rights are granted, and even among native-born citizens. But such sinister aspects are difficult to recognize when Madonna’s dance moves, Sophia’s Petrillo’s quips, and J-Lo’s curves made immigration seem fun, cool, sexy, and empowering, whether through seemingly accessible feminine agency and/or upward mobility. And on the other end of the spectrum, when films like Scarface and Mi Vida Loca made immigration seem like a frightening emergency, restriction and punitive measures make sense. Thoroughly understanding U.S. immigration in the period in which nation crossings became neoliberal necessitates analyzing the variety and ubiquity of immigration discourses. Only by comprehending how the discourse of an “immigration emergency” has been used—and veiled and justified by “nation of immigrants” discourse, from the congressional floor to the Billboard Top 10—is there a chance of fostering a truly democratic project that puts immigrants’ human rights at the center of immigration politics.