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Continuities and Ruptures

The Gender of Latinidad

> *...the gendered subject of globalization, far from being self-evident or transparent as often assumed, has to be situated within shifting formations of power.*
>
> (Hegde 2011, p. 1)

> *When I started, I was labeled "exotic." That was it. It was like you had to be mysterious and sexual. Back in the day if you were Latina it was always a stereotype. They couldn't write you as a normal person in the world. [Director] Robert Rodriguez was kinda the first person who made Latinos commercial in his movies, like in the Spy Kids franchise. And then Jennifer Lopez and Salma Hayek [helped pave the way]. It was tough in the beginning.*
>
> (Jessica Alba, quoted by Brown 2018, p. 93)

In this millennial rewriting of Latina/o media history, Jessica Alba, a 37-year-old Latina mogul, takes us back to Robert Rodriguez's success story, begun in 1991, and Jennifer Lopez's *Fly Girl* days in 1992 – or perhaps to her major starring role in *Selena*, in 1997. Salma Hayek also crossed over to Hollywood from Mexico in 1991 but did not achieve a major role until she landed a part in Robert Rodriguez's *Desperado* (1995). Alba nails a historically significant period of Latina/o popular culture ascendance in which Latina/os functioned in particular roles but managed to rupture stereotypes and achieve lasting inclusion in the entertainment industry. All of those mentioned by Alba remain in the spotlight today: Robert Rodriguez, Jennifer Lopez, and Salma Hayek have not disappeared. Indeed, their careers are solid, their legacy secure. Jessica Alba herself continues to have success as a cover girl and neoliberal entrepreneur, creator and owner of the billion-dollar Honest Company, selling organic and environmentally sustainable baby and beauty products. All of these prominent popular culture Latina/os have a broad range of provenances and function in relation to one another and to other ethnicities within a national and global terrain of mainstream media. None of them are pure, nor do they resemble

The Gender of Latinidad: Uses and Abuses of Hybridity, First Edition. Angharad N. Valdivia.

one another. Yet, they represent mainstream Latinidad. Their varied careers, geographical and professional roots, and visibility speak to the gender of Latinidad in contemporary mainstream media.

One undeniably enduring component of any politics of inclusion continues to be mainstream media – whether legacy, digital, or thoroughly converged – as this serves to circulate narratives with embedded ideologies to a wide swath of the population. So-called "minority" populations deserve presence, respect, and dignity in the mainstream because they/we are part of the mainstream, and expectations that apply to mainstream presence go to the core of citizenship issues (Amaya 2013; Casillas 2014). This book focuses on Latinidad as a broad multiplicitous and diverse category of ethnicity that is pan-national, multi-ethnic, intersectional, and transnational. Latinidad is a flexible and unstable hybrid construct whose mediated presence remains salient in the new millennium and indexes broader currents of population mixtures, resulting demands, and backlashes from and through the mainstream, which both construct and are constructed by the cultural struggle identified so long ago by Gramsci, amended by Bauman, and articulated to media by Shohat and Stam (1995).

Thoroughly grounded in a set of analytical frameworks derived from the intersection of Media and Cultural Studies, Gender Studies, and Latina/o Studies, as a form of Ethnic Studies, *The Gender of Latinidad* explores the tension between the politically necessary strategic essentialism that identity categories rely on to make demands upon the state and the impossibility or untenability of maintaining these categories as discrete and easily identifiable – the conundrum of authenticity. Moreover, *The Gender of Latinidad* explores this tension as it is played out through the bodies of and cultural forms signifying girls and women. Given the growing institutionalization of Latina/o Studies as a pan-ethnic construct, this project sets out to contribute to an extension of existing paradigms.[1] As a way to understand the increased acknowledgment of the heterogeneous complexity of Latina/o populations, industries, and cultural forms, *The Gender of Latinidad* draws extensively on hybridity and mixed race as essential, recurring, and unifying concepts for understanding the contemporary situation of ethnicity and the media. Given that the Latina/o population and Latina/o popular culture encompass a wide range of origins – perhaps running the gamut of origin possibilities – *The Gender of Latinidad* maintains a tension between identifying and acknowledging Latinidad, allowing or erasing its multiplicity, and identifying its spillage into other ethnic categories or markers. Ultimately, this book explores the tension between the top-down efforts by media industries to market ethnicity and the bottom-up pressures and efforts to gain employment, expand visibility, and transform the mainstream. What are some of the current degrees of freedom? Rules of engagement? Who benefits within Latinidad? The material conditions that segregate racialized communities and generate bottom-up community pride formation, as well as strategies for inclusion in the body politic and in mainstream culture,

coexist with efforts to exploit newly created niche audiences for the purposes of increasing profit. Latina/os draw on symbolic resources to maintain an identity and draw from a shared history even as their massive mobility and mixture generate a hybrid culture. Mainstream media industries draw on an archive and an overflow of talent and creativity from ethnicized populations to pick and choose what fits best with their vision of "multiculturalism." Latina/os must disrupt and provide their vision, which itself is contested due to their heterogeneity.

The year is 2019. In the past 5 years, Latina/os have been highly visible in a range of mainstream television programs, post-network digital offerings, and feature-length films, such as *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009–19), *Jane the Virgin* (CW, 2014–19), *Narcos* (Netflix, 2015–), *East Los High* (Hulu, 2013–17), *Coco* (Disney, 2017), *One Day at a Time* (Netflix, 2017–19), and *Beatriz at Dinner* (Killer Films/Bron Studios, 2017). Latina/os are present on the screen, behind the screen, and as audiences. As we explore and analyze visibility through presence, production, and interpretation, we need to consider the demands for visibility as a complex process and dynamic that encompasses the trifecta of media studies – production, content, and representation – in relation to issues of cultural citizenship, the inescapable hybridity that works against the fantasy of authenticity, and the implicit utopia that is both never articulated and always beyond the possible. As Latina/o Media Studies ascends into a field of its own, in relation to a number of interdisciplinary projects, it also experiences the limits and possibilities of expansion, dilution, and acknowledged hybridity. It was much easier for hegemonic forces to produce mainstream popular culture and proceed when a simplified purity and imposed homogeneity prevailed as dominant discourses. From a mostly white mainstream, to a Derridean juxtaposition of white and black bodies and narratives, to the inclusion of the homogenized bronze[2] race, to the suggestion of AfroLatinidad, the presence of Latina/os disrupts easy narratives of the US national imaginary. Moreover, because the United States has been an imperial power and thus US media conglomerates function across a global terrain, these narratives circulate transnationally. Thus, the visibility of US Latina/os has global implications, though these remain to be extensively researched.

Latina/os unsettle the US racial binary arrangement. Latina/o internal diversity poses many challenges to strategies for inclusion. We can no longer pretend that Latina/os are a pure group – the "bronze" race – nor that Latina/os remain within Latinidad, in terms of culture, reproduction, and geographic mobility. Latina/os fan out globally (both racially and geographically), sample and mix culture globally, and reproduce across ethnic, national, and cultural groups. In sum, Latina/os are inescapably hybrid, and any analysis of visibility or activism through media must take this mixture and hybridity into account. Latina/os lead hybrid lives, consume a hybrid diet of hybrid media, and deserve to be treated in relation to their hybridity. While this book focuses on gendered

Latinidad in contemporary mainstream media, a hybrid analysis can be made for all other ethno-racial groups (e.g. Washington, 2017b). Issues of mixed race and hybridity apply across the racial spectrum. Nonetheless, mixed-race studies and postracial studies still cohere around transnational feminist studies, which in many ways precede all of these areas in providing a bridge between nation and transnation, ethnicity and mixed race, and gender and transgender. The concept of hybridity connects Latina/o Studies to Feminist Media Studies, as it connects Media Studies to Ethnic Studies.

Whether we are looking at the academic location, salience, and influence of Latina Feminist Media Studies or at the media and public discourse inclusion of Latinidad as a gendered construct, with enduring narrative tropes assigned to a binary gendered terrain, there is undeniable presence. The objective of this book is to explore contemporary strategies for gendered visibility in a range of mainstream forms of popular culture. The prism of the female body, drawing on extensive gender scholarship, is chosen precisely because, historically, the female body has been used to carry out national identity struggles and struggles over the belonging of the ethnic subject. For example, López (1991) documents the Hollywood representation of Latin American women, and by extension US Latinas, as a double threat – sexual and racial – to the dominant popular culture and, by implication, the nation. The threat represented by Latinas is likely to be overrepresented across a range of discourses, from the oversignified freeway signs foregrounding the female gendered border crossers, discussed by Ruiz (2002) and now fronting a popular T-shirt in Southern California, to the development and wildly successful marketing of ambiguously ethnic doll brands such as Bratz and Flavas (Valdivia 2004a, 2005a, b, c).

Latina/os are part of the population, part of the electorate, part of business, part of media industries and representation, and part of the cultural fiber of the United States. Latina/o culture is a core component of the United States – whether in terms of food, as in the recent taco truck moment or the more dated salsa over ketchup historical marker; of music, with all the Latina/o-influenced genres that circulate and hybridize in the United States, such as samba, salsa, merengue, reggaeton, and hip hop; or of literature, with major authors such as Sandra Cisneros, Junot Diaz, and Isabel Allende and entire subgenres such as "chica lit." Musicians like Marc Anthony, Daddy Yankee, Juan Gabriel (recently deceased), Los Tigres del Norte, and Enrique Iglesias demonstrate the "hotness" of Latinidad. In fact, if we google "Top Latin Hits," Billboard rewards us with a website entitled "Hot Latin Songs." Rather differently, but still alluding to the hotness of Latinas, the cover of the *Latino Media Gap* has a spotlight on a faceless yet light-brown "cartel gunman #2," a dark-brown "Officer Martinez," and a light-brown "Latina with hot accent" (in a short yellow bodycon spaghetti-strap dress) (Negrón-Muntaner et al. 2014). All of these Latina/o icons reiterate the trope assigned to Latina/os and our culture: a dangerous masculinity and an exotic and sexualized female othering

that continues unabated within the mainstream, and which scholars find in their research about Latina/os and the mainstream media.

In 2019, the presence, significance, and popularity of social and digital media is inescapable and undeniable. As with previous media, original "common wisdom" about Latina/o absence or indifference is not borne out by research. Whereas it was once thought that Latina/os did not read mainstream media, Selena's death news repeatedly selling out *People* magazine issues led to *People en Español* – a weird response, given that the issues Latina/os were purchasing were written in English. Research continues to deliver the findings that there are millions of Latina/os who consume English-language media (e.g. Chavez 2015). A report by Pew Research (Flores and Lopez 2018) reveals that for US Latina/os, the internet rivals legacy television as a source of news. That study reiterates that radio remains an important source of information for Latina/os. Latina/os appear in and consume media across the spectrum.

In presence and erasure, Latina/os stand in for the imagined nation. They/we track the interstices and struggles of the contemporary identity crisis that face the United States, which formerly thought of itself as homogenously white or binary in composition (i.e. black and white). The rather recent and reluctant public acknowledgment that Latina/os are a numerically and culturally significant part of the United States documents the fact that from its very beginning, the country was anything but homogeneous. Prior to the relentless settler colonialism enacted since the 17th century, native populations were numerous and heterogeneous. Involuntary waves of slaves and "voluntary"[3] waves of immigrants from every region of the globe have continued to expand the heterogeneity of the US population. Maintaining a predominantly white mainstream media has taken an enormous amount of exclusionary labor. Given that a huge chunk of the continental United States was Mexico until 1848, and that border crossings were not considered as such – that is, they were not named, articulated, and regulated – the flow of Latin Americans into and out of the US national space was fluid. The presence of what is now known as the US Latina/o[4] dates back to the birth of the US nation, and even before. Waves of slaves and migrants from Africa and the other continents further complicated the homogeneous fiction assiduously circulated by the mainstream – a fiction that had to be sustained, as all political fictions do, through unequal power arrangements. Present and culturally productive US Latina/os have been excluded – an active process. Resistance to demands, refusal to employ, insistence on rehashing old genres and tropes, all form part of the conscious labor of exclusion – that is, the active construction of a fictitious homogeneity.

The institutional level of analysis rests above the organizational layer, wherein, at the site of production of media, decisions and routines serve to perpetuate existing arrangements. In a capitalist economy – or, rather, in a capitalist global system – the search for profits reigns supreme. From an industrial perspective, the inexorable search for increased profits must include an

effort to discover new audiences, beyond the mass audiences that had previously been conceptualized as white. Looking for audience niches involves the tricky task of not alienating the dominant white audience. The search for new audiences in the 21st century reaches out to previously ignored segments such as women, working-class people, nonheteronormative people, and people of color. The tension between identifying these "niches" to begin with and moving to the realization that niches are not mutually exclusive, within or without Latinidad, is a rather big lesson for an industry that remains mired in whiteness or with a binary black and white representational terrain and audience conceptualization. Latinas are part of all these targeted audiences, and their/our hybridity makes us as desirable as we are slippery, in terms of being difficult to peg down concerning our presence, predilections, affect, and attention. Moreover, our belonging within multiple Latinidades (Báez 2007) and across ethnicities and races further muddles efforts to track us, to include us, certainly to coopt us, and totally to market to us.

The complexity of Latinidad derives from and informs the global circulation of mainstream media. Narratives and situations must be produced with acknowledgment of global flows and diversity. This is not an altruistic enterprise. Rather, from an industrial perspective, a global sensitivity potentially increases audiences, and therefore profits. If done well, frontloading the global possibilities can pay abundant dividends, not only for a particular media vehicle, but also for many more products in a franchise, for a particular company, genre, or actor (Meehan 2005). Indeed, given the synergy deployed by the major media conglomerates, initial global attention is the crack in the door through which massive investments will hopefully yield consistent, long-term returns. Economic figures support this global move. Traditionally, in the network era, US mainstream producers of television shows recouped a large portion of their production costs with the large US audience. Global circulation of these media vehicles, leading to multiple syndications, was merely the icing on the cake of a very profitable national distribution model. In the contemporary post-network era, when conglomerates release their films simultaneously across a range of countries, or parse out releases to coincide with national holidays, the global is no longer the afterthought but the very core of a distribution strategy. In fact, film production has experienced a flip of its 80/20 budget model – that is, whereas through the 1980s, Hollywood film planned to recoup 80% of its investment with domestic audiences, nowadays the aim is for 80% to come from global audiences. Another facet of media industry expansion alongside Latina/o exclusions is that mergers of Latina/o-targeting media do not include Latina/os in the process. No apparent upward mobility from entry-level to executive ranks in the merged top brass exists for Latina/os working in Latina/o-targeted media industries. Workers from the Latina/o or Spanish-language side do not move to the merged English company. Negrón-Muntaner and Abbas (2016) found that Latina/o media underemployment is actually accelerated by media market consolidation.

The large sums that it takes to greenlight a Hollywood blockbuster, such as the now ubiquitous superhero movie, apparently have caused Latina/os nearly to disappear from our screens when such movies are shown. This generates an internal contradiction, in that big-budget movies apparently prefer a racialized binary, but these movies are supposed to appeal to a global population whose composition is much more complex than black and white. Indeed, the global majority is "brown," even as Hollywood film remains either uninformed or resistant to this fact (Silva 2016). Music, digital gaming, advertising campaigns, and pornography all include Latina/o production and representation, but the continuities are far greater than the ruptures. Today's US Latina/os continue to appear in the mainstream mostly according to stereotype, and more often in sidekick or background roles than as protagonists. However, we cannot pretend that nothing has changed. Indeed, numerical analyses show both gains and losses that run counter to linear hopes of incremental improvement (e.g. Negrón-Muntaner et al. 2014; Negrón-Muntaner and Abbas 2016).

Some of the most promising theoretical and conceptual developments for an exploration of Latinidad in mainstream media are the inclusion of hybridity (Lowe 1991; Kraidy 2006), multiracial studies (e.g. Nishime 2014), and mixed-race studies (Washington 2017b). Challenging our field to consider hybridity in conjunction with international communications, Kraidy draws on the many intellectual streams that converge in cultural production. I am informed by the mapping of the field of hybridity by Kraniauskas (2000a, b), who identifies a cultural/anthropological strain (Canclini 1995) and a more psychoanalytical literary version (Bhaba 1994), both of which circulate as globally influential versions of hybridity. Mapped over Media Studies, from where I write, this bimodality of contemporary theories of hybridity reminds me of a constructed binary within my field that had largely, but not totally, been abandoned by the late 2010s. The US academy's tendency toward binaries, as well as its rejection of paradigms that criticize structural inequalities, resulted in the 1980s in a juxtaposition between cultural studies and political economy. This fiction was difficult to sustain, as global intellectual traditions inextricably connected these two areas of study (e.g. Cardoso and Faletto 1979; Lowe 1996), and had done so for many decades (O'Connor 1991). I find that the bimodal approaches to hybridity – in literature and anthropology – inherit traces of this divide, which partly is informed by a US academy that despite statements to the contrary, has not fully embraced global intellectual perspectives (see Shome 2016). In terms of the interdiscipline Media and Cultural Studies, there is still relatively little research on Latina/os (Valdivia 2004b), and most of that which exists is medium-specific rather than broad, sweeping across the terrain of mainstream popular culture. Additionally, much – though not all – of the research on media issues is currently carried out by scholars outside of Media Studies, and often reveals a lack of familiarity with sophisticated approaches to the study of media. This project thoroughly combines Latina/o and Media

Studies, taking both interdisciplines as foundational to the study of contemporary popular culture. Moreover, it takes both the textual and the industrial seriously.

Hybridity is not a new term or concept. Though its original use in the 17th century was in a biological sense, much of the resistance to it stems precisely from its racist social applications. Hybrid agricultural plants, for example, are not only more resistant to disease but are also infertile. However, when applied to populations in the 18th century, hybridity was often "invoked by those hostile to racial difference" (Labanyi 2000, p. 56) – usually in conjunction with the term "miscegenation," which connoted unwanted and often illegal reproduction between white women and men of color. This concern was all the more intense in a historical period marked by colonial expansion, which brought many previously separate populations in contact with one another (Young 1995). Miscegenation was legally precluded in some settings so as to preserve both purity and colonial authority, but in others it was encouraged so as to improve, Westernize, and whiten the local population in a positivist quest for racial breeding. Of course, the latter strategy always simultaneously generated fears of the tipping point where the native blood, stock, and bodies would outnumber the racial purity of the white colonizer. Fears of mixing were voiced both by the colonizers and the colonized. For instance, hybridity was reviled by Octavio Paz (1959), who identified the pachuco, a young masculine Mexican American resistant subject, as an instance of depravity. For Paz, this depravity resulted from the mixing of the purity of Mexico with the pollution of the United States. Fears of the contamination, dilution, and disappearance of the pure-white subject continue today, and are central to understanding the contemporary sociopolitical situation wherein Latina/os have become the largest US minority, with some demographic projections showing us becoming the majority sometime in this century. From a Latin American perspective, Paz's sentiments toward US Latina/os have not altogether disappeared. Given that so many producers of mainstream US Latina/o media are actually Latin Americans, this historical trace is not inconsequential. As well, these fears demonstrate the endurance of a biologically and anthropologically untenable belief in purity – though, when people implicitly refer to "purity," this has to be treated as a floating signifier.

Contemporary scholars continue to contribute to this language of cultural tension, collision, mixture, erasure, and displacement. Thus, Mary Louise Pratt uses "zones of contact," Gloria Anzaldúa speaks of "nepantla," Homi Bhabha writes of "mimicry" and a "third space," and Nestor García Canclini uses "hybrid cultures." While its application to population and cultural form is undeniable, there are still many who caution against the wholesale adoption of the concept of hybridity. Foremost among their concerns is the depoliticizing potential of accepting that there is an inevitable mixture and hybridity in everything and that if everything and everyone is hybrid then there is no

theoretical validity to the term. Sommer (1991) worries that the deployment of hybridity duplicates national unity movements that seek to rewrite the violent and uneasy history of many Latin American nations. Others are concerned that concepts such as hybridity, mestizaje, syncretism, miscegenation, and assimilation are being used carelessly and interchangeably, flattening historical, geographical, and cultural specificity. Shohat warns that a "celebration of syncretism and hybridity per se, if not articulated in conjunction with questions of hegemony and neocolonial power relations, runs the risk of appearing to sanctify the *fait accompli* of colonial violence" (1991, p. 109). When coupled with a critical assessment of hegemonic relations, the concept is foremost a rejection of essentialist notions, either of gender or of ethnicity and race, as well as an acknowledgment that there is no purity to be found at the level of culture, the body, blood, or DNA.

Since Latina/os represent an instance of radical hybridity, drawing the boundaries around this ethnic group proves to be most challenging. Focusing on Latina/o television, Levine (2001), drawing on Naficy (1993), reminds us that hybridity is unstable and uncomfortable. Not only is it verifiably evident that cities are not the sites of national (let alone ethnic or class) purity – Miami is not purely Cuban American, Los Angeles is not purely Mexican American, New York is not purely Puerto Rican – but also the in-between space (the Midwest, the South, etc.) is populated by fast-growing heterogeneous Latina/o populations that are, in turn, reproducing across the ethnic and racial spectrum. Yet, a range of Latina/o Studies scholars, such as Fusco (1995) and Lugo (2000), remind us that it is far easier for cultural forms to cross borders than it is for human beings, for whom hybridity is often a wrenching lived experience. The lived experience of Latina/o bodies remains a hybrid one, full of ambivalence, tension, and pain despite celebratory and messianic messages of the joys and pressures of globalization. Whereas music, food, and style may cross borders unchecked, bodies are continuously inspected, even after legal and successful border crossings, as Latina/os remain the eternal outsiders within the US political psyche and system. Against this context, media strives to portray and reach the Latina/o audience.

Applying hybridity to US Latinidad and mainstream popular culture must rely on a combination of both versions and take up inherent tensions in locating the concept of US Latina/o within a nation while simultaneously acknowledging that Latinidad cannot be contained by national boundaries and is influenced by hybrid cultures and populations. Historically, at least as far back as the 15th century, Latin American populations were already hybrid, with a mixture of indigenous and settler colonialists, in both South and North America. Therefore, hybridity is not new to Latinidad. Indeed, hybridity may be the most authentic element of US Latina/o culture. Considerations of cultural mixing, as well as of textual hybridity, are inextricably entwined in the commodification of Latinidad. Throughout my work, I draw on the canonical

writings of Levine (2001) and Naficy (1993), who usefully outline the difference between hybridity as an unsettled and difficult-to-harness cultural mixture and syncretism, which is a manageable, fixed, and domesticated identity. All through the violent history of the Spanish in the Americas, syncretic outbursts of local populations were allowed to manage indigenous resistance to Roman Catholic imposition. An indigenous deity, for example, would remain behind the painting or sculpture of a virgin or crucifixion. Similarly, the Virgin of Guadalupe and her attendant representations combine Mexican with Spanish religious symbols, and are further infused with feminist iconography (Latorre 2008). Syncretic appropriation is an ongoing process. The effort to domesticate and fix ultimately fails, but at least it slows a tendency toward hybridity. Unsurprisingly, mainstream media industries prefer to produce easy-to-manage syncretic Latina/o material culture and to visualize Latina/o audiences as settled and fixed. Neither the production, the visualization, nor the targeting of the audience engages with the complexity of contemporary Latinidad.

Media scholars, focusing across the racial spectrum, warn us that mixed race is a reality often ignored but nonetheless quite common. For example, in *Undercover Asian*, LeiLani Nishime (2014) seeks to understand how "ideological narratives of race, sexuality, gender, and nation intersect to create or erase multiracial representation…" Kraidy (2006) reminds us of hybridity's controversial history and charges that it represents the lives of elite intellectuals more than providing a useful tool to analyze contemporary global popular culture. However, hybridity is not synonymous with cosmopolitanism, and cultural mixture is not only the province of the rich and well-traveled. To begin with, millions of people engage in involuntary mobility across regions and nations, and there is nothing elite about this forced migration. Along with migration comes hybridity – and US Latina/os, our culture, and our population bear out the mixture of culture, blood, and populations. Hybridity is not an effort to erase power from the equation of mixture and migration. Rather, a major task of media scholars is to tease out the many possibilities of hybridity in the production and consumption of media at each step, given that hybridity does not erase power differentials. Neither the temporary stability achieved by syncretism nor the fluidity of hybrid processes resolves power inequalities. Rather, the syncretic settlement can be called a truce – with the vanquished retaining some form of presence, albeit a negotiated one, as they continue to prepare for the next assault. Hybridity represents a combination of low- and high-intensity cultural conflict. It can be harnessed toward democratic and social-justice goals just as it is more often harnessed to buttress the status quo. It can, as anything else, be used against social movements and segments of the population. Just as some people can voluntarily and luxuriously shop for ethnicity (Halter 2000), others are forced to make do with what is available, to consume from limited options or with limited resources, and to engage with similarly displaced but differently rooted populations.

Thus, hybridity between cultures and populations is inescapable and undeniable, though potentially unacknowledged. Ethnic studies used to be treated as drops of oil on pools of water. African Americans, Asian Americans, Latina/os, and Native Americans were treated as coexisting yet separate groups. While historical and geographical roots differed, they sometimes overlapped. Moreover, given the segregation prevalent in the United States, minoritized groups often share less desirable living locations. As a result of this long-term process, we can begin to discern the acknowledgment of inevitable mixture. For instance, the *Latino Media Gap* (Negrón-Muntaner et al. 2014) notes the presence and incorporation of AfroLatinos as a positive trend. Concordantly, recent research on mixed race and media (Washington 2017b) explores the mixtures that challenge previous assumptions about discrete ethnicities, and expands the possible mixtures beyond white and whatever else. For example, Washington examines Blasians – black Asians. The controversy over the casting of Zoe Saldana as Nina Simone demonstrates mainstream media's tension toward African Americans and the strategic casting of Afro-Latinas (Molina-Guzmán 2013b). Despite the backlash from the African American community at having one of their heroes played by a Latina, the fact remains that Saldana is and identifies herself as a black Latina. Saldana herself is subject to an industry that prefers to cast light Latinas such as Jennifer Lopez for ethnic roles. Industry practices also continue to avoid casting African Americans, especially dark-skinned ones. So, Saldana is too dark to be Latina, and African Americans are too dark to be cast as African Americans. Here is a case that clearly illustrates the uses and abuses of hybridity. The hybrid Afro-Latina body cannot be used for Latinidad, yet it displaces the black body. Consequently, these casting practices pit ethnic communities against one another. Possible interethnic alliances are undermined by the favoring of light skin even for African American roles.

Hybridity is deployed through gendered bodies. Ideally, one of the uses of hybridity could be to reach a space beyond gender binaries. Predictably, one of the abuses is to reinforce gender binaries as natural. Ethnically hybrid characters, when they exist beyond a mere suggestion of more than one ethnicity or race, fall firmly within cisgender categories. We are firmly embedded in a gendered mainstream wherein Latinas sign for Latinidad much more so than Latinos. Latina bodies are sexualized or relegated to abnegation narratives, such as spitfires and dedicated asexual mothers. Ultimately, Latinas are much more visible than Latinos in mainstream popular culture, especially in spectacular forms (Molina-Guzmán 2010). Latinos appear more often as specters of violence and criminality within the current political administration of the United States.

In the 2016 US presidential election, the Republican party, which for decades has courted a section of the electorate that retains whiteness as a premium, generated a successful candidate who combines tendencies to simultaneously

racialize and criminalize with a reality television approach to decision making. A love of social media and Twitter rounds out his novel idea of national governance. This toxic mixture of media and narrative results in a rapidly evolving terrain of belonging, whose terms of engagement disfavor US Latina/os regardless of citizenship, race, location, and socioeconomic status. While discrimination is suffered most heavily by those with darker skin, no browned body is safe in this political climate (Silva 2016).

In a book drawing on hybridity, it must be mentioned that we cannot assume homogeneity of political conviction within Latinidad. While it's true that more Latina/os are either Democrats or Independents, there are Latina/o Republicans – especially, though not solely, a powerful and vocal Cuban-American community in Florida. Thus, it came to be that in the thick of the 2016 presidential election, amidst all of the ratings-driven TV coverage that the Republican candidate received, an unexpected supportive statement from Marco Gutierrez, founder of the group Latinos for Trump, appeared. Latinos come from a very dominant culture, he warned. If you don't watch it, you might have "taco trucks on every corner"! Gutierrez's interview with Joy Reid, broadcast on MSNBC on September 1, 2016, immediately went viral on social media and mainstream news. His statements trended for days on Facebook and Twitter, and became a favorite subject of gifs and memes. Classic and contemporary art were recruited for ironic commentary. For instance, a widely circulating visual added a taco truck to Hopper's classic painting, "Nighthawks"; another added one to Munch's "The Scream." Visualizing technologies were added to the debate: a gif showed taco trucks spreading from south of the border throughout the continental United States. The taco truck incident also became a major news item on legacy media – newspapers, television, and radio news. As well, it inspired taco trucks throughout the States to position themselves in front of or close to Trump campaign headquarters (e.g., in Denver). Mostly, people voiced a desire to have more taco trucks in their lives and neighborhoods. Some people posted that they would welcome a taco truck in every corner of their living room. Others outed Marco Gutierrez, the originator of this statement, as a real-estate scammer preying on poor Latinos (Kuns 2016).

This ironic reaction can be read as a repudiation of anti-immigration policies and support for Latina/os in general and Mexican Americans in particular. However, if we heed Coco Fusco's (1995) warning that culture has an easy border crossing whereas the bodies that produce it face stiff barriers, and combine this with a neoliberal preference for a global extraction of wealth transferred to the imperial private sector, then it makes sense that people voice support for tacos while not necessarily supporting amnesty, DACA, or any of the other policies opposed by the current administration's efforts to engage in wide-sweeping immigration reform/rollback of immigrant rights. In other words, one can be pro-tacos and anti-Mexican. President Trump has famously celebrated Cinco de Mayo by eating tacos even as he dedicates himself to

policies to restrict the rights and possibilities of US Latina/os and immigrant bodies. Cinco de Mayo itself is a stereotypical US made-up holiday marketed as a national Mexican holiday for the purposes of cultural commodification. As well, salsa surpassed ketchup as the condiment of choice in the United States over 20 years ago. Yet, public embraces of Latina/o culture have not necessarily elicited increasingly humane approaches to Latina/o immigration in the US Congress. To be sure, there is also undeniable backlash, and Mr. Trump's successful candidacy points to the political and cultural value of rhetorical attacks on Mexican Americans in particular and Latina/os in general. Actually, "Mexican" functions as a metonym for all Latina/os in a classic deployment of the flattening of difference. Mexicans serve a unifying function for a political party whose anti-immigration platform serves as its *raison d'être* in the face of irreversible population flows and the changing domestic balance of forces they generate. Mexicans serve as a rhetorical tool to attempt to reverse decades of ambivalently inclusive racial and immigration policies. The return to the mythically pure Mexican body belies the diversity and hybridity within Latinidad but yields a simple figure to be attacked in a concerted effort to return to an imagined past of racial purity. Unfortunately, some Mexicans, such as Marco Gutierrez, contribute to this misplaced hysteria.

We could engage in a slightly more gendered analysis of the taco truck incident by asking who makes up Latinos for Trump. It's hard to tell, as the website was taken down right after the "tacos on every corner" interview. Yet, it deserves to be asked: Why are Latina/o spokespeople in the news almost inevitably male? For example, in the Joy Reid segment on MSNBC, Adriano Espaillat, New York senator and former undocumented youth, represented the counterpoint to Marco Gutierrez, author of the taco comment. No Latinas were interviewed. Soledad O'Brien, one of the few major network television Latina news broadcasters, was relieved of her CNN position in 2013, and currently anchors a political commentary show on Hearst Television Network, a part of her own Starfish Media Group. Even the taco truck rhetoric presumes a male-gendered labor force. Though some of the memes included female cooks, by and large the representational terrain of the taco truck workforce was male. The fear and the discourse about Latinos continues to focus on working-class or unemployed, mostly undocumented males. The fear of rapists, clearly articulated by Trump and displaced on to non-white bodies, is about men. The attempted moral panic over lesbian farmers orchestrated by conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh (August 16, 2016), which preceded and was displaced by the taco truck fiasco, focused only on white women. In the contemporary news environment of fear of the criminal Latino body, men figure prominently and women are nearly absent. The difference with the news coverage of the epidemic of mass shootings is worth mentioning. Whereas most of the recent mass shooting in the United States have been carried out by white males, the mainstream news media seldom calls out the race and gender

characteristics of the perpetrators of this violence. On the other hand, with little evidence, both the current administration and Fox News repeatedly and continuously construct a narrative of Latino male criminality.

Latinas largely fall out of the news prism, both as news sources and as news subjects. In comparison, when it comes to celebrities, Latinas sign in as spectacular bodies, as theorized by Isabel Molina-Guzmán (2010). Spectacular Latinas in the mainstream include major figures, enduring names, and new stars. These women can carve out long-term careers that remain remarkably normative in terms of whiteness but show ruptures illustrating the presence of a hybrid and heterogeneous population whose numbers and influence continue to increase. Feminist Media Studies has long tracked the many and ingenious ways in which mainstream media genders populations, genres, and bodies as a discursive means of parsing out power, empowering some and disempowering others between and within ethnic categories. Thus, not surprisingly, we are witnessing a gendered division of Latina/o visibility in mainstream media. There is a fear of Latinos in the news and a desire for curvy Latinas in entertainment. In terms of sources of authority (news anchors and reporters), neither gender is prominent, but Latinos appear more often than Latinas.

The Gender of Latinidad addresses the contemporary situation of Latinidad, the dynamic process of signifying and performing Latina/o peoples and cultural forms, in the United States and, by implication, globally, as US popular culture is exported throughout the world. Focusing on three sites of intervention – historical and contemporary efforts by Latina actors who entered the mainstream as spitfires to construct an enduring career in entertainment; the ambiguous Latinidad constructed by Disney; and an exploration of the tensions within Latinidad about implicit and explicit utopias through the media – this book addresses Latinidad as a constant low-intensity conflict of cultural engagement, negotiation, and deferment carried out by unequally empowered forces. On the one hand are individual Latina actors, who function as representatives of labor and cultural forces, and who seek to carve out a space of presence, belonging, and, hopefully, success. Some major examples are discussed individually in Chapter 2. On the other hand is mainstream media as a whole, with its global power and resources. In particular, Chapter 3 focuses on the Walt Disney company, arguably the biggest global media conglomerate, as it engages in avowal and disavowal of Latinidad. The push and pull of forces come together in the desire for an ideal place, a utopia, whose internally contradictory contours are discussed in Chapter 4.

The book explores the concept of hybridity and applies it to the study of contemporary Latina/os. In particular, it seeks to complement documented demographic and political evidence of increased Latina/o presence with an understanding of the complex terrain of representations and narratives in the mainstream media. *The Gender of Latinidad* investigates some of the many ways that hybridity as a concept is strategically deployed in a range of

contemporary media, with strong tendencies to resolve tensions by settling for syncretism. Hybrid launches land as syncretic culture. The energy that sends hybridity off settles in a domesticated manner. Efforts to contain hybridity and to harness it toward increased profitability, the commodification of Latinidad, coexist with unruly bodies and messy categories that threaten to interfere with neatly planned advertising and marketing campaigns, as well as official government efforts to account for, regulate, and service the Latina/o segment of the population. Indeed, the ongoing debates and controversies about Census categories reveal the fissures over both the definition of Latinidad and the acknowledgment of mixed race and hybridity as a challenge to that most official of population accounting. The tendency to "snap back" – that is, to retreat to old-school ethnic categories – is great. It is always easier to rely on outdated yet neat categories than to engage in the far more difficult process of trying to understand and include heterogeneous populations whose lumping together originally occurred out of historical exigency and oppressive undemocratic goals, and not necessarily due to any empirical accuracy. Borders to the north and south of the United States effectively divided pre-existing communities in the name of unifying the nation. Despite an undeniable increase in representation of Latina/os, production and representational analysis, findings are examined in terms of the gains in visibility against the costs, displacements, and erasures generated through it. Visibility is not the only goal. The questions of whose visibility and toward what purposes overlap with hybridity, as, in representing mixed cultures and populations, decisions have to be made as to what to foreground, and *ipso facto* what to displace or leave out.

Nonetheless, Latina/os compose a statistically significant percentage of the US population: 17.6% as of 2019. Projections predict Latina/o population growth, Latina/o consumer power growth, and Latina/o media consumption growth. Historical attention to the Northeast and Southwest has transitioned to acknowledgment that Latina/os are present in every region of the country. In addition to the "flyover" zone of the Midwest (not only Chicago, but other cities and the rural area), there has been Latina/o growth in the Southeast and the Northwest. In sum, Latina/os are part of the fiber of the United States. Latina/o presence has great implications for mainstream media, which prefers the male 18–34 age group as both media and general product consumers. Latina/os are a young demographic, and that fact could have positive expenditure implications for media industries, should they choose to exploit it, in terms of sheer ratings for television and box office receipts for movies. The gendered preference of mainstream advertising rhetoric about the most desired segment of the audience implicitly undervalues women. Exploiting this gender blindspot would be a great asset to media industries, which are constantly actively seeking new "niche" audiences, and would be an opportunity for Latina audiences to assert symbolic ruptures and cultural citizenship (Molina-Guzmán 2010, 2018; Báez 2018).

Because viewership is but a point of entry into the synergistic merchandising, product placement, and tie-ins accompanying any mainstream media circulation, media produced by conglomerates derives profit from integrated global marketing and advertising campaigns. The 18–34-year-old age group has been found to devote more time to media and to have the discretionary income to purchase the products and services implied by the media that it consumes. As the *Latino Media Gap* (Negrón-Muntaner et al. 2014) documents, Latinos are overrepresented (in relation to their percentage of the population) as radio listeners, moviegoers, and social media participants. Thus, including Latina/os in general, and Latinas in particular in the production of media, in their representation and narratives, and in their target audiences seems like a win–win proposition. That this strategy is not being widely deployed once again illustrates that media production is not always about the bottom line but implicitly derives from ethnic and gendered omissions.

The Gender of Latinidad investigates specific representational strategies used in mainstream popular culture that differ, sometimes drastically, from previous efforts to account for and to reach ethnically diverse populations. Drawing on a wealth of research (Molina-Guzmán and Valdivia 2004; Valdivia 2004a, b, 2005a, b, c; Harewood and Valdivia 2005; Calafell 2008; Moreman 2008; Molina-Guzmán 2010; Cepeda 2015, etc.), the book seeks to map the deployment of particular ways of representing the "radical and dynamic relationality" resulting from population and cultural mobility (forced and voluntary). As Shohat (1991) has so brilliantly noted, ethnicities only make sense in relation to other ethnicities, and this is all the more true in the contemporary global situation. Ethnicities are discursive, in that they are deployments of power. They are not natural, as a brief tour of what constitutes Latina/o or blackness in separate nations will reveal. There is no such thing as an absolute ethnic identity or position. Ethnic positions shift across time and space. There is no such thing as a particular skin color – for, the very fact of identifying and naming a skin color results from a political, historical, and cultural context.[5] In the contemporary US moment, Latinas, for example, make sense in relation to whiteness and blackness. They/we occupy an in-between location, regardless of our heterogeneity. Despite the fact that some Latinas are Afro-Latinas, others are China-Latinas,[6] and so on, we have been coded, for cultural purposes, as light-brown Latinas. Our hybridity is erased in favor of that very useful in-between location that serves many purposes at once. Light-brown Latinas provide the US mainstream with a rationale of inclusivity. They can say, "hey, look, we are diverse." This inclusion often displaces blackness, because why stop at that in-between, why not just redraw the spectrum to white and light brown? It also excludes many if not most Latinas, as it displaces blackness and foregrounds whiteness as normative (Shuggart 2007). It coexists uneasily with other ethnicities, such as Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Arab

Americans, whose skin color and ethnicization also place them between the white and black poles that rule the United States' racial spectrum.

Within US history, and really anywhere else in the world, ethnicization as a project has served not only to categorize but also to segregate. Government and marketing efforts to control and profit from this ethnic relationality coexist with ethnic populations' efforts to gain rights and access to democratic processes – including education – as well as their political and cultural representation, ranging from political elections – both as voters and as candidates – to mediated representations – both behind and in front of the camera. The slow quantitative increase in the representation of Latinas and the qualitative change of these representations of Latinidad bear witness to the resilience of ethnic narratives of purity and binary fantasies. Both of these tactics are so entrenched that they function as default. To try anything else means going against the stream. The force of this ideological marginalization and erasure ensures their survival, despite the fact that quite possibly it would be more profitable to leave them behind. The mainstream is not very open to change, even if it promises increased profit. Latinas provide a malleable signifier of difference that at once tames the unruliness of hybridity through desirable sexualized images and provides close to a *tabula rasa* of ethnic signification for government and business purposes. In the simplest of formulations, Latinas provide an in-between space of representation for a nation that until recently thought of itself as black and white. The recurring and unavoidable reminders of a far more complex and violent history, culture, and population – that is, the inescapable heterogeneity within Latinidad and within the US population – renders such simplicity unstable and untenable. Yet, hybridity bites back. Returning the look or focus to the mainstream with the complexity of that in-between space, Latinas talk and push back (Báez 2018). Ethnically diverse Latinas can use the foregrounding of ambiguity to complicate previously binary US national imaginary. Industry and audiences understand that ambiguity simultaneously displaces, and sometimes replaces, the darker, usually black, subject (see also Molina-Guzmán 2005). Throughout the research on the subject, the attention to global circulation and hybridity has been constant. Latina/os come from everywhere and fan out everywhere – in unexpected paths. What are we to make of the Latin Americans who migrate to Europe – either Spain or the United Kingdom – and later come to the States as European citizens (Retis, 2014)? My ongoing interest in hybridity and mixed race, as a rejection of purity and an indicator or Latina/os and Latinidad, takes me back to the mainstream, a hybrid space that attempts to assert purity through contradiction and erasure – a process whose failure is yet another indication of the identity crisis facing the United States as a nation and transmitted globally through transnational conglomerate media industries.

The uses and abuses of representing ethnicities as hybrid have both potential for liberation and an expanded public sphere but also the danger of subsuming

all difference into a flat ambiguous otherness for the sake of commodification and transnational profit. Therein lies the rub, in terms of production and activism. Producers within the mainstream and activists trying to make demands upon mainstream media industries engage in unequally empowered bargaining and negotiations. Demands for richer and more textured narratives are met with resistance and outright avoidance. Industry executives claim that the profit motive guides development, and as such it makes little sense to alienate a large segment of the audience. Even when production of a television show including a range of Latinas somehow comes to be, the perceived tensions between mainstream (read: white) and Latina (read: brown) audiences appear to producers as a liability rather than a possibility. Exploring the production of *Devious Maids* as a more Latina version of *Desperate Housewives*, Báez (2015) concluded: "Ultimately, in trying to simultaneously appeal to a broader female audience *and* a narrow Latina/o audience segment, *Devious Maids* illustrates the difficulties cable networks like Lifetime experience in trying to diversify programming that will attract highly segmented audiences, while also maintaining their larger audience base" (p. 54). Internal contradictions abound.

The long history of representations of Latina/os in the US mainstream reveals far more continuities than ruptures. Felix Gutiérrez (2012) summarizes the range of possibilities:

> Greasy bandidos, fat mamacitas, romantic Latin lovers, lazy peons sleeping under sombreros, short-tempered Mexican spitfires, violent revolutionaries, faithful servants, gang members, and sexy señoritas with low-cut blouses and loose morals have long been staples of Latin images in fiction, films, and television. When seen on the screen or page, the stereotyped characters quickly trigger a picture in the heads of the audience of what the character is like and what role she or he will play as the plot unfolds.
>
> *(p. 100)*

This neat summary of production leading to representations leading to audience reactions maps out the continuities. Yet, we also have some presence in the mainstream, which sometimes brings along ruptures. In the entertainment realm, we have the continuation of Jennifer Lopez as the reigning Latina mogul whose ethnic presence does not preclude her othering of other ethnics, such as a recent incident on *The Voice* with an Asian American contestant (Washington 2017a). As mentioned previously in this chapter, ethnicities between the white and black ends of the spectrum are positioned in uneasy relation to one another. In this particular case, Lopez deployed her agency and status as a successful mainstream Latina to pass judgment on Asian Americans striving for presence and success in the same mainstream. We have also witnessed the rise of Sofia Vergara, the breakout star from the ensemble-cast mockumentary *Modern*

Family. As the best-paid television actress, Ms. Vergara represents the latest Latin bombshell to hit US airwaves. Former Disney and Barney girls Selena Gomez and Demi Lovato continue their music, acting, and branded-products careers, with the ups and downs that follow young media celebrities. Gina Rodriguez became a breakout star through the aptly Latina-entitled *Jane the Virgin*. While the title is cheeky, it does hook to the Roman Catholicism stereotypically attributed to Latina/o populations in the United States. Cameron Diaz, Christy Turlington, Salma Hayek, Eva Longoria, Eva Mendez, Michelle Rodriguez, Zoe Saldana, Sofia Carlson, and others all remain bankable mainstream figures. Notice that these spectacular Latinas represent the multiplicity within Latinidad. Cameron Diaz is a blonde and blue-eyed Cuban American from San Diego whose Latinidad would go nearly unperceived were it not for her last name. Former supermodel Christy Turlington has used her Latinidad, as a Salvadorean American, almost as a way to stay in the limelight after aging out of her top-model days. Salma Hayek will be more extensively discussed in Chapter 2, but suffice it to say that she is a first-generation Mexican, of Hungarian and Spanish Jewish parents, who crossed over in the United States and now lives in France. Eva Longoria, Eva Mendez, and Sofia Carlson fit the bill as petite light-brown Latinas. Michelle Rodriguez is Afro-Latina, something she has said was a cause of conflict in her family, and has been typecast in a long career performing embodied and active Latina roles (Beltrán 2004). Zoe Saldana, also Afro-Latina, has removed some of the Latinidad by taking the ñ out of her name (Molina-Guzmán 2013b) and shortening it from Zoë Yadira Saldaña Nazario. She hit the big time through the *Star Trek* franchise, and has played a range of African American and ethnically ambiguous characters, gaining controversy through her casting as Nina Simone. All of these spectacular Latinas form part of the mainstream terrain. Yet, fully half do not fit the light-brown ambiguous mold, and thus are seldom discussed as Latina. Nonetheless, when it suits the individual stars or when media companies find it useful to reach out to Latina/o or ethnic audiences, white Latinas will exhort their Latinidad. Every once in a while, Cameron Diaz will assert her Latinidad, such as when she and Jennifer Lopez shared the stage while presenting an award at the 2012 Oscars. That moment, when they posed with their backs to the cameras, simultaneously reiterated their common Latinidad and differentiated Diaz's whiteness from Lopez's more ethnic body. On the other hand, Longoria and Mendez are always already Latinas, regardless of the story or role in which they appear. Unambiguous white Latinas, such as Diaz and Turlington, have the luxury of passing as white and choosing to out their Latinidad when it suits them. Light-brown Latinas play across the racial spectrum. In addition to Jennifer Lopez, Jessica Alba has proven so malleable that she has played characters from albino in the *Fantastic Four* (2009) to an African American in *Honey* (2003). The inescapably racialized Rodriguez and Saldana enjoy embodied careers, wherein they have to continuously prove their belonging within

Latinidad and African American-ness. Border crossings for these Afro-hybrid Latinas are far more inspected than for the white and light-brown ones. Clearly, Latina actors are useful to mainstream media industries for their malleability and the fact that they can displace other ethnicities.

Recent production of predominantly Latina/o shows in the post-network era provides expanded employment opportunities and roles for Latina/os, with possible ruptures in addition to inevitable continuities. The transmediated *East Los High* (2013–17), for example, provided a welcome Latina/o presence in the digital television landscape, via Hulu (Molina-Guzmán 2016). The reboot of *One Day at a Time* (2017–2019) does the same through Netflix. At an organizational level of analysis, these shows function as sites of symbolic annihilation. Were it not for them, Hulu and Netflix would have nearly zero Latina/o presence (Negrón-Muntaner et al. 2014). Latina/os are found in predictable locations, in working-class communities, yet the narratives within which they appear present novel ways of treating family structures, fluid sexuality, and productive agency. The salience of these two shows belies the overall ongoing underrepresentation of Latina/os in general in mainstream popular culture. The many critiques applied to them speak to the burden of underrepresentation – so much is expected from these shows in the absence of many others.

A mainstream that underrepresents Latina/os and maintains damaging tropes has consequences in terms of politics, education, and resource distribution. As the *Latino Media Gap Report* (Negrón-Muntaner et al. 2014) asserts:

> The consequences of this gap are far-reaching. The current data suggests persistent and unchecked job discrimination in a major US industry. The relegation of Latinos similarly deprives media consumers of innovative perspectives at a moment of rapid industry and demographic change. Equally important, as entertainment and news reports often carry more weight than do other forms of communication, the limited and stereotypical nature of existing stories about Latinos skews the public's perception of US society, sanctioning hostility toward the country's largest minority, which has already become the majority in many cities, including the media capitals of Miami and Los Angeles.
>
> *(pp. 1–2)*

I write this book 23 years after my *Feminism, Multiculturalism, and the Media: Global Diversities* (Sage, 1995), 18 years after *A Latina in the Land of Hollywood* (University of Arizona Press, 2000), and 8 years after *Latina/os and the Media* (Polity, 2010). The first, an edited collection, was groundbreaking in that it foregrounded media and gender through an intersectional range of vectors of difference and ethnicities, including Latinas, Native Americans/First Nations, Asian Americans, African Americans, Jews, and lesbians. Up to that point, most diversity gender and media studies had focused solely on African

Americans. The second book came out as Latina/o Media Studies was beginning to explode as an area of research. In addition to posing questions about audience and interpretation, which were at that time woefully understudied, it covered a broad terrain of mediated culture and analyzed issues of class as well as gender and ethnicity. The third book cohered the intersection between Latina/o Studies and Media Studies, attempting to account for the vast amount of research that was then being conducted and pointing toward future work in an area of study that continues to be dynamic and multifaceted. Mini case studies at the end of each chapter took up two separate issues to illustrate how mediation of Latinidad could be understood through the body of Jennifer Lopez, a major celebrity, and the coverage of Latino death in the *Los Angeles Times'* "Homicide Report." These two examples illustrated a continuum of production, representation, audience, and effects borne out by mediatized Latina/os and, in turn, contributing to the circulation of information about Latina/os. The Jennifer Lopez study focused on a spectacular Latina, while the "Homicide Report" analysis explored the implications of reporting the death of unnamed and unacknowledged young Latinos in the greater Los Angeles area. Overexposure of Jennifer and her butt and underexposure of Latino death coexist in the mainstream media.

In all previous and contemporary work, my focus is on the mainstream media. Never underestimating the presence, creativity, and importance of alternative media and Spanish-language media, I also acknowledge that these are very large areas of research and activity, which are beyond the scope of this book (Albarrán 2009; Chavez 2015; Báez and Avilés-Santiago 2016). My decision to keep researching what happens in the mainstream is rooted in the firm belief that Latina/os are part of mainstream US popular culture and deserve to be part of the mainstream media – as owners, producers, subjects, and interpreters. By focusing on presence in mainstream popular culture, including survival and archives, mass-produced and -marketed children's toys and books, television, popular music, movies, and celebrity culture, this book addresses Latinidad in its everyday location. The mainstream is normative and discursive – it foregrounds power through narratives, tropes, and cultures. It proposes that which "should be" through a prism of representation that in turn represents institutions and everyday signifying practices (Giles and Middleton 2008). As well, through its wide distribution and circulation, the mainstream contributes to the functioning of institutions and our personal, group, national, and transnational everyday signifying practices. Furthermore, Media Studies research suggests that we learn more from media in the absence of personal experience – so, given the segregated reality of much of our population, the mainstream provides powerful lessons about Latina/os to those not living in contact with us. The fact that Latina/os are spread throughout the United States and come from a wide range of origins, recent and ancient, and, in turn, fan out throughout the world, means that cultural production, circulation, and

consumption are globally mobile. The mobility of cultural forms is also complex, dynamic, and consistent. The mainstream has implications of access to media – and also in terms of the circulation of Latina/o narratives and tropes among non-Latina/o audiences.

In 2019, Latina Feminist Media Studies contributes to many interdisciplinary streams, such as Feminist and Gender Studies, Ethnic Studies, Transnational Studies, Sexuality Studies, and the many forms that Latina/o Studies takes within the United States, such as Chicana/o Studies, Boricua Studies, Dominican Studies, and so on. Recent articles calling out gaps and omissions in mainstream communications and media studies publications point out our gendered (Mayer et al. 2018) and racialized (Chakravartty et al. 2018) citational practices. As this book is being finished, Latinas continue becoming more visible in academic research through Gender Studies journals such as *Feminist Media Studies*. As a grassroots phenomenon that continuously reacts in concert with as well as against market pressures (Cepeda 2015), Latinidad – and, more specifically, the gendering of Latinidad – has thus emerged as a key related site of inquiry for Latina/o Feminist Media Studies scholars (Cepeda 2015, p. 7). Previous erasure of Feminist Media Studies work also needs to be addressed, as by now there are decades of excellent Latina Feminist Media Studies texts (Valdivia 2018). As well, Latina Feminist Media Studies aims to be taken seriously in interdisciplinary journals such as *Latino Studies*. In conferences, the most notable inclusion lies in the recently created Race and Media conferences (2916, 2017, 2018), in which the work of Latina feminists is aired in a ventilated conversation across racial categories. As well, *The Routledge Companion to Latina/o Media* (2016), edited by Maria Elena Cepeda and Ines Casillas, includes many of the Latina feminist scholars whose work guides this chapter and this book. Moreover, in a lead article in *Feminist Media Studies*, the major feminist journal in our field, Maria Elena Cepeda (2015) clearly articulated the need to call to task practices that, unsurprisingly, center whiteness: we need to move beyond citational practices that exclude Latina Feminist Media Studies research, acknowledge the diversity within Latinidad, and admit the inescapability of transnationalism (Cepeda 2015). I take all three of these challenges very seriously. Journals that focus on the ethnic category of Latino Studies need to take Media Studies seriously as an interdiscipline, related to but different from Journalism, History, American Studies, and so on. This has long been a pet scholarly peeve of mine. No historian, for example, would conduct research without taking history seriously as a discipline. Conversely, scholars in all the fields just mentioned regularly publish books and articles about media in which media scholarship is barely included. This omission is doubled as the myth of discovery about Latinidad applies to scholarship as well as to mainstream media. Many of our feminist colleagues do not read our work, so I followed up my "Latina Media Studies" (2018) article in *Feminist Media Histories* with an exhortation to feminist media scholars to move

beyond the tokenistic mention of Gloria Anzaldúa. This book contributes to a rich body of scholarship, and encourages readers to explore the other scholars, books, and articles that enrich our understanding of the world, mediated ethnic categories, and Latina/os and media in particular. It promises to extend and revise contemporary intellectual paradigms of Latina/o Studies and ethnicity. It underscores the utter necessity of understanding the tension between the need to assert an identity and the reality of the difficulty of maintaining boundaries around that identity. It also encourages the acknowledgment of hybridity as both a tool for inclusion and something to be used in the name of profit. Recognizing the uses and abuses of hybridity gives critical knowledge and potential empowering strategies to underrepresented groups.

While the flattening of difference, both within Latinidad and between ethnics, is readily apparent, so is the tacit acknowledgment that neither all Latina/os nor all ethnics are alike. Ambiguity and hybridity have been found by both the US Census, where large portions of the ethnic population feel frustrated by the discrete ethnic categories provided in census forms, and by major research projects such as the Pew Hispanic Center and Kaiser Family Foundation's report, National Survey of Latinos (2002, updated 2004), which documents that second- and later-generation Latina/os overwhelmingly (62%) do not list any single national origin as their background but opt for an umbrella category such as Latina/o. Ambiguity within Latinidad is coupled by ambiguity between ethnicities, as the Pew Foundation finds that both Latina/os and Asian Americans marry across ethnicities in increasing proportions. This hybridity is present in media culture and is represented through internally contradictory approaches. So, for example, while Dávila (2001) notes that all ethnics – Latina/os, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans – are treated as the last bastion of purity, tradition, and family, in another essay (Dávila 2001) she points out that media industries are beginning to pursue a parallel path of selective differentiation between and within types of Latinidad, often built on stereotype and essentialist national characteristics. Thus, at the level of tradition, all ethnics may be the same, but Asian Americans are the "model minority." Similarly, until quite recently – before the Elián González spectacle – Cuban Americans were treated as the model minority within Latina/os (Molina-Guzmán 2005).

The concept of hybridity is extremely useful to communications scholars for a number of reasons, yet it remains to be fully utilized by our interdiscipline (Kraidy 1999, 2002; Murphy and Kraidy 2003). Kraidy (2002, p. 317) proposes that we foreground this concept, as it "needs to be understood as a communicative practice constitutive of, and constituted by, sociopolitical and economic arrangements" that are "complex, processual, and dynamic." Beyond its merely descriptive uses, hybridity also opens up the space for the study of cultural negotiations, conflicts, and struggles against the backdrop of contemporary globalization (Shome and Hegde 2002a, b), wherein an

increasing part of the global population is simultaneously becoming geographically displaced and endlessly commodified. This is precisely the framework of analysis around which this book coheres. Contemporary mainstream Latinidad will be explored against the backdrop of globalization, with an emphasis on cultural negotiations and displacements.

Notes

1 Elsewhere, many scholars have written about the history of Latina/o Studies and the previous academic formations that contributed and continue to coexist with this interdiscipline. *The Gender of Latinidad* begins within Latina/o Studies as a pan-national and pan-ethnic formation.
2 There is a long history and debate within US Latina/o Studies, and more so within Chicana/o Studies, about the mythical "bronze" race, which celebrated the indigenous elements of the Southwest Latina/o. Most powerfully articulated in the 1960s and '70s, this bronze race discourse was politically powerful and served to unify and valorize the presence and history of US Latina/os.
3 I put "voluntary" in quotes because it hides the many layers of involuntary migration due to famine, persecution, and economic dispossession. To be sure, there are fully voluntary migrants, but waves of migration usually follow push-out forces that make it impossible for populations to remain in their homeland.
4 I realize "Latinx" is widely used instead of "Latina/o." A complex conversation about terminology is beyond the scope of this book. I am still being educated about it. Whereas I am persuaded by Vidal-Ortiz and Martínez's (2018) call to challenge androcentric gendered hierarchies, I am also respectful of R. Rodriguez's (2017) questions about what is left out or eliminated by the "x." Furthermore, as Trujillo-Pagan (2018) convincingly argues, "Latinx" amounts to "genderblind sexism," echoing Molina-Guzmán's (2018) work on colorblind casting and providing yet another call for the agency to claim a gender, like the previously referenced Rodriguez (2017). Consequently, throughout the book I will use the term "Latina/o," as I continue to explore the possibilities and challenges of "Latinx."
5 This was evident in a global children's television project in which I participated. In terms of coding race, research teams across national boundaries found it impossible to concur as to what counted as "white" and what counted as "black," let alone the many possibilities in between.
6 This might read offensive to some, but in Latin America, the term "Chino" is applied to all Asian-descendant or even Asian-looking people. This usage of the term has been imported to the United States, where many use "Chino Latino" to refer to Asian-Latinos.