HATE IT OR LOVE IT: GLOBAL CROSSOVER OF REGGAETÓN MUSIC IN THE DIGITAL AGE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation critically examines reggaeton music as it is discursively constructed through mainstream media and Internet debates about the genre (e.g., online music forums, social networking profile pages) during and after the 2004 global musical crossover of reggaeton. Using various case studies to critically examine processes of both textual production and reception to reggaeton, I interrogate if and how the music industry constructs and simultaneously targets a Latin global and US Latino market for reggaeton through various marketing strategies and via mainstream media coverage in the US and abroad. Considering textual production and reception as equally significant processes that are constantly in contention with one another, I examine how active and participatory audiences online, particularly fans and anti-fans, negotiate reggaeton as a cultural text and in relation to the ways they are interpellated as the target market for it. Here, I apply Louis Althusser’s definition of interpellation, as “ideology’s ability to assign individuals to specific positions within its own communicative (semiotic) representations of reality” to the ways that the audience for reggaeton is constructed based on specific demographic features, such as ethnicity, race, age, income and/or language (Grossberg et al. 207-208). In this dissertation, I interrogate how targeted demographics play a distinct role in the interpellation of the audiences for “Latin urban” musical forms like reggaeton. Reggaeton is a cultural signifier for the contested ways in which Latinidad is negotiated in everyday life and, particularly, in relation to discourses of authenticity that circulate through Latin(o/a) popular culture and mainstream media representations of Latinidad.
Para mis amores Sergio y Genesis
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation centers on reggaetón, a controversial and provocative Afro-diasporic musical phenomenon that derived from Puerto Rican underground music in the 1990s, and achieved crossover success as a mainstream pop music form by 2004. Thus, reggaetón is now a global commodity interpreted by a global audience. Mainstream media coverage between 2004-2013 provides a window into pan-ethnic branding strategies that have successfully exposed and expanded reggaetón to global Latin music audiences. This study interrogates the interrelationship between media representation and audience reception of reggaetón. In addition, this dissertation critically examines the circuits of culture\(^1\) connected to reggaetón’s global crossover in the digital age. As a result, my 2 main research questions are: (1) how is reggaetón discursively constructed through pan-ethnic branding strategies and mainstream media coverage during and after its commercial crossover in 2004, and (2) how is reggaetón’s commercial crossover complicated by the online participatory culture of anti-fans that reject the global spread of the genre as well as the pan-ethnic branding strategies that seek to target them as global Latin audiences?\(^2\) I assert 2 hypotheses: (1) that the deployment of such strategies point to the marginal spaces that still exist for Latin(o/a) representation, even and especially in the context of a Latin-branded cultural form like reggaetón that attempts to represent Latin(o/a) populations globally.

\(^1\) Paul du Gay et al. (1997) argue that there is a linkage of five major cultural processes (representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation) through which cultural texts and/or artifacts come to possess meaning (40).

\(^2\) Henry Jenkins (2006) defines a participatory culture as one in which “Fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (290). Jonathan Gray (2003) defines anti-fandom as “The realm not necessarily of those who are against fandom per se, but of those who strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel” (70). While I use Gray’s understanding of anti-fans in this study, I also expand his definition to encompass the role of cultural resistance to a particular genre or text.
(2) these online communities comprise over 100,000 reggaetón fan and anti-fan sites, which reveal Spanish-language dominant audiences as interactive subjects online who are speaking back to their marginal representation.

Given US census data from 2000 and 2010 that place a spotlight on the exponential growth of “Hispanics,” demographic trends for Latinos and Hispanics are being followed more closely than ever before. However, marketers for the culture industries who continually seek more effective strategies for reaching the Hispanic and Latino consumer are carefully watching those demographic trends. The most recent figures from the AHAA (Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies) estimate that the purchasing power of the “Hispanic” population will reach $1.3 trillion in 2014 (<http://ahaa.org/default.asp?contentID=29>). Yet, Arlene Dávila (2008) argues that too often Latinos gain visibility “only as market, never as a people” (89). Dávila’s research elucidates the ways in which marketers are increasingly modifying their advertising strategies based on their conceptual distinctions about Latinos (as US natives, bilingual and/or English-language dominant) versus Hispanics (as Spanish-language dominant, foreign born or immigrants) (83). As the target on the Hispanic consumer increasingly moves toward second, third and fourth generations of bilingual, bicultural, and/or English-dominant Latinos in the US, the soundtrack for reaching this distinct Latino audience and market also changes.

Reggaetón appeared on the mainstream music scene on the heels of the previous “Latin music boom” of the 1990s and early 2000s. During this period, artists like Selena, Shakira, Ricky Martin, and Jennifer Lopez became household names and proved highly effective in cross-promotion strategies that married their music and image as mainstream Latin pop stars with the promotion of globally recognized brands from Pepsi to Gucci (Parédez 2009; Durham and Báez
The success of the “Latin music boom” of the 1990s and early 2000s emphasized the value of “crossover appeal” for the entertainment industries both in terms of Latin pop music and mainstream Latin pop music stars in reaching not only the coveted 12-34 bilingual, bicultural Latina/o market in the US, but also a global Latin market abroad. Thus, the notion of “crossover” appeal has been instrumental for the entertainment industries in attracting these segments of the US Latin/o(a) and global Latin market going forward.

By 2004, the commercial music industry figured out that a youth driven and controversial Afro-diasporic musical form like reggaetón that was in some ways already bilingual and bicultural, with more than a decade of built-in popularity on the island of Puerto Rico (and in parts of the US mainland via circular migration)\(^3\) signified its massive crossover potential to capture markets across the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, English/Spanish-language dominant audiences in the US, and particularly Spanish-language dominant audiences abroad. As demonstrated in Dávila’s (2001, 2008, 2012) research, marketers used distinct strategies to reach Latino versus Hispanic target markets. Accordingly, the marketing strategy behind reggaetón’s crossover was to build it into the Latin urban subgenre of globally disseminated Latin pop music. Following the success of reggaetón, other genres such as bachata and cumbia have been similarly incorporated under the Latin urban umbrella. The Latin urban subgenre on the Billboard music charts and the Hurban (a neologism formed from combining the words Hispanic and urban) programming format developed for radio, paved the way for reggaetón’s entry into mainstream popular music.

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, Dávila (2001) tracked the rising popularity of the

\(^3\) Jorge Duany (2002) examines the strong ties maintained among Puerto Ricans on the Island and U.S. mainland through family connectivity and circular migration.
“urban-centered yet ethnic core of Hispanic marketing” (54). This project follows the contemporary Latin urban/Hurban incarnation of such marketing strategies through the case study of reggaeton. As illustrated in Dávila’s (2001) findings, these marketing strategies replicate “the same process of generalizing about the totality of Hispanics on the basis of a particular segment of that totality” (73). Reggaetón is a musical form symbolically linked to the urban centers of Puerto Rico—“de la disco al caserio” [from the discotheque to the housing projects] (Dinzey Flores 35). As such, Dinzey Flores (2008) argues that the “urban socio-spatial community actualized between the disco, the barrio, the caserios, and the street” through reggaetón’s lyrics “underscores poverty, violence, masculinity, and race as vital constructs of an authentically urban experience” (ibid). Though I recognize the foregrounding of “urban spatial aesthetics” in reggaetón music, it is critically important to also be attentive to the ways those same “authentic” Latin urban aesthetics ascribed to reggaetón and reggaetóneros are too often deployed as a means to target fashionably urbanized consumer products—and more often than not, inferior goods—to poorer urban consumers. Using reggaetón as a case study, I examine the integral linkages between the Latin urban aesthetics of reggaetón and the discourses of authenticity that are vital to the marketing and commercial crossover of reggaetón on a global scale.

Through various case studies (see Dissertation Chapter Overview) I interrogate the complex circuits of culture connected to reggaetón’s global crossover. By textually analyzing media representations of the genre, I seek to deconstruct the mainstream construction of reggaetón as popular culture and the discourses of authenticity, particularly pan-latinidad and Latin urban authenticity, that circulate through the commercialization and crossover of the genre. Drawing critical attention to the massive expansion of user-generated anti-reggaetón content
online since the crossover of reggaetón, I explore the most prominent debates undergirding the backlash against reggaetón as well as the representational and identity politics at play around reggaetón’s increased visibility in the mainstream media in the US and abroad.

Taking both an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach to analyzing both textual representations and cultural reception to reggaetón, I draw theoretically and methodologically from Media Studies, Digital/New Media Studies, Latina/o Communication Studies, and Popular Music Studies. For this study, I apply Gillian Rose’s critical visual methodology and also conduct Internet discourse analysis of online user-generated anti-reggaetón content (see Chapter 5) from a sampling of digital visual culture of reggaetón. Through these texts I engage active reception to reggaetón from the perspective of participatory fans/anti-fans online, interrogate global responses to the genre, and garner insights into the complexities of mainstream crossover for reggaetón in the digital age.

Musical flows have never been controlled in any age and arguably reggaetón would and could have spread globally with or without the Internet, but the platform for global responses, debates, and cultural production around a musical form like reggaetón that are accessible online today are not to be ignored. Accordingly, this dissertation also addresses the ways in which boundaries of space, gender, race, ethnicity, nation, class, and taste cultures are being negotiated, policed, reinforced, affirmed, and/or contested by global music fans and anti-fans of this musical genre online.

**Review of Relevant Literature**

Most early academic research on reggaetón (i.e., studies of Giovannetti 2003; Flores 2000; Salamán 2004a, 2004b; del Barco 1996; Santos 1996; Manuel 1995; Rivera 2003; Gaztambide-Fernández 2004) examined its formation in a local context, particularly in parts of
Puerto Rico and the U.S. Yet, given the current global visibility of reggaetón, there is an increased need for scholars to turn their attention to the transnational movement and globalization processes that have contributed to the visibility of reggaetón abroad. Thus, this project expands the current body of literature on reggaetón by interrogating the political economy of reggaetón; thereby, examining how the reggaetón functions as a commodity in the global marketplace and as part of the culture industries which extend across integrated platforms of music and entertainment.

This dissertation also extends the more recent body of literature on reggaetón (i.e., studies of Rivera, Marshall, and Pacini-Hernández 2009; Cepeda 2009; Báez 2006; Baker 2005; Samponaro 2009; Marshall 2006, 2009, 2010; Pacini-Hernández 2009; Calafell 2007; Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera 2007; Negrón-Muntaner 2009; R.Z. Rivera 2010; M.M. Rivera 2011) by researching active and participatory reception to reggaetón through the examination of multi-layered discourses online. In doing so, this project also makes several interventions to scholarship on online music fandom, Latin(a/o) media and popular culture as well as popular music formations in the U.S., Latin America, and the Caribbean.

Drawing on scholarly literature that critically engages the commodification of Latinidad (Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman 1997; Dávila 2000, 2001, 2008; Levine 2001; Molina-Guzmán 2006, 2010; Valdivia 2000, 2003, 2004), this dissertation addresses how reggaetón is conceived of as a “Latin-branded” commodity. In doing so, I consider how homogeneity and hybridity function as tools of the cultural industries for marketing reggaetón to a constructed “young urban Latino/a,” while simultaneously being rejected by those who are interpellated by these market constructs worldwide. Hence, the case studies presented in this dissertation are instructive of how global commodities like reggaetón, which exemplify the commodification of pan-ethnic
identity, are being met with resistance and struggle in their acceptance based on what they represent to particular Latin-branded communities. In many ways, this study raises broader questions about how cultural identity is being negotiated through Latin(a/o) media and popular culture today when Latinos still struggle for mainstream representation and visibility outside of the narrow forms offered through the market constructs of the culture industries.

**Significance of Study**

Foundational literature on reggaetón has been established for nearly two decades. These studies have traced the musical trajectory of reggaetón from Puerto Rican underground rap in the 1990s to its commercial crossover into the mainstream in 2004. Ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, and popular music scholars have examined reggaetón’s origins, dances, and artists; however, little attention has been paid to the complex ways audiences have negotiated reggaetón as a Latin-branded commodity after its commercial crossover. Globalization and commercialization critically influence the circuits of culture that enable reggaetón and its capital to flow transnationally, and yet too often these processes are taken for granted in the literature just as audience engagement is ignored. This is a significant gap as reggaetón’s active audience, particularly fans and anti-fans, have created a global and participatory online music culture around reggaetón since the early 2000s. Accordingly, sites for audience reception studies must shift to engage the overlapping networks of music audiences, fans, and anti-fans that increasingly converge online in the digital age (Baym 2007, Baym and Burnett 2009).

This dissertation makes 3 significant interventions: (1) it deploys a core media studies analysis to address the current gaps in the literature by informing the critical role of online

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audiences in reggaetón’s global circuits of culture (2) it pays critical attention to Spanish-language dominant Internet users as interactive subjects online and provides sorely needed data in digital/new media studies on active Latin/(o/a) cybercultures (Nakamura 2008; Nakamura and Chow-White 2012; Livingston 2010) (3) it extends scholarly literature across popular music, fan studies, Latin American and Latina/o communications studies, media studies, visual culture studies, and digital/new media studies.

**Theoretical Framework**

By highlighting the significant ways in which these salient areas of study inform one another, I set forth a theoretical framework for analyzing the negotiation of transnational media texts, like popular music, mediated through digital global spaces of active audience reception and participatory fan culture that exist on the Internet. In this study, I consider the ways in which reggaetón music is discursively constructed through processes of global crossover across mainstream media representations, online debates about the genre, and in anti-fan user-generated content circulated online.

Focusing on three virtually inseparable areas of Media Studies inquiry, I devote critical attention to content, production, and audiences of reggaetón music (Kellner 1995; McQuail 1994; Valdivia 2006). As a Communications and Media Studies scholar, I am particularly attentive to how mass media and popular culture are mediated by society. Deploying a cultural studies approach, I foreground issues of representation and identity (Hall and du Gay 1996; Hall 1997; hooks 1992, 1994) and incorporate music into a broader discourse\(^6\) about Latinidad and the negotiation of identity and meaning in everyday life (Aparicio 1998; Rodríguez 2003; Flores 2003).

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\(^6\) Here, I deploy the term *discourse* based on Stuart Hall’s (1997a) definition: “Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images, and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society” (6).
2000, 2004; Cepeda 2010; Rivera 2003; Pacini-Hernández 2009; Negrón-Muntaner 2004). In this dissertation, I seek to critique the ways in which discourses of authenticity are ascribed to Latinidad and to reggaetón music, artists, and fans. Thus, I integrate interpretive frameworks and methodologies that examine “the nexus between texts, power and social context” (Saukko 113). Methodologically, I use textual analysis to grapple with the ideological struggle waged as multiple meanings are interpreted, negotiated, and mediated through texts such as popular music (Croteau and Hoynes 183). Through textual analysis of mainstream media representations of reggaetón and anti-fan user-generated content, I critically examine how mainstream media, artists, fans, and anti-fans construct reggaetón. In doing so, I follow Shohat and Stam’s (1995) premise that:

It is not enough to say that art is constructed. We have to ask: Constructed for whom? And in conjunction with which ideologies and discourses? In this sense, art is a representation not so much in a mimetic as a political sense, as a delegation of voice (Shohat and Stam 180).

Addressing these concerns, I seek to engage how and why the music and media industries generate particular racialized, gendered, and classed discourses about reggaetón music, artists, and fans that circulate through processes of crossover and commercialization. Furthermore, I question whose interests are being served by reproducing these discursive formations either through marketing efforts or through the mainstream media.

globalization that enable its circuits of culture and capital to flow transnationally, yet be distributed unevenly. Drawing upon transnational feminist scholarship in communications research (Chabram-Dernersesian 1999; Hegde 1998; Parameswaran 2002; Shome and Hegde 2002a, 2002b; Shohat 1998; Shome 1996; Valdivia 2004), I work “to deconstruct the subtle mechanisms of Othering that structure the neocolonial discursive regimes of globalization” (Parameswaran 312). Thus, this requires attention to the ways vectors of difference are commodified through global culture and media, but also to how homogenizing discourses of cultural identity are decentered by the instability of hybrid identities. As the commercial media offers consumable categories of cultural representation that further marginalize difference instead of offering heterogeneous spaces for marginalized communities to negotiate cultural identity on their own terms and within their own frame of logic. Yet, as demonstrated in critical scholarship on hybridity (Bhabha 1994, García-Canclini 2005; Kraidy 2005; Valdivia 2003, 2004), given the dynamics of cultural hybridity these heterogeneous spaces of identity already exist; however, are contested, constrained, and complicated when coupled with the logic of neoliberal capitalism that operates within the “transnational marketing paradigm” (Valdivia 2004). Marwin Kraidy (2005) has described “corporate transnationalism” as the profit-driven strategy that “systematically seeks to capitalize on cultural fusion and fluid identities” (90). Hence, I draw on these theorizations to engage how reggaetón’s global crossover has both enabled and constrained the ability of its audiences, fans, and anti-fans to assert themselves as interactive subjects in their negotiations of identity and meaning in relation to reggaetón. More specifically, I interrogate the ways audiences, fans, and anti-fans navigate the many flows of music, media representations of Latinidad, and products of the culture industry that infiltrate their daily lives. Turning away from previous studies of popular music and culture that
predominantly emphasize critiques of mass culture (Horkheimer and Adorno 1982), I draw attention to the authority of active and participatory audiences online in this study.

New media scholars, Burnett and Marshall (2003) advanced the cultural production thesis to describe the ways that Web **users** are different from users of traditional or “old” media in that they engage in simultaneous processes of reception and production. The cultural production thesis goes beyond the traditional focus on reception in cultural studies to further engage the meaning making produced on the Web. Thus, anti-fans of reggaetón music who turn to the Internet to form a movement against it online are not just an audience, consumers, readers, or listeners. They are actively engaged in the processes of interpretation, negotiation of meaning, and active production. This is in keeping with the way that new media scholarship has challenged traditional notions about audiences that persist from the reigning days of old media. With the shift from a broadcast model of radio/television programming to a model where new and old media converge online and on multiple technological devices, arguably past notions about more “passive” audiences from the broadcast days no longer apply. The Internet has presented a unique platform for active audiences to take advantage of the new digital technologies to produce and circulate their own cultural texts. For years, scholarly work on active audiences (Báez 2008, 2009; Bobo 1995; Hermes 1995, 2005; Molina-Guzmán 2006, 2010; Rojas 2004; Valdivia 2000) has challenged former myths of the “passive” audience. Henry Jenkins (1992) was one of the first scholars to highlight the active participatory culture of fans that existed even before the first Internet browser became commercially available. Jonathan Gray’s (2003) groundbreaking study on anti-fans envisioned new ways for engaging television audiences based on their affective responses. In this study, I draw on this foundational scholarship on active audiences and participatory fan/anti-fan culture as a means to gauge digital
global audiences, fans, and anti-fans online.

In the digital age of global communications, one of the greatest challenges faced by scholars interested in conducting audience research is determining how to get access to a diverse and global audience. This study pushes the boundaries across the aforementioned bodies of research as it confronts the challenge of grappling with increasingly global audiences, participatory fan/anti-fan communities, and media texts that are seen, read, heard, and interpreted globally thanks in large part to the dynamic means of communication and channels of distribution that are facilitated by the Internet.

Early waves of new media scholarship recognized the potential that the Internet held in terms of broadening and expanding the reach of community (i.e., online fan communities), creating a space where one could form an audience community and exchange ideas about mass media, providing a medium that could be contributed to and created anew based on participation and interaction (Baym 2000; Bird 2003; Darling-Wolf 2004; Watson 1997). In many ways, the Internet has provided the ideal fertile ground for active audiences and fans to cultivate community as they negotiate media texts. In her earlier work on a soap opera fan community, Baym (2000) found that: “the Internet makes audience communities more common, more visible, and more accessible, enabling fans to find one another with ease, regardless of geography, and enhancing the importance of the interpersonal dimensions of fandom” (215). In making fans more visible online and stripping away geographical barriers, Baym (2007) recognized that these fans also became increasingly visible to the media industry as well (<http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1978/1853>). In the early 1990s when fan studies emerged, fans were still viewed as a “subculture.” However, as fandom has become increasingly mainstream, fan studies scholarship has traced how fans are sought out even more
than ever by advertisers who seek to capitalize on their significant value to the market (Baym and Burnett 2009; Gray et al. 2007; Jenkins 2006).

This dissertation will address how anti-fans use the Internet to distribute fan-produced content that they have created as means to further negotiate the media texts they love to hate. New media scholars have addressed the myriad ways that Internet and digital technologies have enabled widespread distribution routes for the media industries to circulate content to consumers. At the same time, fan cultures have benefitted in kind from these new technologies and means of circulating their user-generated content online. Social networking sites, video sharing sites like YouTube, and various blogging venues have provided instantaneous online platforms for fan communities to go digital and global at the same time, while leveraging their technological acumen to challenge the culture industry’s control over their favorite or most hated texts. While, fan studies scholars have addressed what this means in terms of fan identity, what do fans get out of this as far as non-monetary benefits are concerned? Arguably, for anti-fans of reggaetón, part of that non-monetary benefit comes in the form of being able to create a space to celebrate their own musical taste cultures as well as reshape and renegotiate what representations of Latinidad and their intersectional hybrid identities are for them.

Methodology

*Cyberspace allows for diverse forms of diasporic linking and interacting: temporal links that bring together the clashing historical perspectives of contesting communities, spatial and geographical links between different parts of the world. In this way downloaded images, sounds, and texts enable critical communities to pass on their perspective, and identifications, and their affiliations.*—Shohat (1999: 211)

The online music forum site under investigation for this study (<www.nueva.com>) (see Chapter 4) offers a unique space to its participants where they not only discuss their disdain for reggaetón, but also simultaneously “pass on their perspective, and identifications, and their
affiliations” (ibid). As such, reggaetón acts as the catalyst to bring together clashing and conflicting perspectives from the world around. When the primary voice and option for visibility in the world remains confined to the mainstream media—primarily owned and operated by a select few transnational media conglomerates—the Internet can present itself as a viable option for communities and individuals to engage in debates not exclusively framed by the mainstream media, whose coverage of reggaetón seldom engages any debate concerning the genre other than to debate whether it is still thriving commercially or will soon fade into oblivion. As the commercial media functions within the logic of global capitalism, few spaces exist for alternative discussion to emerge in the commercialized arena. And yet, Shohat (1999) envisions alternative spaces online for marginalized communities to negotiate reggaetón—or any other cultural form—on their own terms and within their own frame of logic. These spaces are not ultimately dictated predominantly by the global market or motivated by profit for either major record labels or multimedia conglomerates, though they exist in relation to them.

While Shohat (1999) argues it is online that “current nationalist and ethnic pressures of committing oneself to one or two geographies of identity are challenged by a quintessentially postmodern technology,” in many ways this dissertation poses a challenge to that statement (214). Communities not only emerge and form online based one or two geographies of identity, but these communities are maintained many times by strict adherence to them. Furthermore, adherence to particular ethnic, racial, national, and gender identities are policed and enforced in several chat fora through the assertion of various pressures—ethnic and otherwise. Drawing on the foundational scholarship of Nakamura (2008), I seek to “assess these practices to evaluate the Internet as a popular environment for representations of identity” attentive to the ways “the
Internet has continued to gain uses and users who unevenly visualize race and gender in online environments” (5).

In fora that are created based on an “anti” sentiment, be it anti-reggaetón or any other, online communities police not only what they are “anti,” but police each other and enforce normative and dominant codes and standards. In either scenario, the Internet presents a unique space, because it allows for a range of debates and discussions to take place that are many times distant from the mainstream megaphone that is the mass media. The Internet allows for the unpredictable; a more vigorous debate which can result in extremes like an “anti-reggaetón” movement. Within these Internet sites, multiple negotiations, diverse temporalities, and different affiliations that emerge are almost overwhelming—as these are not the typical debates that one hears or sees everyday. According to Baym (2000) “scholars (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire 1984: 1130 as cited in Baym 2000) argue that rather than being mitigated, as often is the case in face-to-face disagreements (Pomerantz 1984 as cited in Baym 2000), online disagreements are exaggerated” (121). Consequently, many times online disagreements manifest in cyberhate as will be discussed further in this study (see Chapters 4 and 5).

The qualitative analyses for this study required two phases. Phase I required analysis of a cross-section of print and online texts selected by grounded theory method and culled from U.S. mainstream and international media on reggaetón from 2004-2013. This data was collected using a Lexis-Nexis keyword search of the term “reggaetón,” and was refined by search of “major world publications.” A deconstructivist analytic approach to textual analysis was deployed to interrogate the semiotic codes that worked to construct a dominant or “preferred reading” for these texts (Hall 1980, 1997) and to decode potential readings and meanings that were subverted
through dominant semiotic codes (Reinharz 149). Furthermore, open coding revealed prominent themes that emerged across the mainstream media texts under investigation.

*Phase II* required *Internet discourse analysis* and *open coding* of the most prominent themes emerging from a 4-month observation period in an online reggaetón music forum. For the purposes protecting the identity of forum participants, the site under investigation has been assigned the pseudonym of: `<www.nueva.com>`. This site is accessible to the public and not password protected. However, measures were taken to protect autonomy, privacy, and confidentiality in the chat fora under investigation such as pseudonyms for all of the forum participants as well as for the fora. Any excerpts in Spanish are also translated into English to add an additional layer of identity protection for the chat participants. Furthermore, on May 10, 2011 the Human Subject Review Committee at the Institute of Communications Research confirmed approval to proceed with this research [under supervision of Dr. Angharad Valdivia] as my project falls under “Common Rule” (45 CFR part 46) for exempt IRB review in Title 45, Part 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).

As far as my role in the forum, I approach the online *fora* as an observer. Accordingly, I did not want to announce my observations to the *fora* and disrupt the naturalistic setting by influencing the discussion of the forum participants given their knowledge that a researcher was observing. In addition, I also did not want add my own perspectives on an anti-reggaetón or reggaetón supporter side and unduly influence the participants either way—as a neutral stance is not generally welcome in these *fora*. Ultimately, taking an “unbiased” position would place me as a permanent outsider. The most recent research on Internet ethics outlined in the literature by the Association of Internet Researchers (Ess et al. 2002), Lisa M. Given (2008), Annette N. Markham and Nancy K. Baym (2009), and Malin Sveningsson Elm et al. (2009) asserts that
“chat exchanges in publicly accessible chatrooms” are under “fewer obligations to protect autonomy, privacy, confidentiality” (<http://aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf>). While measures were still taken to protect autonomy, privacy, and confidentiality in the chat fora, they were not explicitly required in these instances. Online, I conducted observation in the chat forum without being an active participant.

Offline, I conducted Internet discourse analysis on the written posts in the online music forum. In addition, I cataloged the visual images embedded in “anti-reggaetón” posts in the fora such as emoticons, photos, and still images with graphic elements (i.e., stop motion animation). These visual images were analyzed using a critical visual methodology drawn from the work of Gillian Rose (2007) that examines the technological, compositional, and social composition of the image under examination (12-13). Following the data collection, both phases of data analysis took place from May to September 2011. Internet discourse analysis (Markham and Baym 2009) was conducted on chat stream data from the online reggaetón music forum under investigation. Open coding was applied for thematic analysis of recurring topics and patterns that prominently emerged across mainstream media texts, the online reggaetón music forum under investigation, and the digital visual culture of the anti-reggaetón movement online culled from a randomly sampled Google image search as well as from publicly accessible social networking profile pages (see Chapter 5).

For this study, I deployed a deconstructivist analytic approach to textual analysis following the work of Shulamit Reinharz (1992), which pays attention to what is said and not said, or the silences in discursive practices. In the context of textually analyzing a variety of media texts (i.e., news articles, online chat streams), it was critical to interrogate not only what

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7 Rose’s (2007) critical visual methodology examines cultural significance of visual images as well as the power relations articulated through their production.

8 See Reinharz (1992) for further discussion on deconstructionist analytic methods (149).
was readily apparent and meant as the “preferred reading” (Hall 1980: 113), but also to address
what was missing from these representations. Particularly surrounding issues of authenticity and
iconicity, it can be easy to focus on the “authentic” or “iconic” images themselves without
touching the silences behind them. Thus, I found it crucial to address the voices not being heard
or the critical issues being ignored in the face of great focus and attention paid to the
maintenance of “authenticity” as this is a process that reproduces multiple silences.

**Dissertation Chapter Overview**

*Chapter 2. Crossing over... When is it ever really over?: Deconstructing reggaetón’s crossover dreams*

**Chapter two** interrogates how mainstream and commercial “crossover” is discursively
constructed in relation to racialized Latin/o/a performers. Situating reggaetón’s crossover
within the longer purview of previous Latin crossover artists and acts, this chapter critically
examines the ways in which the US mainstream media traditionally deploys crossover as a
means to suggest representative parity and Latino inclusion into the US mainstream (read: non-
Latino). And yet, long-standing data demonstrates the narrow and uneven ways in which Latinos
have been represented continually in US mainstream media and popular culture. Additionally,
this data highlights the scarce number of Latino head writers, media producers, and executives
with the power to actually green-light projects across media industries. This chapter also follows
how the culture/entertainment industries have increasingly begun to target bicultural Latino
millennials, based on the rapid growth of this particular segment of the Latino population in the
US. In many ways, reggaetón’s crossover serves as an effective case study for examining how
the media and culture industries have deployed pan-Latin and Latin urban discursive constructs
to attract the growing segment of younger bicultural Latinos/as in the US, as well as to extend
reggaetón’s reach to Latin global audiences abroad. This chapter is instructive of the ways in
which “crossover” ultimately operates to maintain the status quo, reinforce the discursive authority of the culture industry, and regulate Latino representation in the process. Furthermore, I underscore how reggaetón’s crossover is a representative example of the enduring ways in which Latino performers and acts still have to “crossover” into the US mainstream and are not considered a constitutive part of it.


In chapter three, I trace reggaetón’s decades-long trajectory from an underground music form to a global commodity. This chapter interrogates the complex local and global circuits of culture linked to reggaetón’s commercial crossover. I explore how reggaetón was sanitized, commodified, and discursively repacked as the musical soundtrack for Latin youth across the globe through commercial crossover. In addition, I interrogate how the advertising and culture industries have discursively constructed and branded reggaetón as pan-Latin, hybrid, and Latin urban. By deconstructing these dominant constructions of reggaetón, this chapter seeks to illustrate how the advertising and culture industries also produce racialized and ethnically marked genres, audiences, and consumers—and in particular, how they attach market currency to the commodification of ethnic identities. Notably, this chapter suggests multiple ways that the advertising and culture industries have deployed the myth of discovery and leveraged multiple pan-Latin discursive constructs to repackage reggaetón for mainstream and global consumption.

Chapter 4. Just sexual games and 24-hour parties?: Anti-fans contest the commercial crossover of reggaetón music online

Chapter four focuses on the global anti-fan movement online centered around reggaetón music. As reggaetón music was repackaged as a “Latin urban/pop” genre during its commercial crossover in 2004, the advertising and culture industries constructed homogenous “pan-Latin”
and “Latin urban” audiences for reggaetón based on essentialist discourses around authenticity, race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation. In response, anti-fans of reggaetón reacted by reaffirming their complex, hybrid, and intersectional identities and individual musical tastes through the production of an anti-reggaetón movement online. This fervent backlash against reggaetón proliferated online as the genre gained commercial viability and global mass media exposure. In the anti-reggaetón online music forum under investigation, I examine fan/anti-fan-generated content, practices, and interpersonal dynamics (from 2006-2009). In this chapter, I argue that anti-fans mediate reggaetón in relation to how they are *interpellated* as target audiences for the genre and as a racialized and commodified ethnic market.

**Chapter 5. The Digital Visual Culture of the Anti-Reggaetón Movement Online**

Chapter five explores the digital visual culture of the anti-reggaetón movement online. This chapter examines what the production, exchange, and circulation of this digital visual culture of the anti-reggaetón movement signifies in a post-crossover context for reggaetón. I analyze a sample of anti-reggaetón digital images and interrogate how these images are being deployed and disseminated across multiple anti-reggaetón sites online. In this chapter, I consider the ways in which the digital visual culture of the anti-reggaetón movement potentially seeks to challenge how the advertising and culture industries envision, interpellate, and target “Latin” audiences for reggaetón as an undifferentiated mass. Furthermore, I underscore the significance of these spaces of digital production online because they illustrate how these anti-fans effectively create a means to destabilize the discursive authority of such commercialized representations of Latinidad.

**Chapter 6. Daddy Yankee’s Army of One: The High Stakes of Commodifying Latinidad through Reggaetón**
Chapter six of this dissertation critically engages the case study of reggaetón icon, Daddy Yankee, as he embarks on his first world tour to promote his “Big Boss” reggaetón crossover. Through his tour, Daddy Yankee effectively served as a spokesman for the US military as he promoted the “Army Strong” campaign to Latinos across his 40-cities—including several in major Latino markets. Accordingly, this chapter highlights some of the direct marketing tactics and covert strategies deployed by the US Army to specifically target Daddy Yankee’s concert attendees for military recruitment. In addition, this chapter surveys the disproportionate ways in which the US military has historically targeted Latino and Black recruits for enlistment. Based on the perceived growth of the Latino population in the US, I also expose the targeted outreach efforts of the US military that have increasingly exposed Latino youth to pro-military messages and agendas in schools (K-12) and through popular culture and entertainment. In addition, I interrogate how targeted recruitment strategies have been developed to entice noncitizen Latinos to enlist in military service as well. This chapter underscores how the advertising and culture industries—working in the service of the military industrial complex—have capitalized on the crossover appeal of the reggaetón genre and Daddy Yankee, particularly among bicultural Latino millennials, to more effectively target them for their corporate and military interests.

Chapter 7. Conclusions

The final chapter (seven) of this dissertation will serve as a conclusion to this study and will include a comprehensive final discussion of the findings as well as possibilities for this line of research into the future.
CHAPTER 2
CROSSING OVER...WHEN IS IT EVER REALLY OVER?:
DECONSTRUCTING REGGAETÓN’S CROSSOVER DREAMS

Introduction: Crossover Dreams/Nightmares

Leon Ichaso’s 1985 film, *Crossover Dreams*, recounts the tale of Rudy Veloz, a
Nuyorican salsa musician (played by Panamanian musician/actor Rubén Blades), whose
crossover dreams are quickly dashed after his first studio album flops and his one shot at
mainstream crossover eludes him. He ostensibly follows the crossover protocol to the letter in
order to achieve mainstream success. Before signing to a major record deal he tells a label
executive that he’s willing to do basically anything it takes to get his first major break, including
changing his name to the more palatable stage name “Rudy Vellez” if need be. The cassette tape
he shops to record labels has a pop-friendly English tune on it, titled “Good For Baby,” which
Rudy assures music executives will be his first major hit song. However, Rudy is pulled in the
opposite direction by his mentor and salsa bandleader, Cheo.

Upon hearing Rudy’s pop-friendly English tune for the first time, Cheo immediately tells
Rudy that it is “tremenda mierda” (tremendous bullshit) and asks Rudy if he is trying to be like
Elvis Presley or those long-haired hippies out there playing guitar? Cheo proceeds to teach Rudy
a new salsa song titled “Todos Vuelven,” which he feels will better suit Rudy’s talents.
According to Cheo, this song is far superior to that other “Rack-et-y, Rack-et-y, Rack-et-y…
garbage” English pop song that Rudy wants to record
(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xc0rcn7gvCQ>). Shortly after this intervention with Rudy,
Cheo dies suddenly during a performance and leaves Rudy pensive about a life not worth living
if he doesn’t seize the moment to fully pursue his crossover dreams
(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20jLhg_LLz4>). Rudy’s dream is to leave his
neighborhood (generically called “El Barrio” in the film), quit the local salsa “cuchifrito” circuit where he has been performing basically for nickels and dime-bags of drugs for 10 years, and to finally gain the international recognition and fame that he feels is righteous-deserved after a long and dedicated career as a local salsa performer. At Cheo’s funeral Rudy meets a record label executive, Mr. Neil Silver, who typically signs rock acts, but is currently looking for “someone just like you” [sic: Rudy]. Rudy eventually goes on to sign his first record deal with Mr. Silver for $15,000 (without fully understanding all the terms of his contract), goes on a massive spending spree, and begins to live a rock star lifestyle.

Rudy’s first promotional photo shoot is set up in a studio with the New York night skyline as its backdrop. There Rudy is asked to give the photographer different poses with him kissing Lady Liberty—a white female model adorned in a shimmery green Statue of Liberty costume. “Ay America—another kiss!” Rudy exclaims as he plays to the camera just so as to capture the perfect money shot— as Rudy seductively kisses the representative signifier of America right on her pearly white cheeks. Shortly after Rudy’s album is released he puts in overtime hours to promote it to radio and at industry-sponsored events and parties. Yet, his efforts are to no avail.

Rudy’s crossover dreams abruptly turn into a dark nightmare as his album sales grossly underwhelm the label and he is immediately dropped like yesterday’s news. Thus, Rudy fails to cement his place in the “American” mainstream. He falls short of achieving his perceived notion of success, which he envisions as an American Dream rife with the ability to freely consume in America and to freely produce art and music without ethnic labels attached to one’s work. He is also rejected when he goes back to his neighborhood and tries to return to the local salsa club.

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Rudy Veloz is forced to confront his marginalized position within the “American” mainstream. Although he is an American citizen—a Puerto Rican living in New York working to achieve the American Dream—his citizenship status ultimately has no bearing on his Latino subjectivity which marks Rudy as “other” and as an outsider from the US mainstream. Up until this point, Rudy appears to lack awareness of his outsider status, but is reminded of it when confronted with the harsh reality that the American Dream is a myth and that acceptance into the music industry does not free an artist from the burdens of representation attached to one’s marginalized ethnic identity. Rudy comes to realize that as a racialized performer, the ever-present pressure to use one’s ethnic identity as a selling point for crafting his/her commercial image is more often the case. Eventually Rudy recognizes that the music industry commodifies a Latin/(o/a) ethnic identity for profit and that as a racialized performer even if you stick to the ethnic script that the culture industry and gatekeepers of commodified culture ask you to perform, this still does not ensure you protection from being disenfranchised from the purported liberatory potential and mythical meritocracy and inclusion that the illusory American Dream holds for many Latinos in the US. Hence, inclusion comes at a high price via the commodification of identity and particularly the commercialization of ethnic identity, as exclusion is always an inevitable reality for Latin/(o/a) racialized performers positioned as eternal outsiders from the dominant culture—always seeking or needing to crossover into the mainstream. Hence, Rudy’s character might be compelled to ask: When will there be an end in sight to crossover for Latin/(o/a) performers and Latin/(o/a) populations in the US?

Unfortunately for Rudy, his friends and family back home no longer saw him as the same guy after his short-lived crossover attempt, which earned him a “sell-out” reputation in “el

10 As Valdivia (2004) perceptively underscores, “The fact that Latina/os continue to be considered mostly immigrant, demonstrate their/our eternal outsider status in a country where their/our presence predates the Anglo population” (<lass.purduecal.edu/cca/gmj/sp04/gmj-sp04-valdivia.htm>).
“barrio.” By having subjected his music and image to the culture industry’s processes of sanitization and commodification, Rudy was stigmatized and judged harshly by those he left behind in the crossover process. Upon being dropped by his friends and record label, Rudy turned to his former record label boss Mr. Neil Silver for answers.

_**Mr. Neil Silver:**_ It’s a crazy business we’re in. It’s nuts. The winners always end up paying for the losers. And for some reason your record was a loser.

_**Rudy Veloz:**_ I went to the promotion guy, right?

_**Mr. Neil Silver:**_ Right, right.

_**Rudy Veloz:**_ That imbecile you have working in there. I did everything he told me to do. Okay, I did the album the way you wanted it, huh? No trumpets… sax… okay, bam! I went to that um radio interview thing. You know, I did everything according to Silver!

_**Mr. Neil Silver:**_ Hey, all I can promise…you’ll have another shot. I promise you. We’ll go back in the studio again and we’ll try it again.

_**Rudy Veloz:**_ You are going to get another chance. Cuz you got all of this. Gold records, you know you have your, your happy phone calls, you have your money, you got your American Express, you know. You are going to get another chance. Me, people like me don’t get another chance. We don’t even get answers….

Rudy’s fictional story offers an insightful critique regarding the uphill struggle for Latin/(o/a) performers with “crossover dreams” to achieve mainstream acceptance by “America” (personified in the film by a white Lady Liberty and connotatively suggesting a white mainstream America). As in Rudy’s case, racialized Latin/(o/a) performers are constantly situated outside of the dominant culture and framed by the media and culture industries as perpetually needing to crossover from their marginalized position into the white American mainstream. Moreover, racialized Latin/(o/a) performers are subject to limitations imposed by gatekeepers of the culture industries who influence and to a large extent regulate if, who, what, where, when, and how they will gain access to the mainstream as well as how they will be framed and constructed once they grab the mainstream spotlight or achieve the ever-illusively...
“crossover.” Racialized Latin/(o/a) performers arguably pose a threat as they gain mainstream visibility, because their presence is read as a challenge to the status quo construction of the US mainstream as a non-Latin/(o/a) space. If, in fact, the US mainstream and national US imaginary were already inclusive of Latinos, there would be no need for Latin(os/as) to constantly have to perform crossover in order to be recognized as part of it or viewed as having to be incorporated into it. Hence, “crossover” performers are always tenuously subjected to being treated as permanent outsiders at any time, because crossover is a perpetual state for racialized “others” who are relegated to marginal spaces in mainstream US society.

Accordingly, while Rudy briefly lives out his vision of the American Dream—a neoliberal one aligning freedom with consumption—he acquires his fancy New York apartment and parties like a rock star. However, shortly thereafter Rudy’s record label drops him, his cash flow ends, and he loses his carefree lifestyle and is evicted from his fancy apartment. Rudy’s rock star caché quickly dries up as his industry friends, label executives, new band mates, and model girlfriends all stop answering his calls once his money and fifteen minutes of fame run out. Rudy is just as easily disenfranchised from the mythical American Dream he conjured up in his mind, as he was lured into pursuing it, and as he was attempting to live out—playing out the fantasy of the glamorous lives he saw advertised around him. Thus, Rudy is never fully accepted into the fabric of mainstream America. He can kiss Lady Liberty’s white cheeks as much as he wants to, but it will not secure him full inclusion into the American mainstream as he had once envisioned.

For a time, Rudy believed that if he followed in the footsteps of white mainstream artists who had succeeded in popular music, that he too could achieve their same level of success. As a result, Rudy tried very hard to follow the blueprint of what he saw work effectively to produce
commercial successful for white male singers embraced by the mainstream like Elvis Presley (whom Cheo claimed all along that Rudy was unsuccessfully trying to imitate); not realizing that even successful imitation would not dismantle hierarchies of ethnic and racial privilege that continually situate Rudy outside the bounds of full acceptance into dominant US culture and the American mainstream. Yet, this doesn’t initially dawn on Rudy as he desperately tries to achieve crossover and sings in English, contemplates changing his name, follows the white male record label executive and rock producer’s direction for his album (firing his original salsa band members for the album producer’s “gringo” musicians), promotes the album to English language radio stations, and kisses Lady Liberty’s white hands and cheeks profusely in an attempt to visually recode himself with American iconography.

At the end of his elusive struggle, Rudy is shocked and devastated when mainstream acceptance never comes. He then seeks answers from Mr. Neil Silver and realizes that opportunities for mainstream acceptance and achievement of the American Dream are limited to a once in a lifetime shot, if even that, for someone like himself, Rudy Veloz, a Nuyorican guy from “el barrio.” He recognizes that by comparison Mr. Silver’s chances in life are unlimited as a male with white privilege in society and access to money and power, which positions Mr. Silver as a gatekeeper within in the music industry enclave and in mainstream society; whereas, Rudy is positioned as permanent outsider, or the one standing outside of the gate waiting for someone to let him in. Rudy then reckons with his ultimate disappointment by discovering where he actually stands within the music industry, and where he is positioned in America in relation to the dominant culture—he is an outsider and is undoubtedly marginalized.

While Rudy’s friends, mentors, and original salsa band mates always recognized the odds stacked against him, Rudy was naïve until he learned this lesson firsthand from his crossover
nightmare. For Rudy it was always problematic that his friends, mentors, and original salsa band mates all wanted to keep him in an artistic box in terms of defining him just as a local salsa band member conformed to only singing in Spanish and sticking to traditional Latin genres and to what he presumably knew best. What Rudy failed to realize is that this same box existed both within the music industry and in mainstream US society. In many ways, Rudy felt confined by the expectations thrown on him as a “Latin” performer for “his” people. He felt a burden of representation from his community that he wanted to throw off as well. Rudy sought to be recognized internationally for “Rudy Veloz” in all his heterogeneity and diversity, playing the hybrid mix of music that he wanted to perform, and not playing the racialized script that either his friends or his record label instructed him to follow.

_Crossover Dreams_ (1985) exposes a complex and tenuous position for performers who are racialized and marginalized by the mainstream and yet celebrated in limited/ing and uneven ways in comparison to white performers in the mainstream. These tensions are heightened by the additional burden of representation carried by racialized Latin/(o/a) performers who do gain visibility in the mainstream and are often projected as representatives of their ethnic communities (across multiple Latino subgroups and/or via a pan-Latin construction)—that are already either symbolically annihilated (Tuchman 1978), symbolically colonized (Molina-Guzmán 2010) or rendered invisible by the mainstream US media. Moreover, Latin/(o/a) performers that carry this burden of representation are also subject to being vilified for “selling out” if perceived as moving too close to the US mainstream (coded: non-Latin/(o/a) and falling within a black/white binary) and too far from their ethnic roots; thus, alienating the community
that originally created them (e.g., case in point Shakira\textsuperscript{11},
\url{http://www.billboard.com/articles/photos/live/949780/juanes-live-qa-archived-video}).

In particular, Rudy’s tale is valuable to a discussion of contemporary crossover in that it
provides an undergirding context for provoking critical questions such as when is the crossover
ever really over for Latin/(o/a) performers? Why do Latin/(o/a) performers consistently have to
keep crossing over into the US mainstream after many decades of Latin crossovers and why are
they still not accepted as part of the fabric of America in ways that are not limiting or limited to
the boundaries imposed by gatekeepers of the culture industries, mainstream US media, or of the
dominant culture? After all, there would be no need for Latin/(o/a) performers to continually
crossover into the mainstream if they were already recognized as constitutive of its very
formation and existence.

This second chapter situates the latest iteration of Latin “crossover” via the commercial
crossover of reggaetón music as the most recent attempt of racialized Latin/(o/a) performers to
gain acceptance into the US mainstream. Branded stateside as a musical phenomenon for “pan-
Latin/(o/a)” youth, created by “Latin urban” youth—reggaetón stakes a claim not only as music
and culture directed at second generation and higher Latin/(o/a) youth in the US, rather
simultaneously seeks a global Latin audience. On one hand, this arguably opens up a space for
Latin/(o/a) youth to affirm their pan-ethnic Latino US identities as well as their individual
nationalities (largely interpellated as: Latino sub-groups, to the exclusion of non-Latino hybrid
identities). And yet, these pan-ethnic discourses around Latinidad are also usurped by the

\textsuperscript{11} In Mariel Concepcion’s (2010) interview with artist Juanes, he was asked about his fellow compatriot crossover artist Shakira.
Question submitted online from screen-name Sebastian3297: How do you feel about Shakira separating herself from the Hispanic community and directing her music more toward an American audience?
Interviewer: Do you actually feel that that’s the case for Shakira?
Juanes: Well, I guess, I respect her. I feel, you have to respect. Everyone has to choose to do their own decisions and maybe she’s feeling better like that, but I miss, I miss that old Shakira. I miss her, because she’s so talented, so strong, and probably she will come back someday, I suppose.
Interviewer: I mean, I think she still taps into her Latin roots a little bit I see, but Sebastian3297 doesn’t think so
\url{http://www.billboard.com/articles/photos/live/949780/juanes-live-qa-archived-video}).
culture/entertainment industries to mass market to a highly attractive target of young bilingual, bicultural consumers all united under a pan-Latin/(o) label.

I contend that reggaetón seeks to expand its appeal to Latin global audiences and consumers through multiple pan-Latin/(o/a) branding strategies—targeting a *pan-Latin* market—incorporating both a US pan-Latino/a and a pan-Latin global youth market also dubbed “millennials” (typically considered age 34 or younger). Exploration of reggaetón’s Latin crossover serves as a productive case study for critically engaging how discursive constructs of pan-Latinidad continue to be constructed and deployed in an effort to capitalize on Latin/(o/a) purchasing power (in reggaetón’s case directly targeted to appeal to pan-Latin/(o/a) millennials).

And yet, Latinos remain excluded or marginalized from the US mainstream. Moreover, examining reggaetón’s global crossover is particularly instructive for demonstrating how marketers and the culture industries discursively reconstruct reggaetón via global pan-ethnic marketing strategies to expand its market reach both on a national and global scale. These strategies include deploying reggaetón’s authenticated *Latin urban* crossover identity as well as its *pan-Latin* (e.g., Reggaetón Latino) and/or *hybrid* discursive construct, so as to endorse and sell pan-Latin/(o/a) branded products (i.e., Zumba) to general market consumers as well as to reach untapped global markets through reggaetón that extend beyond bilingual or Spanish/English-dominant consumers (i.e., more recently incorporating Portuguese collaborations or South Asian diasporic influence in the music).

**Bridging the Crossover Gap**

In 1999, journalist Kate Fitzgerald published an article in *Advertising Age* titled: “Latino lifestyle missing from English-language fare; Untapped Gold Mine: In film and music industries, there have been advances, but TV interest lags” (<http://adage.com/article/news/latino-lifestyle-
missing-english-language-fare-untapped-gold-mine-film-music-industries-advances-tv-interest-lags/61293/). Fitzgerald’s article contemplated the lack of English-language television programming directed at young bilingual Latinos in the US who wanted “to see their lifestyles and culture reflected in English-language network and cable TV programming.” The absence of television content was glaring at the time considering the demographic statistics on the Latino population. In 1999, the median age of Latinos was 24.8 years of age (Strategy Research Corp. cited in Fitzgerald 1999). At this time, 34.4% of the 32.4 million Latinos living in the U.S. were younger than 18 years of age (ibid). In addition, a 1999 television viewership study revealed that, “three-quarters of Latinos routinely watch[ed] both English and Spanish television” (DeSipio 5). Hence, the gap that Fitzgerald pointed to in her article was fundamentally indicative of a long-standing disconnect between advertisers, TV networks, and the Latino audience. Fitzgerald dubbed these younger bilingual and/or English-dominant US-born Latinos an “untapped gold mine” and characterized network executives and advertisers as lagging behind the curve. Fitzgerald found that networks and advertisers were basically unconvinced that there was another Latino market outside of “Spanish-dominant Hispanics who favor its [Univision] novelas and family-style programming.” Aside from the cable television network Si TV (now Nuvo TV), which sought to offer bilingual television content early on but was seeking funding at the time, as well as a few select shows still being market tested at the time by cable networks such as Galavision and Gems—English-language programming on television that appealed to younger bicultural, bilingual Latinos was scarce in 1999. Some of the reasons offered to explain this gap included an overall lack of understanding on the part of advertisers and networks who considered the young bilingual and mostly English Latinos as a “new” audience that they just could not figure out yet or put their finger on (due to unanswered questions around language and
differentiated acculturation levels for this group), which subsequently resulted in their general inability to convince more advertisers that there was a point to broadcasting content to Latinos in English. Moreover, conflicts existed between local affiliate stations with larger English-dominant Latino audiences, such as WSVN-TV in Miami, and the way Nielsen’s rating system disproportionately measured Spanish-dominant households—arguably skewing the audience meter results in these markets and not precisely revealing thousands of bilingual Latino households that were already a huge part of the English-broadcasting audience (Fitzgerald 1999). These points raised in Fitzgerald’s article were also echoed in Arlene Dávila’s (2001) research for *Latinos, Inc.* Dávila’s research exposed the prevailing view from Madison Avenue as “the more connected Hispanics are to Latin America, not U.S., culture, the more valuable they are as consumers;” ultimately constructing Latin America as “the only source of vitality and strength for U.S. Latino culture” (79). As such, Dávila argued that at this moment the industry was biased against acculturated “MELS (mostly English Latinos),” which explained their exclusion from the Hispanic market at the time. According to Dávila, the advertising industry directed its efforts at targeting the Hispanic consumer who was constructed more often than not as foreign-born, of immigrant status, and as “more docile and apolitical, and hence easier to please by advertising, as compared to their Latino counterparts” (78). Arguably, the advertising industry also partially justified ascribing MELs lesser status and lower priority within the Hispanic market based on their smaller size. One of Dávila’s interviewees divided the Hispanic market share up between the “70 percent of the Hispanic population; of those 50 percent we call Spanish-dominant, the ones who live their lives in Spanish, and 20 percent we call bilingual”—relegating mostly English Latinos to the “remaining 30 percent” (78). When Dávila asked a vice president of research at advertising agency BBDO about the short shrift given to this remaining 30 percent of
2nd and 3rd generation or higher Latinos, she was told: “those populations have already been lost….”, which led Dávila to surmise that “it was now up to the English-language networks to target this type of consumer” (79-80). This response was problematic given that, as Fitzgerald’s (1999) article exposes, mainstream or general-market TV also failed to either represent or appeal to these 2nd and higher generation bilingual or mostly English-dominant Latinos—i.e., “Watching a show like [NBC-TV’s] ‘Friends,’ you’re not seeing the actual diversity of people who live in New York” (said Tom Feie, director of Chicago UPN affiliate, WPWR-TV, cited in Fitzgerald 1999).

While MEL (Mostly English Latino) and bilingual households have been watching English-broadcasting content since the birth of television as a medium in the US, clearly the invisibility of these Latinos on television demonstrates not only a missed opportunity for advertisers and networks from an economic standpoint, but also speaks volumes about how Latinos are ethnically and racially marginalized in the mainstream media, as they are easily dismissed and ignored—even in markets where their larger presence and viewership exists. In large part, this ability to bypass certain segments of the Latino population also stems from the lack of inclusion of Latinos in network programming and chief executive positions within the mainstream media. Decisions to predominantly broadcast and market to Spanish-dominant Latinos in the US have been largely determined by advertising executives and the culture industry’s power-players and gatekeepers who rarely reflect the faces actually struggling for recognition on television; rather more often than not reflect the white audiences marked “general” that already maintain dominant prime-time visibility across mediums. And, yet this notion has troubled some programming directors with larger Latino audiences such as Tom Feie, director of Chicago UPN affiliate WPWR-TV, whom Fitzgerald quoted in her article as saying
that, “It’s obvious there’s a lot of interest in Latino-themed entertainment in music and movies, but TV has been slow to respond” (*ibid*). While stating the obvious with regard to television, Mr. Feie’s comments regarding interest in Latino-themed entertainment in music and movies seem quite understated considering that the late 1990s ushered in an absolute frenzy of mainstream media coverage around “new” Latin Booms and Explosions emerging from both the music and entertainment industries.

**Previous Latin Booms and Explosions: Crossovers of the Late 1990s**

Ricky Martin rode this song all the way to number one in the summer of 1999—prompting everyone from *Entertainment Weekly* to *Time* magazine (which boldly declared, “Latin Music Goes Pop!” on one of its covers) to announce the start of a nueva onda in music. In fact, “La vida loca” proved such a defining musical moment that now, six years later, some people think it was the song Ricky performed during his electrifying, hip-shaking performance at the 1999 Grammy Awards. (He actually sang another hit, “La copa de la vida,” that night.) ‘People’s jaws dropped; they were in awe,’ says former MTV VJ Daisy Fuentes, who attended the show. ‘Here was this gorgeous guy, this cool, fun sound, and he was full-on entertaining. Because that’s what Latin entertainers do! And that’s what started this whole new wave of Latin pop’ (Greeven 166).

Based solely on *Latina* magazine’s coverage of Ricky Martin’s 1999 Grammy Awards performance, one might be convinced that it singlehandedly set off the first Latin Boom or Latin Explosion of its kind and opened the door for a “whole new wave of Latin pop” (emphasis added). Yet, as popular music journalist Leila Cobo (2004) reminds us, “Crossover acts, of course, are not new. Long before [Ricky] Martin or [Gloria/Emilio] Estefan, there were many cases of Latin artists recording in English and vice versa, from Jose Feliciano, Xavier Cugat and Julio Iglesias to Eydie Gorme and Paul Anka” (14).12 Accordingly, “crossover” in popular music

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12 Although too often effaced by the discourses of Latin Boom and Latin Explosion promulgated via mainstream media, the legacy of Latin(o/a) musical performers in the US spans at least a century. Long before talk of yet another Latin explosion, boom, or wave hitting the US in the 1980s, 1990s, or 2000s, Afro-Cuban and Puerto Rican jazz musicians became popular among diverse audiences in Harlem Renaissance New York as early as the 1920s (Serrano 2007). Mexican Americans were also performing swing and big band music in the 1930s in Los Angeles (Macías 2008). Latin(o/as) have a long history of developing new fusions in Latin music such as Latin jazz as well as “styles not specifically associated with Latino cultures” such as disco, rap, house, freestyle, meren-rap, banda-rap, and reggaetón (Pacini-Hernández 2010: 54). Pacini-Hernández also asserts that: “The
is typically conceived of as the movement of artists “from margin to mainstream”\(^\text{13}\); however, based on the history of Latin crossover in the US this purported movement “from margin to mainstream” is often drastically overestimated and particularly hyped by the mainstream media in the US. Based on the many “Latin Booms” and “Explosions” that have appeared in US news headlines over the last few decades alone, attaining full inclusion into the US mainstream via crossover has been a largely unfruitful venture for Latin(os/as) via popular culture or other means; as Latin crossover still persists as the primary discursive construction for Latino inclusion into mainstream culture.

On the other hand, crossover is set up as a zero sum game for racialized Latin/(o/a) performers who must constantly walk a tightrope to conform to general market standards and undergo repeated processes of sanitization and commercialization of their music, language, performances, and image in order to achieve and attempt to maintain their crossover status.

Accordingly, Cepeda (2003) points to the physical changes undergone by crossover stars such as Jennifer Lopez, Christina Aguilera, and Shakira as she asserts that “each woman has grown successively thinner and blonder with time. It is as if by means of hair dye and weight loss (and in Aguilera’s case, brilliant blue contact lenses as well) these Latin/(a) American women sought to mitigate their respective receptions within the US mainstream conscience, in essence manipulating the visual in a way that renders them more ‘user-friendly’ to non-Latinos” (221).

Additionally, Báez’s (2006) study reveals the extent to which female reggaetón icon, Ivy Queen 1940s and 1950s are often considered the glory years of Latin popular music, thanks to the aesthetic developments and commercial success achieved in the national and international arena by the mostly Afro-Cuban-inspired dance musics emanating from New York City that virtually came to define ‘Latin music’ in the U.S. imagination, particularly in the wake of the mambo craze” (ibid). Rivera (2003) contends that there has also been “a long-standing tradition of Puerto Rican participation in genres most commonly identified as African American, such as jazz in the early decades of the twentieth century, doo-wop and rhythm-and-blues during the 1950s, and boogaloo and Latin soul during the 1960s and 1970s” (x). 13 I deploy the popular music term crossover to reference the “process whereby an artist or a recording from a ‘secondary’ marketing category like country and western, Latin, or rhythm and blues achieves hit status in the mainstream or ‘pop’ market. While the term can and has been used simply to indicate multiple chart listings in any direction, its most common usage in popular music history clearly connotes movement from margin to mainstream” (Garofalo 1993: 231).
has “disciplined her body in an effort to mimic codes of Anglo and Latin American white femininity” from “more feminine and sexually provocative in her dress, hair, and make-up, in addition to recently deciding to augment her breasts through implants” (73). Although these Latin crossover artists exercise their own agency in deciding what physical changes to make to their bodies, this does not diminish the constraints and demands put on these artists to construct and maintain an image that will simultaneously appeal to non-Latinos in the US, Latinos in the US, and well as global Latin audiences abroad.

Hence, Latin crossover only provides conditional and illusory promises of inclusivity, which serves as sustained evidence that Latin(os/as) are still positioned outside of the mainstream—no matter what we still need to “cross” over. Reggaetón is but the latest iteration of Latin crossover, but arguably many others will follow in its wake. Whenever the mainstream media draws attention to what Latin(os/as) do, sing, dance, cook, create, perform, dress like, look like, talk like, etc., it is always discursively marked by ethnic and racial difference and thereby treated as a novelty for the dominant culture’s gaze or sanitized and commercialized for mainstream consumption in the U.S.—thereby reifying the permanent outsider status of Latinos within dominant culture. This is most clearly revealed in US mainstream media coverage of “Latin Booms” and “Latin Explosions.”

The US mainstream media’s memory is particularly short, as every few years various news sources spotlight yet another Latin Explosion story with headlines like: “Another Latin Boom, But Different” or “Who is the next Ricky Martin?”14 Headlines such as these suggest that

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14 Other “Latin Boom” and/or “Explosion” related news headlines include some of the following: (“The networks barely hear the Latin boom outside; last year, only 3 percent of the characters were Hispanic; but cable TV sees a market and is taking up the slack” (Adams 2000: <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/29/arts/television-radio-the-networks-barely-hear-the-latin-boom-outside.html>); “Taking Salsa by Storm with a Power Punch of Rock-and-Roll” (Watrour 1998: <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/06/27/arts/music-another-latin-boom-but-different.html>); “An explosion of Mexican Electronic in Chicago” (Ortiz 2009: 5.11); “Another Latin Boom, But Different” (Garcia 1999: <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/06/27/arts/music-another-latin-boom-but-different.html>); “Boom in U.S. for Latin Writers”
the perpetual hunt for the next Latin crossover act or quest for the next bit of exotic Latin spice to expose to the mainstream is merely status quo by now. Negrón-Muntaner (2004) expands on the “Who is the next Ricky Martin?” phenomenon:

Only one year after Martin’s 1999 Grammy presentation, the 2000 Grammy Awards focus was on Latin music and the search was on for the next singing sensation. The hunger pangs for Latino talent were so urgent that singers like Shakira and Carlos Ponce were lauded in mainstream publications for their crossover success, even before they had recorded or released English albums. This enthusiasm also spilled over to Latinos toiling in other sectors of the entertainment industry, who now experienced a previously unimagined increase in value. As the cover of Latin Heat, a Latino film and television trade publication, put it, ‘Thank you Ricky Martin!’ (253).

Thus, achieving crossover functions only as a transient experience for Latin performers who are raised to icon status in the mainstream for a brief moment until the search continues for the next crossover star. A prime example of Latin Boom turned bust surfaced in Leila Cobo’s (2013) Billboard magazine article titled, “Grammy’s Latin Problem: Despite 1 in 10 viewers of the telecast being from a Hispanic household, the show lacks a notable Latin presence,” where she problematizes the stark absence of Latin Grammy performers against the 11.2% of Hispanic viewers who watched last year’s Grammy Awards presentation and the current variety of Latin acts that could be made “palatable to a mainstream Grammy audience”—in other words those with bilingual/bicultural appeal like “Juanes (up for best Latin pop album); and Romeo Santos (nominated for best tropical album)” (16). As such, Cobo waxes nostalgic stating:

Juanes sang an acoustic version of Elton John’s “Your Song” during the 2013 Grammy Awards. However, Juanes who is notorious for only singing in Spanish (<http://www.billboard.com/articles/photos/live/949780/juanes-live-qa-archived-video>) opened the performance singing in English and sang the chorus. When asked during a Grammy press conference about his crossover, Juanes mentioned that on the new album he is recording that he will have 4 songs in English or in Spanish and English (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K99p2PDNeY>). Coda: Leila Cobo wrote a follow-up piece post 2013 Grammys and weighed in on the Juanes Grammy performance stating: “Winners aside, all eyes were on Juanes as he performed -- yes, a Spanish speaking Latin act finally performed -- on the Grammys. And, okay, it was a bilingual cover of Elton John's ‘Your Song,’ a total hand-out, peace offering, or call it what you may for those of us constantly griping that there's no Latin presence in the Grammys. Was it enough? Hardly. But hey, it's a start” (<http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/latin-notas/1538723/juanes-aside-upsets-dominate-among-latin-grammy-winners>).

15 Juanes sang an acoustic version of Elton John’s “Your Song” during the 2013 Grammy Awards. However, Juanes who is notorious for only singing in Spanish (<http://www.billboard.com/articles/photos/live/949780/juanes-live-qa-archived-video>) opened the performance singing in English and sang the chorus. When asked during a Grammy press conference about his crossover, Juanes mentioned that on the new album he is recording that he will have 4 songs in English or in Spanish and English (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K99p2PDNeY>). Coda: Leila Cobo wrote a follow-up piece post 2013 Grammys and weighed in on the Juanes Grammy performance stating: “Winners aside, all eyes were on Juanes as he performed -- yes, a Spanish speaking Latin act finally performed -- on the Grammys. And, okay, it was a bilingual cover of Elton John's ‘Your Song,’ a total hand-out, peace offering, or call it what you may for those of us constantly griping that there's no Latin presence in the Grammys. Was it enough? Hardly. But hey, it's a start” (<http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/latin-notas/1538723/juanes-aside-upsets-dominate-among-latin-grammy-winners>).
What then, has happened with the Grammys? The last memorable Latin appearance on a mainstream Grammys show was Ricky Martin’s groundbreaking bilingual performance of ‘The Cup of Life’ in 1999. Since then, [Jennifer] Lopez and Marc Anthony duetted in 2005 in a dated bedroom scene reminiscent of an 80’s telenovela, Shakira and Wyclef Jean performed together back in 2007, and there’s been an occasional Latin presenter. There have been few others. And few Latin awards have been given out on air. The lack of an on-camera presence is demoralizing for the industry, so much so that many major Latin acts don’t even bother attending the Grammys anymore (ibid).

Extending Cobo’s well-illustrated point, the Grammys could also be interpreted as a marker for where Latinos currently fare when it comes to gaining mainstream acceptance. The 1999/2013 Grammy comparison demonstrates that the lack of Latino visibility on the main stage in 2013 only reaffirms that regardless of the “Latin Explosion” that went off in 1999, huge barriers that still exist for mainstream inclusion of Latinos in the US—be it in English, Spanish, or both. This example also shows that even though there are Latinos “palatable” enough to gain acceptance onto the main stage (i.e., as language barriers are less frequently used as a scapegoat given the current spate of bilingual/bicultural Latin performers), they are still marginalized or segregated into Latin/(o/a) spaces—e.g., the Latin Grammys. And yet, if this is the way in which “palatable” Latinos are perceived and treated by the media and culture industries, how do perceptions fare for Latinos represented as “non-palatable” by US mainstream media? Arguably, the lack of mainstream inclusion for Latinos (citizens or undocumented, native-born or foreign-born)—the majority minority in the US—can be partly attributed to the ways that non-palatable Latinos, particularly undocumented immigrants, are still largely constructed and perceived in the US as a highly dangerous threat to the maintenance and “purity” of a white middle and upper-class mainstream. Thus, the mostly white male elite industry gatekeepers tightly regulate the borders of Latinos “crossing” over into the mainstream via popular culture, lest they risk eliciting fears of shifting demographics and the changing of the white US majority status quo—or of the
“brown tide rising” (Valdivia 2010: 14-16). Historically, these fears have often manifested in acts of anti-immigrant backlash. For instance, the “Latin Booms” and “Explosions” of the latter 1990s followed on the heels of rising of xenophobic legislation proposed throughout the US in the mid-1990s (i.e., Propositions 187, 209, 227 in California) (Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006: 149). More recent reinventions of Prop 187 are being faced by Arizona’s residents dealing with the fallout from SB 1070 requiring police to arrest and detain those who provoke “reasonable suspicion” of undocumented status in the US (<http://www.aclu.org/arizonas-sb-1070>). And while we celebrate the star status of palatable Latin crossover acts like Shakira in the mainstream media, those deemed unpalatable or “reasonably suspicious” are violently subjected to outright discrimination and border inspections (Lugo 2008). Báez (2009) perceptively calls out this disjuncture in her dissertation as she highlights the “hypervisibility” of spectacular celebrated bodies like that of Jennifer Lopez against the undocumented female ordinary body that is rendered invisible and/or highly undesirable in the mainstream media (6-7). I argue that it is within this contextual framework that reggaetón’s Latin crossover must be analyzed. As the latest iteration of spectacular Latin crossover, reggaetón’s Latin music boom must be critically engaged within the context of the established Latin boom discourses from which it originates and against the anti-Latin/(o/a) immigrant discourses that also circulate alongside those which celebrate reggaetón’s commercial mainstream crossover for purportedly amplifying the status of Latinos to global mainstream visibility.

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17 The hotly contested and later struck down, Proposition 187 from California (1994), was designed to take public services from undocumented immigrants and required that suspected undocumented immigrants be reported to the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) by any public officials (Félix, González, and Ramírez 2008: 621). This was followed by another law also proposed in California in 1996 to deny citizenship status to the US native-born children of undocumented mothers, called “Save our State,” however this proposed act did not make it to the ballot (Martínez 2001: 43). Additionally, Congress followed suit in Washington D.C. with legislation such as the Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which sought to restrict immigrants’ access to benefits as well as increase penalties for those caught falsifying documents for immigrants (Martínez 2001: 44).
Don’t Believe the Latin Boom Hype: Representation of Latinos in US Mainstream Media

The mainstream US media has been a highly effective tool for discursively constructing and circulating rhetorical hype around “Latin Booms” and “Explosions” over decades—constantly recirculating narratives which conflate Latino visibility in US mainstream media with representative parity. Across the board, Latinos remain underrepresented in US mainstream media both behind the scenes and in front of cameras. NAHJ’s last Network Brownout Report (2006) finds that: “each year very little changes and this report continues to yield the same dismal results. Latinos make up 14.5 percent of the US population but less than one percent of stories on the network evening news” (Montalvo and Torres 5). Based on 2012 US census data sets, Pew Research Center (Brown and Lopez 2013) reveal that 53 million Latinos comprise at least 17% of the U.S. population; however, National Association of Hispanic Journalist’s (NAHJ) 2006 recommendations for increasing Latinos journalists and managers have not precipitated the strong effort needed to move toward parity in Latino network news coverage and representation (Montalvo and Torres 19-20). For example, CNN recently announced the departure of Soledad O’Brien, which leaves one Latina anchor on the network, Zoraida Sambolin, a co-host on the 5-7 a.m. time slot, and no other Latin/(o/a) anchors in either CNN daytime or prime-time (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/26/nahj-cnn-diversity-latino_n_2764981.html>). Accordingly, Montalvo and Torres argue that, “the lack of newsroom diversity at these networks is the primary reason for their poor coverage of Latinos. Unfortunately, the nation’s news media have historically failed to ensure that their newsrooms, as well as their news coverage reflect the communities they serve” (20).

On the network television side, the National Latino Media Council’s (NLMC) 2012 Latino diversity report card for media companies observed that while the Latino talent source
and audience is abundant in the US, “without more Latinos as creative executives, writers, producers and directors, the television shows are less likely to succeed in attracting the Latino audience” (<http://www.nhmc.org/tv-network-report-cards/>). NLMC’s 2012 report card for television diversity evaluates the major broadcast television networks’ implementation of diversity commitments agreed upon in the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) signed in 1999 between the major broadcast networks (Disney/ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox) and the Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition (1). The categories measured in this report include: Actors: On-air Primetime Scripted Shows, Actors: On-air Primetime Alternative Shows, Writers and Producers: Primetime, Directors: Primetime, Program Development, Procurement, Entertainment Creative Executives, and Network Commitment to Diversity initiatives and Submission of Data (16).

NLMC’s 2012 report recognizes that some television network executives are beginning to embrace the move toward programming with Latino presence and appeal—i.e., deeming Disney/ABC a “model network in terms of providing opportunities for Latinos” with a B grade overall, but F in the category of recruitment of Entertainment Creative Executives (3). The other three networks received the following overall grades for 2012: CBS—B+, NBC—A-, and Fox—F (16). The Fox Network was graded an F in every category for failing to provide NLMC with employment data and procurement statistics that reflect their diversity efforts (15). In light of 2012’s evaluations, the NLMC stressed the significance of supporting Latino writers and ensuring that they occupy more empowered head writer positions given that, “Junior writers may not have the clout to debate a negative stereotype or a bad Latino joke” (2). The same recommendation was offered in terms of the need for television networks to also boost the number of Latino creative executives with the ability to green-light programs (1).
In Hollywood, the Writers Guild of America, West (WGAW) released a report in 2011 that provided an overview of minority employment and compensation figures in the field. Overall, the WGAW report cited minimal progress from earlier reports and found that “white males continued to dominate employment opportunities and earnings both in the film and television sectors. While the situation was more mixed for older writers, women and minority writers experienced little progress, if any, relative to their male and white counterparts” (<http://www.wga.org/uploadedFiles/who_we_are/hwr11execsum.pdf>). As such, the earning figures of minority writers in 2009 ($87,225) lagged behind those of women ($100,000) and white males ($117,343) overall (7). Moreover, the trends for minority employment were found to be in line with the “longer-term trend in which minorities have been regularly underrepresented by factors of about 3 to 1 among television writers” and “7 to 1 among employed film writers in 2009”—“the lowest level in at least ten years” (5). As this report took into account the effects of the Great Recession of 2007 on these employment and compensation statistics, WGAW also underscored the importance of women and minority writers achieving parity within the Hollywood industry, declaring that—“Diversity is not a luxury, not even in tough times” (14).

As these figures from network news, broadcast television, and Hollywood intimate, the status of Latino employment, compensation, visibility, and representation in US media industries reflects a reality that is a far cry from the sporadic calls for celebration of Latino pop stars depicted via US mainstream media coverage of “Latin Booms” and “Explosions.” Even in the music industry where Latino performers have arguably received the most visibility, these repeated media-hyped “Latin Booms” and “Explosions” celebrating Latin crossovers have only exposed how uneven and problematic US mainstream media coverage is for Latinos. In other
words, Latinos that do receive mainstream media attention and visibility, still obtain it in ways that predominantly generalize and stereotype them (Ramírez Berg 2002, Valdivia 2010).

**Yet Another Latin Explosion**

The collective media celebration of Latin crossover ostensibly functions as a palimpsest—as the long musical trajectories and faded pasts of Latin musicians are layered over by narratives of fresh start, tabula rasa, and new discovery—all discursively constructed for Latin acts via commercial crossover. Subjected to the commercial maw of the music and culture industries, Latin crossover artists and audiences alike encounter the politics of appropriation firsthand. Latin crossover artists become headline fodder for press coverage of “Latin Booms” and “Explosions” that circulates in the US and aboard. Latin Boom discourses have been rightfully critiqued by Cepeda (2001) for the ways in which they have “de-contextualized, de-historicized language and subject matter of various recordings, television programs, and popular print media produced, written, and/or performed by non-Latinos and U.S. Latina/o performers and industry figures alike, with an emphasis on the unique role placed by Miami-based entrepreneurs Gloria and Emilio Estefan” (65). Consequently, Pacini-Hernández (2007) has also critically examined the ultra-dominant Cuban American influence over the Latin music industry and cited numerous examples of intra-Latin/(o/a) discontent with their unfair “ability to define and project Latin Music to the world” (56). Pacini-Hernández offered accounts in which post-2000 Latin Grammy Awards “both Mexican and Puerto Rican producers and musicians complained that their communities’ musics were not adequately represented in the on-air television extravaganza, and they accused the Cuban American organizers of using the event to promote their own products” and Nuyorican salsa legend, Willie Colon, even went so far as to address them as “the Miami mafia” (56-57). Cepeda (2000) also draws attention to the many
musical trajectories and histories within Latin music that are diminished as a result of the “disproportionate privilege” ascribed both to the Estefans and to Ricky Martin throughout the 1990s iteration of Latin Boom (58). For instance, Selena Quintanilla’s Latin crossover is one often subverted in the dominant media discourses around the Latin Music Boom of the 1990s. Yet, Parédez’s (2009) work reminds us that although Selena broke through crossover barriers before her death and even more so posthumously, her role in ushering in the Latin Music Boom of the late 1990s was “an ironic fact, given the conspicuous erasure of Mexicans and Tejanos both from dominant representations and from the Latin/o music industry itself’” (25). Thus, these examples from within the Latin music industry effectively illustrate the extent to which Latin music audience and consumer perceptions are primed and dually influenced by the ways in which the media and culture industries construct, expose, privilege, and assert particular representations of Latinidad as popular—i.e., favoring Caribbean Latino identities such as Cuban and Puerto Rican over Mexican or Mexican American identities—“(dis)regarded as decisively un-hip, blue-collar, country cousins within larger Latina/o imaginaries” (Paredez 25). Dávila (2012) relevantly conjectures that these underlying critiques around Latin crossover, Latin Boom, and Latin Explosion have “underscored the problems of commercial Latinidad and the need to examine the structures and dynamics behind its production, circulation, and consumption” (xiv).

In specific regards to the production of the Latin music boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s, former chairman and CEO of Sony Music Entertainment, Tommy Mottola played a significant role behind the scenes in orchestrating the Latin crossovers of Ricky Martin, Jennifer Lopez, Marc Anthony, and Shakira. In 2004, Mottola admitted to Billboard Magazine that “Latin Explosion” was a term invented by the media and strategically deployed by record labels as a
marketing tool (Cobo 2004: 14). In his own words Mottola explains, “It was a mirage. And two of the biggest stars [Marc Anthony and Jennifer Lopez] were from the Bronx, N.Y. But we used it to take gigantic advantage of it, and lots of our stars benefitted from that” (ibid). The blatant admission of Mottola around the discursively constructed nature of the “Latin Explosion” has led scholars, such as Pacini-Hernández (2007), to question: “Is there any such thing as Latino popular music in the United States, and if so, what is it? What is its relationship to ‘Latin music’? (49). For Pacini-Hernández, the music industry’s power to name and constantly (re)-construct “Latin music” in an all-encompassing pan-Latin frame is problematic whereby Latin music ultimately serves as a:

[c]atch-all phrase to describe all Spanish and Portuguese-language popular music regardless of genre, or where and by whom it is produced and consumed—including musics from Spain (and, at least in principle if not in practice, from Portugal as well). In addition to effacing differences between Latin American and US Latino musical practices, the catch-all Latin music category also erases the profound differences among the different regional styles falling under that umbrella term—and by extension, ignores the cultural specificity and lived experiences of the communities that produce and consume them (50).

Extending from the conflation that occurs as Latin American and US Latino musics are subsumed under one generic Latin music category, Pacini-Hernández also argues that “Latinas/os are equated with Latin Americans and Spaniards, thus perpetuating exclusion of US Latinas/os from US cultural citizenship; the implicit message is that those who perform and consume ‘Latin’ music are foreign, and therefore not ‘American’” (51). In fact, Latin artists have discussed being made to feel foreign within the context of crossover, despite being native-born Americans. In a televised interview with Charlie Rose that aired on PBS, Marc Anthony critically examined his place within the constructed “Latin Explosion” (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/latinmusicusa/index.html#/en/wat/04/05>):
**Marc Anthony:** You know you hear day in day out about this Latin music explosion…stuff like that…when the music that the world is being exposed to at this time…be it through Ricky Martin, Jennifer Lopez, Enrique Iglesias, or myself, is not truly representative of Latin music.

**Charlie Rose:** Does it annoy you? Does it make you happy? Does it in some ways put you in a place where you’re kinda lumped together with other artists?

**Marc Anthony:** I’d rather not be…

**Charlie Rose:** …lumped together…

**Marc Anthony:** …at all. I don’t think anybody…anyone of us…cause it’s almost like we’re invading, or like we don’t belong and we’re coming from somewhere else… and, I was born and raised here in New York City.

For Marc Anthony and other Latin crossover stars, it was not uncommon to be lumped in with other artists and swept up in the US mainstream media’s discourses around the growing “Latin Wave.” It was also not uncommon for these Latin acts to have their entire music histories prior-to-crossover strategically overlooked by the media and the music label in order to sell their newly crafted Latin crossover artist identity to mainstream US and global audiences. For example, Rivera (2003) reveals the little known fact that George LaMond, Marc Anthony, La India, Brenda K. Starr, and Lissette Melendez all had careers in freestyle music before crossing over into salsa and/or other Latin crossover or pop music forms (211). Yet, according to Cepeda (2000), through processes of sanitization and commodification, these artists were ostensibly “repackaged as ‘debut artists’ and as new ‘discoveries’ of mainstream record companies, in a reflection of what Wilson Valentín terms the ‘Columbus effect’ (59). Also, referred to as the *myth of discovery*, Cepeda draws out the connection between this myth and the music industry’s “ability to re-contextualize and in essence ‘resemanticize’ Latina/o artists” (*ibid*). The Columbus effect is a constant go-to in the music industry to create a tabula rasa on which the record labels circumscribe a new narrative for Latin crossover acts, which sanitizes and recasts the artist’s
image as exceedingly flexible and pliable—enough so as to target and expand their reach to more expansive audiences and markets.

Thus, Latin crossover functions as an illusory narrative of Latino inclusion in the US mainstream. In particular, the hype around “Latin Boom” and “Explosion” attempts to signal greater visibility and parity for Latino representation in the US mainstream media; however, actual representation figures for Latinos in network newsrooms, executive creative positions, and on-screen in primetime still lags far behind that of white counterparts. Thus, visibility is not a fair measure of parity (Gross 2001), particularly in the case of Latinos in the mainstream media. The media coverage that Latinos do receive is either symbolically annihilating (Tuchman 1978) or symbolically colonizing (Molina-Guzmán 2010), in that it homogenizes Latinos and at the same time reproduces “dominant norms, values, beliefs, and public understandings about Latinidad as gendered, racialized, foreign, exotic, and consumable” (Molina-Guzmán 2010: 9).

Moreover, Latin crossover works to perpetuate myths about Latinos in the media. In particular, Latin crossover circulates myths of discovery that resignify Latin crossover artists as new to the US, which at the same time discursively constructs them as foreign to the US mainstream even though some of these artists were born and raised in the US. The Latin music industry also presents a decontextualized construct of “Latin music” to mainstream audiences as all musics connected by Spanish and/or Portuguese and subsumed under a Latin umbrella, which then leaves the bilingual/bicultural Latino musician and fan “located on the faultlines between the Latin and mainstream markets—and the cultural assumptions associated with each of them” (Pacini-Hernández 2007: 57). Through Latin Booms, Explosions, and crossovers the media and culture industries also produce hierarchies within Latino identities, privileging those most closely perceived as consumers and as amenable to inclusion in the Hispanic market—i.e., Cubans,
Puerto Ricans and increasingly Dominicans. At the same time, this creates displacements for those of Mexican identities. Although Mexicans are the majority Latino-subgroup in the US, they are constructed as “more passive, traditional, more rooted to the land, composed of extended families, largely working class, and fiercely patriarchal” (Valdivia and Garcia 2012: 26). Thus, for all the celebratory praise and media hype surrounding Latin crossover that continues to circulate through discourses of Latin Boom and Explosion, there are several cracks exposed under the umbrella of pan-Latinidad. These cracks reveal just how unevenly Latinos are incorporated into the “Hispanic”/Latino market, how extensively Latinos are still discursively constructed and represented as a threat to a white non-Latino majority, and how far Latinos are still distanced from mainstream inclusion—despite the triumphant counter-narratives produced and circulated en masse via Latin Booms, Explosions, and crossover.

**Mostly English Latinos (MELS): The Latest Target of the Commodified Hispanic Market**

While Latinos remain severely underrepresented and symbolically annihilated and colonized in mainstream US media, market research studies (e.g., Synovate’s annual U.S. Diversity Markets Report) and corporate-steered Hispanic/Latino marketing literature\(^\text{18}\) have touted the arrival of yet another Latino boom primarily centered around the growth and market recognition of *bicultural Latino millennials*. In the latter part of 1990s and heading into the new millennium, the Hispanic market was largely constructed as and targeted to older Hispanic immigrants—also considered the most authentic, docile, desirable, and brand loyal consumers—or as described to Dávila (2001) in her research “the guy who works hard and at night watches a

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soap opera and goes to sleep” (78). In contrast and based on a uni-directional understanding of acculturation, highly assimilated Latino consumers were considered to be tainted by American culture, less connected to Latino culture, and thereby considered less authentic and less valuable as consumers within the Hispanic market (Dávila 2001: 79). Dávila (2001) also found that marketers she interviewed in 1999 were also not very keen on market segmentation at the time and preferred to keep the homogeneous construct of the Hispanic market intact versus recognizing the differentiation among Latinos that actually exists (xiii). In some ways conventional wisdom about the Hispanic market has changed since the late 1990s and early 2000s, as its target now increasingly shifts to younger bilingual/bicultural and English-dominant second generation and higher Latino millennials. On the other hand, the construction of the Hispanic market still remains tethered to homogeneous constructs of pan-Latinidad and dominant generalizations about bicultural Latino millennials in the US, again failing to recognize any differentiation that actually exists among them. For example, bicultural Latino millennials are interpellated by advertisers and the culture industries as the target audience of reggaetón music and are expected to either consume pan-Latin, generic Latin-urban/Hurban, or hybrid discursive constructions of reggaetón. These dominant discursive constructions of reggaetón are highly visible in US mainstream media and are most commonly deployed via pan-Latin branding and marketing strategies based on their perceived mass appeal to an envisioned homogenous mass of bicultural Latino millennials. Thus, market segmentation is still not a priority to advertisers as the Hispanic market’s current address to younger bicultural Latino millennial consumers is still designed to maintain a homogenous pan-Latin construct in place now, just as it was to construct the Hispanic market as an undifferentiated mass of docile Hispanic immigrant consumers over a decade ago.
What has mainly shifted the direction of the Hispanic market toward increasingly competing for bicultural Latino millennial consumers is the recognition of the most recent growth trends associated with this segment of the Latino population in the US. The Pew Hispanic Center’s (2009) study, *Between Two Worlds: How Young Latinos Come of Age in America*, revealed that not only do Latinos comprise the majority minority population in the US, rather that they are also the youngest (13). The 2011 US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) data confirmed this finding and categorized the Hispanic population as the youngest major racial or ethnic group in the US, with a median age of 27 for Hispanics (33 Blacks, 36 Asians, 42 Whites).19 The Pew’s (2009) *Between Two Worlds* study outlined some distinctions in age between foreign and US-born Latinos. Foreign-born Latinos (ages 16-25) make up one-third or 34% of Latino youth in the US (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2009/12/11/latino-youths-optimistic-but-beset-by-problems/>).

Yet, the majority of the Latino youth population in the US is comprised of second-generation US-born Latinos (37%), and those born of third generation or higher (29%) (*ibid*). While first generation Latinos tend to be older with a median age of 38, second-generation Latinos have a median age of 14 with half of this younger demographic still waiting to enter its teens (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2009/12/11/latino-youths-optimistic-but-beset-by-problems/>).

Third and higher generation Latinos tend to be older than second-generation Latinos, with a median age of 20 (*ibid*). In terms of language dominance, US Census population trends data (2011) reveal 86% of Hispanics between ages 5-17 and 59% ages 18 and over report speaking English “very well” (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/02/15/hispanic-population-19

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Additionally, out of all Hispanics ages 5 and older, 25% report speaking only English in the home (*ibid*). Pew’s (2009) *Between Two Worlds* study also addressed the steady rise of second-generation Latino youth (projected to peak in 2025 comprising 42.8% of the Latino youth population), claiming:

While growth in the Latino population in the recent past has been driven by the flow of immigrants (the first generation), the children of those immigrants now account for the plurality of the Latino youth population. This trend is projected to intensify in the coming years as the first-generation share continues to shrink and the second and higher generations of Latino youths come to the forefront (13).

Pew Hispanic Center researchers (2009) have also predicted that over time the expansion of second-generation Latino youth is expected to taper off, as growth amongst third and higher generation Latinos increases (projected to go up from 29.3% in 2009 to 37.4% in 2050) (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2009/12/11/ii-demography/>). These trends are also forecasted against the current declines observed in the population of foreign-born Latino youth in the US (expected to drop further from 33.8% in 2009 to 26.9% by 2050) (*ibid*). Accordingly, as the share of second and higher generations of Latino youth are envisioned as growing and on the rise for the future, Hispanic marketing guides such as, *Hispanic Marketing: Connecting with the New Latino Consumer* (2012), offer advice to advertisers and corporations on how to categorize and address these native-born generations in a few concise bullet points:

- Recognize that bicultural Hispanics are by far the largest segment of the US Latino population. This consumer target is complex and merits meticulous research to identify its potential relationship to your product or service.
- Keep up with the ongoing changes among Hispanic consumers. Hispanics creating a *New Identity*—neither predominantly from their culture of origin nor from the mainstream US culture—are influencing others on what it means to be Latino. The combination of Latinos who are bicultural with those who focus more on their evolving ‘third culture’ is creating a wave of excitement in this country about all things Latino.
Latinos are the largest minority in the US and are growing not only by immigration but even more so by births. They are a young market and in many respects represent the future of the country. Review your marketing strategy with this in mind. Your Hispanic initiatives may be central to the future of your company.

Remember that all marketing is cultural, and that understanding the ways of being, thinking, acting, and feeling shared by a group is central to your success as a marketer, whether investigating the Latino population in the US or any other segment (Korzenny and Korzenny 2012: 183).

This particular marketing guide also offers a cultural segmentation model to provide “a useful starting point for understanding Latino acculturation”—dividing the Hispanic market into—Bicultural, Hispanic/Latino Dominant, Anglo Dominant, and New Identity (181). Korzenny and Korzenny (2012) describe the New Identity segment as one that is close to bicultural, but functions more or less as an identity forged from “being a Latino in the US rather than by being traditionally Latino or Anglo oriented” (182). The authors also explain that this “new Latino essence” is “being created by the commonalities of being ‘neither from here nor from there’”(ibid). Aside from the sheer confusion provoked by this corporate mapping of Latino identities, these descriptors provide a peek into some of the current market wisdom behind efforts to pinpoint and tap into this demographic that has been in other contexts referred to as an “untapped gold mine” (e.g., Fitzgerald 1999) or as a “gold rush” (i.e., Valle and Mandel, 2003).

These efforts also indicate a sharp turn taken within the marketing industry between now and the late 1990s when MELS [Mostly English Latinos] and bilingual/bicultural Latino millennials (roughly situated between ages 18-34) were deemed a demographic that was either “lost” to the general market or market territory that was ostensibly too unchartered to pinpoint much less be packaged and sold to marketers at the time. In turn, the current approach deployed by multiple corporate interests as well as by the media/communications and culture industries has been to fund market research studies directly aimed at garnering all insights possible about
this demographic that acculturation based models have not been able to produce. Hence, a recent study from Univision Consumer Insights Research/Burke initiated a newer market research method called the CCI Methodology that calculates points on a Cultural Connection Index. This study included 754 respondents (502 Latino millennials ages 18-34 and 252 Latino nonmillennials ages 35 and older) and engaged them via qualitative case studies, online questionnaires, and phone surveys (Snyder Bulik 2012: 5). The CCI score was based on three major factors and was weighted accordingly: community--20%, family--40%, heritage--40% (ibid). Scores were then ranked between low (64 points or lower), medium (65-79 points), and high (80 points or higher) on the index (ibid). According to the researchers involved, this method proposed to offer “a concrete way of measuring US Hispanics’ cultural connections” (emphasis added). The higher a participant rated dimensions affiliated with family, heritage, and community, the higher he/she would score on the cultural connection index. The study provides the following example of a participant with high CCI score:

For example, an individual who rated key statements such as family importance, preferring to eat Latin food and participating in events in the Hispanic community as being important or extremely important would have a high CCI score (4).

The Univision/Burke study makes negative claims about acculturation models that “silo U.S. Hispanics” and “assume a one-way path to assimilation” (6). The study also critiques the way the advertising industry typically uses acculturation-based classifications to justify marketing to Latinos in English only, for example, without ever looking beyond the language component to interrogate or “explain the whys behind behaviors and actions” (ibid). And yet, the Univision/Burke study contends that using the CCI (Cultural Connection Index) allows them to do just that—it allegedly unlocks the cultural connections of Hispanic millennials and non-millennials—ultimately providing marketers with insights on how cultural connections
“influence their lifestyle and decision making” ([ibid](#)). This, in turn, guides marketers’ address and discursive framework for speaking “to them, particularly the influential millennials, through that lens” ([ibid](#)).

For the purposes of the Univision/Burke study, millennials fall in the 18-34 year-old age groups, while non-millennials are defined as falling between ages 35 and older ([5](#)). These millennials and non-millennials are further categorized by either US-born or foreign-born status. Although the researchers of this study allege language is “a discriminating factor in assessing cultural connection,” they still measured language dominance in the home and found that 61% of all millennials included in this study reported as bilingual, while 59% of nonmillennials with a high CCI scores were bilingual ([6](#), [8](#)). Weighing birthplace as a significant marker of distinction in assessing cultural connectedness, this study found that 78% of the high CCI group was comprised of foreign-born participants and that only 21% of US-born ranked as high on the CCI ([7](#)). Additionally, (65% of) the older millennials (ages 25-34) tended to rank higher on the cultural connection index than (58% of) the younger millennials included in the study (ages 18-24) ([ibid](#)). An overarching finding of this study was that nearly 80% of participants interviewed scored either high or medium CCI scores, which led the researchers to conclude that:

> [t]he importance of culture is not only the province of older Hispanics and new immigrants....[S]uch a large majority means that—and the study supports this fact—importance of cultural connections runs across all demographic groups on Hispanic Americans. This holds up unilaterally when it comes to gender, geography, income, education and, likely most relevant to marketers, the generational group Hispanics are in. Marketers who target baby boomers, Gen X and Gen Y as subsets of the larger consumer population need to understand that Hispanic culture is as important to a 21-year-old Mexican born in the United States as to a 65-year-old Colombian who immigrated 15 years ago ([7](#)).

As the Univision/Burke study’s results are geared toward satisfying corporate interests, the interpretations of the data are largely couched in the language of trends, buying power, shopping,
correlations between millennial/nonmillennial groups, low-high CCI scores, foreign/US-born status, and how these factors influence brand loyalty, purchasing patterns, research behaviors on products, as well as usage of technology. The study interweaves case studies drawing “expertise” from infamous Hispanic marketing campaigns from within the ad industry and also interjects excerpted splice of life quotes and background information singling out data such as age, gender, birthplace, and CCI scores of individual participants from the study.

The Univision/Burke study not only proposes to encapsulate the thoughts, actions, and behaviors of millennial and nonmillennial Hispanics in this report, but it also imagines itself as providing a revolutionary blueprint for marketers to follow and better understand the culture, lives, social interactions, families, lifestyles, and decision-making of this particular demographic. And yet, it grossly underestimates its own biases. First, it contends that the importance of family “is a critical discriminating factor among all Hispanics” and then weighs responses on family as 40% of the CCI score. Family as a category is never defined in the interpretative findings of this study, rather questions used to determine higher and lower cultural connectedness on the CCI are arbitrarily interpreted based on the percentage that participants rank family as important. Not surprisingly, the researchers correlate High CCI scores with feeling “more strongly about family” (10). Thus, there is a bias in the frame of the questions and interpretation regarding family connectedness and cultural connectedness. This is demonstrated in the case study of “Samuel Ramirez” who is 21 years of age and was born in Oaxaca, Mexico. He is labeled in the study as Low CCI. Given this study’s own 40% weighting measure given to family connectedness, one would imagine that Samuel’s responses would produce a higher CCI score. Samuel was quoted as saying that, “Family is really important to me. Without them, I wouldn’t
be here. They raised me to be the person I am” (20). Researchers also explain that, “While Mr. Ramirez said he doesn’t plan to have children, it is important to him to maintain his culture and stay close to his family and its traditions. He speaks Spanish with family and Hispanic friends, although most of his friends are English-speaking” (ibid). As such, Samuel’s responses also appear to lean higher toward connectedness to heritage—the other category weighted at 40% of the CCI score. And yet, researchers assert that, “Even as one who has a low Cultural Connection index score, he [Samuel] does make time for his large family—parents, one brother and three sisters, and may nieces and nephews—who all live in California. They often get together to celebrate U.S. holidays as well as Mexican ones, such as el Dia de Reyes on January 6, keeping the traditions their mother taught them” (ibid). Samuel Ramirez’s short case study is demonstrative of the ways in which this study frames family connectedness either as a product of cultural connectedness or vice versa—drawing out a compulsory connection between the two that does not necessarily exist in reality. In other words, a lack of family connectedness should not mutually exclude cultural connectedness or vice versa. And yet, the study’s interpretative reading of the data frames it as such. Similar framing concerns and biases are evident in this study with regard to how responses about community and heritage are also measured and weighted among participants’ surveys. Even though this study claims to draw out insights that acculturation models bypass altogether, I would argue that the Cultural Connection Index is as grossly generalizing and biased about Latinos as acculturation models in the very structure of its survey questions, in the premises of its correlations, and in the arbitrary and assumptive interpretations of survey data that is then extrapolated into broader and more sweeping generalizations about how Latinos connect to culture, family, heritage, and community.
A major concern raised by the interpretation of the Univision/Burke data as well as the data found in the litter of Hispanic marketing books is that they “have become involved in ‘crafting’ knowledge of and ideas about Latinos as objects and subjects of their marketing strategies” (Kahn 2010, Montoya 2011 cited in Dávila 2012: xxiv). This knowledge is highly colonizing to the subjects of it and yet, highly profitable for the producers and consumers of it. Arguably, the ability to translate this “crafted knowledge” into profits is the most valuable commodity of all. Thus, the data itself is one small component, the target market of bicultural Latino millennials is another, but the ability of marketers to discursively construct the appropriate and effective message to appeal to the target and entice them to consume is debatably the proverbial gold mine.

As such, it is also no surprise that the Hispanic advertising is more than a $5 billion industry that is currently growing 4 times faster than any other sector within advertising overall (<http://www.ahaa.org/default.asp?contentID=161>). This growth is paralleled by advertising dollars spent on media targeting Latinos. With the exception of Latino newspapers (which saw a 2.5% decline), there was a 4.6% increase in Hispanic media in 2011 including spot radio, Internet, and other print (where a 56.7% spending increase was observed) (ibid). According to the Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies AHAA, (Kantar Media Report) advertising spending for Spanish-language television also increased by 17.8% during the second quarter of 2012, and Spanish-language magazines saw an 8.9% increase (ibid). While organizations such as AHAA read these spending increases in advertising to Latinos as a representative sign of “the power of the Hispanic Market,” these figures should be approached cautiously given Dâvila’s contention that “Latinos are continually recast as authentic and marketable, but ultimately as a foreign rather than intrinsic component of US society, culture, and history, suggesting that the
growing visibility of Latino populations parallels an expansion of the technologies that render them exotic and invisible” (Dávila 2001: 4).

Beyond spending increases in advertising to the Hispanic market there is additional evidence that suggests a shift in the US market’s turn toward the larger and still burgeoning US consumer base of bicultural second and higher generation Latino millennials. In particular, there is a growing awareness and competition for this segment of the Latino audience within television. Rafael Oller, Nuvo TV’s senior vice president of marketing, explains: “Most everyone is focused on total U.S. Hispanics, but the real story is the bicultural Latino…Three out of four speak English well or very well. These bicultural Latinos self-identify as Latino and American and are looking for culturally relevant programming” (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/28/latino-tv-shows-nuvotv-40-million-investors_n_1836645.html>). As such, Nuvo TV brands itself the “first and only English-language television network created for American Bi-Cultural Latinos 18-49A” with at least 27 million subscribers as of January 2012 (Nuvo TV 2012: 2). This network has been at the forefront of providing television content for English-dominant bicultural Latinos since at least 1999, when it was seeking start-up funding for its original launch of Sí TV in 2004. Nuvo TV then re-launched in 2011 and recently gained press coverage for raising an additional $40 million from investors to develop a new slate of television programming for the bicultural Latino audience—particularly targeting English-dominant Latinos who comprise 82% of their viewers (Nuvo TV 2012; <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/28/latino-tv-shows-nuvotv-40-million-investors_n_1836645.html>). Some of Nuvo TV’s new television content will be created in partnership with Jennifer Lopez who signed onto a development and marketing deal with Nuvo TV, which she describes as the network equivalent for English-dominant Latinos as BET
(Black Entertainment Television) is for African Americans in the US (<http://www.mynuvotv.com/jennifer-lopez>). Nuvo TV’s mediakit promises to grant advertisers access to “TAP INTO THE POWER OF BI-CULTURAL LATINOS”—also packaged as the “fastest growing segment of the U.S. population,” representative of “82% of the 15 million Latino growth in the U.S.,” and who spend “1.2 million dollars per minute in the U.S.” (Nuvo TV 2012: 2). These figures work to discursively construct this growing demographic as an undifferentiated younger Latino mass that is just ripe for the picking for advertisers. This is followed up by a short-hand translation of exactly how these population growth projections translate into dollars—as the current spending power of bicultural Latinos serves as a representative signifier of their commoditized worth to advertisers and thereby to the marketplace at large. Whereas in 1999, bicultural Latinos represented a question mark in the mind of advertisers—constructed by and large as an “untapped gold mind,” they are currently being sold to advertisers as a gold rush that they can ostensibly tap into right now.

As such, in anticipation of the projected growth of the bicultural Latino audience, media conglomerates such as Comcast (Fitzgerald 2012) have also entered into partnership and developments deals for proposed cable networks20 such as El Rey, which will be headed by Hollywood director Robert Rodríguez, and whose content will target bicultural English-dominant Latino audiences (<http://www.npr.org/2012/04/03/149845056/media-outlets-adapt-to-growing-hispanic-audience>). Spanish-language networks such as Univision also seek to...

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20 A joint venture between ABC and Univision is also set to launch, Fusion, a new cable network based in Miami, Florida that will target English-dominant Latinos. This new channel will be carried by at least five major cable operators (Cablevision, Charter, Cox, AT&T U-verse, and Google Fiber) (<http://abcnews.go.com/Business/abc-news-univision-announce-cable-network-called-fusion/story?id=18468776#.UU5e1RnB3-A>). Fox has also launched a Spanish-language broadcast network, MundoFox, in addition to the three Hispanic cable channels that it already runs. The CEO of Fox International Channels, Hernan Lopez, describes MundoFox as “a Latino network with an American attitude…It is in Spanish, but with a level of quality that viewers are used to in American television” (<http://www.npr.org/2012/04/03/149845056/media-outlets-adapt-to-growing-hispanic-audience>).
maintain their high ratings and continue surpassing that of English-dominant broadcast viewship in primetime by increasingly moving toward capturing bicultural Latino audiences. For instance, “Univision recently began broadcasting its prime-time telenovelas with English subtitles — something competitor Telemundo has done for years” (ibid).

Arguably, these strategic decisions have been made in an effort to solidify the position of Spanish-language networks nationally among other broadcast networks “in the pack,” as well as to set them apart by leading the pack in now delivering content to English-dominant Latinos as well (<http://articles.philly.com/2013-03-21/business/37875853_1_cesar-conde-univision-networks-nbc-tv>). And yet, it has taken decades for these Spanish-language networks to make any significant efforts to even attempt to appeal to the English-dominant Latino viewers who have been long been ignored by English-dominant broadcast, cable networks, and Spanish networks alike. Moreover, current efforts to subtitle content for English-dominant viewers on Spanish-dominant networks recalls earlier attempts by HBO, for example, whose HBO Latino network mostly dubbed HBO programming in Spanish (Martínez 2007: 211). Martínez (2007) explains that for bicultural bilingual Latino viewers this meant tuning into HBO Latino to find, “[T]he Sopranos, The Wire, or the latest Hollywood blockbuster dubbed into Spanish. Finding no significant difference between HBO Latino and the main HBO channel, this Latino often ends up back at the English-language HBO channel” (212). And yet, NPR journalist, Greg Allen (2012), comments on the latest “boom” in Hispanic media stating: “For media companies looking to grow, Hispanics now look less like a niche market, and more like the future” (<http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=149845056>). However,

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21 Univision’s ratings surpassed those of NBC’s prime-time schedule during February 2013 sweeps for the first time. This ratings boost for Univision continued into the first week of March (4-10), 2013 where Univision fell into the second top ratings spot among all broadcast networks for adults ages 18-34 and in the third spot among adults ages 18-49. The president of Univision networks, Cesar Conde, call this “the new American reality” and adds that “Univision is seeing consistent growth while our English-language counterparts are struggling with eroding audiences” (<http://articles.philly.com/2013-03-21/business/37875853_1_cesar-conde-univision-networks-nbc-tv>).
scholars have addressed how media companies have been dangling and toying with the promise to offer media content in the US that addresses the “biculural experiences” and captures the “biculural sensibilities” of Latinos for more than a decade now (Martínez 2007: 195); while completely underestimated how “programming is read by audiences in complex ways” (Moran 2011: 58). Furthermore, while media companies have spend inordinate amounts of time and money working to tap the “new” bicultural Latino gold mine, they have effectively ignored the ways in which their target audiences actually read and engage their media content—much less acknowledged the complex ways in which they read and negotiate media texts. As such, Moran (2011) issues a call for in-depth audience reception studies among audiences corralled under the pan-Latin label, with the understanding that: “Studying the audience is a difficult task; they are illusive, unpredictable and complicated” (62). Furthermore, Moran argues that:

Much of the empirical research comparing Latina/o media consumption with other groups in the U.S. has limited explanatory power because the construction of ‘Hispanic’ as an ethnic variable fails to account for the diversity within the group and therefore fails to account for the diversity within the group and therefore typically renders it meaningless (59).

This finding is similarly addressed in Pacini-Hernández’s (2007) work on the popular music industry, as she also critiques the effectiveness of using a “catch-all” Latin music category to encompass all the diverse musical histories and heterogeneous experiences of the pan-Latin audiences such umbrella “catch-alls” propose to encapsulate (48). Thus, cable network and music industry executives alike often deploy pan-Latin labels as a means to concisely package their target audiences also as commodified ethnic consumers of television, popular music, other media, and various consumer goods. In marking this audience under an ethnic construct, or in specifically branding them as pan-Latin, advertisers and entertainment industry executives also make extenuating claims to “know” their target audience based either on “expert” knowledge
derived from Hispanic marketing brand geniuses or funded market research data conveniently parsed into *Diversity Market Reports* (Synovate 2004, 2006, 2008). This form of Hispanic marketing expertise claims to produce concrete nodes of information on a particular “Latin” demographic from statistics gathered across region, income, gender, age, education, among various other segments—all culled to produce cutting-edge reports summarizing everything from the everyday lifestyles of the demographic under investigation to the impetus behind their decision-making processes (i.e., mostly purchasing decisions). While the public release of these reports often surface in mainstream media as trusted and “authoritative” discourses on the current direction and trend of the Hispanic market or newer “Latino market” at large, the faulty premises behind these broad sweeping market approaches is often overlooked. It is strikingly evident, as Moran effectively elucidates in her research, that pan-Latin branding strategies are invariably limited and are ultimately subject to dismantling under their sheer inability to account for all the diversity that they presume to encompass. Diversity Market Reports from highly paid market research firms and Hispanic market expertise presented across multiple books, reports, and public speaking circuits constantly circulate data on pan-Latin branded consumers as the authoritative word on “The Latino Essence of ‘Hispanic’” (a chapter title in Korzenny and Korzenny 2012).

Accordingly, Dávila (2001) also engages the deployment of pan-Latin branding strategies in her work as she highlights major themes commonly found in Hispanic advertising ranging from *love of tradition*, to *ethnic pride*, and *nationalism* (emphasis added, Dávila 101). Dávila explains that the marketing approach used to incorporate these themes often consists of “associating products with particular countries or with some names or unnamed generic Latina heritage or tradition. References to ‘our’ cooking our values, *with ‘our’ standing for Latinas as a*
finished identity and an inclusive whole are also common” (emphasis added, ibid). Hence, pan-Latin branding terminology (i.e., Latin, or “our” in reference to a Latin/(a/o) tradition) proposes to operate as a representative signifier of inclusivity—encompassing all Latinas/os. However, the deployment of pan-Latin branding strategies can also be read as a means to operationalize Latin/(a/o) as a “finished identity” that precludes the actual existing complexities of hybrid identities. In other words to be interpellated as part of a pan-Latin audience or to be read as a pan-Latin consumer already maps particular meanings onto one’s pan-ethnic branded identity—such as those found in Dávila’s assessment of recurring themes in Hispanic advertising (i.e., that Latinas/os love tradition or can relate to products/ad campaigns that express strong ethnic or nationalistic pride). The implementation of these assumptions either through Hispanic advertising or via the construction of the pan-Latin audience belie the actual lived experiences, realities, or subjectivities of the people they presume to address or to target. It goes without saying that not all Latinos/as necessarily identify as such, much less have any more or less love for tradition, ethnic, or nationalistic pride than general market consumers. And yet, these assumptions are still heavily engrained within current market research data on the “new” bicultural Latino target market as well. This is especially evident in market studies such as the recent Univision/Burke report that introduces the Cultural Connection Index as the latest and greatest empirical instrument to allow marketers to truly “know” Hispanic millennials and non-millennials, as it filters its survey data through participants reaction to three main premises: family—40%, heritage—40%, and community—20%—all weighted according to the presumed significance that the researchers envision as the defining structures and pillars of Latino identity. These are all discursively constructed premises that then influence survey responses, structure the Cultural Connection Index, and impact the way in which the data is interpreted. Arguably,
these premises and assumptions on behalf of market researchers contribute to the discursive construction of the commodified Hispanic/Latino identity—as referred to in market literature as “culture” or “essence.” It is produced and constructed by marketers and then disseminated by mainstream US media.

Thus, as marketers and the culture industries contribute to the construction of a commodified ethnic identity (i.e., pan-Latin branded), as a purportedly finished identity it is expected to behave in particular ways (i.e., reacting positively to ads that use mock Spanish or focus on “ethnic pride”), which then forecloses other possibilities for the actual complex ways in which audiences negotiate meaning from the texts they encounter, and in doing so assert their multidimensional and hybrid identities. As such, pan-ethnic branding strategies encode dominant readings or preferred ways in which pan-Latin audiences are intended to read and react to particular meanings from the text. At the same time, these ethnically marked audiences are constantly subjected to these dominant readings either through advertising or through media that directly targets their particular demographic. These dominant or preferred readings are also discursively constructed based on presumptions and assumptions about what pan-Latin branded audiences should relate to or identify with based on the market experts who are handsomely paid to make these determinations. And yet, often the way in which pan-Latin branded audiences have been interpellated by the advertising and culture industries demonstrates the total effacement of their hybrid subjectivities and the absolute resistance from the market or the media industries to attempt to acknowledge the actual responses of audiences and consumers interpellated as pan-Latin, or who fall into their demographic categories and market research studies. Hence, there is no attention paid to what these highly pursued audiences and consumers actually have to say about the ways in which they are marketed to and addressed via media content that purportedly
speaks to their bicultural experiences and sensibilities. Thereby, Stuart Hall’s (1980s) encoding/decoding model falls completely out of sight when it comes to marketers and the culture industries, as the negotiated or oppositional readings of texts among their audiences are completely ignored.

As the case of reggaetón’s commercial crossover demonstrates, for example, oppositional readings have always existing among its target consumers and pan-Latin branded audiences, and yet as the genre achieved commercial crossover these oppositional readings were subverted over celebratory discourses in mainstream media touting its increased popularity among bicultural Latino millennials. Additionally, reggaetón’s audiences have also brought their own negotiated readings to bear on its content as well. Thus, later in this dissertation (Chapters 4 and 5) I return to the ways reggaetón’s audiences mediate its content in complex ways as they also negotiate the complexities of their hybrid identities—rejecting the pan-Latin and Latin urban labels attached to them by advertisers and the culture industries. Thus, pan-Latin branded audiences and consumers are constantly being interpellated by the Hispanic/Latino market as “homogenized docile bodies” (Molina-Guzmán 2010: 11), and in the process their interactive subjectivities and hybrid identities are resisted as the advertising and culture industry commodifies their ethnically marked identity—which is constructed as a “finished identity” that is pliable and subject to various pan-ethnic branding strategies. As discussed throughout this chapter, the deployment of these pan-Latin branded strategies is most often visible in the US mainstream media coverage of Latin booms, explosions, and crossovers.

The pattern of reconstructing the pan-Latin audience, hyping the latest Latin explosion in the mainstream media, and then offering advertisers the most cutting edge approach to market and sell to these consumers—packaged as the prime up-and-coming and trend-setting consumers
(i.e., Univision/Burke CCI Cultural Connection Index) has been tracked by scholars (e.g., Dávila; Levine; Halter; Banet-Weiser; Molina-Guzmán; Valdivia; Moran; Báez; Martínez; Mendible; Beltrán; Aparicio) for decades. In particular, Martínez (2007) provides an illustrative overview of exactly how these Latino booms and busts have turned out in the past:

In 1977, an article published by the National Council of La Raza declared that cable represented ‘the only avenue available for Hispanics to gain substantial control over a communications medium.’ Securing cable ownership was obviously not an outcome of the so-called 1980s ‘Decade of the Hispanic.’ Nor did cable ownership occur as a consequence of the late-1990s ‘Latin explosion.’ Instead, consumer choice has been championed, and HBO has made efforts to reach out to the Latino community via dubbed HBO programming and the advocacy of multiplex patchwork viewing habits (211).

As Martínez highlights the disappointing outcomes for Latinos in securing positions of power over their consumer choice through media ownership, this form of media advocacy on behalf of Latino communities is often dismissed over more boisterously celebrated narratives found in mainstream media exploring the latest and greatest Latino explosion. What is missing from the US mainstream media’s narrative constructions of Latin booms, explosions, and crossovers is the persistent lack of Latino empowerment as far as media ownership is concerned or in regards to parity for Latinos in the media, entertainment, and culture industries either in employment or income across newsrooms, in executive boardrooms, behind cameras, in head writer positions, or posts in creative development that are able to green-light projects.

Overall, the constant visibility of Latin crossovers in US mainstream media also signals to the continued lack of inclusivity for Latinos in the US mainstream. While more recent US census data has projected current and future growth trends among younger, US-born, increasingly bilingual and/or English-dominant second and higher generation Latino populations, this data has sent the advertising and culture industries into competition mode to develop the most market effective strategies to finally tap this bicultural Latino gold mine. However, these
efforts have only underscored the disproportionate authority that these industries wield in
discursively constructing an audience and Latin demographic. The discursive construction of that
latest target of the Hispanic or “new Latino” market has also been based on conflating cultural
assumptions and the deployment of pan-ethnic labels and branding strategies increasingly
directed at effectively packaging and selling the “new” bicultural Latino millennial audiences to
advertisers. This approach has also highlighted the advertising and culture industry’s enduring
fetish with the Latino middle class (Dávila 2008). Marketers constantly focus attention on 1.2
trillion dollar (and growing) buying power of Latinos in the US. This market approach draws
attention to the spending of disposable income of Latinos in the US and subverts that fact that
median incomes of Hispanic households (all Hispanics $39,000, Native-born Hispanics $42,400,
Foreign-born Hispanics $35,900) were found to be lower than U.S. totals overall ($50,000). In
turn, the lens through which bicultural Latino millennials are currently perceived does not stray
not too far from the Hispanic market ideologies of the 1990s concerning foreign-born Hispanic
immigrant consumers—both are relegated to the docile consumer category.

Although advertising budgets to target the “new Latino” consumer and Latino media
outlets are expanding, it is important to keep a critical eye on the content directed at pan-Latin
consumers just as it is important to pay critical attention to the complex ways in which these
interpellated consumers read and negotiate this content. While the advertising and culture
industries adopt and deploy pan-ethnic branding strategies that offer these interpellated
consumers a “finished” ethnically commodified pan-Latin identity with which to identify, this is

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22 As such, the Hispanic poverty rate (26%) was also found to be higher than U.S. poverty rates overall (16% US total, 28%
Black, 13% Asian, 11% White). Hispanics households (22%) were found to be more likely to receive food stamps than U.S.
household totals (13% US total, 28% Black, 9% White, 7% Asian). Hispanics were found to be more likely to lack health
insurance (30% of Hispanics) than U.S. totals (15%, 19% Black, 15%, Asian, 11% White). Moreover, fewer than half of
Hispanic householders actually owned their homes based on 2011 data sets (46% Hispanics, 65% US total, 72% White, 58%
not to say that these consumers do not reject it. All of the recent market research studies and current Latin marketing expertise behind the upswing in media and advertising targeting bicultural Latino audiences, assumes to know this audience and how to represent the complex diversity of their hybrid and multiple identities under one big pan-Latin umbrella.

Reggaetón’s crossover is particularly illustrative of the diverse ways in which its audiences read this pan-Latin branded genre. This speaks to the oppositional and negotiated readings that are ignored by the advertising and culture industries—readings that go explicitly against their intended meanings and dominant messages that discursively construct a crossover identity for reggaetón. In many ways, reggaetón’s crossover is an effective example of the latest Latin boom and crossover to commercially succeed among Latino youth populations in the US. Interrogating, the ways in which reggaetón’s crossover is discursively constructed through the advertising and culture industries is instructive of how market research assumptions influence how Latin-branded audiences are constructed and targeted today.

While, the advertising and culture industries persistently offer us Latin crossover acts as evidence of Latino success stories in the US, these discourses around Latino boom and explosion never address the tightrope act that racialized Latin crossover acts must perform in order to gain and maintain US mainstream visibility or risk the constant fragility of the “Latino boom” going bust. As several of these Latin crossover acts celebrated today were born in the US, this raises questions as to if and how Latinos actually fit into the US imaginary. Bicultural, for instance, now serves as a convenient market category carved out by Hispanic marketing experts to signify the “neither here nor there” subject position of US-born Latinos within the Hispanic market, but it also points to the tenuous position of Latinos in the US that is constantly subject to the whim and discursive authority of the advertising and culture industries. In the 1990s, bicultural Latinos
were considered undesirable, because they are too influenced by the US mainstream and therefore perceived as tainted and too distant from the Hispanic authenticity that foreign-born Hispanic immigrants possessed. However, by the new millennium and particularly by the release of the 2010 decennial US Census, the advertising and culture industries were busy raising investment capital and entering into joint corporate ventures to launch new media outlets and advertising campaigns directly influenced by their perceived notions of the bicultural Latino millennial. Again these efforts raise questions as to the motives behind these newer Latino booms that are being currently written about in mainstream US media.

The headlines around Latin booms and explosions arguably give off the impression of increasing visibility of Latinos in the US media, however, the circulation of these discourses in headline news should not be confused for parity. Latin booms, explosions, and crossovers offer mainstream US general market audiences a means to consume Latinidad and relish in discursively constructed narratives centered around Latin crossover acts that reify a celebrated American dream success story. In many ways, reggaetón’s crossover narrative is a demonstrative example of this.

In the following chapter, I address the ways in which reggaetón’s mainstream US crossover success served as an effective market test case within the Latin music industry for marketing to and expanding audiences based on the projected growth of the bicultural Latino.

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23 Out of fear that the current marketing trend toward bicultural Latino consumers will displace focus on foreign-born Hispanics, Lee Van wrote a blog article on behalf of the Captura Group marketing agency to remind the industry not to simply write off the estimated 19 million foreign-born Hispanics in the US. Van argues that: “On the other hand, reaching native-born U.S. Hispanics is more complex, more expensive and not as measurable as simply targeting U.S. Hispanics in Spanish. To reach native-born Hispanics, marketers often infuse Hispanic culture into general market campaigns, partner with emerging, English language, Hispanic-centric media properties or leverage advanced consumer targeting techniques” (<http://hispanicprpro.com/2013/03/15/foreign-born-hispanics-hold-the-key-to-the-hispanic-market/>). As a result, Van’s suggested approach for targeting both foreign-born and native-born Hispanics was to take the tried and true “family approach” given that: “Although native-born Hispanics are forming their own unique Hispanic-American culture, the importance of family and the role of elders remain strong” (ibid). It is noteworthy to observe that Van’s suggestions closely mirror some of the same correlations made in the Univision/Burke (2012) study. Researchers tabulated higher CCI scores among Latino millennials and non-millennials with stronger levels of family orientation. Davila’s Latinos, Inc. (2001, 2012) more specifically addresses the lineage of these family-oriented discourses and themes within Hispanic marketing.
millennial market in the US and the salability of a pan-Latin branded genre such as reggaetón to global Latin audiences abroad. Reggaetón’s crossover success has contributed to the current frenzy around bicultural Latin millennials who are increasingly targeted now more than ever across television, radio, social media, and on Internet, digital, and mobile platforms.
CHAPTER 3
FROM UNDERGROUND TO REGGAETÓN:
THE POLITICS OF BRANDING, PAN-LATINIDAD, AND COMMERCIAL MUSIC CROSSOVER

Introduction: Marketing Machine and Culture Industry Behind Reggaetón

This chapter explores how reggaetón music achieved mainstream and commercial crossover. In particular, it critically interrogates three dominant discursive constructions of reggaetón music—pan-Latin, Latin urban, and hybrid—that have circulated in US mainstream media for a little over a decade (2002-2013). First, this chapter follows how these dominant discursive constructions were initially produced and deployed by the culture and advertising industries in efforts to re-brand reggaetón for commercial crossover. Secondly, it explores how particular discursive constructions of reggaetón have been circulated by the advertising and culture industries in order to repackage the genre as a transnational Latin-branded commodity effectively used to sell ancillary Latin-branded products across the globe. This chapter expands the current body of literature on reggaetón by interrogating the circuits of culture (production, consumption, regulation, representation, and identity) linked to reggaetón’s global crossover and the multi-million dollar industry that has been generated from it. Thus, I examine how reggaetón emerged from underground and censored production in Puerto Rico and was then sanitized and commercialized for mainstream circulation by the advertising and culture industries in the US and abroad. In examining the processes of reggaetón’s commodification, I explore how and why reggaetón has been represented in US mainstream media as the global soundtrack for Latin youth that is able to cross all geographical borders and boundaries and simultaneously fuse Latino

24 Here, I deploy the term discourse based on Stuart Hall’s (1997a) definition: “Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images, and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society” (Hall 6).
cultures and audiences under a neat pan-Latin construct marketed as “Reggaetón Latino.” While this pan-Latin construct for reggaetón claims to encompass multiple Latino identities, I trace how particular Latin(o/a) identities are privileged through media coverage and marketing of reggaetón while others are displaced or subverted.

This chapter investigates how pan-Latin, Latin urban, and hybrid constructions of reggaetón have been discursively encoded as such and used to sell “authentic” Latin-branded commodities (i.e., Latin urban) to the coveted bicultural Latino market in the US and to global Latin consumers abroad. This discussion contextualizes the ways in which the culture and advertising industries also produce, discursively code, interpellate\(^\text{26}\), target, and address racially and ethnically segmented audiences and consumers of reggaetón. Additionally, this chapter highlights the importance of deconstructing the inseparable but often subverted linkage that exists between the market currency attached to particular commodified ethnic identities and the ways in which the culture and advertising industries discursively produce ethnically and racially marked and marketed genres, audiences, and consumers. I contend that US mainstream media coverage of reggaetón’s commercial crossover effectively illustrates the discursive narratives also currently being produced and circulated about the bicultural Latino market in the US. These discursive narratives are revealed through the specific ways bicultural Latinos are constructed, targeted, interpellated, and addressed by the advertising and culture industries as the target market for reggaetón music in the US. As such, I interrogate some of the market research data implemented by the Latin music industry within the last decade to delineate market segmentation of bicultural Latinos/as. In doing so, I gauge ways in which this market segmentation has

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\(^{26}\) Here, I apply Louis Althusser’s definition of interpellation, as “ideology’s ability to assign individuals to specific positions within its own communicative (semiotic) representations of reality” to the ways that the audience and target market for reggaetón is constructed by the culture and advertising industries based on specific demographic features, such as ethnicity, race, age, income and/or language (Grossberg et al. 2006: 207-208). In this dissertation, I interrogate how targeted demographics play a distinct role in the interpellation of audiences and particularly in the construction of racially and ethnically marked and targeted consumers for musical genres like reggaetón.
reproduced outmoded cultural assumptions and stereotypes about this targeted group in the process. I also examine how market research data has been interpreted by the Latin music industry and then developed into marketing strategies that have since produced a profitable industry out of reggaetón’s mainstream crossover and subsequently generated multiple touch points in the marketplace for Latin/o/a youth populations to encounter and consume reggaetón (i.e., television, video games, Hollywood films, various product lines, ringtones, apps, digital media). I then follow how these marketing strategies have been modified for global exportation.

Arguably, reggaetón’s crossover success has proffered a successful market test case and blueprint for the ways in which the advertising and culture industries will likely proceed to address bicultural Latino and Latin global consumers into the future—addressing them as trendsetters and lead consumers, appealing to their sense of cultural and social currency, but ignoring them as multidimensional, interactive, and hybrid subjects. Accordingly, it is likely that these industries will also continue to efface the complex hybrid identities of these targeted consumers in order to privilege the pan-ethnic commodified identity marketed and ascribed to them. It is a pan-ethnic commodified identity that ostensibly holds much greater market value for these industries as it serves their commercial interests and ultimately their bottom line. While the mainstream media upholds and celebrates reggaetón as the latest iteration of successful Latin crossover, Latinos in the US still struggle for parity and heterogeneous representation in US mainstream media coverage. In turn, critical examination of mainstream media coverage devoted to reggaetón’s commercial crossover over the last decade is particularly revealing of the strategies implemented by the culture and advertising industries to craft and privilege a flexible pan-Latin “cross-blend” market identity for reggaetón that is transferable and deployable across US Latino, general market (non-Latino), and Latin global markets. Thus, this chapter contributes
to the larger objectives of this dissertation project, which is to examine reggaetón’s circuits of culture through its commercial crossover and critically engage how its flexible pan-Latin branded market identity has been produced, consumed, regulated, represented, and also negotiated by audiences.27

Exploring Reggaetón’s “Underground” Circuits of Culture

Reggaetón is the music of those who grew up with barely enough to eat, watching their parents hustle to survive, those who grew up with one foot in the official world and one in the gray economy. If the rap generation questioned the huge changes it saw in society, the reggaetón generation knew only the harsh new world. Reggaetón is a crude, raw music that emerged from a crisis, the mass of young people in poor barrios who do not see themselves represented on TV, on the radio, or in the newspapers and for whom appearances may provide an economic lifeline and niceties often take a back seat to necessities. Today their voices boom from speakers across the city, broadcasting the issues of the street in the language of the street, and other members of the reggaetón generation answer the call on the dance floor (Baker 2011: 166).

The turntable- and mixer-based dance cultures that nurtured rap and disco in the 1970s, freestyle and Los Angeles’s eclectic DJ parties in the 1980s (and beyond), banda-rap and meren-rap in the 1990s, and reggaetón in the 2000s have all, in their own way, crossed racially and ethnically defined boundaries and, in many cases linguistic boundaries as well. Far from being signs of assimilation or imitation, these musics make audible the experiences of Latino musicians and fans whose cultural roots are not located unambiguously in Latin America or in the United States, but instead at the crossroads of the Latin American, Latino, black diasporic, and Anglo-American worlds (Pacini-Hernández 2010: 76).

It can be argued that the difficulty of handling increasing levels of cultural complexity, and the doubts and anxieties they often engender, are reasons why ‘localism,’ or the desire to return home, becomes an important theme—regardless of whether the home is real or imaginary, temporary, syncretized, or simulated, or whether it is manifest in a fascination with the sense of belonging, affiliation, and community attributed to the homes of others. What does seem clear is that it is not helpful to regard the global and the local as dichotomies separated in space or time; rather, it would seem that the processes of globalization and localization are inextricably bound together in that current phase (Featherstone 1996: 47).

27 In this dissertation, I emphasize the significance of examining the impact that the digital age has had on reggaetón’s crossover, particularly given the way the digital and online spaces have introduced additional complex sites of active and participatory global reception to reggaetón that remain largely unexamined by scholars. Accordingly, I draw attention to some of these global sites of audience reception and participatory fan/anti-fan culture that exist online (see Chapters 4 and 5).
Reggaetón is an Afro-Caribbean diasporic music that was mediated by audiences nearly three decades ago in its former iterations as more locally produced underground productions in Puerto Rico and Panama. And yet, reggaetón has been more recently engaged as a commercial pop culture sensation and Latin crossover genre in the US and across the globe. As Baker’s study (2011) affirms, the current diffusion of reggaetón music throughout Cuba must be examined within the broader context of what this musical formation has signified across geographies and generations. I second Baker’s contention and also assert the importance of examining reggaetón as a popular diasporic music form.

**Mass Culture Critique of Popular Diasporic Music**

Scholars such as Horkheimer and Adorno (1982) would likely engage hip-hop, underground, or reggaetón solely as destructive products of mass culture, citing the “absolute power of capitalism.” On the other hand, Lipsitz (2001) would argue conversely that these Afro-diasporic forms serve as a “crucial force for opening up culture, social, and political space for struggles over identity, autonomy, and power” (182). As such, Lipsitz identifies a “cultural politics” in hip-hop through which he foresees the potential rise of social movement as well as powerful spaces through which to negotiate identity (ibid). Tejaswini Niranjana’s (2006) research on chutney-soca and calypso as well as Carolyn Cooper’s (1995) scholarly work on dancehall music, also point to a politics of subversion that emerges through how these popular diasporic musical forms are able to “undermine consensual standards of decency” (Cooper 1995: 141). In Susan Harewood’s (2005) study on calypso masquerade performance in Barbados, she

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28 Joseph Pereira’s (1998) study highlights the “trans-border cultural cross-fertilizing” that occurred for decades prior to the commercial crossover of reggaetón between Jamaican reggae and “the Spanish circum-Caribbean, especially in Panama and Costa Rica” (79). Specifically, Pereira traces “cultural accommodations” that recontextualize reggae and dancehall thematics, linguistics, and aesthetics to Hispanic reggae from Panama, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico (80). Pereira’s research finds that these cultural accommodations are indicative of various adaptations and translations of reggae being sampled by these “receiving culture[s],” rather than “straight transfers across cultural borders” (88). As such, Pereira’s work underscores how processes of transculturation are inevitably occurring within the context of Caribbean popular musics and cultures.
critically engages ways in which these particular performances produce a “decentralizing multiplicity of discourses that attempt to defer closure of the imaginative boundaries of the nation” (Harewood 2005: 203). Similarly, early resistance to the subversive content of underground recordings in Puerto Rico is also indicative of a disruptive cultural politics or a politics of subversion that emerged through the ways in which underground was mediated in Puerto Rico during the mid-1990s and early 2000s. As I will address further in this chapter, one could argue that in some ways underground’s failed censorship attempts exposed the fragility of the state’s power, as well as its hypocrisy and corruption; this erected a viable threat that the state then attempted to manage by discursively framing underground as a highly corrosive and foreign element to the national body. By privileging the voices of those most evidently marginalized on the Island and turning a critical eye toward political corruption and social injustices, arguably, underground rappers, music, and its related youth counterculture produced a rupture within “traditional” and nationalist imaginaries of what was considered to be singularly representative of Puerto Rican music, culture, and identity. As underground became a highly contested musical form on the Island in the mid-1990s, it began to expose the fears on behalf of the state that underground music could potentially shift more representational authority and power over to undesirable darker and poorer Puerto Rican youth on the Island and away from elite ‘blanquitos’ [literal translation= little white person/loose translation: referencing wealthier Puerto Ricans on the Island of whiter or lighter phenotype also often associated with having the privilege of a higher education], the state’s governing and representative bodies, and the mainstream media on the Island.

Hence, as a popular diasporic music, reggaetón invariably exists in relation to a cultural politics connected to its underground roots and subversive potential. Reggaetón is also mitigated
by its mainstream crossover existence as a commodified form. Thus, neither underground nor reggaetón should be exclusively subjugated to a reductive mass culture critique that does not also envision the potential development of a politics of subversion through these forms. Moreover, it is equally important to be attentive to reggaetón’s local and global circuits of culture—as these are incontrovertibly linked and provide a means to grapple with the political economy of reggaetón’s crossover. It is through this critical lens that I begin to locate reggaetón as a diasporic musical form also integrated within a global system of transfer and translation of popular music forms. Popular diasporic music, such as reggaetón, is as much a reaction to the culture industry as it is a reaction through it. Engaging reggaetón’s crossover from the “margins to the mainstream” is particularly impactful as it demonstrates the complexities and attendant tensions also present in negotiating a popular diasporic music in the digital age.

As a popular diasporic musical form, I engage reggaetón as a critical site of ideological contestation, identity negotiation, and hybrid cultural production. As reggaetón continues to “cross” over and re-hybridize transnationally into newly syncretized formations, it produces cultural transformations and engenders new musical fusions across the globe. Reggaetón exists in relation to the culture industry’s influence and is subject “to the imperatives of global capital and its attendant austerity and oppression,” but also produces reactions to and through it (Lipsitz 2001: 182). As both a diasporic and commercial form, reggaetón provides a critical space for contestation and ideological struggle for its artists, audiences, fans, and detractors. As such, reggaetón serves as a “crucial force for opening up cultural, social, and political space for

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29 Reebee Garofalo. “Black Popular Music: Crossing Over or Going Under?,” in *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*, ed. Tony Bennett, Simon Frith, Lawrence Grossberg, John Shepherd, and Graeme Turner (London: Routledge, 1993), 231-248. I deploy the popular music term *crossover* to reference the “process whereby an artist or a recording from a ‘secondary’ marketing category like country and western, Latin, or rhythm and blues achieves hit status in the mainstream or ‘pop’ market. While the term can and has been used simply to indicate multiple chart listings in any direction, its most common usage in popular music history clearly connotes movement from margin to mainstream” (Garofalo 1993: 231). Thus, I am interested in the movement of reggaetón from its underground status to its mainstream popular music success. See Garofalo (1993) for a more in-depth discussion of musical crossover.
struggles over identity, autonomy, and power” (Lipsitz 2001: 182). Examining the ways in which reggaetón has been discursively produced, mediated, and read over the last couple of decades demonstrates that the global and local are not distinct or oppositional, rather inevitably converge through diasporic connections. Hence, the following sections provide an analysis attentive to the interlocking of local and global production, consumption, and reception of reggaetón.

Reggaetón: From Popular Diasporic Music to Modern Popular Music

Think about the language of modern contemporary music and try to ask, where are the traditional musics left that have never heard a modern musical transcription? Are there any musics left that have not heard some other music? All the most explosive modern musics are crossovers. The aesthetics of modern popular music is the aesthetic of the hybrid, the aesthetics of the crossover, the aesthetics of the diaspora, the aesthetics of creolization.—Stuart Hall (1997b: 38)

Music might be considered ‘delinquent,’ in Michel de Certeau’s seductive terminology, in that music presents a ‘challenging mobility that does not respect places.’ This is not to say that music is located in no place. Music does not respect places precisely because it is capable of inhabiting a particular place while at the same time moving across several places—of arriving while leaving. Through music, space is constructed and deconstructed, shaped and shattered, filled up and hollowed out.—Josh (1997: 288)

While the US mainstream media has predominantly focused the public’s attention on reggaetón as a commercial Latin crossover since 2004, several scholarly studies within the existing body of literature on reggaetón (Rivera 2009; Santos 1996; Báez 2006; Negrón-

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30 I bring these two passages into this discussion about reggaetón to foreground the way in which I envision reggaetón as a musical and cultural form. Stuart Hall (1997b) and Josh Kun (1997) effectively engage the role of music as it pertains to transnational movement, processes of globalization, and hybridity. Reggaetón is hybrid at the very essence of its makeup and roots. Evidence of that hybridity can be heard in the words of reggaetón’s lyricists and seen in the performances of reggaetón artists. Reggaetón speaks many languages all at once. It encompasses many musical styles and forms in its essence, while pulling in and being pulled in by many influences globally. For many years before and after the commercial crossover of reggaetón, heated debates have waged on among journalists, scholars, artists, fans, consumers, and anti-fans about the origins of reggaetón music. Some trace the influences of reggaetón through Jamaican (reggae, dancehall), others through Puerto Rican (bomba, plena), Panamanian (reggae en español), and/or U.S. (rap) musical formations. And yet, each of the aforementioned musical formations is also subject to their own origins debates. Similarly, Aparicio’s (1998) research has addressed the contentious debates that still occur around pinpointing the “authentic” roots of salsa—originating in Cuba, Puerto Rico, or New York? In reference to Stuart Hall’s (1997b) inquiry: “Are there any musics left that have not heard some other music?” I would venture to say no. Thus, in this study I move away from an investigation that seeks to locate the precise roots of reggaetón, and toward a critical analysis of the dominant discourses, narratives, and media representations deployed by the culture and advertising industries to construct reggaetón as an “authentic” Latin global commodity. Moreover, I seek to direct debates about reggaetón away from containing notions that are wedded to notions of authentic origins, fans, audiences, and genres. Arguably, the frame of such debates inevitably serves as a mechanism for policing and gatekeeping the boundaries ascribed to musics and people that cannot be neatly classified in such containing ways.
Muntaner and Rivera 2007; Giovanetti 2003; Calafel 2007; Baker 2005; Samponaro 2009; Manuel 2006) have directed attention back to the 1980s and 90s to explore the linkage between reggaetón and one of its musical precursors—underground also known as reggae-rap. Rivera (2009) traces underground music to Puerto Rico and situates its emergence within “a continuum of longstanding African American and Afro-Caribbean (including Puerto Rican) musical practices” such as “U.S. rap, Jamaican and Panamanian dancehall reggae” (113).

Examining
the trans-Caribbean lineage and the hybrid musical collaborations out of which underground derived demonstrates the cross-cultural world from which reggaetón initially emerged, which subsequently affected how it was then produced and marketed by the culture and advertising industries, but was also mediated and negotiated as a popular diasporic musical formation. Prior to reggaetón’s commercialization in 2004, the music industry was seeking a provocative bicultural musical form that could appeal to younger bilingual/bicultural Latin/(o/a) audiences (see Chapter 2). In many ways underground (later repackaged as reggaetón) fit the mold of what the music industry was seeking in that it was already bilingual and bicultural (if not transcultural) and had more than two decades of built-in popularity in Puerto Rico, in parts of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, and in parts of the US as a result of circular migration between the Island and the US mainland. Hence, underground music was sought after by the Latin music industry for its crossover potential and unique ability to reach markets across the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, English/Spanish-language dominant and/or bilingual audiences in the US, as well as Spanish-language dominant audiences across the globe. In part, the music industry’s recontextualization of reggaetón served as a means to enact the myth of discovery for the purposes of rebranding the genre as pan-Latin, but this could also be interpreted an effort to sanitize the genre and craft a more commercially viable and radio-/advertiser-friendly version out about reggaetón. These narratives are constructed as such and circulate globally as dominant discourses, because of how effectively they serve the interests of corporate transculturalism and globalization. Accordingly, discursive constructs that do not serve these market interests will often be found subverted and/or in competing tension with commercially viable constructions. Addressing the tensions between hybridity, globalization, and power, Kraidy (2005) compellingly cautions: “The claim that hybridity is symptomatic of resistance to globalization is troublesome, and the less forceful assertion that cultural mixture reflects the lightness of globalization’s hand is misguided. Hybridity as a characteristic of culture is compatible with globalization because it helps globalization rule, as Stuart Hall once put it, through a variety of local capitals…[M]ainstream public discourse frames this exchange as benign and beneficial. The sheer repetition of the word ‘hybridity’ in hundreds of media outlets and dozens of academic disciplines gives hybridity an aura of legitimacy and hides its inherent contradictions as it mystifies globalization’s material effects. Hybridity, then, is not just amenable to globalization. It is the cultural logic of globalization” (148).

32 Jorge Duany (2002) has emphasized the strong ties maintained between Puerto Ricans on the Island and U.S. mainland through family connectivity and circulation migration—patterns of back and forth travel between these spaces. These circular migration patterns between Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland are also often referred to as “el vaiven” (back and forth) or “brincando el charco” (as if jumping across a pond).
of **underground rap**—a highly contested musical form popularized in Puerto Rico throughout the late 1980s\(^{33}\), 1990s, and into the early 2000s.

**Underground’s Production, Perversion, and “Contagion”**

According to the foundational literature on underground, Rivera (2009) asserts that *underground* rap developed without any state intervention and outside of the mainstream purview for nearly a decade before it was ever targeted for containment in Puerto Rico (115).

Underground did not become a public nuisance until it began to seep into mainstream visibility in Puerto Rico during the mid-1990s (*ibid*). For example, underground did not officially appear

\(^{33}\) There are multiple points of contact, musical cross-flows, and cultural expressions to explore from the ways rap and reggae permeated various musical expressions in Puerto Rico. As *underground* encompasses the hybrid expressions of Puerto Rican youth culture and the complex integration of “different cultural elements of the gangsta-rap culture of the United States and the reggae and dancehall cultures of Jamaica” there is no straight trajectory that can either fully or precisely engage how and when Puerto Rican underground culture developed (Giovannetti 2003: 8). However, existing scholarship on *underground* traces the influence of US rap in Puerto Rico back to the early 1980s (Rivera 2009). While U.S. rap emerged in New York during the early 1970s, Rivera argues that: “The popularization of rap in Puerto Rico happens precisely at the moment when dominant U.S. culture came to legitimize rap. Sectors of Puerto Rican youth who would not have identified with African American or Afro-Caribbean music can do so now that it has been accepted by the North American mainstream. The indiscriminate consumption that market forces promote has definitely been one of the factors that has made the popularization of rap in Puerto Rico possible” (Rivera 1992-93: 63). As such, Rivera contends that by the early 1980s, U.S. rap was already a commercial successful on the Island and she highlights particular artists (e.g., Vico C) and DJs (i.e., DJ Playero, DJ Negro) who were producing and circulating early Puerto Rican underground rap recordings during the 1980s (Rivera, 2009: 133). Rivera (2009) also finds that “reggae came a bit later” in terms of its influence on underground rap culture in Puerto Rico (113). Giovannetti (2003) argues that the “Rasta boom” from the late 1980s early 1990s took on new meanings as reggae was resignified and reappropriated by Puerto Rican youth on the Island in the later 1990s (85). Giovannetti also contends that the terms “reggae,” “rap,” and “underground” have been used interchangeably and in indiscriminant ways on the Island, which displays what he deems a “general ignorance of the origins of the [reggae] genre and of Jamaican culture and society” (90). For example, he describes that when he was writing a book on roots reggae music in Jamaica, some would confuse it Puerto Rican rap music [or reggae-rap] (*ibid*). At the time of Giovannetti’s (2003) writing the term “reggaetón” had just recently been coined and was mentioned just once in his article. Thus, the context in which these labels were being used could make a significant difference in terms of referencing either U.S. mainland rap, which had a presence on the Island at the time, or Puerto Rican/Boricua rap which was more often referenced in relation to *underground*. Moreover, these examples demonstrate ways that the musical fusions created by underground artists and DJs on the Island were producing a cross-cultural blurring of lines in terms of genre labels, but also underscores the ways in which these younger generations were raising inevitable questions about the value of fortifying strict and unsustainable boundaries around these respective genres in the first place. On this note, Giovannetti (2003) submits: “These parallel tendencies of roots and recognition and searching are related, in part, to the need to affiliate the global musical trends received with the local setting where the music is performed and to the inevitably and constant process by which Caribbean cultures and societies search for, establish, and negotiate identity” (91). As the roots of both underground and reggaetón music are continually the subject of debate, recent scholarly work has also traced Asian (LeBrón 2011), Dominican (Pacini-Hernández 2009), Cuban (Fairley 2009; Baker 2011), Jamaican (Manuel and Marshall 2006), and Panamanian (Marshall 2009) musical influences through reggaetón. I recognize that the musical roots of underground and reggaetón are intricately interwoven into the musical trajectories of multiple music forms, as this contributes to the radically hybrid makeup of popular diasporic music. My scholarly engagement with the various origins debates around reggaetón centers primarily on audience/fan/anti-fan reception to reggaetón post-crossover, thus I defer to the existing body of scholarly literature on reggaetón that interrogates various complex musical histories that inform the hybrid makeup of reggaetón. Also see Wayne Marshall (2005) for further discussion in this area. (http://www.wayneandwax.blogspot.com/2005/08/we-use-so-many-snares.html).
“aboveground” until 1994 as underground artists (i.e., Wiso G and DJ Nelson) began selling their music in local retail stores on the Island (Rivera 2009: 114). As underground bled outside the bounds of its former marginal location in the informal economy, this was largely perceived by underground’s detractors as the “periphery” posing a threat to the “core with cultural contagion” (Rivera 2009: 112). Presumably, the middle-class and upper-class elites on the Island were the only population segments vulnerable to the “contagion” of underground, as the music’s proliferation among the poorest barrios and caserios (housing projects) on the Island elicited little if any cause for concern in the years leading up to underground’s mainstream dissemination. Rivera (2009) calls out such uneven reactions to underground as illustrative of the kinds of “classist hysteria” evident in media accounts on the Island that deployed “yellow journalism and the social imaginary of fear” to depict underground as an unwanted potentially corrosive element to civil society on the Island (116-17).

By the mid-1990s and again in 2002, underground was subjected to public attack in Puerto Rico, particularly from local media outlets, conservative media monitoring groups (i.e., Morality in Media), local police, and government officials. In 1995, the state moved toward

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34 Prior to 1994, underground music was produced and circulated within the context of an informal economy (Rivera 2009: 113). Puerto Rican youth on the Island created and used homegrown recording and editing studios in caserios (housing projects) to record cassette mixtapes and operated amateur-friendly equipment such as handheld video cameras to record music videos (Santos 1996: 220). Santos (1996) describes the early production of underground as a “technoculture” whereby the “great voice of virtuosity in playing a musical instrument is not necessary for its creation” (224-225). In essence, underground was produced via virtual drum-kit. Taking into account the many sonic transformations and contemporary hybridizations that have taken shape since underground and other musical forms, that Wayne Marshall (2009) deems “proto-reggaetón,” contributed to the development of the genre now commercially tagged “reggaetón,” what makes it distinguishable to the ear are “steady kick drum and syncopated snares”—also referred to as “el dembow” (20-21).

35 Aparicio (1998) also describes how initially salsa was not readily accepted within the Island’s national identity given that, “For many upper-class Puerto Ricans, salsa was not an appropriate and lofty enough symbol of the island’s musical traditions” (65).

36 Rivera (2009) draws a distinction between the public smear campaign waged against underground in 1995 in efforts to ban it, versus the legislative action launched to censor “musica del perreo” (music of the doggie-style dance) in 2002. Whereas the 1995 backlash against underground in Puerto Rico could be described as falling under “the logic of extreme censorship,” the legislative hearings held by Senator Velda González in 2002 were more moderately tempered and directed at censoring the music videos and lyrics as well as regulating the grinding dance called “el perreo” (Rivera 2009: 130). El perreo was still most closely associated with underground during the 2002 legislative hearings held on the Island, however perreo later became known as the dance of reggaetón during and after the genre’s commercial crossover. El perreo is one of the direct remnants of reggaetón’s former underground history that the US media often latches onto in an effort to imbue reggaetón with a somewhat titillating underbelly that also doubles for a juicy headline for articles about reggaetón. I draw a connection between the dominant discursive framing of “musica del perreo” in Puerto Rico as indecent, and the US mainstream media’s discursive construction of
censuring and banning underground music on the Island and justified their actions by discursively coding underground music and rappers within dominant narratives of “delinquency, violence, illegality, and transgression” (Santos 1996: 225).

Giovannetti (2003) explains:

As national rap emerged from the underground, the state began to implement calculated policies to work against rappers and their musical productions. In February 1995, the Vice Control Division of the Puerto Rican police unsuccessfully took action against businesses selling underground music, based on allegations that the explicit sexual content of the music’s lyrics was ‘obscene’ and the music fomented violent behavior and drug consumption. …[In 1995, public debate centered on the alleged obscenity and explicit violence in many of the lyrics and performances of the rap underground singers. Later, rap underground music was defined as a response to the ‘mano dura,”37 the...
repressive policy of Governor Pedro Roselló and the New Progressive Party (PNP) against crime that targeted the housing projects (87).

During the February 1995 raids, the Drugs and Vice Control Bureau of the Puerto Rican Police Department seized cassette tapes of underground rap for violating obscenity Laws 112 and 117 (Santos 1996: 219). These state sponsored raids were bolstered by mainstream media coverage that simultaneously worked to incite moral panic on the Island by suggesting that the music was pornographic and promoted violence, drug use, and risky sexual behaviors among Puerto Rican youth (Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera 2007, Rivera 2009). As such, Puerto Rican legislators such as Waldemar Quiles—also the president of the Puerto Rican House of Representative’s Commission on Education and Culture—worked to “amend the Puerto Rican Penal Code in order to typify the production of underground rap as a serious crime” (Rivera 2009: 116).

Ultimately, underground’s lyrics were considered exceedingly crude and threatening in their ability to “offend public morality” (Santos 1996: 224). Santos elaborates on the uncensored edge of underground in its rap lyrics:

There are two types of rap, commercial rap and underground rap. In both, rap identity is constructed as a social menace. If in the commercial sphere, rap speaks of life in the barrio and offers advise on how to end drugs and unemployment, in the underground market it speaks about life in the barrio in its own terms. Rap lyrics and music offend public morality. They are violent, explicitly sexual, and vulgar. Its sexual discourse includes homophobia and misogyny characteristic of Boricua culture. But the reason for its persecution is its use of a language that lays bare these prejudices in a violent manner (224).

under this anti-crime policy the state attempted to “control a much more abstract or elusive aspect of ‘disorder’” via policing and censoring underground music and rappers in lieu of actually deterring crime. In the process, this policy provided the authority to government to essentially target poorer youth in Puerto Rico, particularly those living in the housing projects, as “the main perpetrators of crime and social disorder” (122).

Rivera (2009) cites these February 1995 raids as a major news event in Puerto Rico, whereby: “Six record stores were targeted; three of them were located in Plaza Las Américas—one of the most prestigious shopping malls in San Juan. Four hundred and one cassettes and compact discs were confiscated. Six store employees were issued court citations” (116). In addition, Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera (2007) explain that the National Guard aided the Puerto Rican police in conducted the 1995 store raids and that Puerto Rico’s Department of Education also essentially complied with these efforts by banning underground from the schools and by implementing dress codes meant to curb the use of baggy clothing (36).
While underground’s unedited form of musical expression was in some ways a means for rappers to harshly illustrate their marginalized position in society and in other ways a platform for exploring their nihilistic fantasies, there were overarching fears revealed through popular discourse on the Island that was reminiscent of the *hypodermic needle theory*, which describes the effects of mass media and popular culture on audiences as strong and powerful.

Rivera (2009) points to several media articles that circulated on the Island and television specials that aired at the height of the mid-1990s underground censorship debates, which helped to propagate myths about the music that were discursively coded as precautionary warnings meant to educate parents and public officials on the dangers of underground (116-17). Effectively, the media’s widespread circulation of such myths helped to disseminate arguments in favor of underground’s censorship across the Island. For instance, one such commonly circulated myth directly implicated underground music with criminal drug trafficking on the Island (Rivera 2009: 117). Another dominant media frame worked to incite moral panic, as underground was discursively constructed as a harmful pollutant that could potentially poison the minds of vulnerable youth exposed to the messages in the music (Rivera 2009: 125). And yet, the definition of ‘vulnerable youth’ was in many ways racially coded and marked by class and socioeconomic status within this context. Underground was “primarily developed and identified with youth of the laboring-impoverished classes” and “spoke the voice of those demonized in the public imagination” (Rivera 2009: 112). Hence, those most vulnerable to underground’s ‘potentially corrosive’ and ‘perverse’ messages were not those who were producing it in the poorer communities; rather, the fear induced discourses that spoke of vulnerable youth referred to those youth perceived as part of the ‘mainstream’ middle and upper classes on the Island.39

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39 Báez (2006) points to similar class tensions at play in the distinction made on the Island between “roqueros y cocolos” as she asserts that “roqueros (rock fans on the Island) were criticized for listening to ‘American’ music (meaning U.S. and non-Puerto...
The early scholarly work of Santos (1996) on underground rap emphasized its explicit racial delineation as música negra (black music)—citing examples such as the classic Playero #38 mixtape introduction claiming ‘this is black music’ to Puerto Rican underground rappers who adopted monikers that Santos associated with an “explicit naming of a black Puerto Rico” (i.e., Blackie, DJ Negro, Prieto, el Negro) (230). While, Baker (2005: 108-9), Santos (1996: 230), and Giovannetti (2003: 83) traced African American and Afro-Caribbean influence in underground through hip hop cultural references or Jamaican Reggae and Rasta symbolism in the lyrical stylings, music videos, and fashion of underground performers and fans; Santos argued that:

This transition from African American influences to Jamaican influences set important guidelines in the development of the musical genre in the Island. Its key developments are marked by this transition and by a greater criminalization of the genre, which suggests to me evident racial links between Boricua rap and its growing illegality (230).

Similarly, Rivera (2009) addressed how the racial coding of underground as black music also intersected with its subsequent ghettoization and criminalization, thus:

Underground was identified (from within this realm of musical expression, as well from its outskirts) as the music of the poor, ‘black,’ and young. Since this was precisely the same sector demonized in social discourse as the embodiment of criminality, it was no surprise that this music was portrayed as the musical expression of a sinister, incomprehensible, marginal, and criminal subculture (122-23).

Rican music) and cocolos (salsa fans on the island) were seen as more ‘authentic’ Puerto Ricans” (65). See also Puerto Rican Jam: Essays on Culture and Politics (1997b), Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel (eds.) in “Rapping Two Versions of the Same Requiem,” where Rivera draws a connection between how 1990s underground rappers were characterized as delinquents in Puerto Rico to the ways in which 1980s salsa fans or “cocolos” were also labeled “‘titeres robacadenas’ (jewelry thieves)” on the Island (251). Manuel, Bilby, and Largey (2006) elaborate on the racist connotation also attached to the use of the term cocolo as he contends that reception of salsa music in Venezuela during the 1970s among “the predominantly white bourgeoisie tended to disparage salsa as música de monos—‘monkey music’—just as their Yankee-oriented Puerto Rican rockero counterparts deprecated salsa fans using the racist term cocolos (94). Thus, mediation of underground also harkens back to a previous lineage of divisive class and racial tensions negotiated through music reception on the Island as demonstrated via the rockero/cocolo dichotomy. And yet, Manuel, Bilby, and Largey (2006) contend that once reggaetón emerged as a widespread commercial success, it ostensibly rendered such divides null and void, or as he asserts “the rockero-vs.-cocolo split no longer made sense” (86). As Manuel, Bilby, and Largey (2006) describe within underground or “Puerto-rap” there is both US mainland influence and a “working-class black and mulatto thing,” (ibid) which presumably challenges the construction of previous divides mentioned by Báez (2006: 65) whereby rock fans fall under US mainland musical influences and cocolos are classified within the context of ‘authentic’ puertorriqueñidad. Reggaetón’s crossover begins to complicate stringent binaries demarcated by race and class that are often ascribed to ethnically marked music genres and fans.
Within this context of underground’s perceived criminality in Puerto Rico, Rivera (2009) argues that these pro-censorship views also fit within a broader discourse that often depicted lower class and darker skinned youth on the Island as the criminal element to blame for social ills on the Island. Thus, in this way underground was posited as the embodiment or “physicalization of their [youth] moral infractions” (Rivera 2009: 129). At the same time, the Mano Dura Contra el Crimen policies of former Puerto Rican Governor Pedro Roselló granted the state the ability to surveil these youth and provided the rest of the “civil” society a concrete target in underground music around which to ignite a backlash—all the while, subverting the institutional and structural inequalities that were actually contributing to socioeconomic decline and civil unrest on the Island.

Colonialist Discourses Applied to “Musica Negra”

In many ways early underground was also largely perceived as falling outside the bounds of middle and upper class respectability, until it was later sanitized and mass marketed as reggaetón. This was quite opposite to the ways in jazz, for example, was interpreted by music scholars like Theodor Adorno who claimed that jazz only worsened as it became more democratic—mass consumption subjected it to banality (Adorno 2002: 475). Conversely, underground would conceivably require sanitization to recuperate it from its low culture ‘barrio’ status to a more democratized version that could be produced for the masses. In the longue durée of musical forms eventually popularized on the Island, danza, salsa, bomba, and plena were also racialized, marked as deviant, and subjected to rigid colonialist discourse around sexuality, taste, and class respectability. For example, Suárez Findlay (1999) describes the tenuous relationship that Liberal Autonomists, also referred to as ‘sons of Spain’ or the emerging bourgeoisie in Puerto Rico, had with danza during the mid to late 19th century (56). In some ways, for them
danza was representative of the “many intimacies shared with women of the popular classes” or reminiscent of their entanglements with the “sensual power that allegedly exuded from Afro-Puerto Ricans” (Suárez Findlay 1999: 57). As such, Suárez Findlay posits that these Liberals perceived danza’s seductive and “dangerously feminine and African” dance as a threat to ‘respectable society’ (56). Thus, danza was constructed in contrast to the “‘pure, virile, patriotic’ notes of the ‘Marseillais;’” and yet, identified as the “emasculating, all too African sensuality that they feared haunted them” and which also evoked imaginings of “promiscuous racial mixing” (Suárez Findlay 1999: 57). Thus, Suárez Findlay claims that for these Liberal Autonomists who were so determined to create and lead a ‘civil’ society and excise any opposing disruptive threats—this presumably “required a disciplined march toward rational, de-Africanized virility” (ibid). Therefore, the threat of danza was discursively constructed within the frame of colonialist discourse, which conceived of civility as European, masculine, and ‘respectable’ against danza’s dangerous signifiers of African hypersexuality, uncontrollable desire, and racial mixture.

Aparicio (1998) similarly observes several prohibitive measures previously waged against merengue, salsa, and danza. In efforts to prohibit these musics and dances, Aparicio highlights how ‘logical’ and ‘rational’ positivist discourses were strategically deployed to degrade and condemn such musical forms that later flourished despite combined efforts to contain them (15-16). Within the context of merengue Aparicio notes:

The prohibitions against the merengue, the pejorative arguments against the faster rhythms, the incarceration of the güireros, and the resistance to the new intimacy and the corporeal movements of the dancing couple, are clearly founded in the Africanophobia of a repressive colonial system, an ideology consistently articulated by the local patriarchal bourgeoisie and justified through sexual and racial constructs, inscriptions, and associations that linked ‘Africaness’ and the black population to exoticism, eroticism, unbridled sexuality, and indolence. The forces of civilization were obliged to contain these sites of unlimited passion, for the ‘domino theory’ of passions assumes that ‘sexual passions have no self-regulating mechanisms, no internal limits’ (14).
As underscored by Suárez Findlay (1999) and Aparicio (1998) in reference to danza and merengue, there exists a historic legacy of racist, sexist, patriarchal, colonialist discourse applied to music and dance forms considered far too delinquent and threatening in their expression, composition, representative authority, and reception. Hence, these at one time unsanctioned musical forms were rigidly policed and markedly disciplined through Eurocentric, imperialist, and racist discourse, which essentially marks and “scapegoats libidinous Blacks for destroying the nation” (Shohat and Stam 1995: 159). As Suárez Findlay observed, danza “represented all that destroyed elite Puerto Rican men’s love of nation as it drove them to ‘intoxication with soft luxuriousness…and moral decay’” (57). Accordingly, underground was also discursively represented by the state as ‘contagion’ for its African hypersexual disruptive nature, its delinquent hybrid and synthetic composition, its US “foreign” African American influences, its low birth among the ‘lower’ classes, and its classed and racialized audiences of poor aesthetic taste and culture. As a result, such interpellation is also predicated on racial fears that subsequently incite moral panics around the musics and dances as well as the audiences that consume and actively participate in them. Thus, to engage with these tainted musical forms is to subjugate oneself to moral corruption and to tear at the discursive fabric of the chaste, Enlightened, rational, and “civilized” national body and socially constructed de-Africanized “gran familia.”

Suárez Findlay (1999) asserts that la gran familia puertorriquena (the great Puerto Rican family) was a socially constructed and homogenous ideal “proto-nation” that Puerto Rican Liberal Autonomists sought to discursively produce in the late 19th and early 20th century on the Island (57). Suárez Findlay describes the Liberal Autonomists on the Island who contributed to the dominant discursive construction of la gran familia puertorriquena as a “de-Africanized male fraternity” seeking to lead the nation out of colonial rule by impressing their own paternalistic reforms and hierarchical racial ideologies as a means to sanitize and then reincorporate poorer ‘unwhitened’ deviant populations into the national body or as part of the great Puerto Rican family (59). These efforts manifested in the proliferation of sexual and moral codes enforced by Liberals and wealthy bourgeoisie on the Island against the rural popular classes, ‘unwhitened’ laborers and plebians (Suárez Findlay 1999: 58-60). Thus, writings and (1870s and 1880s) tracts of Liberal Autonomist leaders reveal their goals to regulate interracial sex and to “produce more white babies to populate the laboring classes” (Suárez Findlay 1999: 57). There were also efforts to redeem and recupereate lighter-skinned lower class women through “class-appropriate white respectability,” education, marriage, and motherhood (Suárez Findlay 1999: 59). While, Suárez Findlay describes analogous strategies deployed for lower class men as “Puerto Rican Autonomists hoped to subject plebian men to moral reformation, which would ‘whiten’ their behavior, if not their skin” (ibid). As
Policing the Sexual Threat of Underground

As a racially marked music form also considered hypersexual, Rivera (2009) argues that underground was targeted for containment on the Island “by a profoundly conservative ideology that lumps together violence and drug use with youth extramarital sex as evils eroding social order. Youth sexuality is deemed, by definition, precocious, libertine, and illicit” (128). Consequently, as the state-sponsored efforts to ban underground precipitated into Police Vice Squad raids on the Island during 1995, Rivera explains that these raids also extended to other sites on the Island, including an adult sex shop called “Condomanía” and “Cups lesbian bar,” where the state presumably also envisioned ‘immoral’ sexual activities taking place (ibid). Thus, state censorship against underground was strategically and politically deployed to also police and enforce unwritten heteronormative sexual codes on the Island. This coincided with a time in which conservative media-monitoring groups and local media often circulated fear-inducing discourses about underground aimed to illicit moral panic around the potentially compromised decency of “vulnerable” middle and upper-class blanquitos on the Island who could be morally corrupted by underground—as if they were they were the very wellspring of morality on the Island. These protectionist and Neocolonialist discourses that projected lighter-skinned and whiter, upper and middle-class youth as highly “vulnerable” populations potentially subject to moral corruption and/or decline at the hands of media are somewhat reminiscent of more recent moral panics discursively produced around young, white girls in the US largely constructed as “vulnerable” youth victims of sexting in US mainstream media. According to Hasinoff (2010), such totalizing discourses over-determine the effects of media and digital technologies while

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such, Suárez Findlay details how in order to reinscribe notions of a unified great Puerto Rican family, it required “de-Africanizing the rural poor” (58). Puerto Rican Liberal Autonomists perceived such reforms as part of the solution to gaining freedom from colonialism and paternalism, and yet these ideologies were predicated on and implemented this exact hegemonic coupling.
dismissing the agency of youth populations, particularly of girls, in negotiating their own sexuality. And while conservative critics would often focus on policing underground rap via discursive appeals to morality or decency, with very little uproar made concerning the music’s hypermasculinist discourses, sexist patriarchy, or blatant homophobic declarations; Rivera (2009) declared these critics of underground as “passive and acritical” in their own adherence to dominant cultural norms of heteronormative sexist patriarchy (128-29). Consequently, as underground was subjected to repeated forms of resistance on the Island, there was a persistent underlying suggestion that its audiences and supporters were merely passive consumers and/or cultural dupes subject to the strong and harmful effects of underground music. This early impulse to discount the pleasures of underground’s audiences combined with the blatant disregard for their active agency as audiences, subsequently set chain reaction in motion to challenge and counter the state, media monitoring groups, and the conservative critics’ efforts to curb it. Ultimately, the significant backlash that emerged against underground on the Island, and that seemingly extends through reggaetón’s commercial crossover, has formed a complex cultural politics through these provocative popular diasporic music forms.

**Underground and Reggaetón: Managing Disruptive Delinquent “Diasporic Noises”**

Critics and detractors of underground have often disregarded the global and local circuits of culture, hybrid musical fusions, translocal and transnational cultural flows⁴¹ that significantly contributed to the production of *underground* music. Hall (1996) emphasizes that:

In terms of popular cultural life, it is nowhere to be found in its pure, pristine state. It is always already fused, syncretized, with other cultural elements. It is always-already creolized. Not lost beyond the Middle Passage, but ever-present, the harmonics in our

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⁴¹ Often the transnational flows of production that contributed to the creation of underground music are seemingly ignored within the existing body of scholarly literature. For instance, the production of underground on the US mainland, particularly in Miami and New York is often de-emphasized. Several reggaetón veteran artists who began their careers performing initially as underground rappers (i.e., Ivy Queen, Vico C, Tego Calderon, Daddy Yankee) were part of the vaivén between New York, Miami, and Puerto Rico and also produced music there (e.g., the Guatauba mixtape series) that circulated in the US mainland before the commercial crossover of reggaetón in 2004.
musics to the ground-bass of Africa, traversing and intersecting our lives at every point (219).

And yet, applying largely essentialist arguments to their one-dimensional perspectives on cultural production and consumption, musical purists in Puerto Rico marginalized underground as a “‘cultural product of United States’ ghetto culture” (Rivera 2009: 112). Rap and dancehall—the primary musical ingredients of underground—were both considered foreign from the national identity and traditional music culture of Puerto Rico (ibid). Underground was cast off either as an imitator of U.S. rap or dancehall, or it was dismissed outright as “black noise.” These responses to underground ultimately failed to engage the “possibility of greater cultural contact among urban Caribbean communities as is made evident in Boricua rap” (Santos 1996: 230). Furthermore, Rivera (1992-93) contends:

[P]uerto Rican rap does not merely imitate North American rap. Rather, rap in Puerto Rico undergoes a process of change that aligns it with the concerns and experiences of Puerto Rican youth. These processes are: the composition of rap in Spanish or Spanglish; themes that are relevant to Island experiences; the incorporation of Caribbean rhythms; and the affirmation of Puerto Rican culture (61).

Santos also explains that Puerto Rican rappers on the Island were creating newly syncretized forms on the Island as “new fusions of Caribbean and African American music that reach us from New York and Miami that we have reshaped” (Santos 1996: 219). Moreover, African American musical traditions have historically influenced Caribbean formations, but they have

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42 Conversely, Juan Flores (2004) defines underground as “the style migrated from the ‘hood in the U.S. to ‘hood on the island, even though it was quickly commercialized and domesticated in Puerto Rico by the mid-1980s, the underground scene continued to serve as a venue for the articulation of life in the marginalized and impoverished calles and caserios that had been out of bounds for all other forms of artistic expression” (289).


also been influenced by Caribbean musics. Hence, underground fusions also mixed “English and Spanish, refined voices with vulgar ones, local fashions with the imported, homegrown rhythms with rhythms from abroad, all the while modifying them all to create an expressive collage” (Santos 1996: 225).

Arguably, what made underground stand out both as a provocative musical force and as a provocateur on the Island was the way its constitutive musical influences and the new fusions produced through it (i.e., reggaetón, cubatón, bhangratón, cumbiatón, rumbatón, among others) also opened up multiple sites for social, cultural, and political contestation among its artists, producers, and audiences. For instance, some scholars have acknowledged the dialectic tension that exists between the hybridization of the multiple musical influences used to produce underground and the ways in which its audiences have mediated this musical formation. Jorge Giovannetti (2003) emphasized how youth audiences negotiated the multiple intersections of their identities through music as: “In Puerto Rico and U.S. rap and in Jamaican dancehall, youngsters found a definitive space for the manifestation of their social, racial, ethnic, and gender identities” (90). Consequently, Frances R. Aparicio (2002) also described how the intermusicality and intertexuality of 1990s salsa affected the ways in which younger audiences adopted and adapted to this newer form, which at the time had been similarly subjected to Latin crossover strategies akin to those more recently applied to reggaetón. Aparicio contends that:

45 Rivera, Raquel Z. 1992-93. “Rap Music in Puerto Rico: Mass Consumption or Social Resistance?” (pp. 52-65). Rivera engages the ways Caribbean and African American musical forms have historically influenced one another, citing: “Cuban and Puerto Rican music has been consistently influenced by African American musical traditions since the early decades of the 20th century. Cuban musicians Machito and Mario Bauzá, pioneers of Latin jazz, performed with African American musicians in the 1940s. The rhythm and blues of the 1950s and 60s, American Blacks and Caribbean immigrants, mainly Puerto Ricans, sang doo-wop in the same New York City streets and parks” (54).

“Because it is not traditional salsa, but salsa with a difference, transculturated by other urban musical styles such as hip-hop, r&b, dance, and house, and mediated by pop, this musical space allows young U.S. Latino/as to reaffirm their own national identities and simultaneously to move across racial, musical, and linguistic boundaries” (142). Analogous to these assertions, Tricia Rose (1994) made an equally compelling case for engaging hip hop as a dynamic global culture and as a potentially counterhegemonic force. In Rose’s (1994) *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, she argued that counterhegemonic discourses also circulated via US rap which made it akin to “a sort of street ethnography of racist institutions and social practices, but told more often than not in the first person” (190).

In turn, further evidence of Puerto Rican *underground*s counterhegemonic potential has been similarly revealed through the multiple contradictory ideologies produced through its music—both progressive and reactionary. For example, Santos (1996) explored how within underground’s range of lyrical content it also privileged the voices of those most evidently marginalized and turned a critical eye toward corruption and social injustices on the Island:

The main themes of rap songs are, among others, marijuana, crime, sex, the glorification of gun culture, and criticism and transgression of state control, especially personified by the police force. This music also denounces social hypocrisy and class exploitation. It identifies racial prejudices and exposes the supposed racial democracy that characterized Puerto Rican society. And, as a last straw, it does not respect national identities neither in musical terms nor linguistically (224).

While the debates around underground’s censorship on the Island often emphasized its status as low culture with little worth or value to offer society, underground rappers rejected these notions through their music and countered these disparaging ascriptions. Underground rappers wrote lyrics that challenged the hierarchies of taste and culture reproduced by the state and by elites on the Island whose own “immoral” behaviors were often never questioned. For example, underground rapper Eddie Dee (2003) addressed his critics in “Censurarme por ser rapero”
(Censoring me for being a rapper)\textsuperscript{47}. He initiated his rap by directing it to “la gente de la alta socieda” (the high society folk) and then immediately corrected himself and turned the phrase to explicitly call them out—“o mejor dicho de la alta suciedad” (or better said the extremely dirty [read: corrupt] folk). Throughout his rap Eddie Dee rebutted the critiques that the state and the “moral” majority waged against underground, by citing multiple examples of their own hypocrisy—from the corrupt government official who signed his high school diploma to the Puerto Rican Senators who disparaged underground from the comforts of their air conditioned rooms:

To censor me for being a rapper is like censoring the entire populace. I do not care if you like me or if you dislike me, because my high school diploma is signed by a corrupt official. To censor me for being a rapper is like censoring the entire populace. People want to make an issue of any silly thing. Maybe that is why so many people are against us. Like the Puerto Rican Senators, because it is very easy to bullshit in an air-conditioned hall. How the fuck am I going to do something positive if all I see is negative.\textsuperscript{48}

In addition, Eddie Dee directly confronts the moral panics and hypercritical discourses circulated through the media about underground’s alleged glorification of sex and drugs, exclaiming:

\textsuperscript{47} There is also a provocative music video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XDRnxAg0o>) for “Censurarme por ser rapero” in which Eddie Dee uses religious iconography as visual cues to disseminate his anti-censorship views. He presents himself as a Christ-like figure crucified on a cross, which signals to the ways in which underground rappers were being harshly persecuted in the media and under the repressive actions of the state during the mid-1990s in Puerto Rico. Eddie Dee raps on the microphone in an empty room with walls plastered with the many front-page newspaper editions calling for the censorship of underground—focusing the camera on images from the news used to justify censoring this form, including one featuring Eddie Dee’s face with the words “corrupto” (corrupt) or “violencia” (violence) written across his mouth transposed against other shots framing the words “silencio” (silence) or “marginados” (those marginalized)—depicting the musical form and its rappers as promoters of violence and corruption in their lyrics. The other actors in the music video of varied ages, races, and backgrounds have duct tape across their mouths as if to visually encode the argument Eddie Dee makes in this song about attempts to silence underground rappers on the Island—that to censor a rapper is to censor the entire populace. Other scenes use footage featuring several politicians who were the most vocal about censoring underground, and yet were found to be involved in corruption scandals of their own on the Island. He also addresses critics of underground’s ritual tradition of battle rapping, by countering with film footage of political rallies on the Island in which he argues that the political parties diss each other far worse than rappers ever do. At the end of the video, Eddie Dee walks toward an elderly woman holding up a small religious cross in her hand and he removes the duct tape from her mouth and kisses her gently on her forehead—as if to counter the dominant dehumanizing bad-guy image that the mainstream media on the Island often circulated in relation to underground rappers as dangerous threats and/or gangsters, with a more humanizing and relatable moment depicting a young man tenderly kissing and loving his grandmother just as any other human-being would.

\textsuperscript{48} Lyrics: Censurarme por ser rapero es como censurar un pueblo entero. A mi no me importa si te gusto o te disgusto porque me diploma de cuarto año esta firmado por un corrupto. Censurarme por ser rapero es como censurar un pueblo entero. La gente quiere hacer un issue de una cosa tonta sera por eso que tenemos tanta gente en contra. Como los del Senado, pero es bien facil hablar mierda sentado donde hay aire acondicionado. Como piñeta voy a hacer algo positivo si todo lo que veo es negativo.
Although my music isn’t innocent, I did not invent either sex or marijuana. To hell with those who criticize us! This is the music that the youngsters identify with.  

Compellingly, Eddie Dee also observes the uneven ways in which the democratic process functions on the Island:

If I talk about my lived experiences, they say I am promoting violence. From what I’ve seen, democracy is subject to their convenience.

In a similar fashion, rapper Vico C (2005) launched his own critique against the state in “Desahogo” (Venting) and specifically referenced the disparate ways in which politicians on the Island reacted to reggaetón after its 2004 commercial crossover:

The politicians, who kill for their position, would persecute us rappers. But when they realized that the audience wanted to have a good time…now they promote their campaigns with Reggaetón. It is very convenient, man, but we know what they are scheming. They use us to win and then discard us after winning.

Vico C’s lyrics in “Desahogo” effectively highlighted the distinct discrepancies between how politicians on the Island persistently targeted and persecuted underground music and rappers in the 1990s and early 2000s, and yet were quick to capitalize on reggaetón’s commercial success to promote their own personal and political agendas. As these politicians realized that the popularity of reggaetón was only increasing with its commercial exposure, this drew attention to its mass marketing appeal and potential to attract younger voters on the Island. For example,

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49 Lyrics: Tal vez mi música no sea sana, pero yo no me invente ni el sexo ni la marijuana pal carajo los que nos critican ja! Esta es la música con que los jóvenes se identifican.

50 Lyrics: Si hablo mis vivencias, dicen que promuevo la violencia. Por lo visto la democracia es a conveniencia.

51 Lyrics: Politicos que matan por su posicion, que a los rapperos nos tenian en persecucion. Apercatarse de que el pueblo quiere vacilon, hicieron sus campanas con reggaeton. Asi cualquiera senor sabemos lo que traman nos usan pa ganar y despues nos tiran cuando ganan.

52 After its 2004 commercial crossover, reggaetón has also been used as a discursive shortcut for politicians in the US (i.e., Former Republican US Presidential Candidate John McCain (2008), US President Barack Obama (2008, 2012) and Latin America (e.g., President of Peru, Ollanta Humala and Former President of Peru, Alan Garcia, and Former Presidential Candidate of Peru, Lourdes Flores 2006) to address younger Latin American and/or Latin(o/a) voters in their respective countries (Brousek 2006: 2-4). The ability of reggaetón to be deployed as a marketing tool to attract younger voters across the Americas illustrates the effectiveness of its market-driven global crossover from a previously censored underground form to a global commodity. And yet, of particular noteworthy mention is the case of reggaetón icon, Daddy Yankee’s, 2008 political endorsement of Republican US Senator John McCain. This political endorsement set off a firestorm of debate and controversy that circulated in mainstream US media coverage (i.e. from CNN to The Washington Post) throughout the 2008 US general election. For example, rappers such as Fat Joe publicly denounced Daddy Yankee as a “sell-out” in the press for endorsing a Republican candidate over then Democratic Senator Barack Obama. After the 2008 election, Daddy Yankee has acknowledged his public relations mistake in
there was a stark change in stance from Velda Gonzalez, the former Puerto Rican Senator who
was notorious for her anti-“musica del perreo” (music of the dance of underground music and
later termed reggaetón) stance and who initiated legislative hearings in 2002 aimed at censoring
“the video images, song lyrics, and brazen style of dancing of the music genre that was still not
recalled Senator Gonzalez’s dramatic change in tune as just a year later:

It was a stunning sight. Onstage in 2003 at San Juan’s Hiram Bithorn Stadium, five-time
senator Velda Gonzalez—former actress, grandmother of 11, and beloved public figure—
was doing the unthinkable. Flanked by reggaetón stars Hector and Tito (a.k.a. the
Bambinos), the senator, sporting tasteful makeup and a sweet, matronly smile, was lightly
swinging her hips and tilting her head from side to side to a raucous reggaetón beat” (35).

Despite all of underground’s alleged criminal transgressions and its hefty share of attendant
vocal critics, by this time (around 2003) even the most ardent of detractors could not easily resist
the temptation to glean some publicity from the afterglow of reggaetón’s captivating rise to
mainstream popularity that was initially evident on the Island and then became increasingly
visible on the US mainland as well as abroad.

**Transformation Post-Criminalization: Underground to Reggaetón**

endorsing a candidate publicly and vowed since to keep his political views out of the public spotlight. This particular example is
significant, because it effectively illustrates a dominant mainstream US media narrative which produces a sensationalized and
racialized spectacle out of a “Latin urban”/Latin crossover star endorsing a white Republican candidate for US President. The
various complex issues raised during these debates require further interrogation and discussion than it is possible to explore here
(for further discussion see Rivera, Michelle M. “Voto, Voz, and Internet Backlash: The politics of representation, Latinidad, and
Daddy Yankee’s place in the 2008 US general election debate”). However, for all the mainstream US press devoted to
vociferously celebrating Daddy Yankee’s “successful” Latin crossover in the US, there was a deafening silence when virtually no
mention was made of the fact that given the second-class citizenship status afforded to Island Puerto Ricans such as Daddy
Yankee—he could not even cast a vote in 2008 US general election in the country where he is a legal US citizen! Lastly, this case
in point demonstrates how such media constructs of Latinidad in popular culture also speak to the ways in which Latinos are also
being considered in the political U.S. imaginary.

53 Ethnomusicologist, Wayne Marshall (2009), observes that before “reggaetón” received any mainstream or global media
coverage as a commercially recognized popular music genre, various iterations of the “reggaetón” moniker had circulated prior in
other contexts (51). For example, Marshall cites a few different narratives originated from DJs (i.e., DJ Nelson, DJ El Niño)
claiming to have coined the term “reggaetón” in the mid-1990s. Additionally, Marshall draws attention in particular to DJ Blass’s
“Reggaetón Sex” productions that, in Marshall’s words, were “crucial in popularizing the term as well as tying it to the new
production style emerging in step with digital music software (not to mention significations of the sexual)” (ibid). For further
19-76.
Reggaetón’s commercial crossover is often cited within the purview of its exposure to US mainstream audiences via chart-topping hit songs such as rapper N.O.R.E’s song (featuring Daddy Yankee, Nina Sky, Big Mato, & Gem Star) “Oye Mi Canto” (Roc-A-Fella/Island Def Jam) or Daddy Yankee’s “Gasolina” (VI Music) both released in 2004. However, it is important to also examine the context in which reggaetón was initially constructed and produced as a commercial genre by the recording industry. In particular, it is critically important to turn back to the periods of time in which Puerto Rican underground rap was under threat of state criminalization and censorship, as these historical moments marked the future of the genre later recognized as reggaetón. Much of the early scholarly literature on underground music reveals the various ways in which the state, conservative media monitoring groups, and media outlets all contributed to diverse efforts to contain and expel underground music from the Island. And yet, the Superior Court of San Juan eventually dismissed previous charges levied against stores where mass confiscations of underground recordings had taken place across the Island (Rivera 2009: 117). Although the state’s chief efforts to ban and censor underground were mainly overturned, Rivera (2009) claims that the legacy of these censorship reforms still reverberated through the persistent moral panics and negative biases ascribed to underground (ibid). As such, Rivera observes that one major after-affect produced in the wake of this turn of events was a transformation in the music. Hence, she argues:

The raids also prompted a visible change in underground lyrics. The threat of state censorship and public scandals resulted in a vastly different lyrical content. This is not to say that artists completely turned away from the raw lyrics of the prereaid heyday, but that overall rawness dropped considerably. The content of recordings and videos was the aspect of the music most clearly affected, whereas live shows continued to provide a safer space for uncensored material (118).

This observable change in the underground rap is significant as it signals to a preliminary stage of sanitization of underground’s lyrics and music videos, which arguably begins to set the stage
for a more commercially viable and radio-friendly incarnation to later emerge through the commercial reggaetón genre.

**Island Rap: Positive Rap, Reggae-Rap, Commercial Rap, and Underground**

Rap formations on the Island had always evolved in relation to changes in the market, reforms of the state, and based on what was popular among the masses. Accordingly, in early underground literature, Rivera (1992-93, 1997a, 1997b) examines the emergence and evolution of rap in Puerto Rico between the 1980s and 1990s. In particular, Rivera (1997b) highlights the period between 1989 and 1991 in which “positive rap” had emerged as a markedly less rowdy and more didactic incarnation of Puerto Rican rap that ostensibly served as a foil to the more marginalized forms of rap on the Island such as underground (251). Positive rap took on social issues including the dangers of alcohol (i.e., Ruben D.J.’s rap “El Alcohol”), AIDS (e.g., Brewley M.C.’s “Sida Rap), and dropping out of school—as in Ruben D.J.’s “La Escuela.” And yet, Rivera (1997a) contends that positive rap addressed these themes from a “dominant perspective” and that “The spontaneity and crudeness that characterized the themes and the language of underground rap were transformed in order to be effectively packaged and sold according to market stipulations” (114). Thus, this signals to yet another moment in which cruder versions of rap on the Island were formerly sanitized for mass consumption. As a result, the cleaner version of positive rap on the Island peaked the interests of local radio programmers and recording labels, as rappers such as Brewley M.C. and Ruben D.J. were offered recording contracts (*ibid*). At that time, positive rap served as an entry point to the recording industry for rappers whose lyrics “supported state discourse on crime, idleness, unemployment, and drugs” (Rivera 1997b: 251). For example, Rivera (1997a) highlights Ruben D.J.’s rap “Puerto Rico,” which addresses mass unemployment on the Island and yet, “blames the poor communities for
their own problems” (115). In contrast to positive rap, which championed the “Say No to Drugs” public service program on the Island, underground “focused on ridiculing the antidrug campaign and celebrating the use of marihuana. Marihuana, as a result of this different perception, became another symbol of the marginal culture that rap sought to vindicate” (Rivera 1997b: 251). And yet, the moment in which positive rap captured the commercial industry’s attention was short-lived as reggae-rap increasingly took hold after 1991 and “Hispanic Caribbean” sounds (i.e., salsa, merengue, mambo, calypso, soca, bomba) began to infuse with Island rap (Rivera 1997a: 115). By 1993, the musical entanglement of rap and reggae on the Island was so hybridized that the genres lines became blurred between the two (Rivera 1997a: 116). These more hybrid modalities in sound also coincided with changes in thematic content, as the motifs previously taken up via positive rap “shifted from reflection, self-control, and restraint toward a relatively carefree celebration of human sexuality” (ibid). During this particular shift in rap on the Island, Rivera also observes another prominent theme that emerged and embraced the pleasures of dancing—which also served as debate fodder for fervent critics of Puerto Rican rap’s explicitly sexual dances such as ‘el perreo’ (ibid). During the mid-1990s, Rivera also traces the influence of commercially successful US mainland rap on Island rap, asserting that “the international commercialization of the U.S. hardcore and ‘gangsta’ rap has allowed and encouraged the mass distribution of the ‘return to the street and to our roots’ message now present in Puerto Rican rap” (ibid). Hence, these historical moments provide an insightful means to engage how rap’s local development on the Island was also already integrated within broader global circuits of culture through its own translations and transformations of popular music forms.

The popularity of these ever-evolving rap forms on the Island continued to expand into the late 1990s within commercially informed and underground circuits. In many ways, the
diametric oppositions that existed between positive rap, reggae-rap, commercial rap, and underground during this period of time effectively highlight the ways in which rap on the Island could be just as easily usurped to serve the interests of the state or of the commercial music industry, as it could provide culturally relevant symbols for marginalized rappers and fans. Thus, the power of rap is exceedingly visible in its ever-shifting discursive fluidity and amenability to transformation and evolution. These earlier moments of sanitization and commercialization of rap on the Island all preceded the commercial crossover of reggaetón, but compellingly highlight the dynamic tensions that have historically existed between these musical forms and the complex circuits of culture tied to their production, consumption, regulation, representation, and identity. This is by no means a comprehensive engagement of the development of either rap or reggae on the Island (not to mention the expansive and complex histories of Jamaican and Panamanian reggae), but serves merely as a starting point from which to attempt to contextualize a glimpse of the more complex diasporic history, as well as some of the local and global circuits of culture that have mutually contributed to the emergence of reggaetón. And yet, reggaetón’s longer diasporic history has often been subverted in the face of dominant narratives reconstructed through reggaetón’s commercial crossover, which promotes reggaetón as a tabula rasa—a “new” Latin discovery of the recording industry and a pan-Latin branded commodity of the advertising and culture industries.

Reggaetón’s Early Rise to Commercial Notoriety on the Island

Although reggaetón’s challenges to musical and bodily expressions as well as to discourses of nationhood have been deemed revolutionary enough by governments, social institutions, and individuals to generate various forms of resistance and regulation, few if any have been successful in restraining the rapid transformation represented by this musical form.
Moreover, scholars (Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera 2007) have argued that the actions taken to repress underground rap or reggaetón eventually produced the opposite effect of stimulating and promoting its growth. Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera (2007) point out that:

Before the media paid attention and the state seized on reggaetón as a convenient symbol of the country’s social woes, the genre was largely a contained class phenomenon. But the efforts to censor reggaetón transformed it from marginal to notorious, boosting its appeal as the new idiom of rebellion for many of the island’s youth (36).

Despite facing repeated threats of containment as an underground form, reggaetón only became more popular over time and expanded to increasingly widespread audiences.

As reggaetón has more recently crossed transnational borders and reached global audiences, scholars (i.e., LeBrón 2011) have observed that there has been a visible interaction between nationalist discourses seeking to claim cultural ownership over reggaetón and market forces seeking to recontextualize reggaetón as a transnational pan-Latin commodity. For example, in Mariella Sosa’s (2011) documentary titled, *La Clave*, she stresses that within the context of its crossover, “Reggaetón has given Hispanic youth, especially in Puerto Rico, a musical genre they consider their own.” Here, Sosa’s statement underscores reggaetón’s market currency among pan-Latin youth audiences, but at the same time still ties reggaetón to a particular nation. Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera (2007) both engage how reggaetón has also been identified as “the new idiom of rebellion for many of the island’s youth” in Puerto Rico (36).

Manuel, Bilby, and Largey (2006) also weigh in on reggaetón’s crossover identity, observing that: “In the first half of the next decade [early 2000s], reggaetón—as the genre was renamed—virtually exploded in the music scene as the new, *pan-Latino party music of choice for the younger generation*” (emphasis added, 112). While each of these statements locates reggaetón differentially in relation to its representative power, neither interpretation is misguided or erroneous. However, it is instructive to examine when and how particular dominant discourses
around reggaetón increasingly shifted away from clearly nation-based interpellations to those more closely aligned with reggaetón’s commercially repackaged identity as the *pan-Latino party music of choice for the younger generation*. Thus, in the following sections I examine the role of the US mainstream media as well as the culture and advertising industries in discursively recontextualizing reggaetón as a pan-Latin branded commodity throughout its commercial crossover, as I seek to highlight the tensions that exist between the representational authority of these powerful institutions and the many complex challenges posed to that representational authority by those negotiating divergent and complex meanings through reggaetón.

**The Cool Hunt Fans out from the US Mainland to the Island**

In 2000, Kevin Zimmerman, US journalist and former editor of *Music Business International*, wrote a revealing article about the state of the Latin music market heading into the new millennium. Zimmerman’s article was titled, “More expansion expected in emerging Latino genres” and the main headline followed: “As the industry builds on last year’s wave of Latino hits epitomised by the success of artists such as Ricky Martin, the challenge now is to convert that success into a longer-term prospect via a broader audience” (17). According to Zimmerman, in the first quarter of 1999 the recording industry witnessed an enormous 46% increase in Latin music sales and subsequently set its sights on strategies to capitalize on the phenomenal market returns derived from Latin crossover acts such as Ricky Martin, Jennifer Lopez, and Marc Anthony (*ibid*). Carlos Sanchez, then president of Universal Music Latino’s Miami-based label, commented on the Latin music industry’s shift to US homegrown Latin/(o/a) talent:

> In the past, the Latin market in the US was all about artists coming from the Latin countries…Julio Iglesias, Jose Rodriguez, Vicente Fernandez…they were very successful here but they were coming from the outside. Now this is changing. Now you have artists being developed here that break not only in the US but also abroad. That didn’t happen in the past with the exception of someone like Gloria Estefan (*ibid*).
This shift was significant as it highlighted the growing market share of US-based Latin music divisions at major labels (i.e., Sony, EMI, BMG, WEA, Universal), but also foretold of the ability of these divisions to develop US-based Latin talent for the world, versus solely relying on the distribution of Latin American content. While treading cautiously not to alienate core Latin music audiences—traditionally perceived as Spanish-language dominant—several Latin music labels debated about how to proceed immediately following the crossover successes seen in the late 1990s. Former president of Warner Music Latin America (based in New York), Andre Midani weighed in on the commercially successful blueprint laid by crossover acts of the “Latin Boom”:

In my opinion, those artists are not performing Latin music; they are performing mainstream US dance music with a Latin flavor...the melodies are made by the same songwriters [as in pop]. I do not consider what they’ve made to be genuinely Latin music, but in a country that’s as into categorizing as the United States is, boom! It’s Latin music! I respect Ricky Martin and someone like [WEA’s own] Luis Miguel equally—I am not comparing their talent (Zimmerman 2000: 19).

Thus, Latin music label executives began constructing market strategies for newly signed artists that were largely based on previously successful Latin pop combinations that could appeal sonically to mainstream audiences in the US and abroad. In particular, they focused in on developing the next Latin pop stars to follow in the footsteps of Ricky Martin. At that time, then president and CEO of EMI Latin (based in Los Angeles), Jose Behar was confident that boxer turned singer Oscar de la Hoya would be the latest global Latin pop success. Behar discussed the market strategy behind the inclusion of both English and Spanish-language music tracks on de la Hoya’s Latin pop album, explaining: “This will appeal to the Latin, bicultural and Anglo consumers—there is enough value in the album content-wise to allow us to go after Luis Miguel and Alejandro Fernandez fan bases” (Zimmerman 2000: 19). As demonstrated in the bicultural strategy adopted for Oscar de la Hoya’s crossover, Latin music executives were decidedly
conscious of the growing importance of targeting bicultural and bilingual audiences. A move toward bilingual audiences was confirmed by multiple Latin music insiders such as Ramon Arias, then director of Latin talent acquisitions in music publishing at Peermusic: “Across the board, in all the Spanish-speaking territories including the US, the bilingual factor will continue to grow in importance…A self-contained act like Enrique Iglesias is something we will be seeing a lot more” (ibid). In turn, Latin music executives sought to sign Latin acts across the US who could record in English and Spanish; thereby, simultaneously targeting Spanish-dominant, English-dominant, and bilingual audiences at once.

Another key strategy, which developed after the Latin music boom of the late 1990s, was the increased engagement of younger bicultural and bilingual audiences. In 2000, Universal lagged behind other major recording labels in terms of dollar value and market share of US Latin music sales, given that at the time sales were predominantly driven by “older, more established artists” (Zimmerman 2000: 19). However, Universal was arguably ahead of the curve in targeting younger consumers in the Latin market. Former chairman of Universal Music Latin America’s Miami-based label emphasized how Universal’s approach to signing artists was ultimately aimed at capturing younger audiences (ibid). Eventually, this early focus on attracting younger Latin/(o/a) audiences would position Universal Music as a market leader within in the context of the reggaetón’s commercial crossover.

**Underground Fever: Indie Labels Clamor for Early Puerto Rican Rap**

Before reggaetón was ever marketed as an international Latin pop genre, Rivera (2009) reveals that it had previously managed to gain a fair share of traction as an underground form, affirming: “Despite the simplicity of its production, promotion and distribution, the early underground market still covered extensive ground” (113). This assertion is confirmed by the
notable 2002 music sales of underground rap cited in Randy Luna’s (2002) *Billboard Magazine* article titled, “Rap on the rise in Puerto Rico: Although generating the Island’s biggest sales, the genre struggles to get the attention it deserves” (LM22). At that time, independent recording labels based in Puerto Rico (i.e., Piña Music, Buddha’s Production) were releasing commercially successful albums annually and had witnessed some Billboard chart topping hits (*ibid*). However, independent label heads on the Island were puzzled as to why the burgeoning commercial success of Puerto Rican rap was not receiving the kind of widespread mainstream media attention they felt it deserved. Accordingly, president and founder of Piña Music, Rafael Piña then described Puerto Rican rap as a definitive market leader stating, “It used to be a trend, but not it has established itself as a genre. It is the strongest source of income in the industry, above pop or tropical [music]…We sell at least 50,000 copies [of each release] between the U.S. and Puerto Rico” (*ibid*). Frank Castillo, owner of indie label Buddha’s Production, also boasted about selling 15,000 copies in New York and Orlando “without any promotion [there] and bad distribution” (*ibid*). Before 2004 the vast majority of the sales of Puerto Rican rap/early reggaetón were being generated on the Island, but this was also the moment in which independent label executives began entering into licensing agreements and signing distribution deals with major recording labels as a means to expand circulation to other major Latin markets in the US. For example, Luna’s (2002) article engages how Sony Discos, EMI Latin, and Universal Latino entered into joint ventures with “rap-specialized indies” on the Island such as Piña Music, Buddha’s Production, Fresh Production, and BM Records (*ibid*). These joint ventures allowed for indie labels such as Piña Music, for example, to gradually expand their reach across Latin markets in New York, Orlando, Miami, Connecticut, Philadelphia, and even Venezuela—where Rafael Piña was able to then sell “an average of 6,000 per release” (*ibid*).
Looking back now, those numbers appear meager by comparison to the platinum album sales records broken after reggaetón’s crossover. However, this early succession of distribution and licensing deals would come to play a defining role in how reggaetón would be discursively constructed, packaged, and marketed as a commercial genre circulated to massive global audiences.

And yet, in the early 2000s and particularly before reggaetón’s 2004 commercial crossover, Puerto Rican indie labels were still relying on informal street team tactics to promote their artists on the Island. Frank Castillo’s initial marketing approach was explained as follows, “I take flyers and stickers in a van with huge billboard on it directly to my clients: junior-high and high-school students…We do it direct because I don’t count on many channels to let the audience know what’s happening” (Luna 2002: LM22). Luna’s article also exposes how another commonly adopted marketing strategy among Puerto Rican indie labels involved engaging in the payola system of pay-for-play, which has been historically associated with radio. Luna elaborates in greater detail:

The marketing approach used with this music is very simple: Labels pay for airtime. Rap station Mix 107.7, which started at the end of 2000, along with video channels Tele San Juan and Tele Net, charge a monthly fee to play a song/video. But, while these outlets function as the primary propellers for rap sales, other non-traditional outlets for the genre are starting to believe in its staying power among young consumers. Top-rated morning radio show ‘El Bayu,’ on tropical station Salsoul 98, and Monday night prime-time TV show No Te Duermas, both hosted by Antonio ‘El Gangster’ Sanchez, now include rap guest sporadically. In addition, newspapers and TV shows are starting to react positively to the movement (ibid).

Debatably, these early take-charge marketing methods derived out of necessity for indie labels and Island rappers, as their relationship with media on the Island was strained, at best, given the ways in which underground rap had been cast as contagion for many years prior by mainstream media outlets as the state intervened and attempted to censor and ban it.
Consequently, Luna (2002) addressed some of the corollary effects stemming from the lingering stain on Puerto Rican rap’s reputation at the time, despite its rapidly growing sales:

Sales like this are providing retailers with such a steady traffic of customers that, for a single market like Puerto Rico, the trend would normally generate massive media coverage. But rap is still overlooked by many media outlets, especially TV and radio, due to the negative perception associated with the music and its highly sexual and violent content. Sponsors are afraid to invest in events as well. All this, coupled with leeriness about dealing with the crowds associated with the music, prevents the genre from growing any further (ibid).

In order to remove these impediments to reggaetón’s future commercial success, it became increasingly evident that artists and labels would need to sanitize their music and video content, as well as engage effective marketing and branding strategies to discursively construct the genre as the much-needed dynamic boost that the recording industry had been seeking after the Latin music boom of the 1990s—also the time when the Latin music industry increasingly began to focus their attention on bilingual, bicultural, younger Latin(o/a) audiences.

The Pre-commercialization and Sanitization Stage of Reggaetón

Debatably, an early pre-commercialization and sanitization stage of reggaetón commenced in the early 2000s—several years before the recording industry began marketing it as an international Latin music phenomenon. In the September 10, 2005, Billboard Magazine issue there were several sections dedicated to closely examining what the front cover described as the “Reggaetón Craze” and it enticed readers with a “guide to the hot genre including 18 faces to watch” (39, 52). By 2005, the advertising and culture industries were already heavily involved in marketing and distributing reggaetón globally. Leading up to the music industry’s commercial repackaging and subsequent launch of reggaetón as the latest Latin pop crossover success, recording industry executives established and affirmed their position as the genre’s head corporate and public relations intermediary. Reggaetón’s musical precursor, Puerto Rican
underground rap, previously relied on a network of DJs, nightclubs, and fans under the framework of a largely informal economy to circulate its musical recordings on the Island. However, after several major recording labels entered into distribution deals with smaller indie labels in Puerto Rico, several of the responsibilities previously undertaken by artists and indie labels shifted over to major labels and their head executives, as the major labels increasingly handled A&R, public relations, media promotions, major distribution, and sales. For instance, Gus Lopez (2007) explained that his role as president of Universal-owned label, Machete, was “to bring the music in a legal way to the consumer, and also to educate retailers about the genre and its culture” (Alban and Posada 2007). Here, Lopez’s assertion about being charged with “educating” retailers about the genre and its culture, speaks to the significant influence label executives wielded when it came to discursively constructing the genre for public consumption. It is arguably the result of these joint ventures launched in the early 2000s between indie labels in Puerto Rico and predominantly US-based major labels that the recording music industry gained its dominant position of authority over the genre, which noticeably spilled over into the Latin music industry’s representational authority over the genre as well.

Music journalist, Leila Cobo, described the moment in 2002 when recording labels were seeing depressed sales of tropical music and were actively in search of discovering the next great Latin pop movement for their consumers (Cobo 2005b: 40). It was during this time period that

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54 In the September 10, 2005 issue of Billboard Magazine, Leila Cobo explains that “Initially, Universal signed licensing and distribution deals through its Latin label, Universal Music Latino, and its distribution arm, UMVD, which distributes the bulk of reggaetón in the United States. Today, many reggaetón stars (including Yankee, Don Omar, and Luny Tunes) are distributed and/or promoted and marketed via some kind of agreement with Universal. But in the past year [2004] the company has also focused on directly signing and developing its own artists. In addition, earlier this year [2005], Universal created the Machete Music label, which is dedicated to all styles of Latin urban music” (Cobo 2005b: 40).

55 The September 10, 2005, Billboard Magazine, included a Latin music special feature. Leila Cobo wrote an article for the feature titled, “Reggaetón Fever!: How the Genre has Reinvigorated Latin Music,” pp. 39-62. For this article, Cobo engaged the dramatic turn that reggaetón had then just recently taken as a mainstream market success, which had dramatically boosted Latin music sales over the course of just one year at the time of publication. Univesion Music Group’s president and CEO [2005], Jose Behar, examined what reggaetón’s commercial crossover meant to the Latin music industry at that time, stating: “It has served as a much needed adrenaline shot for the business by expanding the consumer base….We had lost the tropical consumer, and it had boiled down to pop and regional Mexican. It’s exciting to see young consumers flocking to retail” (Cobo 2005b: 39).
Universal’s label executives “turned to Puerto Rico to explore up-and-coming music trends,” and in particular, “[Gustavo] Lopez, who came to Universal from BMG, had seen the possibilities of reggaetón with Panamanian rapper El General, a pioneer in the genre who sold several million albums by the late 1990s” (Cobo 2005b: 40). Thus, it was during the early 2000s that the music industry began to more fully recognize reggaetón’s potential to produce massive album sales on a transnational level. This palpable industry buzz around reggaetón gained even more significance heading into 2003 when the Latin music industry faced budget cuts, the effects of music piracy, and sales that had “flatlined” and then slipped (Buckley and Levin 2003: 1C). Therefore, the pressure was on Latin music industry executives to introduce “new sounds for an apathetic public” (ibid). Gustavo Lopez recalled his growing interest in reggaetón at the time, stating:

Even before radio stations supported this music, which in my opinion helped for the explosion of the movement, we were already beginning to see sales increasing in markets outside Puerto Rico. It was in that moment when we decided to invest more and looked to other labels, not just VI Music. We thought, ‘if we were selling music just making it available, imagine what we can do if we have a marketing, a public relations and a video/radio promotions staff to support these artists that are showing signs they can be key sellers in this market,’ and it was at that moment that Machete came into the game (Alban and Posada 2007).

Subsequently, and as projected by Gustavo Lopez, the recording industry moved toward sanitizing the music and video content for mainstream audiences in order to gain the essential support of national radio in the US. DJ Kazzanova (aka Oscar Cortez), the radio persona on a rap and reggaetón centered show on WCAA/New York, addressed some of the ways in which he had witnessed the sanitization of reggaetón unfold:

To get on the radio, it can’t be as aggressive…In Puerto Rico, the people who buy albums are women. And these rappers were only appealing to guys. So they started doing softer raps56, about dancing…and the ladies started buying” (Cobo 2003: 66).

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56 The way in which DJ Kazzanova interprets reggaetón’s early content as aggressive and suited for male audiences against its more recent turn to female audiences within highly feminized discourse around “softening” the genre, bears resemblance to the
Leila Cobo (2003) adds that reggaetón artists also began making a conscious effort to lessen the amount of “colloquial lyrics” so as broaden the appeal of the music beyond its existing fan base (66). Furthermore, the vice president of promotion at Univision Music Group [2003], Lupe de la Cruz, weighed in on her label’s approach to producing more mainstream content, adding: “In the six years we’ve been around, we’ve stressed to our artists the importance of not only changing the violent content of lyrics but also having content all Hispanics can understand…Our products have 95% clean lyrics. There’s no need to be violent or aggressive toward women” (Cobo 2003: 66). In many ways, these overt efforts at “cleaning up” the lyrics were a necessary step in order to effectively sell the genre to mainstream retailers and corporate sponsored radio. And yet, Leila Cobo explains that even with more sanitized content, there was still a persistent language barrier in existence—as Spanish raps were not as readily embraced on English-language dominant rap stations (ibid). Therefore, out of profit-driven necessity, the Latin music industry began to strategically market and package reggaetón for radio and advertisers.

**Discursively Constructing Reggaetón as “Pan” & “Urban” … Sin Barreras (Without Barriers)**

Drawing from previously circulated descriptions of Puerto Rican underground rap, major label executives discursively repackaged reggaetón as both a Latin urban genre and a pan-latin branded commodity. In 2002 when Puerto Rican rappers and indie label executives were still making the case for the commercial viability of reggaetón they would often highlight its keen potential to capture pan-Latin youth audiences with its Caribbean rhythm induced dance-ability, and its gritty and real “authentic” street edge. Hence, rapper Lito (half of the reggaetón pairing of Lito and Polaco) argued that, “Our lyrics reflect reality. People identify with us because we come...
from the same place they come from. We show what’s really going on in society, in the ‘hood’” (Luna 2002: LM22). In addition, rapper and producer Master Joe (also in a rap duo with O.G. Black), asserted, “Many [lyrics] are considered violent, but they reflect life as it is. [Musically,] it is happy, you can dance to it, that’s why it is supported by our youth” (ibid). DJ Nelson, who also produced underground rap in Puerto Rico, emphasized the musical adaptability of reggaetón—citing that its undergirding dembow drum sequence could be easily combined with a variety of musics (Navarro 2005). Moreover, Indie label head of Buddha’s Production, Frank Castillo claimed that Puerto Rican rap was essentially what the commercial music industry needed to support as: “Rap culture exists in every country, Whoever doesn’t invest in it is out of the game” (Luna 2002: LM22). Over time, these arguments along with the early 2000-2002 sales figures of Puerto Rican rap on the Island and in parts of the US mainland, set the stage for the way in which the major recording labels would market and brand reggaetón to US national radio and to corporate retailers.

Ultimately, the music industry engaged a dual strategy of subsuming reggaetón into a “Latin urban” subgenre of the broader “urban” music genre categorization already familiar to radio, advertisers, and consumers through hip-hop; and secondly, of promoting reggaetón as the latest iteration of successful Latin crossover which would leave it discursively open enough to be marketed to pan-Latin/(o) audiences and consumers in the US and abroad. Arguably, what the Latin music industry saw as most effective about the Latin Urban and pan-Latin constructs was that they provided an ample amount of discursive latitude in terms of their ability to be able to interpellate younger bilingual/bicultural Latin/(o/a) consumers in the US, Spanish-language dominant consumers across the globe, and general market consumers [read: non-Latin/(o/a)] in the US (and to some extent abroad as well) through their deployment in the marketing and
branding of reggaetón. Throughout reggaetón’s commercial crossover executives from the advertising and culture industries have produced and circulated discursive narratives about its unique ability to cross multiple barriers and boundaries as a pan-Latin and/or Latin Urban genre. For example, marketing executive and concert tour promoter, Henry Cardenas engaged this border-crossing frame in his description of the kinds of audiences attending his client and reggaetón icon, Daddy Yankee’s concerts: “Most of the kids that are going to this concert, they’re second and third generation. They’re fully bilingual. They speak English in the street and they speak Spanish in the home. And reggaetón appeals totally across the board, including general-market kids. African-Americans, they love this music, too. That’s why reggaetón is going to last for a while. It’s hitting all the ethnic groups” (Pareles 2005). Additionally, Daddy Yankee located reggaetón’s popularity within the context of a broader “urban movement,” declaring, “This is the first time that we have a real urban movement that speaks for Latinos, that speaks for everybody” (ibid). Thus, embedded in these discourses constructed around reggaetón’s far extending and border crossing pan-Latin and Latin urban reach, there is also an underlying argument waged about reggaetón’s discursive ability to “speak for” and/or represent Latin(os/as).

Debatably, it is the combination of these dominant discourses that the music and culture industries have consistently deployed as a means to interpellate and target particular audiences and consumers for the reggaetón genre. I argue that reggaetón ultimately served as a market test case for the advertising and culture industries to interrogate the extent to which Latin urban and pan-Latin could potentially succeed in selling other similarly marketed musical genres and products in the future—to gauge how effectively these constructs could break through barriers for these industries to be able to interpellate and actually reach the consumers they most desired.
The way in which these discursive constructions were applied to reggaetón throughout its commercial crossover is particularly revealing of how marketers view their role in “educating” other corporate entities about the genre and about the genre’s Latin-branded audiences and consumers. For instance, during a marketing industry panel at the Billboard Latin Music Conference (May 2003), then vice president of television programming for Mun2, Yolanda Foster, argued: “Right now, it’s about taking chances…That’s what’s making a difference. We’re educating the advertisers. We’re bringing them a whole new market of urban and bilingual. The street has to keep busy, because the big guys will start listening” (Cantor 2003: LM3). Thus, in this context reggaetón serves as an intermediary commodity used to sell its audiences, which are the real commodity—the potential consumers for the products and services marketed down the line by advertisers and retailers. Reggaetón is a convenient interpelling force for strategically targeting ethnically marked audiences that advertisers can then parse into either the Latin urban or the pan-Latin consumer categories.

While, reggaetón is cast as crossing barriers of age, race, sex, gender, class, language, and ethnicity in its discursively constructed mass market appeal, it is simultaneously branded as pan-Latin and Latin urban to interpellate and target particularly racialized, classed, and ethnically marked audiences (further demarcated by age group and language). Thus, the deployment of the expansive, boundless, border-crossing narratives attached to reggaetón serve as a means to discursively extend the reach of the genre in terms of its audience, but at the same time allow the dominant discursive constructions of reggaetón as pan-Latin and Latin urban to strategically signal to and hail reggaetón’s targeted consumers—younger, bilingual, bicultural Latin(o/a) millennial consumers—explicitly marked by their age, language dominance or preference, and ethnicity. This dialectic tension that arises as reggaetón is cast both within border-less discourses
and ethnically marked discourses, has also emerged in other contexts related to marketing industry discussions around reggaetón’s base audiences. For example, during the May 2003, Billboard Latin Music Conference, journalist Judy Cantor recapped the main takeaways from a marketing industry panel discussion around launching the commercial crossovers of various other Latin rap forms (Cantor 2003: LM3). In summation, Cantor detailed: “Panelists acknowledged that, as in the Anglo world, producers and promoters have to make efforts to eradicate prejudices about rap music and rap artists. In addition, they advocated for urban Latin music that could break down geographical and cultural barriers and appeal to young audiences in diverse Spanish-speaking countries and U.S. regions” (ibid). Furthermore, panelist Magic Juan (music producer and former Proyecto Uno singer), argued: “Black is black everywhere you go…But Latin is a bunch of different countries. We’ve got to find a way to make it musically hot so that everyone, everywhere, will get what’s going on. That’s what’s going to make this music really popular” (ibid). As noted in the previous commentaries, the overarching concern that persists through the panelists’ discussion around breaking through barriers is one that predominantly hones in eliminating barriers to profits as they ostensibly search for continued ways to strategically harness the commodified ethnic difference of Latinidad for market growth through the deployment of Latin urban and pan-Latin branding strategies similar to those applied throughout reggaetón’s commercial crossover.

**Radio Formats Flip to Test Market Reggaetón and other Latin Urban and Pan-Latin Genres**

By 2004, the first hurban [Hispanic + Urban] radio station emerged on Clear Channel’s KLOL Houston, which had turned over from a rock format to more bilingual, bicultural programming rotating reggaetón and hip hop music (Cobo 2005a: 48). As early adopters of the “Hurban” market, Clear Channel reaped the initial harvest of the financial benefits—seeing that
the station “increased its average quarter hour [AQH is “a key audience metric closely followed by media buyers and advertisers”] audience share by 42% after introducing the format in November 2004” (Alonso 2006: 4). Upon flipping formats, KLOL Houston also saw a boost in ratings that increased from “2.3 in fall to 3.6 in winter” (Cobo 2005a: 48). Clear Channel’s senior vice president of Hispanic radio [2006], Alfredo Alonso, describes Hurban as:

[a] Clear Channel Radio format where bilingual DJs play a mix of upbeat, Spanish-flavored pop music. (Airplay is reflected on Billboard Radio Monitor’s Latin Rhythm chart). The format relies heavily on the wildly popular musical style dubbed reggaetón—a fusion of salsa, hip-hop and rap that originated in Puerto Rico in the late 90’s. Reggaetón gained a great deal of popularity and credibility during the past few years behind the successes of Daddy Yankee, Don Omar, Shakira, and others (Alonso 2006: 4).

At the time, there were several radio programmers who were still reluctant to pursue the Hurban format before feeling more reassured about reggaetón’s ability to sustain the long-term attention of audiences dually targeted as “Hispanic/Urban.” And yet, major players in Latin music-based radio such as Clear Channel’s Alfredo Alonso and SBS’s [Spanish Broadcasting System, Inc.] executive vice president of programming, Bill Tanner, were early champions of reggaetón and of the Hurban format’s ability to draw in Hispanic audiences across the US ages 14-34. Leila Cobo (2005a) adds that “Latino 96.3,” the first Latin urban or “Hurban” station (see Figure 3.1) in Los Angeles (flipped under the direction of Bill Tanner)—intending to follow Clear Channel’s programming mix format—but also planned to add urban regional music, which was in need of a “radio home” at that time (48). Thus, the successful mainstream crossover of reggaetón also served as the impetus for the Latin music industry, and subsequently Latin-based radio, to test the boundaries of the Hurban market construct by way of gradually introducing other genres similarly constructed as Latin urban (i.e., urban bachata, urban cumbia, urban merengue, urban Mexican regional, etc.) and broadcast to their target audiences, based on what made sense regionally as well. Overall, the impact of reggaetón’s commercial crossover became increasingly
evident between 2004 and 2005\(^5\) when at least 17 US radio stations “including former English-language outlets—had flipped to rhythmic Latin formats with reggaetón-dominated playlists” (Cobo 2005b: 39). Another early adopter of the Hurban format included Univision, which launched La Kalle [aka “the street”] across historically targeted Hispanic markets such as Chicago, San Antonio, Las Vegas, New York, Dallas, Miami, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Jose, California (Taylor 2005: 47). La Kalle’s popular tag line was “reggaetón y mas” [reggaetón and more], as it centered around reggaetón, but integrated other tropical sounds such as salsa, merengue, and bachata along with Latin pop in markets like Miami (ibid). Music journalist, Chuck Taylor (2005) remarks that those who originally converted their radio formats to Hurban in the US, ostensibly adopted programming aiming to fuse reggaetón with US hip hop, which followed in the footsteps of the “first full-on English-language reggaetón station, WVOZ San Juan, Puerto Rico” (47). Therefore, US radio programmers developed the Hurban format by taking cues from what was already proven commercially viable on the Island and then attempted to adapt it for pan-Latin(o/a) audiences on the US mainland.

Debatably, US Latin radio and the US Latin music industry constructed generic terms such as “Hurban,” Latin urban, or Lurban (Latin + urban) for the purposes of discursively packaging reggaetón and its audiences for advertisers. In many ways, radio programmers and Latin music industry executives were on the same page as far as perceiving “hurban” as a productive discursive shortcut—a neologism combining Hispanic and urban—used to signal how it simultaneously “unites younger Latinos and reaches into the English-speaking mainstream”

\(^5\) As some have described reggaetón’s increasing popularity as a wave hit that radio in the US between 2004 and 2005, scholar Gabriel Rossman (2012) contextualizes reggaetón’s diffusion in US radio as follows: The airplay of reggaetón in Latin radio rises as an s-curve, with a slow build throughout 2004 and then a tipping point in May 2005 that launches rapid growth in the genre’s popularity, before plateauing in October 2005 at about a quarter of (non-Mexican Regional) Latin airplay. Furthermore, the confidence intervals show us that this success is attributable to the genre as a whole, and not just a few hits that happen to belong to it” (84-85). Accordingly, Rossman’s analysis provides evidence that, for that year in particular, reggaetón’s strong solid airplay across US national radio was not just the result of isolated hit songs (i.e., Daddy Yankee’s “Gasolina” or N.O.R.E.’s “Oye Mi Canto”), which has been often attributed to the mainstream and commercial crossover success of reggaetón.
(Pareles 2005). The deployment of hurban follows the way in which “urban” has been historically usurped and appropriated by the advertising and culture industries to carry and signal multiple encoded meanings. Aside from “urban’s” association with rap and hip-hop in the US, the authors of *Marketing to the New Majority: Strategies for a Diverse World*, David Burgos and Ola Mobolade (2011), argue that within the context of the advertising industry’s use of the term “urban” there has been an ever-evolving range of uses for it:

Over the last 30 years, its meaning has morphed from a literal geographical definition to a euphemistic term used to refer to inner-city and low-income African Americans, later on expanding to include poor Hispanics. Since then, its implications have softened somewhat, at least within a marketing context, as it became associated with trend leadership and innovative youth culture. Still, the popular usage within a number of industries carries with it the residue of its association with the minority underclass (70).

Thus, it is the wide range of connotative and denotative possibilities derived from *urban* that has made *Hurban* the discursive construction of choice for marketers and music industry executives alike. They ultimately relied on the discursive fluidity of the term Hurban to be able to expand from its initial connection to the radio format of Hurban to what would later develop into ancillary products, services, consumer goods, and lifestyle brands that emerged pursuant to reggaetón’s commercial crossover—comprising the multi-million dollar reggaetón industry connected to the genre and to the broader Hurban and/or Latin urban discursive constructs originally constructed and circulated by the recording industry and US/Latin-based radio.

It is important to highlight the significance of US radio in contributing to the mainstream crossover of reggaetón, particularly in the US, as also previously emphasized by Universal/Machete’s label president, Gus Lopez who argued that it helped generate “the explosion of the movement” (Alban and Posada 2007). Given that reggaetón achieved commercial crossover in the digital age, some reggaetón artists have predominantly attributed reggaetón’s widespread dissemination to the Internet. Daddy Yankee, for example, has discussed
the exceptional platform that the Internet has provided for the expansion of the genre, calling the Internet—“la nueva calle” [the new street] for reggaetón’s mainstream diffusion (Cobo 2012). While, new media platforms such as the Internet have played a critical role in carving out a powerful and alternative lane of commerce, fan interaction, and global dissemination for the genre, legacy media such as radio exposed the genre to mainstream audiences through traditional broadcast channels that have more direct engagement with mainstream and corporate media as well as direct relationships with retailers and advertisers. Furthermore, the strong impact of US radio on reggaetón’s crossover is also clearly evident through the Hurban market that developed out of the Hurban radio programming format concept, as well as through the direct promotion that radio gave and continues to give the genre and its artists. In particular, radio was instrumental in sponsoring and promoting major reggaetón-themed events and concerts that boosted reggaetón’s visibility among mainstream audiences in the early stages of its crossover. For example, in 2004 SBS-owned radio station La Mega 97.9 FM (New York), sponsored one of reggaetón’s largest concerts of that year, Megathon, held at Madison Square Garden in New York (Sanneh 2004). The 2004 Megathon as well as the previous year’s first Reggaetón Summerfest (at Madison Square Garden)—attended by at least 12,000 reggaetón fans—generated some of first mainstream media coverage of the genre in the US (Pareles 2003b: 3).

**Reggaetón Promoted as the Latest Latin Crossover & Hispanic Market Fetish**

As reggaetón achieved commercial crossover in the 2004, the mainstream visibility of the genre increased dramatically as did the amount of global media attention to it. Within the context of US media coverage, reggaetón was interpellated and promoted as the latest iteration of Latin music crossover to US mainstream audiences. With print media articles describing the genre as “Mad Hot” (Navarro 2005), a “Spicy Mix,” (Pareles 2003a) and “Reggaetón Fever” (Levin
2007), there was an explicit way in which reggaetón increasingly began to be cast to mainstream and general audiences (read=non-Latino) as a “new” form of Latin spice and commodified Latinidad available for their consumption. By renarrativizing reggaetón as a new Latin discovery of the music industry, the US mainstream media played an integral role in disseminating the music industry’s repackaged narrative about the genre as a tabula rasa—a newly sanitized and commercialized form. And yet, in doing so this also produced erasures of its decades-long musical history, its veteran artists’ careers, and its existing fan following. Thus, through commercial crossover reggaetón was subjected to the myth of discovery, or the “Columbus Effect,” propagated by the culture industries to fulfill the dominant culture’s persistent desire for the newest exotic Latin spice. Several reggaetón artists (i.e., Ivy Queen, Daddy Yankee, Hector El Father, Tito El Bambino) sustained long careers in underground and other forms of music before being “rediscovered” by mainstream audiences through reggaetón’s commercial crossover. However, after artist Hector El Father released his Los Rompe Discotecas album in 2006 on (Roc La Familia/Def Jam/Universal/Machete Music/VI Music/Gold Star Music), he was repackaged and reinvented through a narrative that made him instantly readable to US audiences—announcing that he was the “P. Diddy” or “Dr. Dre” of reggaetón (Kimpel 2006). For some reggaetón artists, such as Daddy Yankee, the “Columbus Effect” hasn’t necessarily worked to his disadvantage as the subversion of his near two-decade career has allowed for his image to be constantly reinvented in the mainstream media spotlight, which has subsequently bolstered his ability to remain current with younger audiences. And yet, Aparicio (1997) puts the market-driven celebratory discourses often circulated through the mainstream media about Latin pop artists into perspective, arguing compellingly that: “[t]he discourse by which these Latino/as are glorified is not always their own, but rather that of the U.S. mainstream, a language and
perspective still constructed from the very same linguistic and ideological elements that have ‘invented’ Latin America since Columbus ‘discovered’ us” (198). As such, reggaetón’s pop artists are not exempt from these dominant discourses of US mainstream media, which are also largely constructed in relation to specific market segments of consumers that the culture and advertising industries seek to target at a particular moment.

**Targeting the “New Latino” Via Reggaetón’s Commercial Crossover**

More recently, Latin music industry executives have claimed to have adopted a different approach to promoting reggaetón acts, such that vice president of marketing and A&R for Sony BMG’s Urbano division, Lorenzo Braun asserts: “We are treating Latins like part of the American mainstream” and in the same breadth he adds “they are Latin talent…Latin promotion will always be important. That’s our core, and we are a Latin company” (Cobo 2006a: 27). Ultimately, the “Latins” in question refer to the young Latin/(o/a) demographic in the US—those who are often cited by marketers and in market research as “an exploding demographic” of “14-34-year-old second generation [and higher] Latinos” who “consume more media in English than in Spanish” (Cobo 2006b: 8). According to several executives from the advertising and culture industries, they have engaged a new approach to reaching this younger demographic of “assimilated” Latin(os/as), which has purportedly “changed the way Latin artists are signed, marketed, and promoted” (Cobo 2006a: 26). With artists such as Pitbull, Tony Touch, or Nina Sky that aim to target the younger or “new Latino” demographic, label executives describe their new approach to promotion as one that “target[s] mainstream and Latin audiences alike” (Cobo

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58 Arguably, much of the way in which bilingual, bicultural, Latin/(o/a) youth populations are envisioned and imagined by the culture industries derives from market research studies. Some of the market research studies on young bicultural Latinos/as that are more frequently cited by US Latin music industry insiders include: Christy Haubegger's/Youth Intelligence firm’s 2004 *Latino Intelligence Report* and the 2006 Mun2 study entitled, *Me2: Understanding the Young Latino in America* (survey research with 1,800 second-generation US Latino participants aged 14-34, with at least one parent born outside of the US). For further discussion see Leila Cobo, “Young Latinos a Missed Target,” Billboard Magazine, March 25, 2006, p. 8. Also, see Cary Darling, Knight Ridder Newspapers, June 29, 2005, “Radio tries to reach young Latinos with ‘hurban’ format,” <http://www.edisonresearch.com/homeimg/archives/AZCentral062905.pdf>.

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2006a: 27). In accordance with this statement, Latin music executives have addressed how language dominance and preference of music consumers plays a defining role in the ways they subsequently tailor particular market strategies. Thus, the president of Epic in charge of artist Frankie J’s previous album “The One” (Columbia), Charlie Walk contends: “There are a lot of assumptions about what language Latins speak and what music they listen to. If you take a look at the younger generation [of U.S. Latins] they may speak Spanish at home, but they speak English in the malls. And by not marketing an English-speaking Frankie J to them, you’re almost disrespecting that community” (ibid). As such, music executives point to a challenge when addressing bicultural Latino millennials who code-switch languages according to environment, or are presumably English-dominant, Spanish-dominant, or otherwise. In turn, Latin music executives have increasingly turned to a multi-prong approach to promoting Latin music genres, such as reggaetón, through which they seek to target second generation and higher Latin/(o/a) youth consumers as well as mainstream/general market consumers.

By deploying Latin urban and pan-Latin discursive constructs of reggaetón that were just as easily amendable to addressing “Latin” audiences as they were to engaging mainstream consumers, the Latin music industry was able to promote their acts across media outlets that had already been targeting English-language dominant and/or bilingual Latin/(o/a) (i.e., Sí TV – now Nuvo TV, mun2, LATV, MTV Tr3s, etc.). In addition, Lorenzo Braun explains that labels such as Sony BMG built up their artist rosters to not only include Spanish-language dominant artists (i.e., Calle 13 or Alexis & Fido), but “bilingual artists like Voltio (who is marketed via a partnership with Columbia) and urban pop acts that sing predominantly in English, like newcomers Jzabehl and Jean” (Cobo 2006a: 27). Moreover, another observable trend evident since 2004 is the increasing pressure that industry labels have put on these Spanish-language
dominant reggaetón artists to learn English and integrate English lyrics into their songs, music videos (i.e., Inna featuring Daddy Yankee “More Than Friends,” Don Omar “The Chosen,” Enrique Iglesias featuring Daddy Yankee “Finally Found You,” Wisin y Yandel featuring Chris Brown “Algo Me Gusta De Ti,” Jennifer Lopez featuring Wisin y Yandel “Follow the Leader”), and performances. This also follows from the long-standing history of English-language dominant Latin-branded artists that have been similarly encouraged to strategically integrate Spanish into their music at particular moments in their careers (e.g., Colby O’Donis, Christina Aguilera, Pitbull). This strategic integration of dual languages, deployed to simultaneously engage mainstream (non-Latino), bicultural, and Spanish-language dominant consumers, is especially evident now as the media, advertising, and culture industries increasingly compete for the attention of the bicultural, bilingual Latin/(o/a) consumers. Leila Cobo responds to this recent market strategy “in defense of Spanish” arguing that “[i]t bugs me that there is a major corporate message going around that endorses the lack of language skills while greatly capitalizing on the heritage. And that message quite often comes from people whose only nexus to being Latino is the possibility of making money” (Cobo 2006c: 24). Furthermore, Cobo adds that this impulse to capitalize on the Spanish language for profit, “actually leads to a trivialization of that culture,” and that it is “ironic that the movement to undermine Spanish comes at the same time that there is an enormous retro acculturation movement under way” (ibid). In many ways, what Cobo is pointing to has been the case with regard to Latin pop crossover forms for decades, as effectively elucidated by Cepeda (2000):

The mere presence of Spanish language and other cultural markers typically associated with U.S. Latina/o communities does not necessarily guarantee that mainstream audiences are being educated with regard to the multiple, and often conflicting, realities of U.S. Latina/o experiences, or moreover, that these realities are relayed by Latina/o voices (56).
Furthermore, specifically in the case of reggaetón and Hurban programming formats adopted by radio stations carrying tag lines such as “Latino and Proud,” “Where Latinos Live,” and “Proud to Be Latino;” while the messaging to the Latino audience is overt, these messages are written in English and come with a prerequisite understanding that these audiences might not bring any knowledge of Spanish to the table. For instance, Darling (2005) offers that for those second generation and higher Latinos who are targeted by these Hurban radio stations, they are already perceived as “either bilingual or [those] whose knowledge of Spanish doesn’t extend beyond Salma Hayek” (<http://www.edisonresearch.com/homeimg/archives/AZCentral062905.pdf>). While, radio programmers or music industry executives might argue that this approach in radio seemingly works to interpellate Latin and mainstream audiences alike; it arguably angles directly toward capturing the attention of mostly English Latinos and/or bilingual Latinos, as made evident in radio stations operating under the moniker of “Where Latinos Live.” Although increasingly operating in English with flourishes of Spanish, these stations engage Latin/(o/a) audiences separately from the mainstream or general markets, and they directly interpellate younger bilingual, bicultural Latin/(o/a) consumers as an undifferentiated mass. Moreover, this approach engages bicultural Latino millennials as strictly bilingual in Spanish or English, while completely precluding Latinos that speak Portuguese, Japanese, French, Italian, among various other languages and dialects. As such, the complex racial, ethnic, and linguistic hybridity of Latinos is subverted through this homogenizing approach still deployed by the culture and advertising industries to address “Latinos.”

Thus, it is intriguing that the Latin music industry claims to now take a new approach to engaging bicultural Latino audiences by “targeting mainstream and Latin audiences alike,” when in practice they have debatably relied on methods of old (Cobo 2006a: 27). In fact, in promoting
artists such as Pitbull, label executives (TVT Records) have “hired a Latin publicist to work Latin media along with a publicist for mainstream media” and also strategized to release a Spanish and English album as a 2-disc set or one bilingual product (ibid). A similar album promotion strategy was adopted for the release of Daddy Yankee’s second studio album release, “El Cartel: The Big Boss,” which was a somewhat bilingual album that was also marketed in both Spanish and English with club promotions and listening parties held in Latin and “non-Latin markets” (Ben-Yehuda 2007: 60). And while Latin music industry executives claim to be targeting mainstream and Latin audiences in kind, as Pitbull and Daddy Yankee’s cases demonstrate, “Latin” and “mainstream” are still constructed as two detached markets that are targeted distinctly beyond the language issues that industry executives often postulate as their reasoning. As described by Daddy Yankee’s former marketing strategist at Interscope, Chris Clancy: “Every step we take in one direction, we’re going to take an equal step in the other direction, between Latin and [mainstream]” (ibid). Thus, taking into account the persistent way in which “Latin” and “mainstream” are being positioned within the market as disconnected, alongside the recent discursive constructions (i.e., Hurban) iterated through reggaetón’s crossover; there are evident constraints also being imposed on Latin-branded artists. For example, Pitbull has publicly asserted his desire to be more fully incorporated into the “general” or mainstream market, and yet, has been confronted with resistance from the culture and advertising industries in that regard. Given the way in which these industries are segmented by race, ethnicity, and language, Pitbull’s expressed desire for full inclusion into the US mainstream market has been met with his reabsorption into the “multicultural” market. As racialized and ethnically marked “Latin urban” performers with racially and ethnically marked audiences, these artists automatically elicit pushback from these industries for wanting to veer outside of the
commodified ethnic identity and script constructed for them within the context of the corporate interests they represent and the culture and entertainment industries in which they work and perform. Although from Pitbull’s perspective, he claims not to allow himself to be used by the culture and advertising industries for his ethnicity, exclaiming, “When I sit in those board meetings, they say ‘multicultural’ and ‘general market’…No—multicultural is your general market” (Vozick-Levinson 2012: 5). As Pitbull asserts his desire to be recognized as a constitutive part of the general market, in practice he is ostensibly subject to typecasting as a Latino performer operating for the general market. This particular form of typecasting has been traditionally observed in the scholarship on Latina actresses in Hollywood such as Rosie Perez, Salma Hayek, Jennifer Lopez, and Penelope Cruz (Valdivia 1996: 129-41; Valdivia 2007: 129-48; Molina-Guzmán 2006: 232-51; Molina-Guzmán 2007: 117-28).

Thus, regardless of his Pitbull’s projections about being included in the mainstream, these “multicultural” and “general” markets have been historically constructed and treated as separate. Furthermore, through examination of the advertising and culture industries’ current approach to parsing out the Latin market from the mainstream—not much has changed. Pitbull is part of an ethnically commodified market that can be called pan-Latin, Latin urban, or multicultural, but it is certainly not considered “mainstream” among industry gatekeepers. With the current market fetish around bicultural Latino millennials, it is evident that Pitbull concomitantly serves a dual purpose in the marketplace—to provide an exotic taste of Latin spice and/or Latin urban “authenticity” to the mainstream and general market, and to penetrate and interpellate the Latin core market through his own commodified versioning of Latinidad. Moreover, the particular ways in which these artists and their core “Latin/(o/a)” audiences are “tropicalized” through the culture industries is obedient to “a long history of Western representations of the exotic,
primitive Other”—through which these Latin-branded artists also “tropicalize” and subject themselves to the dominant culture’s gaze (Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman 1997: 8).

This aforementioned example of Pitbull’s industry experience is also fairly reminiscent of the previous hurdles faced by hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons when he ventured into a partnership with marketing guru, Donny Deutsch, to form an advertising agency directed at reaching youth markets. According to Simmons and Deutsch:

*It failed...because corporate ad budgets are separated by race. Companies tried to pigeon-hole the team’s work into smaller minority ad budgets. We kept saying, ‘No!’ There’s no such thing as a minority. Youth is colorblind.* –Donny Deutsch (Fetterman 2007: 2B).

*If they [youth] say Versace is cool, Versace is cool. And it’s not a black/white thing. Eighty percent are not people of color. People just have race on the brain. It’s an obstacle—*Russell Simmons (*ibid*).

Hence, the way in which the advertising and culture industries have been historically segmented by race and ethnicity, has worked to reify the permanent outsider status of racialized and ethnically marked youth within dominant culture. Similarly, Latino performers are often pigeon-holed based on the ethnic and commodified markets that they represent both within and outside the boundaries of industries in which they operate—as the US mainstream media also perpetually constructs Latin performers as needing to crossover into the mainstream. Within the context of reggaetón’s crossover, Latin music industry insiders have claimed to adopt new approaches to “targeting the new Latino” that purportedly ushers “Hispanic acts and their fans” quickly into the U.S. mainstream—as implied by Leila Cobo’s (2006a) industry-based article of the same title: “Targeting the New Latino: Hispanic Acts & their fans are quickly moving into the U.S. mainstream” (26-27). However, I argue conversely that through reggaetón’s commercial crossover, the culture and advertising industries have recirculated familiar tropes and tropicalizations that were previously used during the commercial and global crossover of salsa
music—casting it as hot Latin spice but also repackaging it as an exotic flavor for general market consumers. And yet, what does distinguish reggaetón’s Latin crossover from those before it, are the newer pan-Latin discursive constructs (i.e., Reggaetón Latino, Latin urban or Hurban) that the media, advertising, and culture industries have produced and circulated in relation to the genre, which I will expand on in the following sections.

Arguably, the way in which markets are currently segmented and parsed between Latin and mainstream is no different than it has ever been, even though the culture and advertising industries claim to be addressing Latin audiences as part of the mainstream market. It is evident through Pitbull’s market stratification, for instance, that the lines between general and multicultural markets have yet to be blurred—much less broken down—within the culture and entertainment industries. These industries still operate around a homogenized and largely conflated conception of Latinos, including around the bicultural or mostly English Latino millennials they increasingly seek to target. Thus, the US mainstream media and culture industries have evidently redeployed a familiar script for sanitizing, commodifying, as well as ethnically and racially segmenting reggaetón and its audiences throughout its Latin crossover.

Growing Fears Emerge about the Overcommercialization, Overexposure, and Oversaturation of Reggaetón in the Global Marketplace

Within much of the early US mainstream media coverage dedicated to reggaetón’s commercial crossover, there was a pervasive thread of skepticism as to whether or not reggaetón was merely a passing trend or a fad. In particular by 2006 and 2007, US mainstream media articles emerged with titles declaring “Reggaetón fever starting to cool” (Levin 2007) and “The reggaetón craze saw a quick burnout with fans and radio” (Gurza 2006). Describing reggaetón as a “new toy,” vice president of radio programming for SBS, Inc., Pio Ferro argued that by 2006 the “novelty” had simply worn off (Gurza 2006). Accordingly, there were reports that: “In at
least three markets—Las Vegas, Dallas and Miami—stations that gambled on the music’s growing popularity have since switched back to more traditional formats” (ibid). Several music industry insiders weighed in on potential reasons for the plateau that reggaetón had allegedly reached in 2006 and 2007, after a year of generating steady ratings and sales. Some have contended that like any other genre, it was no different in experiencing its share of ups and downs (Levin 2007). Others claimed that the competitive rush to jump on the reggaetón bandwagon diluted innovation and spawned replication of what was an assumed formula for commercial success with the genre. Thus, the senior vice president of music programming/talent at MTV Latin America/MTV Tr3s, Jose Tillan asserted, “Folks fell into this hype machine….I was getting pitches every week that had me rolling my eyes: ‘This is going to be the next [Daddy] Yankee.’ Yankee didn’t become Yankee by sounding like somebody else. The biggest challenge is to find their own voice and sound” (ibid). While, many music industry executives and radio/television programmers called for more innovation from the genre, reggaetón artists observed that the commercialization of the genre increasingly put demands on them for radio-friendly content that was not necessarily the most innovative content they were capable of creating. For example, in documentary La Clave, Tego Calderon argued:

And then when the doors [of the mainstream culture industries] are open, then you start to think about what to talk about so that the radio stations play you. And then you are not writing from the heart, you are writing for radio….[a]nd that is what scares me a bit about all that is happening since the Gringos got involved and all these people who did not believe in the genre, began to open radio stations like crazy—which now they had to close down. And it makes it look like the genre is in decline, but it is not in decline. What happened is that they opened radio stations like crazy and we do not have enough catalog. This music is young. It has been around for a while, but the radio-friendly music—there is not that much catalog. There are not that many productions (Sosa 2011).

Other veteran artists and producers of the genre also addressed the aftereffects of reggaetón’s commercial crossover. Describing the details of his 2005 clothing and footwear lines as well his
negotiated deal for cellular ringtones, reggaetón veteran producer DJ Nelson commented that, “Ten years ago, reggaetón was music…Now it is a business” (Navarro 2005). Reggaetón artist duo Alexis and Fido also highlighted the lucrative fringe benefits of the genre’s mainstream crossover on their 2009 (Sony U.S. Latin) track titled, “Superhéroe,” where they proclaim: “Esta es la musica que produce dinero!” [This is the music that makes money!]. While some producers and artists seemingly embraced reggaetón’s commercialization, others revealed their fears concerning the genre’s overcommercialization. For instance, long-time reggaetón producer and artist, Hector El Father, described how:

In the 1990s, Reggaetón was cruder, more ‘street.’ The 2000s began the same way, but by 2004 we started to get a Reggaetón that was more commercial which is what we are listening to now…[w]hat happens is that we, as producers of this genre, we cannot let something that perhaps the Salsa producers lacked, we cannot let commerciality erase the basis of reggaetón (Sosa 2011).

As Hector El Father suggested that the overcommercialization of reggaetón would ultimately result in the genre’s decline, Tego Calderon concurred and argued that in some ways it already had contributed to its deterioration:

I compare what’s going on today with reggaetón with the salsa romántica era in the ‘90s. Everything began with Eddie Santiago and Frankie Ruiz and ended with Orquesta La Luz, and then the genre began to go downhill from there. Although they were singing salsa romántica, it was great. But suddenly, salseros started crawling out of every rock and the genre ultimately lost its magic mass appeal and that’s what’s happening to reggaetón today – there are many out there that could be compared to Menudo (Malinow 2009).

Parallel to the ways in which the commercial incarnation of salsa romántica was largely perceived as a precipitating factor for the downfall of the genre, Hector El Father and Tego Calderon seemingly attributed reggaetón’s loss of innovation to the mass production of the genre. As previously underscored by Tego Calderon, the demands of the culture industries on artists to consistently pump out “innovative” music that is also “appropriately” sanitized for
various commercial media outlets, has arguably stifled the genre creatively. Subject to the commercial maw of the culture industries, reggaetón became increasingly interpellated as an industry in itself and therefore open to criticism for operating under profit motives rather than embracing true innovation. And yet, Aparicio perceptively engaged the dialectic tension that exists between the culture industries and audiences of salsa music, stating: “Thus, while the commercialization has definitely resulted in the production of trivial lyrics and in part has allowed salsa to become an object of passing listening or mere distraction, this music transcends reification by maintaining direct interaction with its audience and with the Latina/o community” (Aparicio 1997: 95). In turn, the way in which the culture industries have shaped the production of reggaetón via commercial crossover should not be disengaged from the complex ways in which audiences read and interpret the genre in its commercialized form as well. In other words, reggaetón’s overcommercialization should not be overdetermined—as its audiences, fans, and anti-fans a play a significant role in producing and negotiating meaning through this hybrid and complex musical and cultural form.
Figures

Figure 3.1 Tagline for Latino 96.3 FM in Los Angeles, SBS Inc. Station
CHAPTER 4
JUST SEXUAL GAMES AND 24-HOUR PARTIES?: ANTI-FANS CONTEST THE COMMERCIAL CROSSOVER OF REGGAETON MUSIC ONLINE

Introduction: Reggaetón’s Participatory Music Fan/Anti-Fan Culture Online

The music industry has created a global Latin music market based on shared language among US Latinas/os, Latin Americans, and Spaniards. Reggaetón music, in particular, has been marketed as a “pan-Latin” and “Latin urban” genre. Reggaetón presents a critical case study for examining how homogeneity has been used as a tool of the industry to target an “undifferentiated” Latin urban market. This paper examines how reggaetón audiences grapple with homogenous representations of Latino identity and essentialist discourses around authenticity, race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation. Deploying a methodology of Internet discourse analysis, I interrogate how reggaetón audiences, fans, and anti-fans use online spaces to negotiate their complex hybrid identities, reggaetón music, and commodified representations of Latinidad.

Reggaetón is an Afro diasporic musical form derived from 1990s Puerto Rican Underground rap that was repackaged as a pan-Latin and “Latin-urban” genre during its

59 Sarah Banet-Weiser. “What’s Your Flava?: Race and Postfeminism in Media Culture,” in Interrogating Post-Feminism, Eds. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007b): 214. Banet-Weiser finds that television channels such as Nickelodeon have similarly adopted an “urban” brand identity with a racially/ethnically unmarked “transracial” or “postracial style” that seeks more “diverse and segmented audiences without alienating specific groups.” While, “urban” brand identity can function in this context as a catch-all for multiple racial and ethnic identities, in the case of reggaetón its specific Latin urban branding serves a different function and therefore requires further interrogation into how it is used as a pan-ethnic branding strategy. Here, I examine ways that through reggaetón the Latin urban brand identity works to expand the reach of the music genre globally under the Latin American, Hispanic, and Latin(a/o) umbrella with audiences linked together by shared language. On the other hand, I demonstrate how these catch-all categorizations are met with resistance by interpellated audiences for the ways their ethnic and racial identities are subsumed, conflated, and commodified through pan-ethnic branding strategies like Latin Urban.

60 Jonathan Gray, “New Audiences, New Textualities: Anti-fans and Non-fans,” International Journal of Cultural Studies 6, no. 1 (2003): 70. Gray defines anti-fandom as “the realm not necessarily of those who are against fandom per se, but of those who strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel.” While I apply Gray’s understanding of anti-fans to this study, I expand this definition to also encompass the role of cultural resistance to a particular genre or text.
commercial crossover between late 2004 and early 2005. Reggaetón’s challenges to musical and bodily expressions as well as to discourses of nationhood have been deemed revolutionary enough by governments, social institutions, and individuals to generate a broad range of reactions and regulations to censor and ban it. However, these attempts have been unsuccessful as the rapid transformation represented by this musical form is both transnational and intersectional. Focusing on participatory online music reception, I explore how anti-fans/fans interpret mainstream media coverage of reggaetón online. I textually analyze an online reggaetón music forum and anti-fan/fan-generated content produced, uploaded, and circulated between 2006-2009. I argue that fans/anti-fans negotiate reggaetón in relation to the ways they are interpellated as a target audience based on shared language alone.

**Theoretical Framework: Transnational Music and Participatory Audiences Online**

This research contributes to an understudied area of new media and Latin(o/a) identity, particularly, ways Spanish-language dominant Internet users assert themselves as interactive subjects online. Situated at the crossroads of digital/new media, popular music, and Latin American/Latin(a/o) studies, this project offers innovative approaches to examining the convergence of transnational music flows and participatory audiences online. I put these salient literatures in conversation to set forth a theoretical framework for analyzing the negotiation of global media texts like popular music mediated through fan/anti-fan discourses. This study pushes the boundaries across the aforementioned disciplines as it presents the challenge of grappling with increasingly transnational audiences, fan/anti-fan communities, and cultural texts.

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61 Reebee Garofalo, “Black Popular Music: Crossing Over or Going Under?,” in *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*, ed. Tony Bennett, Simon Frith, Lawrence Grossberg, John Shepherd, and Graeme Turner (London: Routledge, 1993), 231-48. I deploy the popular music term *crossover* to reference the “process whereby an artist or a recording from a ‘secondary’ marketing category like country and western, Latin, or rhythm and blues achieves hit status in the mainstream or ‘pop’ market. While the term can and has been used simply to indicate multiple chart listings in any direction, its most common usage in popular music history clearly connotes movement from margin to mainstream” (Garofalo 1993: 231). Thus, I am interested in the movement of reggaetón from its underground status to its mainstream popular music success. See Garofalo (1993) for a more in-depth discussion of musical crossover.
that are seen, read, heard, and interpreted globally thanks in large part to the dynamic means of communication and channels of distribution that are facilitated by the Internet.

Methodology

The anti-reggaetón chat forum under examination in this study is part of Foros Nueva [Fora Nueva] on <www.nueva.com>. Internet users from all around the globe participate in chat forums on this Web site, but the anti-reggaetón forum in this study predominantly consists of users from parts of Spain, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The anti-reggaetón forum is one of many participatory fan/anti-fan sites available under the broader category of música foros [music fora] on the nueva Web site. The anti-reggaetón forum was initiated in January 5, 2006 and the most recent chat participant posted on December 4, 2009 (last accessed 2009, December 4). This forum has attracted at least 87,697 visitas [visitors] to the site and generated over 1,200 responses. I monitored the anti-reggaetón forum in question from January 2006 until December 2009. Some participants identified themselves by gender either explicitly or implicitly. Few participants self-identified by race, but a majority did reveal some form of national identity or country of origin. All posts on the anti-reggaetón forum were in Spanish and for the purposes of this study I have translated all posts into English. I have also left grammatical errors, styled formatting, and emoticons in tact as captured from the original forum posts. Based on a grounded theory approach, I excerpted posts that centered on issues of representation, ethnic, racial, sexual, gender, and national identity, as these were all recurring and key issues garnered through open coding in the anti-reggaetón debates at large. I selected posts both from chat participants that were very active on the Foros Nueva —some posting over 600 times (in various fora on the nueva Web site)—and from participants who only posted a handful of times. I have chosen to
include excerpts of several posts together in order to provide more contextual background for a particular debate.

**Findings and Analysis: Policing Female Sexuality in Reggaetón and el Perreo**

62 El coro dice asi:

Yo quiero bailar  
Tu quieres sudar  
Y pegarte a mi  
El cuerpo rozar  
Yo te digo si tu me puedes provocar  
Eso no quiere decir que pa’ la cama voy

Bailo reggaetón pero no soy chica facil….—Artist - Ivy Queen (Song -“Quiero bailar,” Album - *Diva* 2004)

The chat stream thread “argumentos anti-reggaetón” [anti-reggaetón arguments] was initiated on January 7, 2006 by *yago*, who introduced the forum with a 7-page (printed) manifesto listing his reasons why reggaetón “deberia ser penado por la ley” [should be penalized by law]. *renzo* is an active chat stream participant who has posted 660 times (at least once a day) to them <www.nueva.com> foros. On the other hand, *lisa1010* has only posted 9 times total in

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62 English translation of lyrics:  
The chorus goes like this….  
I want to dance  
You want to sweat  
And get close to me  
Touch on my body  
I will let you know if you can seduce me  
That doesn’t mean that I’m going to the bed [with you]  
I dance to reggaetón, but I am not some easy chick….  
63 Scholars have highlighted the ways in which reggaetón artists like Ivy Queen “challenge the pervasive virgin/whore dichotomy in suggesting that women can express their sexuality and still be respected and considered complex individuals…create[ing] a space for asserting agency on a very grounded level with everyday interactions such as dancing” (Báez 2006: 71). Dance is a form of cultural production and performance that continues to incite multiple and multilayered streams of debate. Baker (2005) has argued: “Ivy Queen brings a female and feminist perspective to reggaetón, both of which are present in dancehall but noticeably absent in reggaetón” (Baker 2005: 114). Báez adds, “her [Ivy’s] agency is limited by the symbolic and political economy of the music industry” (Báez 2006, 70). Ivy and other reggaetóneras are also operating in a male dominated space of cultural production and performance. In this space of male dominance one must consider the ways in which “sex is used as a way of controlling women” (Julian 1993).  
64 On January 7, 2006 a debate about “el perreo,” also referred to as the “dance of reggaetón,” ensued primarily between two participants named and *lisa1010* and *renzo*, but was initially sparked by the comments from *yago*.  
65 [English Translation:] forums / I will use the term “foros” with “forum/s/fora” interchangeably in this study to refer to the chat forum space under examination.
the nueva music foros, and the following debate includes 3 of her posts and begins with the following:

Re: [yago] ANTI-REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS
Lisa1010

I think that you have to respect people that like REGGETON or another type of music and not respond with this large amount of stupidities that you put in your [yago’s] formulation you either haven’t been in school or they haven’t taught you to RESPECT and furthermore I don’t listen to a reggaetón song that tells a woman to put her ass next to a man’s penis when dancing I believe that the woman who allows a man to put his penis on her when they are dancing is because she wants him to furthermore every individual dances how he/she chooses and not how a song tells them to and about gasolina [Daddy Yankee’s song “Gasolina”] all the time it refers to a motorcycle have you heard it right or even seen the video LEARN TO RESPECT OTHER PEOPLE AND THEIR TASTES 😊 O.K.

Re: [lisa1010] ANTI-REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS
Renzo

Perhaps you’re implying that a woman who likes for a man to put his penis on her ass in front of the whole world deserves respect?

Please skinny girl [responding to lisa1010], respect is given where respect is due, if you don’t make yourself be respected, no one will do it…furthermore the one who stands to look bad is the woman…I ask myself where is her dignity?...Where is her feminism that you all talk so much about, if women only portray themselves like sex objects?

Don’t you get fooled…learn to have a personality and don’t imitate the masses…

Do no ask me to respect Reggaetón when this genre of music only demonstrates a lack of respect to society.

These arguments parallel the long-standing moral panic debates that circulated around reception to Underground rap in the 1990s.

For the purposes of this study I have included excerpts from the <www.nueva.com> anti-reggaetón chat forum. Current research on Internet inquiry ethics as outlined by the Association of Internet Researchers (Ess et al. 2002), Lisa M. Given (2008), Annette N. Markham and Nancy K. Baym (2009), and Malin Sveningsson-Elm (2009) find that: “chat exchanges in publicly accessible chatrooms” are under “fewer obligations to protect autonomy, privacy, confidentiality” (<http://aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf>). However, measures were taken to protect autonomy, privacy, and confidentiality in the chat fora under investigation such as pseudonyms for all of the forum participants as well as for the fora. Any excerpts in Spanish are also translated into English to add an additional layer of identity protection for the chat participants.
posed in predatory stance as he imposes himself on the woman with his genitalia. Ultimately, pleasure for the man or woman is discounted and almost barred by renzo. In response to lisa1010, he questions her dignity for even condoning such behavior as a “respectable” woman herself and as a “supposed” feminist. In addition, he reduces lisa1010’s argument to cheap imitation of “the masses” and dismisses her individual intellectual position. This particular deduction is interesting considering that renzo’s position is seemingly drawing on arguments that have been waged against women for “overstepping” the bounds of decency for centuries (Suárez Findlay 1999). In fact, the language of deeming women “prostitutes” is even invoked by chat participants like yago who states:

Re: [todamex] ANTI-REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS
Yago

Todamex:

Forgive me if I offended you, but that was not my intention. You probably think like the masses who think reggaetón is the best. I only transmit the truth: reggaetón is garbage that will quickly go out of style. Just search on Google with the phrase ‘anti-reggaetón.’ You will be surprised. In Ecuador reggaetón is for vulgar people, or better yet, also for young kids that are searching for a personality and that don’t do anything other than follow the herd, like sheep, or like crap in the multitude, they go where everyone else goes. I know plenty of people that are against this garbage music, people who think. There are many other rhythms that are worthy of being heard. Regarding what you say, that if a women allows a penis to be put next to her ass, she is nothing more and nothing less than a prostitute. [emphasis added] I suppose that you aren’t one right?

When you get over the craze of the moment and your obsession with ‘Daddy Yankee’, think and reflect a bit and write something positive. Always think that fads go out of style.

Salutations

67 Rivera (2003) argues: “Unsurprisingly, rap is also ruled by an I-want-them-all mentality, where women—whether sistas or mamis—are not real subjects, complex and distinct, but interchangeable sources of masculine pleasure or pain” (140). The perfect contemporary illustration of how these patriarchal narratives play out cinematically for all spectators to see and interpret occurs in the context of the music video. Lorna Salamán (2004a) has dedicated an entire thesis to exploring—through a feminist and Gramscian theoretical framework—how masculine hegemony is maintained via the audiovisual realm of reggaetón music videos. It is not the actual dance in the videos (dancehall, disco, club, dance floor) that becomes so controversial, be it grinding, juoking, or el perreo. The dance debate is arguably a front for conflicts that surface when women confront unrelenting conservative mores and moral “decency” codes that are symbolically ascribed to their bodies (Aparicio 1998; Cooper 1995; Desmond 1997).
YAGO

In the preceding exchange, not only does yago, who started the forum and positions himself as “webmaster” for it, police the decency of women who like or dance to reggaetón, but simultaneously polices the decency of todamex.

“Flaming” as a Method of Policing Male Sexuality

Many times the debates turn to personal attacks on all sides of the gender line. Some female participants use homophobic insults against other chat participants that “flamed” them. daisy8756 reacts to gornoten, who called her “mamona” and “hija de perra muerta,” stating the following:

Re: [gornoten] ANTI-REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS
Daisy8756

HAHAHAHA. LOOK WHO’S TALKING ABOUT SUCKING ON C&S WHEN THE FIRST C*SUCKER IS YOU WHO IS LICKING ON THAT OTHER IDIOT YOU ARE THE ONE IT APPEARS IT APPEARS THAT YOU ARE ANOTHER FAG LIKE THE OTHER GUY AND FOR THAT REASON YOU DEFEND HIM HAHAHA AND THE DOG IS YOUR MOTHER YOU LITTLE FAG COWARD WITH YOUR SKIRT AND THE OTHER GUY WHO SAYS THAT HE WILL NOT WASTE HIS TIME WITH ME HAHAHA HE HAS BEEN PAYING ATTENTION TO ME FOR A WHILE THAT C*SUCKER HE ALWAYS RESPONDS TO ME POOR DEVIL WHAT A DUMB IDIOT

IMBECILE.HAHAHA WHAT A BUNCH OF FAGGOTS
IMBECILES…..G&DAMN FAGS…

In this post, daisy8756 not only responded to gornoten, but to his alliance of chat participants as well. daisy8756 posted this response twice, back-to-back, to emphasize her points. At several points in the forum the debates escalate to flaming attacks, many times some form of apology

68“Flaming” is a term used in Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community by Nancy K. Baym (2000) who explains, “The widely noted phenomenon of flaming (i.e., attacking others) has been hypothesized to result from ‘a lack of shared etiquette by computer culture norms or by the impersonal and text-only form of communication’” (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984, p. 1130 cited in Baym 2000, p. 121).
69[English Translation:] woman who performs oral sex on a man’s penis
70[English Translation:] daughter of a dead dog
follows, and then the cyberhate against reggaetón takes center stage; usually as provoked by either yago or renzo.

The Politics of Representation: Negotiating Ethnic, Racial, and National Identity Through Reggaetón

Reggaetón, like hip hop, is also a musical and cultural form that is racialized and ascribed markers of deviancy, in particular, associations with violence, drug use, the culture of poverty theory (Lewis 1965), the underclass, gang culture, and prison life. Even as reggaetón has crossed over into the mainstream music market and been sanitized to a great extent as far as lyrical content, image, and performances are concerned, those original markers of deviancy persist in reggaetón’s audience reception and these attachments serve as fodder and fuel to the add to the anti-fan campaign against reggaetón. For example, yago sparked a debate about reggaetón artists being drug addicts that included posts such as the following:

Re: [bezantil2005] ANTI-REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS
Yago

WELCOME TO THE ANTI-REGGAETÓN BROTHERHOOD, READY TO PUT THIS GARBAGE ON BLAST. MY WIFE USED TO LIKE THE CRAPATON BUT I AM CONVINCING HER AND NOW SHE HARDLY LISTENS TO IT (IT WON’T TAKE MUCH MORE [CONVINCING] THOUGH). ANOTHER THING, REGGAETÓN IS FULL OF GANBANGERS SINCE DADDY YANKEE WAS A GANBANGER BEFORE THEY SHOT HIM AND HE HAD TO LEAVE THE GANG TO DEDICATE HIMSELF TO SINGING THIS GARBAGE. TO DAISY AND ALIANNA PLEASE DO NOT COME WITH YOUR VULGARITIES. THIS FORUM IS CALLED ANTI REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS, DO NOT RUIN THE FORUM, SHOUT OUT TO BEZANTIL, AND ALSO TO GORNOTEN AND RENZO.

THE AUTHOR, YAGO

Re: [yago] ANTI-REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS
Daisy8756

first of all it is not full of gangbangers because from what I know whitney houston is a drug addict and she is a crazy woman and she does not sing reggaetón and britney spears also has a bunch of tattoos and is another drug addict and from what I know does not sing reggaetón…and daddy yankee is famous for his music not for his scandals…even shakira
had to put out a reggaetón song…and I don’t know what you are talking about when you say vulgar when the first vulgar ones are you guys and my goodness you really know the history of daddy yankee and that with you not liking him… 😂😂 o.k.

Re: [daisy8756] ANTI-REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS

Yago

THE HISTORY OF DADDY YANKEE I READ PRECISELY ON THIS FORUM OF ANTI-REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS THAT SOME REGGAETÓN ARTIST INTRUDER DARED TO POST.

LOGIC DICTATES: NOT ALL DRUG ADDICTS AND GANGBANGERS ARE REGGAETÓN ARTISTS, BUT ALL REGGAETÓN ARTISTS ARE DRUG ADDICTS AND GANGBANGERS

DAISY, I WOULD NOT WANT TO OFFEND YOU, THAT IS NOT MY CUSTOM IN THIS FORUM, AND HERE GOES THE QUESTION: GIVEN YOUR NICKNAME, ARE YOU PERHAPS 14 YEARS OLD.

SHOUT OUTS TO ALL OF MY ANTI-REGGAETÓN BROTHERS

YAGO

Another tactic used against defenders of reggaetón, who are predominantly female participants in the forum, is to marginalize them through vulgar sexist and racist discourse as in the following post where renzo responded to a comment by daisy8756 stating:

Re: [daisy8756] ANTI-REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS

Renzo

Hold on disturbed little girl…to move your ass for a bunch of ugly black crapatoneros… 😳

I got that letter from an anti-crapaton forum…dedicated to Alan Garcia and all those crapatoneros who only listen garbage 😁

Most if not all of the aforementioned comments from yago and daisy8756 speak to issues of representation. As reggaetón crossed over into the mainstream music market, it received a notable amount of media attention globally from 2004-2009. Constructed as “Reggaetón Latino” and/or “Latin Urban” music, it was marketed via pan-ethnic branding strategies aimed at
expanding its reach to Latin global audiences. In turn, this mass exposure placed a spotlight on the ability of the culture industries to turn a once underground musical form into a globally consumable Latin commodity. One of the ways audiences, fans, and anti-fans negotiate the effects of reggaetón’s crossover and commercialization is through engaging in debates over representation of the genre and of its audiences. Consequently, some chat participants, like darsenn, speak directly to the ways in which reggaetoneros are represented in the media:

Re: [yago] ANTI-REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS
darsenn

TO BEGIN WITH….I DON’T KNOW BUT I THINK THAT THE MAJORITY OF REGGAETÓN’S SUPERFANS ARE PROBABLY UNDER 25 YEARS OLD….RIGHT?

FROM THERE WE CAN DEDUCE THEIR QUICK, EASY, AND NAÏVE DISPLAYS OF UNCONDITIONAL DEVOTION TOWARD THIS TYPE OF MUSIC…I DON’T THINK THAT A FACTOR LIKE ‘ITS IN STYLE’ IS A DECISIVE ONE HERE.

WE SHOULDN’T BE SO RADICAL HERE, NOT SAY: ‘THAT MUSIC IS GARBAGE UGGGGG’ OR ‘IT IS THE BEST THING THAT COULD EVER HAVE BEEN INVENTED’ BECAUSE SUCH EXTREMES ON BOTH SIDES LACK SOUNDNESS TO SUSTAIN A DEBATE.

IN REALITY IT IS A LESSER GENRE OF MUSIC, IT IS NOT AT THE HEIGHT OF ROCK, SALSA, JAZZ, BLUES OR OTHER APPROPRIATE RHYTHMS FROM EACH OF OUR COUNTRIES, I DON’T THINK IT IS BAD FOR PEOPLE TO ENJOY THEMSELVES DANCING WITH SIMPLE REFRAINS, IF THEY WANT TO DO IT LET THEM, BUT WE CAN’T TALK ABOUT A ‘PHILOSOPHY OF REGGAETÓN,’ IT CAN’T BE BECOME THE CENTER OF ONE’S LIFE, TO TRY TO TALK, TO DRESS AND TO BEHAVE LIKE THOSE IDIOTS IN THOSE VIDEOS IS PATHETIC.

DO YOU GUYS REALIZE THAT REGGAETÓN CONTRIBUTES TO THE FORMATION OF THE STEREOTYPE OF THE STUPID LATINO? HAVEN’T YOU GUYS THOUGHT ABOUT THAT? ARE OUR COUNTRIES JUST SEXUAL GAMES AND A 24 HOUR PARTY? [emphasis added]

WE SHOULD ALSO CONSIDER THAT RHYTHMS LIKE THIS ONE ARE IMPOSED ON US BECAUSE THE MEDIA BOMBARDS PEOPLE ALL DAY LONG AND THEY WIN BY VIRTUE OF IMPOSITION AND THEN THEY ARGUE THAT THEY PUT THESE MUSIC OUT ‘BECAUSE IT IS WHAT THESE PEOPLE ARE
ASKING FOR’ DO YOU GUYS AT LEAST REALIZE THIS? OR DO ALL THE REGGAETÓN FOLKS THINK WITH THEIR LOWER HEAD?

Here, there is a strong reaction against the flattening of difference and conflation that occurs via representation of Latin Americans and Latin(as/os) in the media, and they want to make it clear in the anti-reggaetón forums that they do not want to be lumped in with reggaetón and what it represents. To create distance from reggaetón and make it even more evident in the forums, many participants exert their racial, ethnic, and national identities (and/or national pride) as a means to separate themselves from reggaetón—and in many ways, also from blackness, which is repeatedly extricated from Latinidad within the context of the forum space. For example, many times this distinction manifests in attacks against Puerto Rico, the birthplace of reggaetón, which serves as a prime target of anti-reggaetón disdain. For instance, renzo and dios349 express their views stating:

Re: [alianna98] ANTI-REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS
Renzo

Ok….we await your photo then… 😁 to see if you have to right to offend my country like you did before. Additionally, I will respond to you with the following:

NOT EVEN IF I WAS CRAZY WOULD I BE FROM A COUNTRY THAT DOESN’T EVEN HAVE A FLAG, THAT SELLS THEIR COUNTRY FOR A FEW DOLLARS FROM THE ANGLOS, AND WHO CREATE OFFENSIVE MUSIC LIKE REGGAETÓN..

BE MORE ORIGINAL AND BELIEVE SOMETHING THAT IS YOUR OWN, STOP IMMITATING RAP OR HIP HOP AND OTHER GENRES CREATED BY THE USA..

AND YOUR GANGBANGERS CAN KICK ROCKS AND STAY IN PUERTO RICO.

Re: [alianna98] ANTI-REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS
Renzo
Ohhh and what happened?…did the dress fit? 😊…and take into account that I have been kind and not posted the other photos…

At least I have a Country, we are not a colony of anybody, not slaves of some Anglos….You people are, you have been slaves all of your lives, of the Spanish and later of the USA….

Better that you don’t make me talk, 😊 like I told you….we can talk about music, and I don’t have anything against your country, this forum is about Anti-Reggaetón and we should talk about that, if you’d like to persist.

And if you want to know the wonders of Peru, it is very simple, just look for forums like “Viva Peru gentleman,” or other similar ones that are easy to find..

I don’t want to fight with you, if you were a man I would not have a problem, but I don’t like fighting with women…so we shall end this discussion in peace 😊

Re: [lisa1010] ANTI-REGGAETÓN ARGUMENTS
Dios349

To lisa1010 and all of those tolerant of this crap that is widespread all over, I have had it up to my balls with the toleration for this b%$$#ass invention and that we are all the same and c&%$sucking things like those, I respect a person who is fair, honorable, hard working and decent, things that reggaetón imbeciles are not, and who have the balls to do nothing other dishonor and bring the culture of South American down to the ground, because it is a music of delinquents, drug traffickers, gangbangers, bitches, and a million other things, and I am from Asturias, and here there are many decent immigrants that are against this b%$$#ass garbage and all that it entails, they work, they make a dignified living and they respect my language, my traditions and everything related to my culture, but coincidently those who do not even respect my LANGUAGE saying that they refuse to learn Asturiano because they are a b%$$#ass piece of crap those who listen to that garbage walk around like delinquents and extort from their fellow countrymen who just for working to be honorable and not wanting to join their street gang and be a lazy bum and a piece of crap criminal without going further into this example this is a Colombian guy who works as a pizza delivery man, and whom these reggaetón sons of bitches attacked and among several of them beat up just because of his COLOMBIAN nationality and for working instead of joining them to make delinquent crap, another example are Africans who come to live as best they can, who do not demand anything they only ask to be left in peace, well those gangbanger sons of bitches call them shitty NEGROS and they throw merchandise on the floor and they rob them, that music and those people what they do is put honorable south americans who come here to find a better future in a bad spot, and on top of that those bastards if they see two or 3 people they won’t even look they way, the day I have a problem with one he’d better run, because I’ll stick that reggaetón right between his ass and his latin boss’s, cuz THIS IS NOT THE UNITED STATES, this is ASTURIAS.
ALL TOGETHER SOUTH AMERICANS AND ASTURIANS UNITED AGAINST REGGAETÓN, BECAUSE SKIN COLORS DO NOT SEPARATE US RATHER THE STUPIDITIES OF A SELECT FEW DO.

Health and good luck with the destruction of reggeton on the lands of south america.

The previous chat debate illustrates how negotiations of cultural forms like music correspond to mediations of national, racial, and ethnic identities that play a significant role for participants in fan/anti-fan communities of ethnically and racially marked cultural forms, and in this case, Latin branded global commodities like reggaetón. All three chat participants embroiled in the debate (renzo, alianna98, and dios349) negotiate multiple sites of identity, including national identity, through their negotiations with reggaetón. Within their complex negotiation of this racially and ethnically marked genre known as reggaetón, I would argue that these participants simultaneously attempt to carve out a space where they can assert and negotiate their hybrid and intersectional identities through their participatory fandom. In doing so, these fans/anti-fans also assert themselves as interactive subjects online who are speaking back to their marginal representation online and offline. Whether forum participants fall on one side of the argument or the other, the one thing both share is that they all assign a great amount of power to a popular music formation like reggaetón to represent “them.” In other words, whether they actually like reggaetón or stake a claim for the anti-reggaetón position, they are all strongly concerned with the message that reggaetón sends to society about them—even as they proclaim that reggaetón doesn’t represent them in the first place. This is a particularly significant assertion as it illustrates the marginal spaces that still exist for Latin(o/a) representation, even and especially in the context of a Latin-branded cultural form like reggaetón that attempts to represent Latin(o/a) populations globally. Hence, there is a sense among forum participants that they are being
spoken for in the media and by the culture industries as they are hailed and interpellated as the audience for reggaetón solely by virtue of their shared Spanish language.

Reggaetón stands outside of the definition of what dios349 articulates as the “appropriate” national identity of Colombians or of Asturians. Similarly, renzo levels his ideal of national identity of Peruvians against the “inferior” Puerto Rican identity, which he argues is not even a formidable one given its colonial status. As such, the birthplace of reggaetón is disparaged for its US/colonial status as well as the music that originated there which is considered a degenerate form. Reggaetón is mocked and stigmatized many times over throughout the anti-reggaetón forum, but in this particular debate anti-sentiment toward reggaetón is negotiated through pitting nations and/or national identities against one other. One illustrative way in which the “whose nation is better” contest plays out is through a beauty contest of sorts. Part of this national beauty contest debate is indirectly referenced in renzo’s first post where he asks alianna98 if she has posted her photo to the forum yet—basically to provide evidence of her beauty, and in turn, prove her nation’s worth. As such, there are several multilayered tropes of empire71 that play out in the context of the forum with regard to race, ethnicity, nation, sexuality and gender. One example specific to the aforementioned posts invokes “the woman as nation” trope that is articulated through an ongoing debate about which countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have the most beautiful women or the most Miss Universe winners. Several chat participants representing for their nation of origin posted photos of “beautiful” women (many adhering to the Eurocentric thin, light, White ideal standard of beauty) to prove that their country/colony/nation is better than the rest. Consequently, this is why renzo refers other chat participants to the ‘Viva el Peru señores’ forum where one can find the

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“wonders” of Peru via photos of women in bikinis or less. In earlier posts, one chat participant, *rosa99*, pointed to how many winners of the Miss Puerto Rico contest have gone on to win Miss Universe.

Outside of the photos of women that do end up on the forum or through mention of famously “beautiful” women, female chat participants in the forum are subjected to and subject themselves to proving the worth of their own nations through visual representations of their own “beauty.” This “beauty contest” is just one example of many which demonstrate that the anti-reggaetón forum is not just about music, as *renzo* or *yago* purport to frame it. As debates over reggaetón turn into debates about nation waged over and through women’s bodies or flaming attacks deploying ethnic and racial epithets, one can observe how the politics of representation and visibility engender confrontation and complex negotiations of forum participants’ values, perspectives, affiliations, linkages, and identifications outside of their negotiation as music fans/anti-fans. In many ways, women’s bodies serve as the sites through which multiple fears and moral panics intersect concerning women’s sexual freedom, feminism, loss of male control over women’s bodies, and tensions around interracial sex among others that emerge within the anti-reggaetón debates. It is the woman’s body that stands in to either validate or denigrate national identity through the “beauty contests” that occur in the forums, and in this way Latinidad is policed through women’s bodies. Similarly, it is also the woman’s body being judged in relation to her physical expressiveness in dancing reggaetón (an already denigrated musical form) that then determines her decency and moral worth as judged by the antireggaetoneros in the forum. In this way, the antireggaetoneros police the genre of reggaetón through women’s bodies as well. Thus, reggaetón music serves as a catalyst through which these fans and anti-fans grapple with dominant narratives, discourses, codes, values, morals, and mores.
in society, particularly around women’s bodies, and at the same time react to their own marginal location within these regimes of power.

Overall, the “argumentos anti-reggaetón” forum is a male-dominated space, and only a select few participants (rosa99, alianna98, daisy8756, todamex) who reveal themselves as women frequently post comments in the forum. The female forum participants are often defending reggaetón, while the male participants attack reggaetón and at the same time fiercely attack the women that defend the genre. In many ways, hypocrisy abounds as the male participants purport to “defend” the women or claim to “save” them from solely being objectified and prodded by penises while dancing to reggaetón, and yet in many postings these male participants resort to the types of flaming attacks that gornoten waged against daisy8756. At the same time, the female participants also deploy similar tactics to insult the men by questioning their adherence to dominant codes of aggressive male sexuality and hurl offensive homophobic insults back as a defense mechanism. For example, renzo questions where the “so-called” feminist ideals of these women are, and yet when women in the forum present their challenges they are called lesbians for coming off too strong. There is a strong undercurrent of postfeminist discourse waged within the anti-reggaetón debates in the forum, whereby male anti-fans appropriate and turn phrases drawn from popular feminism to challenge female forum participants who disagree with their points of view on the genre. However, in doing so they enact what Tasker and Negra (2007) call “othering of feminism” in that they construct it as “extreme, difficult, and unpleasurable” (4). In turn, feminist perspectives are actually silenced in this forum space, unrecognized, or harshly disparaged. Hence, this ensures that normative sex and gender roles remain the status quo in the forum as several anti-fans work to recuperate them time and time again.
Throughout the chat forum, renzo and yago often come to one another’s defense, mostly against the female participants. From their chat threads it appears as if they might know each other outside of the anti-reggaetón forum space. Renzo posted the second response after yago initiated the chat stream stating, “YAGO FRIEND, YOU KILLED IT WITH THAT ARTICLE, IT IS VERY GOOD, I CONGRATULATE YOU 😊.” Then yago replies to renzo by his real name saying, “[xxxx], my friend, check it, it’s been a while since anyone has seen you anywhere. We have new chat participants in the forum, some are in favor of reggaetón, others are in our alliance. !!!DIE REGGAETÓN!!! YAGO.” The relationship between yago and renzo lends itself to camaraderie and almost an alliance that manifests in power plays of cyberhate against others in the chat forum—particularly against the participants that indirectly or directly identify themselves as female. For example, renzo responds to yago’s previously mentioned post, “I took some vacation time, but here I am again...just tell me how many there are chief 😁...!!! We will finish with all the crapatoneros!!!... 😁.” With yago and renzo positioning and posturing in the forum as the “chiefs” they tend to dominate the conversation, they spark new debates about why others should join their alliance of cyberhate against reggaetón, and they double-team many of those in favor of reggaetón.

In particular, renzo’s position is one that assumes a dominant patriarchal stance of imposing decency on women. Lisa1010’s comments stem from a position of respect for all, versus a conditional respect invoked by renzo. One potential reading of renzo’s usage of the terms “respect” and “dignity” is that they are couched in a patriarchal narrative of dictating women’s appropriate behavior and roles in society, but under the guise of a pseudo-feminist stance that pretends to “defend” women from being contained solely as sexual objects. Renzo takes issue with women engaging in “public” displays of what he interprets as hypersexuality.
Renzo grapples with whether or not the woman is being objectified or self-objectifying herself (this speaks to different readings of music videos and performative dance), but he appears to be strongly opposed to both scenarios. In the case of the woman “liking” for a man to “provoke” sexual contact publicly, renzo finds this to be a type of behavior that does not fit in the realm of what he deems respectable—regardless of what the woman may think, feel, or believe. Lisa1010’s position is grounded in the idea that women have choices in society, in dance, and particularly regarding their own bodies—be it in public or private. Lisa1010’s comments are more in line with Ivy Queen’s aforementioned lyrics that challenge the idea that by dancing provocatively women are “loosely” offering themselves sexually. On the other hand, renzo goes as far as to say that this perreo dance of reggaetón does not respect society—code for the dominant patriarchal norms imposed and policed in society. This forum demonstrates how norms that are often policed offline are similarly policed online; therefore, challenging scholarly rhetoric that singles out the democratic and liberatory potential of fandom (Jenkins 1992, 2006) but evades discussion around the social and structural hierarchies that are replicated in online fan spaces as well.

Yago’s posts point to clear examples of heterosexist patriarchy as he brags about influencing his wife’s musical choices and as he questions todamex stating, “I suppose that you are not one [a prostitute]” after framing his contained notion of what a prostitute is and is not. In addition, as yago presents his points about reggaetón it is often via paternalistic power tactics against the women in the forum, as he reinforces the “brotherhood” he is seeking to establish and the alliances he seeks in other “brothers” against reggaetón, as well as his outright policing of women in the forum as he asks daisy8756 and alianna98 not to post to the forum and ruin it with their vulgarity. Those framing who is and who isn’t decent and/or vulgar in the forums are
overwhelmingly male chat participants. The male morality is not questioned or up for debate in the same way the woman’s “questionable” decency is used almost as a weapon against her and as a means to discredit her opinion in the forum. A similar tactic is used by renzo in response to lisa1010’s arguments. The imagery and wording about the phallus and “forced entry” is repeated incessantly throughout the forum, but male decency is not challenged, even in the context of the purported imposition of the man on the woman. These repeated images and phrases reinscribe female subjectivity to male dominance\textsuperscript{72}.

The arguments waged in the posts also engage the representations of artists like Daddy Yankee, Whitney Houston, Britney Spears, and Shakira that appear either in the media, blogs, or chat forums such as this one. Many of these images associated with reggaetoneros come directly from the way in which they are represented and represent themselves in the media. Daisy8756 points out the hypocrisy of associating drug addiction and gang activity with reggaetón artists when the media has given equal visibility to the deviancy of celebrities and musical performers outside of the realm of the reggaetón genre. Yago, on the other hand, remains committed to reinscribing common representational tropes that seek to keep particular groups, like reggaetóneros in this case, marginalized for their “deviance.” darsenn makes a connection between the way in which reggaetón or reggaetoneros are represented in the media and how that contributes to the formation of stereotypes about Latin Americans and/or Latin(ass/as). The sentiments of darsenn seem to imply that reggaetón is the problem, given that darsenn appears to have internalized the associations of deviancy and indecency about reggaetoneros. In other words, it is not the media’s construct of the reggaetón or how reggaetón artists self-tropicalize in

\textsuperscript{72} Many times the female participants are infantilized and called “nena [little girl],” “flaca [skinny girl],” “hija [daughter],” “hermana [sister],” “nina [female child],” “chica [chick],” and all of these are also used in their diminutive forms as well. In addition, women who dance reggaetón or like reggaetón are referred to as “sucia [dirty girl],” “puta [bitch],” “perra [female dog],” “mamona [woman who performs oral sex on a man’s penis]” (to name a few).
order to gain access to the mass media, rather it is the essence of reggaetón and all of the markers of deviance that it must embody that create the stereotypes. In this analysis, there is no mention of the market forces investing time and money in promoting these images to increase global visibility and accumulate global capital. At the same time, darsenn challenges these representations in the media and finds that they provide a narrow or symbolically annihilating frame for Latinidad and for Latin(as/os) by portraying them as stupid. In addition, darsenn observes that other Spanish-language dominant countries are often represented within tropes of exoticism, eroticism, and libidinous pleasures—pointing to sexual and party imagery. These are representations that darsenn does not identify with and challenges others in the forum to consider and challenge as well. There is a sense of cohesion with the other forum participants that darsenn tries to establish. Darsenn uses the online fan/anti-fan space to raise collective awareness about other crucial factors missing thus far within the anti-reggaetón debates at large. The discursive terms used such as “we should” and “do you all realize” addresses not just those posting in the chat streams, but might also address lurkers or trolls to the forum who might visit and read the chat streams but not necessarily post to them.

Through this post darsenn appears to work through other arguments posed in the anti-reggaetón forum, while at the same time working through and negotiating personal valuations. While earlier in the post darsenn attributes stereotypes of Latinos/as in the media to reggaetón, later in the post darsenn calls the media into question again. Is it the media or the genre (or a global capitalist system) that contributes to problematic representations, or all of the above? Darsenn encourages others to question how the media imposes cultural products, like certain forms of “selected” pop music, on audiences under the guise that they [the audience] clamors for their production and that the culture industry is simply supplying that demand. To darsenn’s
point, previous research (M.M. Rivera 2011) has shown that reggaetón has received a large amount of visibility in mainstream media since 2004 and has been framed as the “new Latin [urban] music boom” over various other genres that fall under the “Latin music” umbrella. Even though “Regional Mexican” music remains at the top of the Latin music market in charts and sales (although now by a smaller margin), reggaetón and other forms of music considered “Latin urban” have received significantly more media coverage and promotion from the music industry since 2004 in an effort to target an increasing bilingual/bicultural Latin(a/o) youth market in the US and abroad. Eventually, “Urban Regional Mexican” will be the musical form in the limelight (as it is filtering in currently), but reggaetón happens to be the first “Latin urban” musical form to usher in a number of hybrid “Latin urban” genres currently rising in commercial popularity (i.e., bachata and cumbia). Yet, in the meanwhile anti-reggaetón forums are full of participants who are reacting against the increased visibility that reggaetón has received since its global crossover into the mainstream popular music market. These reactions predominantly come in the form of what darsenn has expressed in the forum under investigation—e.g., arguing that reggaetón does not represent Latinos, or that the representations of reggaetón imposed by the media do not represent anything more than stereotypes of Latin Americans and Latin(os/as).

**Concluding Discussion**

Use of strong language and the manifestations of cyberhate, the assaults on other Internet users, as well as by the alliances formed and strengthened at times by adherence to dominant tropes/stereotypes/tropicalizations and other times by collective movements of resistance against such regimes of power and representation, demonstrate how the anti-reggaetón forum functions as a complex site of negotiation over multiple sites of identity and power in society, particularly concerning the politics of representation and visibility. Several participants in the anti-reggaetón
forum rejected and resisted being situated by the music industry’s, multinational media conglomerates’, or the media’s interpellation of them as the audience, consumers, or producers of reggaetón. They reacted against this triumvirate’s tendency to conflate Latin(os/as), Latin Americans, and Spaniards as one large and undifferentiated mass and/or consumer market. In turn, the market conceptualization of these participants was rejected as they strongly worked to “throw it off.” Several users addressed the ways in which the media was imposing this musical formation on them. In addition, users like darsenn pointed to the way the media’s representations of reggaetón simply served to stereotype Latin Americans and Latin(os/as) en masse. Other participants pointed to the multiple markers of deviancy and indecency attached to reggaetón from gang violence to drug affiliations. Moreover, these participants also deconstructed how these markers of deviancy are often racialized and ethnically coded through language and visual references associated with reggaetón in mainstream media. Although some chat participants internalized and reproduced these ascriptions of deviancy and indecency in their own posts, others challenged them and pointed out the ways these ascriptions are not just specific to reggaetón. Several participants spoke to the ways that these ascriptions are reproduced through various representations in popular culture and discussed how they have seen these representations impinge on them either indirectly or directly in their lives or in the lives of others they know. In turn, several chat postings expressed a desire that other forms of music and representations gain visibility in the public eye. Within these debates chat participants like Daisy8756, darsenn, and yago expressed larger concern over their marginal representation and visibility in the media and in society. These issues speak to the complexities of commodifying Latinidad as these fans/anti-fans aggressively challenge the efforts of the culture industries to use pan-ethnic branding strategies to target undifferentiated global Latin audiences. Through the
debates in the anti-reggaetón forum, participants engage in a battle to carve their own spaces outside of the pan-ethnic market constructs made readily consumable to them by the culture industries.

The debates in the anti-reggaetón forum were polarized and polarizing. Forum participants made sure to create distance between themselves and reggaetón either by posing oppositional moral and value systems iterated through language about decency or by pitting their ethnic, racial, and national identities against what they believed to be a lesser one connected to reggaetón. Throughout the forum reggaetón was racialized in negatively connoted ways and ascribed markers of deviancy. In addition, reggaetón was also presented as a vulgar musical form with indecent dances, artists, fans, and participants. The policing of reggaetón’s decency and deviancy extended to other forms of policing that manifested as mostly male participants, such as anti-fans renzo and yago, questioned the decency and morality of most female chat participants in the forum who supported and defended reggaetón. Within these debates traditional forms of patriarchal dominance were expressed and constantly reproduced. Adherence to normative sexuality and gender codes was strictly enforced in the forum among male and female participants. While online fan/anti-fan sites potentially offer users a space to challenge heteronormative discourses, they just as easily serve as contained and containing sites where adherence to heteronormativity is imposed and strongly enforced. Challenges to male dominance were addressed in the forum at times, but mostly maintained as female participants often backed down from their initial positions or engaged in similar tactics of rebuttal. Several attempts were made to discredit, devalue, and police the views of female participants. Overall the forum remained a male dominated space regulated within a patriarchal hierarchy. Debates about reggaetón turned into personal attacks that devolved further into homophobic insults hurled back
and forth across gender lines. In the midst of a forum dedicated to online music fandom, reggaetón served as a provocateur and touchstone for an offshoot of divergent topics falling far from the scope of reggaetón music, and yet not outside of the purview of fan/anti-fan negotiation. Thus, within fan studies an intersectional approach is critical for engaging the range of complexities that fans/anti-fans negotiate through their participatory fandom.

Online fan/anti-fan sites provide unique spaces to gauge transnational debates around cultural forms such as popular music as well as complex negotiations of identity. These are not the same debates one might see or hear in the mainstream media. While at times the logic of global capitalism and corporate America is espoused in these spaces as well, there is at least another side presented which allows for the formation of an actual debate. Many times with regard to pop culture forms, the focus in the media centers on measurable charts, programming formats, sales quotients, and quantified markets. From the media’s frame audiences glean little more than salacious scandals and popularity polls. However, fan/anti-fan sites online can reveal less filtered perspectives offering critiques of media and the culture industries that are often marginalized if not completely erased from mainstream media.

There are hundreds of thousands of anti-reggaetón sites online created outside of the corporate media’s purview, where cultural production is almost if not totally dominated and driven by market forces. These sites allow for like and un-like minded online communities to form and exchange and share thoughts, revelations, attacks, debates, apologizes, alliances, and affiliations. In the anti-reggaetón forum under investigation we were able to see reactions against the commercial media and market-led constructs of Latinidad and of “Latin music.” Arguably, these online fan/anti-fan fora provide a space for alternative perspectives that might not otherwise ever see the light of day, much less be transmitted globally from Asturias to Puerto
Rico. This is particularly relevant as it applies to Spanish-language dominant fans/anti-fans. Within scholarly literature on participatory fandom, Spanish-language dominant fans/anti-fans have been often overlooked. As English remains the lingua franca of the Internet, Spanish-language dominant Internet users exceedingly fail to be recognized as interactive subjects online and scholarly work on Latin(os/as) online remains understudied (Nakamura 2008, Nakamura and Chow-White 2012). Hence, further work is needed to understand the ways Spanish-language dominant Internet users engage online spaces, including participatory online fan/anti-fan sites, to act as agents against their marginal representation in mainstream media.

Some chat participants in the anti-reggaetón forum resented the imposition of reggaetón music on them (i.e., having to hear it in the nightclubs, the streets, on the buses, on the radio, on television, etc…), and knowing that they were being bombarded with it (in the words of darsem) just based on their shared Spanish language. They were fully aware that they were being constructed as the audience for reggaetón by the culture industries and thus “spoken for” by the market. Yet, it was their shared Spanish language, even with variations in dialect from participant to participant that was drawing them together to the same forum to interact and exchange debate. In doing so, these fans/anti-fans used these debate sites to produce multifarious sites of identity negotiation for themselves. In these spaces, forum participants grappled with essentialist notions about race, ethnicity, nation, class, sex, and gender, including their own. As contradictory as many of these discourses in the anti-reggaetón forum may appear, they underscore the larger complexities negotiated by fans/anti-fans with hybrid and intersectional sexual, racial, ethnic, gender, and national identities that cannot be divorced from their participatory fandom either offline or online.
CHAPTER 5
THE DIGITAL VISUAL CULTURE OF THE ANTI-REGGAETÓN MOVEMENT ONLINE

Introduction

While recent studies have cited rising rates of broadband adoption and Internet usage among US native and foreign-born Latinos (Livingston 2010), research is sorely lacking on the ways in which Spanish-language dominant Internet users assert themselves as interactive subjects online. This chapter critically examines a thriving online participatory culture of Internet users whose dominant language is Spanish and who are anti-fans of reggaetón music. These anti-fans actively assert their disdain for this genre of Latin pop music in user-generated content that includes anti-reggaetón images circulated on blogs, social networking sites, and online music forums. Together these digital venues support a growing anti-reggaetón movement online.

In what follows, I wish to analyze digital visual culture as it relates to the anti-reggaetón movement by focusing on nine images drawn from a cross section of multiple sites online. By employing Gillian Rose’s critical visual methodology (2007: 12-13) I seek to address the following questions: What has been fueling the anti-reggaetón movement online since the global crossover of this popular music form? What does the circulation of this digital visual culture online signify in the post-crossover context for reggaetón? How are these digital images being created and deployed on anti-reggaetón sites?

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74 Henry Jenkins defines a participatory culture as one in which “Fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (2006: 290). Jonathan Gray defines anti-fandom as “The realm not necessarily of those who are against fandom per se, but of those who strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel” (2003: 70). While I use Gray’s understanding of anti-fans in this study, I also expand his definition to encompass the role of cultural resistance to a particular genre or text.

75 I deploy the term crossover to reference the process described by Garofalo “Whereby an artist or a recording from a secondary marketing category like country and western, Latin, or rhythm and blues achieves hit status in the mainstream or ‘pop’ market. While the term can and has been used simply to indicate multiple chart listings […] it most common usage in popular music history clearly connotes movement from margin to mainstream” (1993: 231). My interest is in the movement of reggaetón from underground to mainstream status.
To begin to answer these questions, I critically examine the digital visual culture that anti-fans of reggaetón produce in response to the many channels of music, media representations of Latinidad, and other products of the culture industry that infiltrate their daily lives. While processes of globalization enable these circuits of culture and capital to flow transnationally, it is too often the case that these processes are taken for granted and the responses to them ignored. As a controversial and provocative musical genre being sold as one of the more recent “hot” Latin global commodities, reggaetón presents an ideal case study for investigating how a global audience and interpretive community of anti-fans grapple with discourses of authenticity tied to the marketing of Latin music and the commodification of Latinidad. One of the ways reggaetón has been marketed is as a Latin urban musical genre targeted at “One of the fastest growing demographics in the US—bilingual, bicultural Hispanics ages 14 to 30” (Holt 2006). I contend that reggaetón artists have been used by the culture industry to promote and sell Latin urban authenticity as a tenable media representation of Latinidad or Latinness particularly for that target market. Iconic reggaetón artists, such as Daddy Yankee, are at the forefront of the commercial incarnation of the genre, selling everything from “urban” music to a line of “urban” hair gel. These marketing ploys have provoked a rejection of the genre, as anti-fans strongly assert their resistance to an urbanized Latin authenticity. In this instance, they reject their interpellation (in Althusser’s sense) as the audience for reggaetón solely based on demographically defined features, such as a shared language. The use of homogenized,

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76 I define Latin urban authenticity as a discourse that is a by-product of the Latin urban marketing construct used by the music industry to reach a bicultural, bilingual youth-driven Latin(a/o) market. Latin urbanness is often invoked alongside coded imagery, and words such as “barrio,” “real,” or “streets,” to associate a putatively real or true Latin(a/o) identity with a particularly urban aesthetic.

77 Dinzez Flores has pointed to the ways that reggaetón artists call attention to critical public policy issues affecting poor urban communities through the “urban spatial aesthetics” with which they infuse their song lyrics. In her words, “Reggaetoneros have done what political figures haven’t been able to do; they restore hope, ‘en la disco o en el residencial’ [in the disco or the public housing project] to the beat of reggaeton” (2008: 61). I argue that it is equally important to be attentive to how those same Latin urban aesthetics ascribed to reggaetón and reggaetoneros are often deployed as a means to target fashionably urbanized consumer products to poorer urban consumers.
conflated, and grossly essentializing representations of Latinidad to market to US Latinas/os and
a Latin global market abroad has only emboldened this imagined community, or interpretative
community of anti-fans, in their response. The online participatory anti-fan culture around
reggaetón offers more nuanced discussions not only of the genre but also of the complexities of
Latina/o identity. In my analysis, I explore how the online visual culture of the anti-reggaetón
movement challenges the culture industry’s invention of the Latin audience for reggaetón as an
undifferentiated mass. It is important to examine these spaces of online production—as I aim to
do in what follows—because they illustrate how anti-fans create a means for destabilizing the
discursive authority of commercialized representations of Latinidad and thus resist the
commodification of Latinidad and Latina/o identity.

This chapter aims to bring together scholarship in new media studies, visual culture
studies, fan studies, popular music studies, and Latina/o communication studies. By creating a
conversation between them, I set forth a theoretical framework for analyzing the negotiation of
global media texts like popular music mediated through anti-fan produced content like digital
visual culture that circulates globally via the Internet. An interdisciplinary approach is called for
in order to address the challenges posed by increasingly global audiences, fan/anti-fan
communities, and cultural texts that are seen, read, heard, and interpreted internationally thanks
in large part to the dynamic means of communication and channels of distribution that are
facilitated by the Internet.

I contend that the realm of digital visual culture can work to challenge the discursive and
representational authority of the culture industry, the commercial media, and, in this particular
case study, mainstream media representations of Latinidad. These are alternative spaces carved
out by anti-fans online where they make their arguments visible and audible, gather information,
commune with those of shared interests, debate with those of disparate interests, and ultimately, share alternative discourses to those disseminated by corporate media.

**Reggaetón Goes Global**

For over two decades, reggaetón has been a touchstone for younger generations in Puerto Rico. More recently, reggaetón has been used as a marketing tool to promote everything from toothpaste to politicians’ campaigns in the US, the Caribbean, and in parts of Latin America. While the social and political relevance of reggaetón has often been questioned, those who have grown along with the genre can speak to its cultural relevance beyond a musical form. After reggaetón experienced a crossover into the mainstream popular music market in the latter part of 2004, there was an increased presence of the genre on the radio, in films, on television programs, award shows, magazines, and other entertainment platforms. Reggaetón’s popularity was parlayed into reggaetón/urban themed clothing lines, merchandising and advertising deals, a bustling ringtone market, and various Internet sites devoted to news about the genre and to music/video streaming. In the midst of the reggaetón marketing blitz, radio broadcast and satellite stations changed their programming around the US and abroad to reflect an *Hurban* format (Hispanic and urban) with some venues playing reggaetón songs around the clock (Hinckley 2005; Navarro 2005). Increased visibility provided a newfound commercial viability for the genre, which, aside from lining the pockets of industry executives and merchandisers, provoked a continuing and forceful backlash against reggaetón.

Arguably, the backlash against reggaetón emerged out of a reaction against particular media representations around the genre that became conflated with Latinidad. While reggaetón was billed as a niche market, it became the hot new sound in the Latin music market and began outselling *música regional Mexicana*, which has a longstanding history as the top-selling genre
in Latin music. Resistance to the perceived invasion of reggaetón was immediately visible on the Internet. There was a strong and immediate reaction from the anti-reggaetón crowd against the pan-Latin media construction of “Reggaetón Latino” as a catch-all avatar for the Latin community in all its diversity in the US and overseas. This rejection of the genre derived, in part, from the deviant image associated with Puerto Rican underground music, which is considered a precursor to reggaetón (Santos 1996; Rivera 2009). Scholars have traced how reception to underground was fraught with tension from the mid-1990s in Puerto Rico, when state interventions imposed censorship and bans on underground music, videos, and dance (Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera 2007; Santos 1996; Rivera 2009). And after reggaetón’s commercial crossover in 2004, reports surfaced from the Dominican Republic regarding imposed censorship of reggaetón songs, videos, and performances (Unsigned 2006a). Earlier bans of underground were premised on the alleged obscenity, sexism, and misogyny of the music videos, and the explicit lyrics of songs held to be rife with sexual content and allusions to drugs and violence (Báez 2006: 64; Baker 2005: 111; Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera 2007: 36; Santos 1996: 219). The more recent censorship against reggaetón in the Dominican Republic cited similar offenses. Hence, to imply that reggaetón was the most popular Latin music form—post mainstream crossover—was offensive to those who did not identify with its repetitive sonic structure, its lyrical content, its visual dimension, or its performative aspects. In turn, issues of representation were at the fore in the anti-reggaetón stance. Many Latinas/os and Latin Americans did not identify with reggaetón and studying the online visual culture of the anti-reggaetón movement helps us to understand why.

78 María Elena Cepeda critically analyzes the music video for “Reggaetón Latino (Chosen Few Remix),” which purports to offer a unified construct of pan-Latinidad, and instead reveals the contested terrain of “inter-Latino youth dynamics.” Such findings demonstrate that complex negotiations over cultural texts like reggaetón also speak to the contested nature of Latinidad (2009: 565).

79 I focus my attention on the underrepresented research area of reggaetón visual culture in this study. Ethnomusicologist Wayne Marshall has written extensively about the sonic structure of reggaetón music.
Theoretical Considerations: Commodified Latinidad and Latin Music Audiences

My analysis draws upon a rich body of literature in Latina/o Communication Studies that has laid a critical framework for analyzing the discursive construction of pan-ethnic Latin(a/o) identity in the media (Calafell 2007; Valdivia et al. 2008). This analysis traverses anti-fan digital visual culture spanning the extension of the Hispanophone and the Anglophone globe and thus seeks to extend this literature by examining how media and market constructs of Latinidad are also being read and interpreted outside of the US context. I suggest that the music industry is currently deploying the Latin urban construct in ways that draw upon the many tropes (Shohat and Stam 1995: 138-139) and tropicalizations (Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman 1997: 1-15) that scholars have pointed to and problematized thus far within the global marketing of Latinidad. Aparicio asserts that “Contemporary constructs of Latinos/as remain obedient to a long history of stereotypes of Latin America textualized through media, literature, historical texts, popular music, and folklore” (Aparicio 1997: 198-199) and Dávila (2001) observes that advertisers segment Latinos as “Part of the same undifferentiated market” regardless of differences in ethnicity, class, lifestyle, taste, age, or race (8). Accordingly, it is against the music industry’s grossly homogenizing construction of Latinidad that I observe anti-fans of reggaetón reacting and reasserting their hybrid and intersectional identities as well as their musical tastes.

In many ways, Latin popular music seeks to interpellate a manufactured Latin global audience. Deborah Pacini-Hernández (2007) identifies the problem very clearly:

By lumping the diverse musics made in the US with musics produced and consumed within Latin America as well as in the Iberian peninsula into a single category, Latinas/os are equated with Latin Americans and Spaniards, thus perpetuating the exclusion of US Latinas/os from US cultural citizenship; the implicit message is that those who perform and consume ‘Latin’ music are foreign, and therefore not ‘American’ (51).

Furthermore, the music industry has used these same categories to expand its audience base
around a shared language among US Latinas/os, Latin Americans, and Spaniards. However, as Pacini-Hernández goes on to explain, “Clearly, the language-based constructions of Latinidad by both the Latin and mainstream music industries were inadequate to describe the multidimensional experiences of US Latinas/os” (2007: 54). I engage this dilemma by examining how these language-based categories of Latinidad are read and rejected by those who are targeted as the audience for Latin music. The music industry draws up neat categories like “música regional Mexicana,” “rock en español/alternative,” “tropical,” and in doing so alienates fans of music formations that fall outside these mainstream categories. These narrow forms of representation for Latin music fans set up a hierarchy that structures which kinds of Latin music are deemed marketable, profitable, and more likely to be consumed by Spanish dominant and bilingual/bicultural audiences. Therefore, these privileged forms relegate alternative music like heavy metal and rock hybrids to the margins. This creates an ideal context in which marginalized fans can establish a binary opposition between cultures of alternative musical taste and more commercially viable forms, like reggaetón, sold under the Latin music umbrella. From this opposition springs the creation by anti-fans of a global online movement to ban reggaetón.

Methods for Analyzing Online Music Fandom and Anti-Reggaetón Digital Visual Culture

Fan studies is attuned to the shifting balance of power between media producers and fans, and more recently current concerns within the discipline have queried how fans “Are embedded in the existing economic, social, and cultural status quo” so that “Taste hierarchies and structures among fans themselves are described as the continuation of wider social inequalities” (Gray et al. 2007: 6). While recognizing the importance of framing studies of fans around a discussion of the structural hierarchies by which they are constrained, I also underscore the importance of examining the carving out by fans of their own spaces where complex hybrid and intersectional
identities are negotiated as they mediate texts they hate and love. There is a tendency in work on online music fandom to polarize fans around these two approaches. Either they are controlled by corporations/advertisers who use digital delivery systems (like Rhapsody or iTunes) to data-mine, atomize, monitor, and automate them, and impinge on their privacy (McCourt and Burkart 2007: 261-68) or they are empowered via their tech savvy functionality as “amateur experts” in music/artist/band promotion (Baym and Burnett 2009). This area of fan studies has yet to engage an intersectional analysis of the way music fans/anti-fans bring their cultural, ethnic, gender, racial, class, sexual, religious, and political identities to bear on their negotiations of the musical taste cultures they privilege and disdain. The analysis I propose of the anti-reggaetón movement requires both an intersectional and an interdisciplinary approach in order to examine these multidimensional layers of mediation, in particular, the complex way in which pan-ethnic identity is constructed and read through reggaetón.

Anti-reggaetón fans use the Internet to distribute the visual culture they create as a means to further negotiate the media texts they love to hate. New media scholars have addressed the myriad ways that Internet and digital technologies have enabled widespread distribution of content to consumers by media industries (Jenkins 2006). At the same time, fan cultures have benefited in kind from the same technologies as a means of circulating their user-generated content online. Social networking sites, video sharing sites like YouTube, and various computer-mediated communication venues have provided instantaneous online platforms for fan communities to go digital and global at the same time, leveraging their technological acumen to challenge the culture industry’s control over their favorite or most hated texts. While fan studies scholars have addressed ways by which fans/anti-fans reassert their control over media texts, far fewer studies have investigated actual fan produced texts like the digital visual culture examined
here. Without fan/anti-fan user-generated content (videos, links, songs, mash-ups, articles, visual images, online discussions and debates) Internet-based movements like the global anti-reggaetón movement online would cease to exist.

Prior to 2004, using an online search engine to look for the term reggaetón produced zero results. After 2004, when reggaetón had crossed over as a mainstream popular music form, the same search engine query produced results numbering upwards of hundreds of thousands—all user-generated content. While fan studies and new media studies scholars have taken an interest in the growing amount of fan-generated content online, this is an area that visual culture studies should examine more closely. Fan produced content extends to various textual, visual, and hybrid forms and is imbued with many layers of social and cultural meaning that have yet to be examined.

While the Internet provides a decentralized site where users from all parts of the globe converge, new media scholars (Baym 2007; Baym and Burnett 2009) have pointed out issues of social incoherence when fans are not concentrated in one location online and instead form chaotic communities and networks dispersed across many different sites, a feature which indeed applies to the circulation of visual culture produced by reggaetón’s anti-fans. Thus, a challenge in approaching this material is to keep track of images spread unevenly across a range of online spaces that are constantly changing, from social networking sites, to blogs, to music streaming sites. In this study, I focus on a sample of the digital images that have circulated in various modified forms among anti-fans of reggaetón online. On June 25, 2009, I took a snapshot of images which recurred across various anti-reggaetón sites using Google’s advanced image search function to provide access to all digital images tagged “anti-reggaetón.” I collected fifty digital images from the 7,536 search results garnered from English and Spanish language sites. I
reduced the sample to nine images by looking for the most prominent and recurrent themes and by considering their cultural significance as well as the power relations articulated through their production. I also considered hyperlinks between pages where these images appear to address the role cross-referencing plays in communicating between anti-fandom nodes.80

**Findings and Analysis: Reggaetón as National and Global Invasion!**

In the foreword to the *Reggaeton* (Rivera, Marshall, and Pacini-Hernández 2009) anthology, Juan Flores writes about his late friend Johnny Ramirez, who considered reggaetón mere noise and called it “racketon” (ix). Flores grappled with his friend’s disdain for reggaetón stating, “The sonic intrusion he feels is the invasion of generational degeneration, the moral decline of young people “que no valen ná” [“who are worthless”] (emphasis added, 2009: x). Here, Flores highlights the framing of the genre as an invasion and hones in on the role played by generational differences in forging distinctive tastes in music. Reggaetón has been discussed with similar terminology in the popular press and mainstream media. In news articles everywhere from *BBC News* (Wells 2005) to various *Associated Press* reports (i.e., Unsigned: 2006a), reggaetón has been described as an explosion, a revolution, mad hot, taking over, coming up, ruling, rising, and as a craze. Reggaetón is seen as an invasion due to a crossover success not seen since the worldwide penetration of salsa music in the 1990s, and a *New York Times* article referred to it as: “The Conquest of America (North and South)” (Caramanica 2005). Among anti-fans of reggaetón, the invasion is anything but welcome. Reggaetón’s active anti-fans appear across the gamut of Internet platforms and their blog posts, for example, describe feeling bombarded by the genre as well as incensed at having to hear it in nightclubs, on the street, on buses, on the radio, and on television.

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80 This study follows the ethical decision-making criteria outlined in the recommendations of the Association of Internet Researchers and thus only assumes fewer obligations vis-à-vis protecting individual privacy where publicly accessible Web sites are under investigation (Ess et al. 2002: 7).
In my sample of anti-reggaetón images one of the most frequently recurring themes is posing reggaetón as a threat or invasion, on both a national and global scale. Among the most commonly circulated images is one that uses the simple device of striking through the term reggaetón. This graphic representation of the wish to ban reggaetón has been altered in various ways and even embellished at times with visual flairs like blinkies, but the particular images referenced here render explicit national and global symbolism. For instance, the images in Figure 5.1 represent only a few of the multitude of signs circulated online that express a desire to rid the world or a specific country of reggaetón.

The three images in Figure 5.1 which refer to “alianza” [alliance] call for “A Venezuela, Mexico, and a world without reggaetón.” The two very similar triangular devices represent a Venezuelan alliance against reggaetón (Figure 5.1 left), and a worldwide alliance (Figure 5.1 right). Between these two iterations, only a few elements have been modified by the anti-fan designer(s). The image for the Venezuelan alliance uses red, yellow, and blue colors and seven stars, which are symbols culled from Venezuela’s national flag. The colors of the worldwide alliance are red, white, and blue, but other examples of the same design have been posted online with variations in the color scheme or adapted to represent Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru. The image of the Mexican alliance against reggaetón (Figure 5.1 center) uses the eagle, serpent, and cactus from the Mexican national flag. This image is not as easily modified as the simpler triangular one and so does not circulate with the same frequency. Images like these are ideal for reggaetón’s anti-fans online, because they are simple, bold statements that can work to mimic the representational strength of national or global symbolism that is similarly achieved with national flags. These images help to construct the appearance of a national and global movement against reggaetón and can be easily transferred to an offline setting—some have been used as t-shirt
decals, for example. The smaller pixelated strike-through globe (Figure 5.1 center) is the picture for a user profile on social networking site MySpace, his given location is Mexico City and his space is identified as the headquarters of AMAR, the Asociación Mundial Anti-Reggaetón [Worldwide Association Against Reggaetón]. While it is hard to pinpoint the creative origin of and motivation behind these images, the texts that surround the sites where they are reused and repurposed often provide insight into how and why particular images are being presented. For example, the owner of the AMAR MySpace profile where Figure 5.1 appears writes in a public comments forum:


Thus, the AMAR member uses a profile image that coincides with his low opinion of the genre. Applying a discourse of reggaetón as a pestilential scourge, this anti-fan clearly reacts against the popularization of reggaetón as something he sees as forced on those in dance clubs by DJs. Hence, the theme of reggaetón as invasion marries the image and the accompanying commentary. The digital image serves as a visual representation of the AMAR member’s text and its forceful stance against reggaetón.

Figure 5.1 (left) appeared on a Facebook profile page dedicated exclusively to the alliance against reggaetón in Venezuela. This profile page has 159 members and all content is public, as recruitment of other Facebook members appears to be the intended goal. On the wall

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81 “What do you think about the decline of the already depressing and absurd reggaetón genre, just wasteful trash, perhaps? If reggaetón since its inception has been shit the broadcasters and deejays in the putrid clubs devoted to this genre have dedicated themselves to spreading this more-pestilental-then-ever genre. Apparently (finally!) the shitty plague of lobotomized people who enjoy such so-called ‘music (?)’ is little by little shrinking in number…have your say!! Senkoe!!
of the profile page, beneath a statement about the alliance and in the field ‘Who I’d like to meet,’ there is an appeal to the likeminded:

Personas sabias e inteligentes, xD ... Rockeros, Emos, Poperos, Hadcore [sic], Techno, Electro, Drum And Bass, lo que sea... Menos Reggaetóneros!! Ni plataneros, Ni tierruos ni X, Caramelos de Cianuro Talento Nacional!! =) [sic] (Unsigned 2007).\(^\text{82}\)

Here, the Venezuelan alliance not only uses the triangular image to appeal to anti-fans of reggaetón, but as the statement on the profile page suggests, this group seeks to target a particular set of anti-fans. The statement uses Venezuelan colloquialisms like “tierruos” and “plataneros,” which connote repudiation of rappers and producers of tropicalized musical forms, such as merengue, and salsa. This group considers these musical forms as culturally inferior compared with rock and electronic dance music forms.

The worldwide variation on the anti-reggaetón alliance image (Figure 5.1, right) links to a blog created by an anti-fan in Granada, Spain, and the design is embedded next to a strike-through device that reads: “no mas [sic] reggaetón” (“no more reggaetón”). The Spanish anti-fan’s blog includes a poll gauging readers’ opinion of the genre: 77 percent of those who responded expressed hate, 11 percent said they loved the genre, and another 11 percent did not much care for it. This blog, which invites a range of perspectives about reggaetón, contrasts with other sites that discount the music completely based on taste differences alone. This blog also demonstrates how fans and anti-fans interact with one another in online spaces, using them as platforms to debate and express divergent opinions.

The Mexican alliance image (Figure 5.1, center) is hyperlinked to an anti-reggaetón forum dedicated to posting, exchanging, and trading similar images. This site functions as a central point where anti-fans can upload newly modified images or download them for their own

\(^{82}\) “Wise and intelligent people, xD ... Rockers, Emos, those into Pop, Hardcore, Techno, Electro, Drum And Bass, whatever … Anyone but Reggaetoneros! Or plataneros, or tierruos or X, Cyanide National Talent Sweeties!! =)”
blogs, profile pages, social networking sites, or other anti-reggaetón sites. Issues of copyright and monetary concerns are not a priority here. Communication, rather than making money, drives the way these images are exchanged and illustrates the workings of the Internet gift economy as anti-fans of reggaetón constantly modify and exchange free content logos and icons. Collaboration is also valued in this gift economy and is a feature of the way in which fans organize online. As Richard Barbrook suggests:

Unrestricted by physical distance, [fans] collaborate with each other without the direct mediation of money and politics. Unconcerned about copyright, they give and receive information without thought of payment. In the absence of states or markets to mediate social bonds, network communities are instead formed through the mutual obligations created by gifts of time and ideas (1998).

Barbrook’s analysis of fans’ behavior seems equally pertinent to the free circulation and online exchange of logos and images by active reggaetón anti-fans who create a visual culture around a shared cause.

Herbert Gans defines taste culture as one which “Results from choice; it has to do with those values and products about which people have some choice” (1974: 12). Gans argues that there is a constant struggle over the prioritization and representation of one’s particular interests, tastes, and content in the mass media (1974: 112) that creates a taste hierarchy in which high culture is always privileged over low culture. Creating this hierarchy relies upon drawing out conflict and relegating certain tastes to the margins and alienating those who identify with interests perceived to be low culture tastes. This power struggle extends to popular music especially, where standards of high and low tastes are often debated. And reggaetón is no exception. Gans’s modeling of taste conflict and hierarchy helps to explain the vigorous exchange and refashioning of images used online in support of and against reggaetón. The Internet-based anti-reggaetón movement not only survives, but thrives based on the activity of a
sizable number of reggaetón’s anti-fans and fans that exchange counterarguments both textually and visually. Figure 5.2 illustrates how digital images based on a common core design are modified and then circulated online by both fans and anti-fans as they repurpose them to serve their particular interests and tastes.

The type of attention and visibility that reggaetón has received in the mainstream media has raised concerns for anti-fans who feel compelled to form national and global alliances against it and demarcate their own spaces online where they can claim their musical taste cultures. The images in Figure 5.1 include only a cross-section of the Latin American countries represented in the online anti-reggaetón movement. Between 2004 and 2006, the top spots in the Latin music charts became a competition between the previously dominant música regional Mexicana and reggaetón, which was becoming increasingly popular in the US. In addition, the peak of reggaetón’s success coincided with a format change that affected Spanish language radio programming across the US. Several stations switched from rotating traditional salsa, merengue, norteño, and tejano music to a programming that accommodated more youth-friendly hurban formats such as reggaetón, hip hop, bachata, and contemporary cumbia hybrids. Thus, reggaetón posed a threat to other musical genres’ slice of the airwaves. Many reggaetón anti-fans devote Internet sites and online media to rejecting reggaetón and embracing other genres considered alternative Latin music forms, such as heavy metal and rock, and other musical taste cultures, such as emo culture. Arguably, the drive to create alternative sites online slamming reggaetón and supporting heavy metal, for instance, derives in some way from the lack of visibility and representation given to these genres and to taste cultures that are not commercialized, marketed,

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83 Grossberg et al. discuss taste cultures as a market type and assert that: “Producers operating with an understanding of the audience as taste cultures construct media products according to their understanding of the features of the product that hold the taste culture together, rather than according to their image of a particular demographic group of consumers” (2006: 225). I argue, conversely, that not only are anti-fans of reggaetón constructed as a market type based on shared demographics, but that they reject the Latin urban construct and in doing so reassert their choice in musical taste cultures.
and packaged in the same ways that propelled reggaetón to more mainstream status. However, what is being silenced in these debates is that even though alternative Latin music genres and musical taste cultures are not as visibly highlighted by the mainstream, they are still just as much products of the culture industry as the commercialized form of reggaetón. Hence, the battle of conflicting musical taste cultures wages on as reggaetón continues to be the mainstream target for these anti-fans.

Anti-Consumerism and Reggaetón

Because reggaetón is often discounted as a musical form it is certainly not considered a cultural form in the eyes of anti-fans. After the crossover of reggaetón, there was a strong reaction against its commercialization. In particular, reggaetón superstars, such as Daddy Yankee and Don Omar, were singled out for attack by anti-fans. Figure 5.3 shows an image of Daddy Yankee that was posted on an anti-reggaetón discussion forum and also an image of Don Omar found on an anti-reggaetón Web site created by an anti-fan from Nuevo León, Mexico, who appears, on the other hand, to be a fan of heavy metal band Iron Maiden. Here, the anti-fan(s) add a Joker face layer to a photograph of Daddy Yankee, so that he resembles a clown, and caption the new image “Daddy Yankee el payaso capitalista” (“Daddy Yankee the capitalist clown”). Arguably, they label Daddy Yankee as a capitalist clown because not only is he the genre’s top-earner—thanks to platinum sales of his reggaetón albums—but he has also received a Hollywood film deal and multiple lucrative endorsements globally. After Daddy Yankee endorsed John McCain’s bid for the 2008 US presidential elections, rap artist Fat Joe publicly referred to the reggaetonero as a sell-out (Reid 2008). Daddy Yankee is well known for the conspicuous consumption evidenced in his fur-lined clothing and bling-bling diamond jewelry, which has many anti-fans up in arms. The same grievance underpins the image (Figure 5.3) in
which artist Don Omar’s head is held in the clutches of a monstrous figure alongside a crudely cut and pasted reproduction of the shiny and large bling-bling chain that Omar often wears. The monstrous figure in the image appears to have been pasted from artwork typical of record sleeves for heavy metal bands like Iron Maiden. The collage design petitions: “Muerte al regguetón [sic]” (“Death to reggaetón”) and this could arguably also be calling for the cessation of the conspicuous consumption practices flaunted by reggaetón’s most fashionable and notable icons.

A text layer added to the image of Daddy Yankee in Figure 5.3 says: “DESPIERTA!!! Esta Sanguijuela solo te quiere chupar el dinero…y aparte te tiene perreando como un imbecil,” framing Daddy Yankee as a capitalist bloodsucker exploiting fans for personal gain.84 Perreando refers to the reggaetón dance style and the word in Spanish is formed from the noun that signifies dog. An adapted clip art image of two dancers in Figure 5.4 mimics and critiques the grinding pose that is typical of reggaetón’s primary dance style. This image, found on a Spanish MySpace user’s public comment board, repurposes a sign with the warning “Prohibido perrear en esta zona…por un mundo sin reggaetón.”85 Further text added to the image reads:

Esse [sic] ritmo es bailado por hombres y mujeres ignorantes, hambrientos de sexo, manipulados por el consumismo. ¿A quién se le ocurre que una mujer debe ser gasolinera y fácil?86

The anti-fan’s attack is waged on two fronts. One critique is waged against the sexually charged dance of reggaetón, and the other targets the commercialization of the genre through mass consumption practices. Thus, in both Figures 5.3 and 5.4, the perreo dance is associated with ignorance, foolishness, and sexual depravity. In particular, the woman who dances perreo is read as submissive and sexually available, creating a discourse that also polices female sexuality.

84 “WAKE UP!!! This leech just wants to bleed you dry of your money… and aside from that he’s got you dancing around doggy-style like an imbecile.”
85 “Doggy style dancing forbidden in this zone…for a world without reggaetón.”
86 “This beat is one which ignorant, sex-hungry men and women dance to, and they’re manipulated by consumerism. Who thinks women should be gold digging pushovers anyway?”
Gasolinera references Daddy Yankee’s number one song and crossover hit “Gasolina,” thus defining women in terms of a particular track, the lyrics of which, furthermore, have been a source of debate on account of being rife with double entendres and sexual innuendos. Thus, the construction of the image in Figure 5.4 crystalizes reggaetón’s role as a site for debates over indecency, sexual provocation, and moral corruption. The image’s critique of the perreo dance echoes moves to ban underground in Puerto Rico during mid-1990s and later censor reggaetón content in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic during the early 2000s. The discourse of reggaetón as a corrupting influence particularly targets women within a punitive patriarchal narrative about sexuality and decency in public spaces (only the woman, the gasolinera, is reduced to definition by the “Gasolina” song though both a man and a woman are shown dancing to it in Figure 5.4). As a dance style found in clubs and parties, perreo has provoked moral panic for decades, and yet, is not so different from other Caribbean forms of dance, such as whining or even hip hop grinding or juiking. Perreo has been debated not only by reggaetón’s anti-fans but among enthusiasts of the genre as well. But the online anti-fan visual culture uses digital cut and paste to make opposition to sexism and consumerism on the one hand, and enjoyment of reggaetón on the other, seem mutually exclusive. The target is not only reggaetón music, but those who dance to it as well. Here, anti-fans conveniently ignore the pleasure derived from dancing and depict reggaetón as a corrupting influence and those who dance to it as the corrupted. Hence, the anti-reggaetón images created, modified, circulated, exchanged, and posted online reveal some of the ways in which anti-fans locate and also negotiate the boundaries of sex, gender, taste, ethnic and cultural identity as they mediate reggaetón.

Concluding Discussion

The online circulation of images analyzed in this chapter highlight how these images are
able to perform a signifying function in the online anti-reggaetón environment. The images we
have looked at serve as a signpost for identity as well as a way to make an argument visually.
Their significance is two-fold in that they not only allow anti-fans to speak back to popular
culture representations they do not identify with, but they also demonstrate the function of anti-
fans as cultural producers in the digital realm. The purpose of reggaetón anti-fan sites is in some
ways to circumvent the culture industry’s gatekeepers. Ironically, several images I have analyzed
here espouse arguments based on essentialist high/low culture arguments of aesthetic taste even
though they wage their arguments by creating amateur low-resolution renderings of visual
culture that would not be considered high art by the very standards they seek to uphold.

Because these online sites and spaces are often associated with low aesthetic worth and
little visual cultural capital, they can easily be ignored by academics. Yet, arguably, they are a
central location of identity negotiation and formation as well as an alternative public sphere
where anti-fans speak back to, interact with, and produce images and text that resist the
apparatus that seeks to define them. These are spaces of rampant controversy, debate, and
conflict as well as of solidarity, community, and fan culture; and the producers and users of these
spaces are underrepresented as cultural producers on the Internet. The anti-fans I examine are
resistant to commercially produced genres like reggaetón, and yet they cling as fans to other
commercial genres and rework images from popular culture to make their case. There are levels
of containment and static, closed, and essentialist notions that work against, and with, flexible,
malleable, changing, fragmented, and negotiated identities. These are creative and expressive
spaces that should continue to be critically examined. Without a doubt, the anti-fans studied here
have claimed these spaces by using digital production and representation for their own ends and
as I have aimed to demonstrate in this chapter, the realm of digital visual culture can be used to
challenge the representational authority of the culture industry as well as the constructs of commodified difference that work to constrain heterogeneous representations of Latinidad within mainstream media and popular culture.
Figures

Figure 5.1 Instances of global and national anti-reggaetón alliance imagery.

Figure 5.2 Remaking pro-reggaetón images as anti-fan signage.
Figure 5.3 Reggaetón’s anti-fans remake the genres’ icons as monsters.

Figure 5.4 Policing the sexualization of reggaetón’s dance—el perreo.
CHAPTER 6
DADDY YANKEE’S ARMY OF ONE: THE HIGH STAKES OF COMMODIFYING LATINIDAD THROUGH REGGAETÓN

Introduction: Daddy Yankee “The Big Boss” World Concert Tour

Reggaetón superstar, Daddy Yankee, kicked off the U.S. cities portion of his “The Big Boss Tour” concert in Rosemont, Illinois at the Allstate Arena on August 31, 2007. Barreling down on the crowd from the rafters above, Daddy Yankee descended upon the stage in an enormous green US Army helicopter engulfed in rising smoke and pyrotechnic induced flames (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxmX4O6CbfY>). Daddy Yankee’s grand stage entrance was accompanied by video footage screened simultaneously in the backdrop <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=326MxjeJ4g0>, which featured the lead track, “Jefe” [Boss], from Daddy Yankee’s second studio-album release, El Cartel: The Big Boss (Cartel Records/Interscope Records 2007). Daddy Yankee’s fans quickly raised their phones and cameras in the air to digitally capture their reggaetón idol in all his glory (see Figure 6.1). Daddy Yankee stepped out from the Army chopper and onto the stage adorned with heavy wrist bling, aviator shades, and a costumed black jacket mock-up of an army officer’s official uniform embellished with military stars and medals, as well as flashy embroidered patch decals with US Army insignia (see Figures 6.2, 6.3, 6.4). Beyond representing himself as the reputed commander-in-chief of the reggaetón genre, Daddy Yankee’s deployment of various military signifiers throughout his performance arguably worked to visually encode and inscribe him

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87 “The Big Boss” tour was scheduled for concert dates in 18 US cities—most in major Latino markets—and at least 12 countries within the Latin American market including: Chicago, IL; Boston, MA; New York, NY; Washington, D.C.; Uncasville, CT; Miami, Fl; Orlando, Fl; Hidalgo, TX; Laredo, TX; San Antonio, TX; Phoenix, AZ; Las Vegas, NV; Fresno, CA; San Francisco, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Dallas, TX; Houston, TX; Tijuana, Mexico; Guadalajara, Mexico; Monterrey, Mexico; Mexico City, Mexico; Guatemala; Tegucigalpa, Honduras; San Pedro Sula, Honduras; El Salvador; Nicaragua; Costa Rica; Caracas, Venezuela; Maracaibo, Venezuela; Panama; Bogota, Colombia; Cali, Colombia; Quito, Ecuador; Guayaquil, Ecuador; Cuenca, Ecuador; Lima, Peru; Santiago, Chile; Provincia, Chile; and Bolivia (<http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/1052748/daddy-yankee-reveals-us-tour-plans> and Billboard Magazine advertisement, May 19, 2007: 52).
within a cultural imperialist narrative of global domination. Daddy Yankee also incorporated similar graphic design renderings and photographs of helicopters, international maps, military equipment, and camouflaged clothing in the CD jacket insert of his *El Cartel: The Big Boss* album. In one photo DY poses, as if plotting secretive military tactics, and strategically charts his next target market territories on an expansive world map (see Figure 6.5).

This particular Daddy Yankee (2007) CD release was the sophomore full studio album follow-up to his initial mainstream crossover success with *Barrio Fino* (2004, VI Music/El Cartel Records)—the top selling Latin album of 2005—and *Barrio Fino En Directo* (2005, Interscope Records/El Cartel Records)—the top selling Latin album of 2006 (Cobo 2007: 54, 56). In anticipation of the (June 5, 2007) release of *El Cartel: The Big Boss*, *Billboard Magazine* dedicated the cover (see Figure 6.6) and a 14-page spread (May 19, 2007) to promoting Daddy Yankee’s “The Big Boss” album (Interscope Records/El Cartel Records) and subsequent tour (produced by Henry Cardenas and CMN Cardenas Marketing Network). Daddy Yankee’s tour promoter, Henry Cardenas, discussed the prime market strategy behind his concert tour:

[He] appeals to Latinos and the general market, so it’s a winning situation. Another advantage is that he appeals to kids. So it’s a family event, which gives us a bigger market (Peters 2007: 60).

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88 President and creative director of Elastic People, Carlos Perez, worked on the graphic design for Daddy Yankee’s *El Cartel: The Big Boss* CD as well as on several music videos throughout the span of Daddy Yankee’s career. In an interview concerning the concept behind Daddy Yankee’s music video production for the song “Rompe,” Carlos Perez explained: “This was a very high quality production, and the final product will be representative of a great video where Daddy Yankee and reggaetón are featured as a liaison between east and west coasts in the U.S. and Latin America,” (<http://www.hispanicbusiness.com/2005/12/8/elastic_peoples_carlos_perez_directs_new.htm>). As evoked within Perez’s discursive framing of Daddy Yankee as “a liaison between east and west coasts in the U.S. and Latin America,” Daddy Yankee’s narrative as a successful Latin crossover act was being constructed in relation to his ability to conquer and/or dominate an expanding consumer markets—from consumers in US to global consumers, particularly across markets in Latin America. This discourse of global domination became increasingly visible after his 2004 commercial crossover into the US mainstream popular music market. According to music journalist Ayala Ben-Yehuda (2007), the strategy for turning Daddy Yankee into a “household name” involved promotion in English and Spanish that would “make Daddy Yankee visible from the store to the street, the beach to the Internet, to Europe and Asia” (Ben-Yehuda 2007: 60). However, it was on the *El Cartel: The Big Boss* (2007) album and during the subsequent “Big Boss” world tour, that this discourse of global domination began to be increasingly iterated through images of Daddy Yankee that were directly incorporating visual US military references. And prior to this, scenes for the music video that Carlos Perez directed for Daddy Yankee’s song “Rompe” (2005) had also included: “missiles, military trucks, barrels of fire, water, a huge boom box and many abandoned cars. The filming took place during the day and night, utilizing a huge crane to capture multiple special effects, auto explosions and wall demolition” (*ibid*).
We booked a lot of general-market advertising...I bought at least 40% in general markets. I was trying to reach the second and third Latino generation. For instance, in Chicago, Miami and New York, we spent money at the Power stations. I had never done that for regular Latino performers—and it worked (ibid).

Thus, pointing directly to the second-generation and higher bicultural Latinos, Cardenas highlights the primary consumer market that Daddy Yankee is able to attract for concert sales, but that is also a highly attractive target market segment for the corporate advertisers sponsoring Daddy Yankee’s concert tour. Accordingly, some of the corporate sponsors and/or affiliates with visible logo signage at the concert held at the Allstate Arena in Rosemont, Illinois included: Univision’s Hurban radio station 93.5 La Kalle, Citgo gasoline, the U.S. Army, Orbit gum, Pepsi, The Daily Herald, Budweiser, Ford, and American Airlines (see Figures 6.7-6.12). These highlighted corporate branding strategies present themselves as completely innocuous within this naturalistic concert setting where all eyes are presumably on the headline performer Daddy Yankee; and yet, opportunities abound for concert-goers to ubiquitously encounter and interact with multiple brands and corporate sponsors specifically interpellating them as Daddy Yankee’s audience, but also clearly targeting them as Latin-branded consumers. In particular, it becomes increasingly evident from the use of bilingual advertising signage and the incorporation of pan-Latin/(o) (and/or mock Spanish) taglines such as “Latinotón” that the intended consumer is a younger bicultural Latin(a/o) who is already familiar with the reggaetón genre.

Daddy Yankee serves as the intermediary or liaison through which these bicultural Latino millennial consumers are being hailed, but also being directed to the corporate sponsors and brands on hand both inside and outside of the concert venue. Daddy Yankee’s audiences encounter overt marketing displays and corporate signage from the moment they approach the concert venue. For instance, at the Allstate Arena the graffiti-detailed Sports Utility Vehicle branded with the La Kalle 93.5 logo and tagline (see Figure 6.7) immediately captured the
attention of concert-goers with blaring reggaetón music that could be heard from the parking lot. The Latinotón CITGO banner displays were also located outside the venue where attendees could take pictures to commemorate their Daddy Yankee tour experience (see Figure 6.8).

Inside the venue there were multiple Daddy Yankee merchandise booths and several marketing displays bearing his likeness as well as his concert tour logos (see Figures 6.9-6.10). Thus, the seamless integration of Daddy Yankee’s image across multiple advertisement interfaces—encountered by his fans throughout the concert experience—is illustrative of just some of the pan-Latin branding strategies that are strategically embedded to discursively signal to the bicultural, bilingual millennial target demographic in ways that are seemingly ubiquitous and innocuous.

As harmless as these observable marketing campaigns may appear prima facie, I argue that there are extremely high stakes at hand in the interpellation and targeting of bicultural Latino millennials through reggaetón and reggaetón artists like Daddy Yankee. This becomes increasingly evident through the strong US military presence at Daddy Yankee’s concert, visible through both a direct marketing approach and via more encoded means throughout the concert. Hence, it is critically important to decode and deconstruct the overt and covert ways in which the US military is able to assert its presence, hail, and interpellate Daddy Yankee’s expansive audiences as potential recruits for military service in ways that are not typically seen at mainstream or general-market (read: non-Latino) concerts. This study’s examination of the US military’s marketing push toward Latinos attending Daddy Yankee’s concerts extends existing scholarly literature^89^ and the historical record, which has demonstrated the uneven ways in which Latinos and Blacks have been targeted for military service in the US.

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Military Propaganda Disseminated Via Daddy Yankee’s “The Big Boss” Concert Tour

In addition to Daddy Yankee’s use of military costuming and high-tech machinery during his grand stage entrance, he also incorporated an on-stage screening of a video [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=326MxjeJ4g0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=326MxjeJ4g0) that on the immediate surface presents itself as a promotional tool for the artist, but is arguably a direct marketing tool for multiple branches of the US military. In the video clip, there is a highly convincing emergency air-to-ground sequence in which Daddy Yankee flies in on an official Army helicopter and lands on a tarmac surrounded by Air Force planes, other Army helicopters, and two formations of soldiers holding their weapons and ammunition and marching in lock step upon Daddy Yankee’s arrival. Daddy Yankee’s song “Jefe” [Boss] plays in the background as the soldiers continue marching on either side of Daddy Yankee to bolster his image as the “Jefe” as he boards yet another Army helicopter—which is presumably the same helicopter that Daddy Yankee lands on the concert stage if one is to completely suspend disbelief (see Figure 6.13).

Once in the helicopter Daddy Yankee flies off and is filmed wearing an Army helmet as he communicates with other military personnel over a headset. Throughout the video clip, the camera mostly focuses on capturing shots of Daddy Yankee, the various military aircraft with “Army” and “Air Force” insignia on them, and the faces of the soldiers who all appear to be Black, Latino, and/or Afro-Latino. This short promotional video operates discursively on (2008) asserts that only estimates exist regarding the number of Latino armed services members prior to the Vietnam War, however, Latinos engaged in major combat from the war of 1812 to the present (Dansby, Stewart, and Webb 2001: xix cited in Lutz 2008: 169). Moreover, Lutz cites Pew Hispanic Center (March 27, 2003) data from a report titled, “Hispanics in the Military” (Pew Hispanic Center 2003: 5) demonstrating that: “Latinos tend to be overrepresented in personnel who—most directly handle weapons, while they tend to be underrepresented in technical occupations such as electronics and communications” (Lutz 2008: 170). Lutz (2008) explains that as early as the Revolutionary War, the US government allowed African Americans to serve “whenever the military needed manpower” (170). Yet, in the midst of widespread discrimination facing African American soldiers during the Vietnam War, “blacks and the poor were serving as cannon fodder” (Armor 1996:9 cited in Lutz 2008: 173). Asch et al. 2009 also cited studies indicating that: “blacks were more likely to serve in combat-related assignments and were more likely to suffer casualties during the Vietnam conflict than whites (Badillo and Curry, 1976; Gimbel and Booth, 1996 cited in Asch et al. 2009: 1). Even as the draft ended in 1973 and the military turned to an all-volunteer force, “the proportion of blacks in the military did grow substantially” (Levy 1998 cited in Lutz 2008: 173).
multiple levels. On the one hand, it visually recodes Daddy Yankee outside the frame of his typical urban persona and into the creative direction of the “Big Boss” tour and album, which constructs and deploys a discourse of global domination using highly realistic military signifiers and iconography to lend credibility and representative authority to his commercially rebranded image. As Daddy Yankee deploys these visual codes of domination and imperialism through his discursive linkages to the US military, he works to recast himself as the “jefe” or big boss that first conquered the reggaetón genre and now seeks to conquer the world as a multiplatform entertainment mogul. And yet, this video also functions as a highly effective marketing tool for the US military, which has been increasingly vying for the attention of Daddy Yankee’s core audience or target demographic of bicultural Latino millennials. Thus, screening this promotional video at concerts across multiple US cities—including major Latin/(o) markets—where Daddy Yankee’s core audience is presumably in attendance, suggests that it also serves the US military as a prescreening tool to reach a large pool of highly attractive would-be recruits from the precise ethnic and racial demographic they seek to target and hail.

Arguably, it is no small coincidence that as Daddy Yankee plays GI Joe in his promotional video for “Jefe,” that the soldiers—or actors, cast in the video to authenticate his position of leadership—are all from the ethnic and racial groups that the US military claims are currently underrepresented among their rank and file. Although not the case for all, for some concert attendees who see these soldiers on screen who presumably look like them, marching next to their reggaetón idol Daddy Yankee; it could potentially provide some points of racial and ethnic identification as well as a space for some to even envision themselves in a military uniform. Hence, Daddy Yankee’s presence in the video also works discursively to capture the
attention of his audiences by exposing them to more glamorized images and discursive constructs of the US military and of himself.

The US Military’s Covert Marketing Strategies Aimed Directly at Bicultural Latino Millennials

Within much of the recent advertising discourse devoted to the Hispanic or Latino market, Hispanic marketing “experts” have drawn attention to the new Latin boom around bicultural Latino millennials, who are increasingly being targeted by the advertising and culture industries and largely being constructed as a consumer market “gold mine” or “gold rush” (see Chapter 2). Accordingly, this discernable turn toward a younger Latino population and/or market is also evident in the US military’s more recent promotional strategies. For example, mun2 (NBCUniversal/Comcast Corporation) is one of the cable networks specifically producing content with a bicultural Latino millennial audience in mind. One of the popular music countdown shows featured on mun2 (pronounced mundos) titled, 2rslvj (phonetically pronounced “tu eres el veejay”), devoted an entire episode to promotional advertisement for the US Army that was cleverly disguised as regular programming content. On the <www.mun2.tv> web site there is an archived version of this particular episode, broken into a series of three shorter video clips (see Figure 6.14), with all of the previously aired music video content removed (<http://www.mun2.tv/shows/2rslvj-178> part 1, <http://www.mun2.tv/shows/2rslvj-177> part 2, <http://www.mun2.tv/shows/2rslvj-176> part 3).

In this episode, the mun2 video DJ or VJ (veejay), Guad, interviews a 24-year-old US Army recruiter, Sergeant Jose Mendez, who at that time had already served 6.5 years in the military and completed multiple rotations or “tours” in Iraq and Afghanistan. Within the narrative structure of the episode viewers are led to believe that “Guad gets personalized training

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90 It was not until the last few seconds of the 2rslvj episode that a caption appeared on the bottom of the screen in small black font, revealing: “promotional consideration furnished by the U.S. Army.”
from Sergeant Mendez of the U.S. Army” (<http://www.mun2.tv/shows/2rs1vj-178>). Accordingly, Guad is dressed in a black “Army Strong” t-shirt and athletic gear in preparation for the military boot-camp style exercises that Sergeant Mendez has prepared for him in this episode to test if he is really “Army Strong.” Over the course of the three aforementioned video clips from the 2rs1vj episode (lasting a total of 8 minutes and 20 seconds), either Guad or Sergeant Mendez repeats the phrase “Army Strong” at least 12 times. Overall, Guad’s interview provides a platform for Sergeant Mendez to publicly endorse the US Army from a recruiter’s perspective. Mun2 interviewer, Guad, throws questions to Sergeant Mendez such as: “What does it mean to be actually Army Strong?,” “You’ve become a leader in the army…how has the army helped you become that leader?, and “You’re a recruiter, so what do you say to young men and women who want to join the army?.” In return, Sergeant Mendez is able to respond with a soft-sell army recruitment pitch directed at bicultural Latino millennial audiences who are presumably more inclined to watch this program. Throughout the episode, both Guad and Sergeant Mendez conduct the interview in Spanish and English, often code-switching casually between the two. Sergeant Mendez also authenticates his position of army interlocutor by intermittently incorporating routine military abbreviations such as ACU (army combat uniform).

Throughout the interview, Sergeant Mendez promotes concepts such as “leadership,” “inspiration,” “responsibility,” “triumph,” or “strength” as highly desirable and virtuous intangible benefits unquestionably developed through US military service. In doing so, he strategically routes around any mention of wars, violence, or combat, and discursively capitalizes

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91 Each of the three 2rs1vj video clip segments also ends with a voiceover from mun2 host Guad stating, “Develop the strength you have within, there’s strong and then there’s army strong.” The Army Strong logo then appears onscreen as Guad also directs viewers and/or potential recruits to the <www.goarmy.com> web site.
on generally positive signifiers of “hope,” “courage,” “honor,” “security,” and “freedom.”

Accordingly, Sergeant Mendez also emphasizes to Guad and the viewers that:

> We just don’t do warfare operations, we do humanitarian aid…it’s a [US Army uniform] a symbol of hope, it’s a symbol of freedom. Te recuerdas el earthquake in Haiti? [Do you recall the earthquake in Haiti?] Those were all Army guys on the ground providing humanitarian aid for people in need. You just distinguish yourself career-wise when you serve in the U.S. Army. Your credentials just skyrocket from there. You have that work experience. You have that leadership capability to be in any kind of situation….and own it!” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qa0QN2I8NTY>).

After Sergeant Mendez promotes the many virtues of serving in the U.S. Army, Guad’s response is “cool,” after which he casually throws to a commercial break. Within this interview, Guad never probes Sergeant Mendez on any potential dangers or irreparable consequences to signing up for US military service. On the contrary, the interview between Guad and Sergeant Mendez is structured to promote the US Army within the narrative frame of light-hearted banter and entertainment content that is characteristic for a music video countdown show. Thus, similar to Daddy Yankee’s concert, this Latin-branded mun2 content is also packaged for audiences as entertainment. As the 2rs1vj episode engages viewers through popular culture and entertainment content on the surface, any underlying pro-military messages appear far less obvious and far less threatening. Appropriately, in this context, Martin and Steuter (2010) would emphasize how:

> Popular culture is a particularly effective propaganda tool because when people are participating in entertainment activities, they are often less suspicious or skeptical of political agendas than when reacting to news media or government. There is a strong sense, supported by the entertainment industries, that one shouldn’t read too much into cultural products that are ‘just entertainment.’ Nevertheless, powerful ideological messages of militarism are communicated through popular culture, sometimes through unconscious reproduction of negative stereotypes and values, and sometimes as part of orchestrated agendas (52).

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92 Here, Sergeant Mendez’s approach to promoting the US military follows the protocol recommended to the US military by Asch et al. (2009) for addressing “high quality” Hispanic recruits who are traditionally high school graduates with the higher scores on the AFQT (Armed Forces Qualification Test). Recognizing that the US military must compete for this segment of youth Latinos with the opportunities available to them in the civilian labor market, Asch et al. (2009) recommend that in the military’s address to them they should specifically highlight “the nonpecuniary benefits of service, such as leadership opportunities, greater responsibility, and opportunities to serve one’s country” (120).
In order for Guad to retain the standard narrative structure of 2rs/hj—a show where viewers expect to find music content—he frames the episode as one in which Sergeant Mendez will also serve as guest VJ and pick his favorite music videos for the countdown. Guad then poses questions like: “You’ve done all kinds of stuff, but have you ever hosted a music show…a TV show?,” “Is it hard when you are out on deployment to catch the latest music and stuff…like how do you keep up with like what’s playing on the radio?,” “So, you have to listen to what was hot when you left?,” and “So you’re a young guy and you like music…from your point of view what does it take to make a good music video?.” While Guad directs the viewer’s attention back to the music portion of each segment, he also facilitates transitional moments for Sergeant Mendez to promote the military as a viable career option to 2rs/hj viewers.

In one illustrative exchange, Sergeant Mendez follows Guad’s cues to seamlessly transition the conversation topic from music videos back to his military pitch:

**Sergeant Mendez:** “Any music video que tiene la playa [that has the beach]…I’m down for that…any day of the week. And a yacht or two, you know.

**Guad:** “Yeah, keep going, keep going. You got two very good elements, but…”

**Sergeant Mendez:** “Vacation and definitely the family.”

**Guad:** Okay, Okay…you know and speaking about family…What would you say is the role that your family and your community play in your life as a soldier in the U.S. Army?

**Sergeant Mendez:** That’s a good question, Guad. I gotta say that it’s the backbone of it…of being a soldier. My driving force to do what I do every single day is to provide security for my community, provide security for my family, and blanket them with the protection of the U.S. Army.
Here, Sergeant Mendez persuasively taps into the affective desire to protect one’s family and translates that into a broader level of desired protection for one’s community—procured, in this particularly framed narrative, through an encoded suggestion to viewer to consider joining the US Army.

Additionally, on the mun2 Web site, <www.mun2.tv>, there is a visual narrative that is similarly constructed around family, which directs prospective recruits to extend the leadership skills they’ve developed within their family structure to future leadership positions within the US military. The following screen shots (see Figures 6.15-6.18) reconstruct the sequence of online advertising currently sponsored by the US Army on the mun2 homepage. These ads effectively demonstrate how military recruitment messages are being strategically constructed and encoded to target both bicultural Latino millennials and their families. Operating within the fluid discursive space of the mun2 Web site that simultaneously integrates targeted display ads within bicultural Latino pop culture, these ads are acutely tailored using bilingual messaging and appealing photos, logos, animations, text, and graphics that signal to potential younger-generation Latino US Army recruits as well as to their later generation parents.93 Directly engaging parents, the ad calls for them to “Discover how your children can be leaders.” Then, specifically addressing bicultural Latino youth the ad implores them to “Follow your path to leadership.” This strategic address to both parents and their children has been deployed in previous US Army ad campaigns. For example, Martin and Steuter (2010) recall the “$10 million campaign that urged parents in 2005 to learn more about the services—to ‘make it a two-way

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93 Efforts to engage Latino families through a bilingual address have been previously noted offline as well as online. Journalist, Liz Fox, detailed that in 2004: “Today, Latinos make up 11 percent of the armed forces and the Defense Department spends approximately $27 million of its $180 million recruitment budget on bilingual personnel and Spanish-language publications, according to department statistics. In many recruitment pamphlets and on many websites, young Latino recruits appear with parental figures, because officials know that family is a key component of Latinos’ lives and usually that’s who needs the most cajoling” (<http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/article_1640.shtml>).
conversation’ with their children who want to join the military” (147). The online mun2 ads, in particular, also echo some key recruitment points highlighted in the RAND National Defense Research Institute (2009) study titled, “Military Enlistment of Hispanic Youth: Obstacles and Opportunities” (Asch et al. 2009). RAND’s researchers specifically underscored the importance of strategically working the family into recruitment strategies, explicitly stating:

It is common to argue today that the military can no longer recruit just the individual; the military must recruit the family as well. This may be especially true of Hispanics, whose family ties are perhaps particularly strong. Future research on the factors determining Hispanic enlistments should pay close attention to the role of the family in determining attitudes toward the military as a career (120).

In many ways, these recommended recruitment strategies, specifically designed to target Latinos, are also drawing from and reproducing Hispanic-marketing views that have traditionally emphasized strong Latino kinship ties. Arguably, such marketing views have often led to overdetermined correlations between Latino kinship ties and the decision-making behaviors of Latinos both within and outside of the marketplace. And yet, it is not surprising to see the direct influence of the advertising industries filtering down into the military’s strategies for increasing recruitment among Latinos in the US. Martin and Steuter (2010) explain that after September 11th, the 9th largest ad agency in the world, Leo Burnett Worldwide, was hired to launch the “Army of One” promotional campaign and that they “engaged the Hispanic-owned Cartel Creative with a $380 million contract to help ‘penetrate’ the Hispanic market” (146). Thus, the US military is sparing no expense and leaving no strategy unturned in their efforts to fulfill their...

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94 Journalist, Deborah Davis (2007), also describes how the Pentagon previously hired market-research firms to develop ad campaigns specifically appealing to Latinos and “the issues they care most about: family pride, education and citizenship” (<http://www.metroactive.com/metro/09.19.07/news-0738.html>). Davis elaborates further on this point, explaining: “Today, the Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force recruitment campaigns focus largely on education and benefits to families. The Army’s campaign, created by Cartel Impacto, a cutting-edge firm from San Antonio, Texas, uses the firm’s proprietary ‘barrio anthropology’ and grassroots ‘viral and guerilla marketing’ techniques to ‘go deep into the neighborhoods and barrios’ in order to tell Latino families how the military can help them have the kind of life they want in America. ‘We address the core issues of why they left their country in the first place,’ says a Cartel Impacto spokeswoman, who did not want her name published. ‘You have to conduct your outreach carefully,’ she says, ‘using PTAs as an entry point,’ as well as ‘local Hispanic groups that the newly arrived would look to’” (ibid).
current mandate to aggressively target Latino recruits, and ultimately, to increase the proportion of Latinos enlisted among their ranks.

**RAND’S 2005 Briefing and 2009 Follow-up Study, “Military Enlistment of Hispanic Youth: Obstacles and Opportunities”**

In addition to hiring outside advertising agencies, the US military also has its own Joint Advertising and Marketing Research and Studies Office (JAMRS) within the Department of Defense, specifically charged with studying “factors affecting youth perceptions of the military and their propensity to enlist” (Asch et al. 2009: 22). Of particular interest to federally-funded research bodies, such as the JAMRS Office or the National Defense Research Institute (RAND Corporation), are demographic data on the Hispanic population from the US Census, Hispanic high school graduation rates across the US, recent US civilian employment statistics, past recruitment figures, and procurement polls related to military service. These research bodies gather these data sets and attempt to identify any potential obstructions to the US military’s current recruitment of targeted populations—including Latinos/as in the US—and they subsequently develop recommendations for the Department of Defense to follow in order to improve their efforts to eventually enlist Service members from these targeted groups.

**Recruitment Diversity Reflecting Parity of Diversity in the General Population**

In a RAND briefing titled, “What Factors Affect the Military Enlistment of Hispanic Youth?: A Look at Enlistment Qualifications,” Asch et al. (2005) examined potential contributing factors to the underrepresentation of Hispanic recruits in the US military at the time (2). Between 2001 and 2005, the US military witnessed an 18% increase in Hispanic enlistment overall, and a 26% increase in the US Army alone (Alvarez 2006). While Asch et al. (2005) had also observed an increase in representation of Hispanic military recruits over the past decade; they argued that Hispanics were still underrepresented among military enlistees—in direct
relation to their demographic composition of the US population (2). Furthermore, Asch et al. (2009) noted that that the US Army failed to meet its recruiting goals in 2005, 2006, and 2007 (xxii). To further illustrate their point, Asch et al. (2009) recalled that:

In 2007, Hispanics made up 17.0 percent of the general population (ages 18 to 40) but only 11.4 percent of Army enlistment contracts and 15 percent of Navy enlistment contracts. While the trend is upward (in 1994, 6.6 percent of Army contracts and 8.9 percent of Navy contracts were Hispanic), *Hispanics are still underrepresented* (emphasis added, xv).

Accordingly, this noted discrepancy in Hispanic enlistment was described as “an ongoing concern of policymakers” and that pursuant to the goals of the Department of Defense (DoD), the “armed forces should approximate diversity in the general population” (*ibid*).

While the DoD declares that the armed forces should approximate diversity found in the general population, there are several indications that particular populations of color are still being heavily targeted for military enlistment even though these groups have already reached levels of parity, or are even overrepresented across certain branches of the armed forces. For example, the RAND (2009) study on Hispanic enlistment in the military exposed that, “*black women are overrepresented in the military (in the Army in particular)*” and that “Relative to their distribution in the services overall, *blacks are overrepresented in the Army* and slightly underrepresented in the Marines and Air Force” (emphasis added, 55, 71). Furthermore, applying linear regression models to data sets representing the distribution of service members across the armed forces, Asch et al. (2009) found that: “[H]ispanics are underrepresented in the Army and Air Force, and *overrepresented in the Navy and the Marines*” (emphasis added, 71).95 And yet, the overarching recommendations of the RAND (2009) study—intent on increasing Hispanic military enlistment—clearly emphasized that:

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95 These findings were also confirmed in Segal and Segal’s (2004) study, in which they cited that: “Hispanic representation has been greatest among the Marine Corps, where it reached almost 15 percent among enlisted personnel in 2001; the Hispanic share is lowest among Air Force personnel, where it hovered at about 4 percent until the late 1990s” (23).
Faced with the choice of otherwise identical whites, Hispanics, and blacks, *the military should choose Hispanics and blacks*. Moreover, faced with the choice of somewhat higher-quality whites versus somewhat lower-quality Hispanics and blacks, *the military should choose the Hispanics and blacks*. Hispanic and black recruits will yield more man-years (due to lower attrition and higher retention) and more leaders. (emphasis added, 118).

Additionally, Asch et al. (2009) also suggested that: “it would be worthwhile to direct more recruiting resources to black and Hispanic markets. Such recruiting resources might include advertising dollars, assignment of recruiters, and guidance to recruiters about successful recruiting strategies” (*ibid*). Based on the aforementioned recommendations made by the military to specifically increase efforts to target Blacks and Latinos for enlistment at a time when they were already overrepresented in certain branches of the armed forces, suggests that motivating factors for the DoD’s recruitment of these targeted populations extends beyond their expressed premise to “approximate diversity in the general population.”

**Targeting Noncitizen Hispanic Recruits**

The RAND (2009) study on Hispanic military enlistment also revealed that among Latino recruit targets, Hispanics noncitizens were considered particularly desirable. Asch et al. (2009) described recently immigrated Hispanics as healthier than US born Hispanics, citing both an *immigration hypothesis*—“that only the healthiest individuals can undertake moving to another country, legally or especially illegally, resulted in better health among immigrants”—as well as an *acculturation hypothesis*—“that immigrants start with healthier lifestyles, eschewing smoking, alcohol, and unhealthy ‘Americanized’ diets…the longer immigrants live in the U.S., the more acculturated they become, taking on more unhealthy behaviors” (52). As potential noncitizen recruits were considered healthier on average than Hispanic US citizen recruits in this study, researchers (Asch et al. 2009) also claimed that noncitizen Hispanics were more inclined to pass weight standards for enlistment (119). Not being able to pass weight standards was one of
the primary factors outlined in this study as a considerable obstacle impeding increased Hispanic military enlistment. Therefore, the way in which Asch et al. (2009) distinctly pointed to noncitizens as a “healthier” Hispanic alternative for targeted military recruitment bears significant relevance in this context (ibid). Asch et al. (2009) directly recommended that the US military consider tapping this alternative recruitment pool, stating:

The final alternative is to recruit from healthier populations. Youth with more education (especially with some college) and noncitizens are more likely to pass weight standards. Enlistment programs that fast-track the citizenship of immigrants serving in the military and recruitment programs targeting college-bound youth may have the added benefits of improving the likelihood of youth meeting weight standards or of improving Hispanic representation among enlistments. However, the possibility of fast-tracking immigrant citizenship should be approached with caution; specifically targeting immigrants to serve in the military could produce strong political and social backlash (119-120).

Despite their awareness of the impending backlash potentially attached to targeting noncitizens for military recruitment, Asch et al. (2009) emphasized additional reasons for the military to directly pursue this particular demographic, including higher retention and lower attrition rates. They specifically cited the Hattiangadi, Lee, and Quester (2004) study that had observed the lowest attrition rates among Hispanics recruits (cited in Asch et al. 2009: 68). They also cited the Hattiangadi et al. (2005) study, which found lower (3-month and 36-month) attrition rates for noncitizen Hispanic Marines over those with US citizenship status (cited in Asch et al. 2009: 68).

Currently, it is not required for one to have US citizenship status for enlistment, but an enlistee must be a legal, permanent resident (i.e., green card holder) (Asch et al. 2009: 21). It was shortly after 9/11 that several governmental policies and legislative actions increased pathways for noncitizens to serve in the US military. Sciubba (2011) explains:

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96 Aside from weight, other named barriers to increased Hispanic military recruitment included lower high school graduation rates among Hispanics and lower AFQT (Armed Forces Qualification Test) scores (Asch et al. 2009: xix).
97 Hattiangadi, Lee, and Quester (2004) observed that similar executive orders were also signed during previous wars as well, including the Gulf War and the Vietnam war, as US citizenship was previously fast-tracked for over 100,000 noncitizens enlisted in the armed forces (Wallace 2002 cited in Hattiangadi, Lee, and Quester 2004: 17).
Less than a year after 9/11, President George W. Bush signed an executive order accelerating citizenship for noncitizens who had served in the military since the 2001 World Trade Center attacks, instead of requiring three years of service to become eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship. If they have permanent U.S. residency (a green card), noncitizens may serve in the military (104).

Sciubba also highlights the induction of the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (MAVNI) Pilot Recruiting Program that sought to “accelerate citizenship for people with special language skills, or licensed health care professionals who meet army standards” (ibid). According to Sciubba (2011), the US government had no qualms about accelerating the citizenship status of these noncitizen military recruits at a time when the US military was confronting a particularly challenging recruiting environment and engaging in two simultaneous wars (ibid).

The Military Provision of the DREAM ACT

In addition to the aforementioned efforts to fast-track citizenship status for potential noncitizen recruits, Zimmerman (2011) underscores a specific revision to the bipartisan sponsored DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minor Act) Act, which allegedly replaced a previous community service requirement with a military alternative (15). According to Zimmerman, this provision as outlined would: “permit certain immigrant youth...”

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98 According to the (MLDC) Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2011), the MAVNI program was piloted and authorized by the Secretary of Defense on November 25, 2008 (37). The intention behind implementing the MAVNI program was to expand the: “eligible recruiting market to noncitizens who do not have green cards but are legally present in the U.S. if they are licensed health care professionals or speak at least one of 35 critical foreign languages. This includes noncitizens with certain student or work visas, refugees, asylees, and individuals with temporary protected status. These individuals are then eligible to become naturalized citizens if they serve honorably in an active duty status during a time of ‘armed conflict with a hostile foreign force (8 U.S.C. § 1440), which is invoked by Executive Order” (38). The commission details some particularly noteworthy caveats that can affect those eventually seeking US citizenship status under the MAVNI program:

The current Executive Order is Ex. Or. No. 13,269 of July 3, 2002, 67 Fed. Reg 45,287, July 8, 2002. Therefore, no new legislation was needed to create the MAVNI program, but the program can only be implemented during wartime or hostile conflict to enable the MAVNIs to obtain U.S. citizenship. (Without U.S. citizenship, the MAVNIs would become illegal aliens once their visas expired) (ibid).

Like all service members, the MAVNIs have an eight-year service obligation. Per DoD guidance, the language enlistees must serve at least the first four of those years on active duty. The health care professionals are officers and may serve on active duty or in the Selected Reserve. MAVNI recruits are screened prior to accession, but these procedures are currently under review and are likely to be enhanced. Individuals who failed to serve honorably for at least five years may be subject to the revocation of their citizenship (ibid).
who have grown up in the United States to eventually obtain permanent legal status and become eligible for U.S. citizenship if they go to college or serve in the U.S. military” (ibid). In response, Zimmerman notes that former backers of the DREAM Act—including VAMOS Unidos Youth (organized New York street vendors and their children)—pulled their previous endorsement of the DREAM Act and decried it a clear apparatus for the targeted military recruitment of undocumented Hispanics (ibid). A portion of the exact statement released by VAMOS Unidos Youth via blog, in which they denounced this version of the DREAM Act legislation, declares:

The DREAM ACT is a de facto military draft, forcing undocumented youth to fight in unjust wars in exchange for the recognition as human beings, a Green Card. This is a trick by the politicians, Democratic Party, and DC immigration advocates. The same way many supposed ‘advocates’ for immigrant rights sold out the community with Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR), they now sell us out with the DREAM ACT. We stand against any militarization—whether it is of the border, our communities, or our status. We will not kill innocent people in exchange for Green Cards (<http://warresisters.wordpress.com/2010/09/23/latino-youth-defines-dream-act-as-a-de-facto-military-draft/>).

And yet, Professor Jorge Mariscal (2010), a Vietnam veteran and advocate for Project YANO (Youth and Non-Military Opportunities), claims that the military provision of the DREAM Act did not come to fruition as a modification ex post facto, rather it was an intended part of the legislation from the start. In the documentary, aptly titled, Yo Soy El Army (Amador 2010: Big Noise Films/Producciones Cimarrón), Mariscal argues:

The dream, really, of citizenship is the main the thing that people—that recruiters offer people. Related to that is something called the DREAM Act. Now, the DREAM Act would actually take noncitizen youth, who have been raised here [US], were brought here as children, are bilingual, bicultural, fluent in English, and graduated from high school, that would allow them to serve in the military in exchange for temporary permanent residency. What one has to realize about the DREAM Act is that the military option wasn’t attached. The military option was there at the beginning...the Pentagon helped write the DREAM Act...that’s what people need to realize.

The danger of the DREAM Act is this…and we all support legalizing undocumented youth here, who grew up here, and have done nothing wrong here…in terms of criminal activity. The danger is as educational opportunities shut down, again, the military
becomes the only viable option for getting permanent residency. So, I’m afraid that we are going to see a lot of our youth driven into the military once the DREAM ACT passes (emphasis added, <http://vimeo.com/17170947>).

Although the military provision of the DREAM Act proposes to offer a seemingly stable pathway to legal US citizenship for noncitizen service members after 2 years, the service contract outlined for all enlistees currently requires eight years of mandated military service (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/print_2024.html>).

Furthermore, even having served during these mandated years of military service, it is still possible for noncitizen enlistees to lose this pathway to US citizenship. In fact, journalist Deborah Davis (2007) exposes that:

What recruiters do not tell their targets, however, is that the military itself has no authority to grant citizenship. It forwards their citizenship applications to ICE, which will then scrutinize them and their entire families for up to a year. Recruiters also do not tell their targets that citizenship can be denied for the very same past criminal offenses that the military may have overlooked when admitting them—such as being in the country illegally. Nor do they tell recruits that citizenship can be denied for any kind of dishonorable behavior, which includes refusing to participate in combat (<http://www.metroactive.com/metro/09.19.07/news-0738.html>).

Thus, this persistent looming threat of deportation imposed on noncitizen enlistees, exposes how the DREAM Act’s proposed pathway to permanent residency and/or US citizenship via military service is perhaps more illusory than has been publicly acknowledged. More recently, some Republican politicians have recommended only supporting the military provision attached to the DREAM Act. Over the course of the 2012 primary debates, former US Speaker of the House,  

99 The following clause of the Armed Forces Enlistment/Reenlistment Document (10 a.) details the mandatory eight-year service commitment for all enlistees:  

10. MILITARY SERVICE OBLIGATION, SERVICE ON ACTIVE DUTY AND STOP-LOSS FOR ALL MEMBERS OF THE ACTIVE AND RESERVE COMPONENTS, INCLUDING THE NATIONAL GUARD  
a. FOR ALL ENLISTEES: If this is my initial enlistment, I must serve a total of eight (8) years, unless I am sooner discharged or otherwise extended by the appropriate authority. This eight year service requirement is called the Military Service Obligation. Any part of that service not served on active duty must be served in the Reserve Component of the service in which I have enlisted. If this is a reenlistment, I must serve the number of years specified in this agreement, unless I am sooner discharged or otherwise extended by the appropriate authority. Some laws that affect when I may be ordered to serve on active duty, the length of my service on active duty, and the length of my service in the Reserve Component, even beyond the eight years of my Military Service Obligation, are discussed in the following paragraphs (<http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/forms/eforms/dd0004.pdf>).
Newt Gingrich specifically said “he would support part of the bill that would allow for legal status for those who joined the military” and former Presidential Candidate Mitt Romney concurred, stating “that’s the same position that I have, and that’s that I wouldn’t sign the Dream Act as it currently exists, but I would sign the Dream Act if it were focused on military service” (Foley 2012).

**Military Enlistment of Noncitizen Hispanics**

Taking into account the irrevocable consequences of potentially taking lives and possibly still facing deportation, or even losing one’s own life in the process—it effectively highlights the particularly exorbitant price paid by noncitizen recruits who enlist in the US military. Furthermore, the likelihood that noncitizen enlistees will have to face some of these alarming consequences is considerably increased by sheer virtue of their jobs in the US military, which are vastly limited due to their lack of citizenship status—they are often relegated to the most hazardous duties and positions. Asch et al. (2009) specifically addresses these and other restrictions facing noncitizen enlistees throughout their military service:

First, noncitizens have restricted job opportunities in the U.S. armed forces. They are not eligible for appointment as commissioned or warrant officers, because citizenship is a requirement for these positions. Moreover, they are not eligible for security clearance status, which disqualifies them from a variety of jobs. Second, some noncitizens are not allowed to reenlist100 (Asch et al. 2009: 10).

On the other hand, Lt.-Col. Margaret Stock describes what options are available to noncitizen enlistees: “they will only be eligible to enlist in some jobs—the jobs that are open to noncitizens.

You can’t join the military police, because you have to be a United States citizen to be a military

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100 According to Asch et al. (2009), reenlistment eligibility varies for noncitizens across each respective branch of the US military. For example, in the Air Force reenlistment is restricted for noncitizens “unless they have become citizens during their first term of duty” (10). In addition, the Army “bars ‘aliens who will have in excess of 8 years of Federal military service (excluding the DEP after 1 January 1985) at the expiration of the period for which they are seeking to reenlist’ from reenlistment” (AR 601-280 Headquarters Department of the Army 1999: 7 cited in Asch et al. 2009: 10). Thus, the only military branches that currently do not impose restrictions on the reenlistment of noncitizens “regardless of whether or not they have become citizens while serving” are the Navy and Marine Corps (Asch et al. 2009: 10).
police officer, but you can join the infantry. That’s a job that’s open to noncitizens” (emphasis added, Amador 2010: Big Noise Films/Producciones Cimarrón). In addition, although the data is not disaggregated by citizenship status, the Pew Hispanic Center’s *Hispanics in the Military* (2003) study revealed that: “Latinos are slightly overrepresented among enlisted personnel who most directly handle weapons, making up 17.74 percent of the category ‘Infantry, Gun Crews & Seamanship’ while that category makes up 16.57 percent of the enlisted force” and “Hispanics are somewhat underrepresented in some of the more technical occupations such as electronics and communications” (Pew Hispanic Center 2003: 5).101 More recent DoD Population Representation report figures showed little change for 2011 as Hispanics made up 16.5 percent of the ‘Infantry, Gun Crews & Seamanship’ category, and this category comprised 16.7 percent of the total armed forces overall (Department of Defense 2011b: 41-43). In addition, 2011 data on US military officer accessions shows that Hispanics are underrepresented among Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard officer accessions (Military Leadership Diversity Commission 2011: 29).102

Ultimately, the nondescript way in which noncitizens Hispanic recruits have been incorporated among the rank and file displays some of the shrewdest enlistment tactics deployed by the military on many levels. The military strategically imposes and enforces restrictions around non-citizenship status as it relates to (MOS) Military Occupational Specialties. For

101 Segal and Segal’s (2004) study also emphasized that: “Hispanics are more likely than blacks to be in combat specialties, and less likely than blacks to be in administrative or supply occupations” (23).
102 The (MLDC) Military Leadership Diversity Commission’s (2011) “Decision Paper #1: Outreach and Recruiting,” describes the following standards to be commissioned as an officer in the armed services: “individuals must have U.S. citizenship, must have a bachelor’s degree, and must have completed a commissioning program (ROTC, OCS/OTS, Service academy, or direct appointment), each of which has its own unique standards for admission. Similar to enlistment standards, they must also meet height and weight standards, as well as have no disqualifying medical conditions” (33). Segal and Segal (2004) have noted a gap in proportion of Black and Hispanic officers in the US military, asserting: “As with blacks, the commissioning of Hispanics as officers has lagged well behind their recruitment into enlisted ranks and falls below their share of civilian college graduates. Four percent of officers are Hispanic, compared with 6 percent of college graduates ages 21 to 35 and 10 percent of enlisted personnel” (23). Additionally, Segal and Segal (2004) found that Hispanic officers are more likely than White or Black officers to be “at the lowest officer grades” and that this holds true across the Army, Navy, and the Marine Corps (ibid).
example, MOS restrictions provide official justification for specifically tracking these enlistees without citizenship status into infantry positions, which are presumably the most likely to expose them to casualties and/or fatalities during combat. As observed in the RAND (2009) study on Hispanic military enlistment, it is at the discretion of the Department of Defense as to what enlistment standards they choose to relax and what standards they do not. It is also at the discretion of the DoD as to which groups they decide to target for enlistment. Based on the considerations of Asch et al. (2009), noncitizen Hispanics are constructed as the healthiest population among potential Hispanic recruits, with a greater likelihood to pass weight standards at enlistment, and an established track record of higher retention rates within the armed forces. Asch et al. (2009) basically make the case for the DoD that they can’t afford not to consider noncitizen Hispanics as part of their targeted recruitment strategies. Although Asch et al. (2009) caution the DoD against the potential backlash it could face for overtly targeting noncitizen immigrants, they still call attention to the DoD’s ability to use the fast-track to citizenship (i.e., green card) strategy to specifically attract noncitizens enlistees (119). And yet, what these RAND studies (2005, 2009) principally underscore is the strong position of power that the DoD holds and is able to wield when it comes to identifying, targeting, marketing to, and recruiting socio-economically insecure and domestically vulnerable populations of color in the US. Noncitizen recruits are presumably more easily enticed to serve in the US military given the enormous incentive of a green card. However, once enlisted noncitizens are subjected to some of the most stringent restrictions, including the threat of deportation from ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement)—despite what they were initially told by recruiters prior to enlistment. In turn, noncitizens are perceived as highly desirable enlistees at the outset and over the long run, because the military can continue to subject them to positions of docility under the guise of a
viable pathway to legal US citizenship, which is long-drawn-out over time and must be presumably “earned” by noncitizen enlistees through the completion of honorable and active US military service duty. Once noncitizens sign a military enlistee contract, their continued future in the US becomes contingent upon their mandatory military duty for at least up to eight years, without any dishonorable discharges or refusals to engage in combat, and reenlistment opportunities that are limited only to the specific branches of the military and a restricted set of jobs they qualify for under noncitizen status. As previously noted by Jorge Mariscal, the US military constructs DREAMERS as particularly desirable recruits—those who might have grown up biculturally and bilingually in the US, but still require a legal pathway US citizenship. And yet, these DREAMERS are being treated as dispensable and disposable, particularly, through their targeted exposure to the most perilous positions during their active duty service (i.e., infantry) and as a result of their tenuous legal residency and/or citizenship status, which can be revoked by ICE at any time.

Asch et al. mapped out the military’s total Hispanic recruitment pool based on the largest Hispanic subgroups represented in the US population, accordingly: “Among the young adult population, the target population for recruiting, about 75 percent of the population is Mexican, about 10 percent is Puerto Rican, and the others come from various other locations (authors’ computations)” (2009: 2). Consequently, the Population Representation report (aka “PopRep” or PRR), compiled annually by the Department of Defense, does not disaggregate their data on Hispanic representation in the US military by Latino subgroups. While the most recently disseminated (2011) PopRep report clearly states: “Since Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic group, the services are all working to increase Hispanic representation” (Department of Defense 2011a: 34), no public record exists of which particular Latinos subgroups are being
specifically targeted for military enlistment. Maintaining a considerably vague stance on which particular Latinos are being more heavily targeted by the US military presumably prevents the DoD from having to confront the kind of backlash that Asch et al. (2009) cautioned against in their tempered recommendation for the DoD to engage ‘alternative’ Hispanic populations (i.e., Hispanic noncitizen recruits)—just not in an explicitly overt way that could potentially elicit widespread public attention or draw criticism to this particular strategy.

**Military Outreach and Recruitment Efforts Increasingly Designed to Target Younger Minority Populations**

It is arguably the case that the DoD has been already aggressively targeting not only noncitizens via the green card incentive, but increasingly targeting younger Hispanics and other minority recruits as well, and for some time now. Within the DoD’s self-reporting of their diversity outreach and recruitment efforts, they use very carefully crafted language to describe the goal of the strategies they have designed with “underrepresented” groups in mind (read: minority), including Hispanics. For example, in a 2011 report conducted by the MLDC (Military Leadership Diversity Commission), the Commission described how our national security and future ability to keep “America strong and safe,” depends upon the ability of the DoD and DHS (Department of Homeland Security) to work in partnership with other federal, state, and district agencies (including the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) to implement strategies to address the dwindling pool of eligible recruits with military readiness in our population (36-37). In specific regard to K-12 programs, the commission recommended increasing outreach to youth and underrepresented populations (read:

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103 In a CNA (Center for Naval Analyses) study, “Recruiting Hispanics: The Marine Corps Experience Final Report,” Hattiangadi, Lee, and Quester (2004) recommended that the DoD begin tracking country of origin in accession data, stating: *Adding country-of-origin identification to accession data.* Current accession information identifies race, ethnicity (Hispanic/non-Hispanic), and country of origin for non-citizens. Because immigration will fuel growth in the youth population over the next few decades, we can expect proportionally more recruits to be first- or second-generation immigrants—many of whom might strongly identify with their country of origin. As such, we believe DoD should collect “country of origin” information for at least 1st- and 2nd-generation citizens (3).
minorities). However, the commission explains that their recommendations are not meant to “target” these populations for recruitment per se, rather to provide them with an awareness of their options and opportunities. In their own words, the MLDC commissioners (2011) explain:

The Commission’s second recommendation is that DoD and the Services should focus on early engagement to help bring the skills of youth up to par with military requirements by conducting strategic evaluations of the effectiveness of their current K-12 outreach programs and increasing resources and support for programs that are found to be effective. This recommendation goes hand in hand with the first recommendation to expand the pool of qualified candidates. Part of expanding that pool is focusing on students before they drop out of school, acquire criminal convictions, or develop weight problems. The Commission is not advocating that any programs directed toward young children be used as recruitment tools, but that these early engagement programs are used to develop successful future citizens (emphasis added, 39).

While the MLDC (2011) claims that their current outreach should not be mistaken for targeted recruitment strategies directed at young children, in their report they specifically outline the goals of their K-12 outreach efforts and broader recruiting programs as follows:

Some programs focus on increasing the number of youth that will be qualified for future military service, while other programs focus on raising awareness of future military career opportunities among youth who are not yet old enough to join the military. The Services also have recruiting programs specifically designed to attract qualified and age-eligible members of underrepresented demographic groups to military service (my emphasis, 5).

Repeatedly, MLDC insists that their outreach efforts generally seek to expose youth populations and “underrepresented demographic groups” to future career opportunities offered through the

104 As outlined by the (MLDC) Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2011), some of their K-12 outreach and educational programs include: “the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC); K-12 outreach programs focused on interesting students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers; and military affiliate clubs (e.g., Sea Cadets)” (5). Other programs include what the MLDC describe as “military-type clubs” (i.e., Army Cadet Corps, the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Program, the Young Marines, and the Devil Pups (Marines), the Naval Sea Cadet Corps (NSCC), and the Navy League Cadet Corps (NLCC)) (Military Leadership Diversity Commission 2011: 7). While not specifically designated by MLDC as a K-12 outreach program, there are also US military academy prep schools (e.g., U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School (USMAPS), the Naval Academy Preparatory School (NAPS), and the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) Preparatory School) (ibid). Each of the US military service academy prep schools tabulated the demographic profiles for their students enrolled for the classes of 2006-2009. Out of the 964 students enrolled in USMAPS, nearly half (47%) represented the “all minority” category (Military Leadership Diversity Commission 2011: 8). At NAPS, out of the 1,076 enrolled, over half (53%) were from the “all minority” student category (ibid). Additionally, at USAFA Preparatory School there were 940 students enrolled, and out of that number at least 48% were recorded from the “all minority” demographic profile (ibid). At these prep academies, the overwhelming majority of enrollees were males, with a range of only 15-20% female representation at each respective school (ibid). Furthermore, MLDC reported that: “over one-third of prep school enrollees for each Service academy were reported to be recruited athletes” (ibid). It is common practice for these military academy prep schools to utilize candidate visits and parent weekend visits as a means to expose “underrepresented youth” (read: minority youth) to the academies (Military Leadership Diversity Commission 2011: 10).
US military, and yet, their own report (2011) details multiple ways in which their programs are specifically designed to increase the proportion of minority youth in the military from specifically targeted areas, such as inner-cities, as well as from “diverse” high schools, two-year colleges with greater Black and Hispanic enrollment, and HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities)\(^\text{105}\) (10-11, 41-42).

In their 2011 report, the (MLDC) Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2011) emphasized that military should “create more accountability for recruiting racial and ethnic minorities and women” (43). Additional proposed strategies for more effectively recruiting “underrepresented demographic groups” include expanding ROTC (Reserve Officers’ Training Corps) programs to “Locations that have large populations of black students and/or Hispanic students” as well as increasing funding for JROTC (Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps)\(^\text{106}\) in high schools (Military Leadership Diversity Commission 2011: 40-42). Texas, California, the mid-Atlantic coast, and the Southeast portion of the US, have all been specifically demarcated as “potentially rich markets” for ROTC expansion (Military Leadership Diversity Commission 2011: 42). In addition, MLDC has underscored the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of their current K-12 outreach programs based on their ability to develop and advance “key skills necessary for the future military force” in STEM, areas of physical strength, and subject matter required in order to graduate from high school and pass the military aptitude test (Military Leadership Diversity Commission 2011: 40). The MLDC also highlighted the importance of having more lawmakers fully capitalize on their purportedly underutilized ability to nominate

\(^{105}\) The (MLDC) Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2011) advised that the military should attempt to more directly engage students at HBCUs and other “minority-serving institutions” by offering them what they vaguely described as “targeted academic scholarships” (11).

\(^{106}\) According to the (MLDC) Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2011) the JROTC is already described as “fairly demographically diverse” with a majority representation of minorities across the Service branches—“66 percent in Army JROTC, 54 percent in Navy JROTC, and 57 percent in Air Force JROTC” and a larger representation of females—“45 percent in Army JROTC, 42 percent in Navy JROTC, 30 percent in Air Force JROTC, and 34 percent in Marine Corps JROTC” (6).
candidates for military service academies—particularly honing in on Congressional members in minority caucuses (i.e., Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Congressional Asian/Pacific-American Caucus) or districts with a higher percentage of minority constituents (44-45). Furthermore, the MLDC has suggested that two-year colleges are another untapped resource for recruiting more Black and Hispanic enlistees, as college attendance is described as “slightly higher” for these particular demographic groups at two-year degree granting postsecondary institutions (41).

In terms of their media and advertising strategies, the MLDC (2011) has encouraged the US military to conduct outreach to potentially targeted recruits via social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, YouTube), through advertising in several different languages, by integrating profiles of military officers from diverse backgrounds on core web sites, as well as placing marketing content in college print dailies at HBCUs and other “minority-serving institutions” (11). The MLDC also suggested that the military progressively target their advertising by launching marketing campaigns in media and entertainment outlets with diverse and/or minority-focused audiences—specifically naming publications and television networks such as “Jet, The Root, and Black Collegian,” “Telemundo,” and “Black Entertainment Television” BET (10). Consequently, this strategy mirrors the tactically targeted placement of military messaging in the 2rsly episode on mun2 as well as the US Army advertising strategically integrated into the mun2 Web site interface—both seeking to appeal to and attract a bicultural Latino millennial audience in particular. Other suggested strategies demonstrated the MLDC’s penchant for targeting economically vulnerable communities, offering that the military should attempt to infiltrate charity and mentorship programs to better reach whom the MLDC (2011) described as “disadvantaged and underrepresented groups” (i.e., Toys for Tots, Adopt a
School, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, and Big Bears) (10). The MLDC also advised that the military set up more recruiting offices in areas that are more densely populated by those from underrepresented (read: minority) groups and “establish connections to community influencers (leaders, educators, and administrators)” (ibid). Lastly, it was the MLDC’s (2011) recommendation for the military to increasingly attend “affinity-group events” and/or conferences—namely “the National Society of Black Engineers,” as well as “the Society of Advancing Hispanic/Chicano and Native American Scientists” (ibid). This long list of strategies for targeting minority enlistees for military service has been compiled by the MLDC and developed over time, as the Military Leadership Diversity Commission was initially established under the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2009, in efforts to “address all aspects of diversity and inclusion, including strategic planning, training and education, leader development, talent management, communications, accountability, and inclusive environments” across the Armed Forces (<http://www.army.mil/standto/archive/issue.php?issue=2011-07-05>). In a March 8, 2011 press statement announcing the release of the MLDC’s 2011 Final Report, the Commission strongly emphasized that the US military is currently confronting two major challenges that require immediate attention, specifically stating:

> Primarily, the racial, ethnic, and cultural makeup of our nation is changing where projections suggest that minority populations of ages appropriate for military service will increase in the next century, while the non-Hispanic, White population will decrease. Following, skills critical to 21st-century mission success needs to be identified and rewarded. Leaders will need to address complex and uncertain emergent threats. The ability to work with multicultural stakeholders will be critical, requiring greater foreign language, regional, and cultural skills sets (<http://www.deomi.org/PublicAffairs/documents/MLDC_PRESS_RELEASE_FOR_FINALREPORT.PDF>).
Consequently, the group tasked with “develop[ing] future military leaders who represent the face of America” and that comprise the 31 member body of the MLDC, are self-described as “an inclusive organization whose members consisted of active-duty and retired officers, senior enlisted personnel from the Active and Reserve Components of all military Services, as well as civilian representatives to include senior executives of major corporations, civil servants, and a law school chancellor” (emphasis added, ibid).

Although never explicitly acknowledged on the part of the MLDC, race, ethnicity, class, and gender are all clear determinants guiding their proposed military outreach and recruitment tactics, especially with regard to those designed to target racial/ethnic minorities and women. In many ways, the MLDC’s 2011 diversity report suggests that US military operates from a deficit model when it comes to the “underrepresented groups” they seek to target. Arguably, the MLDC utilizes this deficit model approach to suggest that these racial/ethnic minorities and women are underrepresented in the military, because they are predisposed to setbacks when it

107 In their literature review of scholarly studies on military propensity, Segal and Segal (2004) also signal to the role of race, ethnicity, gender, and class in previously observed attitudes toward military enlistment. Segal and Segal (2004) explain that: “Enlistment is also predicted by parents’ education (children of college educated parents are less likely to serve), high school grades (those with higher grades are less likely to serve), college plans (college students are less likely to serve than whites), and attractiveness of military work roles” (9). Furthermore, Asch et al. (2009) also emphasize: “that Hispanics comes disproportionately from poorer families, and more youth from poorer families enlist in the military than do those from wealthier families” (23). Historically, the US military has tracked and measured levels of positive propensity to Service through polls issued by the Department of Defense (i.e., the semi-annual DoD youth poll that poses questions to participants such as “How likely is it that you will be serving in the military in the next few years?”) (Asch et al. 2009: 2). Segal and Segal (2004) have pointed to periods in which survey responses of “both male and female high school seniors, and among blacks, whites, and Hispanics” have indicated a decline in positive propensity to serve in the US military—particularly citing a period of observed decline in the mid 1980’s and less than positive responses “among 8th and 10th grade students since 1991” (9). In addition, Segal and Segal (2004) highlight previous research from the National Research Council (2003), which suggests that the US military has worked to combat these declines in positive propensity by specifically producing “targeted advertising and promoting the propensity to serve in the military among young people” (9). See also National Research Council, *Attitudes, Aptitudes, and Aspirations of American Youth* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2003); and David R. Segal et al., “Propensity to Serve in the U.S. Military: Temporal Trends and Subgroup Differences,” *Armed Forces & Society* 25, no. 3 (1999): 407-427. There is no one-to-one relationship between expected enlistment and actual enlistment in the US military; therefore, a gap exists between those who demonstrate positive propensity to enlist on surveys or polls and those who actually serve. As such, the military’s propensity for “targeted advertising” directed at young people will presumably persist. Arguably, based on the military’s current and proposed outreach efforts into the future, it appears evident that the military is and will increasingly seek to close the perceived gap between minorities and women who demonstrate a high propensity to serve and those who actually join. Segal and Segal’s (2004) study underscored this gap citing two respective studies that found: “women are more likely to indicate on surveys that they would like to serve than that they expect to actually serve” and that “African American men and women have had higher levels of positive propensity to serve than have white men and women. However, only about 45 percent of those expressing positive propensity actually serve. Hispanics also have higher levels of propensity than whites, and about 60 percent of high-propensity Hispanics serve in the military” (9).
comes to meeting military standards. As a result, the MLDC suggests that this ultimately diminishes the pool of eligible recruits available to the military from these groups; thereby, justifying a demand for the military to create special programs specifically designed to more aggressively target ethnic and racial minorities as well as women (typically in underserved areas). For example, the MLDC (2011) argues that the DoD and the military must “focus on increasing resources for programs that have been found effective at addressing some of the primary disqualification factors, with a special focus on those programs targeting students in middle school before many problems arise. This way, the Services will be devoting resources to the best possible programs” (emphasis added, 40). While, the MLDC does not specifically name minority youth and/or females as those students for whom problems may be more likely to arise after middle school, the Commission has emphasized that disqualifications for enlistment are more likely to be seen among racial/ethnic minorities and women than among white men of eligible enlistment age (31, 35). While the MLDC constructs its recommendations to the military for boosting “diversity” based upon an underlying premise that white men present less of an obstacle in terms of their eligibility for enlistment, racial/ethnic minorities and women are signaled as an out-group that specifically presents hurdles for the military with regard to recruitment and enlistment. Therefore, according the MLDC, it is incumbent upon the US military to develop and deploy targeted strategies and programs that will intentionally work toward expanding the pool of eligible candidates with military readiness among these underrepresented groups, as well as increasing the share of disciplined bodies among these groups that are more apt to meeting appropriate military standards. Accordingly, the MLDC has proposed that in order for the military to avoid potentially losing some of these eligible candidates from these underrepresented groups after middle school and once “problems”
foreseeably arise for them, they are far better off developing and deploying early engagement strategies that provide a means to instruct these groups about military service and careers from a young age (grades K-12); thereby, lowering the military’s propensity to see disqualification “problems” arise for these targeted groups down the line.\(^{108}\) For women, frequently cited disqualification factors included their single-parent status and/or failing to meet the weight/body fat standards for enlistment (Military Leadership Diversity Commission 2011: 30, 31). Common factors cited for the disqualification of racial and ethnic minorities included lower high school completion rates, single-parent status, lower scores on the AFQT (Armed Forces Qualification Test), lower scores on ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) tests, and failure to meet weight or height standards (\textit{ibid}). Thus, it is against these risk calculations tied to the organizing principles of race, ethnicity, gender, and class, that the military develops and pursues its initiatives to target particular groups for recruitment.

It is arguably the case that the military has also attempted a strategy to draw in more minority youth by tailoring their outreach programs to lower-income areas such as inner cities. For instance, as explained by the MLDC (2011), the US Navy’s NAVOPS Deep Submergence program\(^{109}\), “targets inner-city youth and offers them the opportunity to participate in simulated submarine operations and learn about related technology” (7). It is under STEM (Science, 108 Recognizing the US military cannot dissipate disqualifying factors produced as a result of structural inequalities, RAND researchers reveal: “Disqualifying factors such as high school graduation rates and low test scores may be difficult for the military to directly influence, because they are shaped by numerous outside influences, from the recruits’ parental education levels to family income” (http://www.rand.org/news/press/2009/01/14.html). In response, RAND researchers suggest that “the military may be able to inspire some potential recruits to complete their education through outreach efforts that emphasize the benefits of being eligible for military service” and that “Military recruitment efforts should promote the availability of higher education benefits, leadership opportunities and the chance to serve one’s country” (\textit{ibid}).

109 NAVOPS Deep Submergence was a program initiated in mid 1990s through a “Community Service Partnership with the U.S. Naval Reserves” (<http://webs.purduecal.edu/news/2009/10/27/150000-grant-2/>). Purdue University, Calumet, received the initial grant to build the first Mission Ocean (NAVOPS) project and received an additional $150,000 from the Office of Naval Research in 2009 to expand the project into a “virtual, three-dimensional undersea environment utilizing Purdue Calumet’s Center for Innovation through Visualization and Simulation” (\textit{ibid}). In the “2009 Annual Report on Diversity,” the Department of the Navy listed the NAVOPS Deep Submergence program among its outreach effort specifically designed to reach “youth at younger ages” (6). NAVOPS was listed among other programs and organizations also seemingly aimed at a younger minority target, including the Black Family Technology Program offering hands-on activities centered around the Navy experience, the Patriot Technology Training Center and chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers directed at African American youth in STEM, and the MANA organization focused on developing leadership among young Latinas (\textit{ibid}).
Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) initiatives that programs such as NAVOPS are able to receive substantial funding to expand their military outreach efforts under the auspices of advancing “innovative technological platforms for science and mathematics learning” to elementary and middle school students across the nation (<http://webs.purduecal.edu/news/2009/10/27/150000-grant-2/>). And yet, it is debatably through NAVOPS and similar “educational” military outreach programs conducted at schools with heavily concentrated minority student populations, that the military is able to prime these minority youth with the prospect of future military service at a young age and subsequently tap them to fill the enlistee gap that the MLDC foresees as a result of a alleged decline among (non-Hispanic) Whites of desired ages for military service. Moreover, it is the MLDC, the military, and the DoD’s strong focus on a presumed upswing among minority youth within the coming century that has their eyes and strategies directly focused on minorities as the prime target groups to fill their ranks in the present and far into the future.

In direct relation to the early engagement strategies that the military has been progressively deploying in schools (grades K-12), Jorge Mariscal has explored the impetus behind such efforts, arguing:

Well, the reason the Pentagon tries to invade the public school system is very simple, and it’s in their literature. They say, ‘Get them while they’re young.’ That’s a direct quote. What does that mean? Well, they’re not recruiting middle school people, but they’re giving them the notion that this is something that you want to be. They’re installing this notion of militaristic culture, that the military is something that they should want to be part of (<http://vimeo.com/17170947>).

Additionally, Marco Amador (2010) has argued that what ultimately provided military recruiters with unparalleled access to schools and educational records of students was the No Child Left Behind Act, as he describes:

At LA’s [Los Angeles] Manual Arts High School college and career day, Navy and
Marine recruiters are on hand presenting the military as an alternative to college or work in the private sector. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act requires every high school in America to give the military access to its facilities and even student records for the purposes of recruiting (emphasis added, <http://www.democracynow.org/2010/5/18/yo_soy_el_army_us_military>).

As such, there was a statutory requirement (§ 9528110 of the ESEA (20 U.S.C. § 7908) passed by Congress that was contained within the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L. No. 107-110) which: “require[d] local educational agencies (LEAs) receiving assistance under the Elementary

110 There is a process in which parents can “opt out” from having their child’s name, address, and telephone numbers released to a military recruiter. For example, if a parent chooses to “opt out” of providing directory information and this option clearly states that phone numbers cannot be disclosed to the public, then the school cannot disclose the student’s phone numbers to military recruiters. However, if the school “does not designate one or more of the three items [name, telephone number, address] as ‘directory information’ under FERPA [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act], the school still must provide all three items to military recruiters upon request” (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/hottopics/ht-10-09-02a.html>). Thus, in this particular case, it would be incumbent upon the school to “send a separate notice to parents about the missing ‘directory information’ item(s), noting an opportunity to opt out of disclosure of the information to military recruiters” (ibid). According to Section 9528 of the ESEA [Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965] (20 U.S.C. § 7908), it requires LEAs [local educational agencies] that accept funding under the ESEA provide military recruiters with equal access to secondary school students as so provided to potential employers or to postsecondary educational institutions. This means that military recruiters must also be allowed on school grounds to pass out information materials if the school already affords this opportunity and access to prospective employers or to college recruiters. Private secondary schools are not exempt either, as those accepting funding under ESEA are also subject to 10 U.S.C. § 503 “as amended by § 544 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002 (P.L. No. 107-107), the legislation that provides funding for the nation’s armed forces in fiscal year 2002” (ibid). This statute [10 U.S.C. § 503] applies to LEAs, private secondary schools included, receiving funding under ESEA [and similar to statute § 9528 of ESEA (20 U.S.C. § 7908) amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L. No. 107-110)], it compels these LEAs to provide military recruiters with access to students and to their information (e.g., name, address, phone listings) unless their parents exercise their right to “opt out.” This statute also requires that these LEAs inform parents of their ability to “opt out” from this disclosure of their child’s information and the LEA must comply with these requests from parents or students. If the LEA refuses access or prevents military recruiters from attaining requested student information, they risk losing funding under ESEA and are subject to “specific interventions under 10 U.S.C. § 503” (ibid). These interventions require that “a senior military officer (e.g., Colonel or Navy Captain) visit the LEA within 120 days. If the access problem is not resolved with the LEA, the Department of Defense must notify the State Governor within 60 days. Problems still unresolved after one year are reported to Congress if the Secretary of Defense determines that the LEA denies recruiting access to at least two of the armed forces (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, etc.)” (ibid). The process for parents to exercise their “opt out” right appears to be relatively straightforward at first glance, and yet, the way in which each school informs parents of this “opt out” option varies considerably from school to school. For example, Orlando Terrazas, a concerned parent featured in the mun2 cable network’s special report, “For My Country? Latinos in the Military” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiacsxU9qwA>) elaborated on the challenges he faced as he sought to get information about the “opt out” option at his daughter’s school, Whittier Union High School (CA). Per 2011-2012 school-year data, Whittier Union High School is 88% Hispanic/Latino (2% Asian American/Pacific Islander, and 1% African American) and has about “ten times as many Hispanic/Latino students as White students” (<http://whittierunion.schoolwisepress.com/home/site.aspx?entity=16038>). In addition, 72% of Whittier Union High School student’s families fall into the low-income indicator, a rate that is 16% above the county average and 24% above California’s state average (ibid). According to Mr. Terrazas:

You get this registration packet. Okay, and there’s a non-[indistinguishable speech]…it’s about 20 pages…and in this registration package there’s like one sentence that says “you can request in writing that your child not be on the list that the military can have access to.” But, it’s not advertised. It’s buried in the middle of this huge packet. So, with our [parental] assistance Whittier Union High School District [Whittier, California] created an opt-out form. So you could check, alright I want my child to have access to college recruiters, but check I don’t want it to military recruiters. And they translate it into Spanish.

My daughter, Gabriela, is a 9th grader at Whittier High School, and she has been opted out! (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiacsxU9qwA>).
and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) to give military recruiters the same access to secondary school students as they provide to postsecondary institutions or to prospective employers. LEAs are also generally required to provide students’ names, addresses, and telephone listings to military recruiters, when requested” (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/hottopics/ht-10-09-02a.html>). Ultimately, considering the K-12 “educational” outreach programs authorized by the DoD to directly engage youth in elementary and middle schools—and which also clearly target youth in inner-cities and/or schools densely populated by minority students—in conjunction with the legal statutes of the No Child Left Behind Act that have essentially expanded the access of the military into high schools across the nation, it is evident that efforts to target minority youth populations in the US are increasingly on the rise and far from imagined. Furthermore, one can imagine that these aforementioned programs and legislative statues will gain even more traction in the future if the military pursues the recommendations of the MLDC, which has explicitly encouraged the US military to create more accountability for the targeted recruitment of racial/ethnic minorities and women, and has called for the DoD to seek even more financial backing from the US government for programs geared at effectively targeting and training recruits from “untapped locations” and “underrepresented demographic groups” at an early age “before many problems arise,” such as the JROTC program, among many others (Military Leadership Diversity Commission 2011: 40, 43).

**Tapped to Fill the Military Gap: Latino Youth and the Growing Target on their Backs for Military Recruitment**

With specific regard to Latino youth, scholars have engaged how the target has been on their backs for decades now. Segal and Segal (2004) approximate that it was during the US shift
to an all-volunteer military\textsuperscript{111}, that the U.S. Census Bureau began to track the expansive population growth of Latinos and that it was also during this time that the US military began to envision Latino youth as a critical segment of its eligible recruiting pool (22). Segal and Segal underscored that: “In 1995, 15 percent of the civilian youth population was Hispanic, although this group accounted for only 9 percent of military personnel. The percentage of 18-year-old civilians who are Hispanic is projected to reach at least 22 percent by 2020” (ibid). Professor Mariscal (2010) explains how the military’s growing interest in Latino youth became particularly evident in the 1990s:

Going way back to the Clinton administration in the ‘90s, there was a recognition in the Pentagon that the largest military-age group in the coming decades, really, was going to be Latino. Just because of the way the population was growing demographically, we were going to have the largest pool of young people.

They also realized that our young people don’t have all the educational and job opportunities that some other groups do, so that meant that we were a logical community to focus on. These things, in combination with the population growth, really meant that we had a target on our back as a Community (<http://www.democracynow.org/2010/5/18/yo_soy_el_army_us_military>).

Additionally, researchers have made projections about future demographic changes in the Armed Forces, specifically based on current growth trends projected within the Latino youth population in the US. Weighing how future growth within the Latino youth demographic could potentially impact the military overall, Hattiangadi, Lee, and Quester’s (2004) cited:

As the Hispanic population grows, growth will be particularly strong among those in younger age groups. For example, Hispanics are projected to represent 17.1 percent of the U.S. population in 2025, but they will represent 23.8 percent of the 15- to 19-year-old population (9).

Furthermore, estimating that minorities will make up 38 percent of the total US population by 2025 and that *Hispanic youth* (ages 16-24) will comprise over 9 million by the same year,

Hattiangadi, Lee, and Quester (2004) proposed that, “This means that the future target population for military recruiting and advertising will be more diverse and more Hispanic than the population as a whole” (9). And yet, while various studies have signaled to an increasing Latino population as an underrepresented segment of the US population from which the US military could potentially recruit more enlistees in the future, Beth J. Asch (2009) has tempered this discussion to some extent arguing that, “The armed forces could recruit highly qualified Hispanics more intensively, but there already is much competition for these candidates from civilian employers and colleges” (<http://www.rand.org/news/press/2009/01/14.html>).

**Challenges to Enlisting Latinos for US Military Service**

There are three main subgroups from which the US military seeks to draw recruits from the Latino population. RAND researchers (Asch et al. 2009) have subdivided these groups based upon the educational attainment and career options presumably available to each group of recruits. The three groups are described as follows:

1. **the least qualified**, defined as those without a high school diploma or who scored in AFQT (Armed Forces Qualification Test) Category IV or V;
2. **the next-most qualified**, defined as those who are high school graduates in AFQT Categories IIIA and IIIB; and
3. **the most qualified**, defined as those who are high school graduates in AFQT Categories I and II (Asch et al. 2009: xxi).

As outlined by Asch et al. 2009, it is difficult to cull more recruits from Group 2, because “the military already disproportionately recruits those in Group 2, relative to their representation in the population” (ibid). Group 3 also presents its own set of difficulties in terms of military recruitment, because as previously acknowledged by Asch et al. (2009), this group is smaller but its youth have greater educational and career opportunities in the civilian market and they traditionally choose those options over joining the US military (115). Lastly, Group 1 represents

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112 According to Asch et al. (2009): “Specifically, 73 percent of young Hispanic recruits are in Category IIIA and IIIB (this group represents only 33 percent of the general Hispanic population). Increasing Hispanic representation by recruiting more intensively from this group will mean pulling from a population that is already heavily recruited” (xxi).
“lower-quality” Hispanic recruits and will require the military to either lower their enlistment standards to retain these potential recruits as enlistees, or to deploy special programs that will bring these recruits up to military-ready standards prior to enlistment (Asch et al. 2009: xx). Asch et al. (2009) explain that historically: “The services strongly prefer recruits whose score places them in Category IIIB or higher. The Department of Defense (DoD) restricts the annual accession of those in Category IV (the next-to-lowest category) to 4 percent of the total, and prohibits all recruiting from Category V (the lowest category)” (xviii). And yet, Asch et al. (2009) have suggested that US military mitigate some of the challenges they currently face with enlisting more Hispanics by: “(1) increasing the pool of Hispanics eligible for enlistment, (2) recruiting more eligible Hispanics, or (3) relaxing current standards so that a larger percent of Hispanic youth qualifies for enlistment” (87).

Observably, the US military has already begun to take action toward relaxing standards as a means to increase their proportion of eligible Hispanic enlistees. Given that the least qualified group (also referred to as Group 1) of potential Hispanic recruits is also described as a “relatively large” group, Asch et al. (2009) asserted that: “identifying and targeting the most motivated of this group offers advantages” (120). Accordingly, RAND researchers have also highlighted the Army’s standing efforts to recruit “more lower-quality but highly motivated enlistees—specifically non-high school graduates” through the Tier Two Attrition Screen program as well as “several experimental programs to allow applicants who are overweight to qualify for enlistment” (<http://www.rand.org/news/press/2009/01/14.html>). In addition, RAND researchers suggest that the military could potentially enlist even more overweight Hispanic prospects by submitting them to weight loss programs while in Delayed Entry Program status (ibid).
Blacks and Latinos are “Better Suited” to Military Service

While Asch et al. (2009) observe that the military will most likely rely on less qualified Hispanic recruits to increase the proportion of Hispanics in the military, they engage the impact this will have on military quality overall (xx). Taking into account their analysis of longitudinal data measuring military retention and promotion rates of recruits as well as the top three disqualifiers for Hispanic recruits, Asch et al. claim:

We find that the effects of these standards on outcomes [AFQT, education, weight] are relatively small compared with the effects of race and ethnicity. In terms of retention and promotion rates, lower-quality Hispanic recruits often compare well to their higher-quality white counterparts. Their lower AFQT and education and their greater weight are not associated with a pattern of lower retention or generally reduced promotion speed. These results suggest that these Hispanic recruits are better matched to the military or have better opportunities in the military than in the civilian sector (emphasis added, 85).

Asch et al. (2009) also emphasize that Hispanics have nearly always maintained higher retention rates and quicker rates of promotion than Whites, with the exception of the Navy (ibid). In addition, Asch et al. (2009) assert that lower-quality Black recruits have also demonstrated higher retention than higher quality White recruits. Based on these assertions, Asch et al. deduce that “like Hispanic recruits, black recruits seem to be better suited to the military or have better opportunities in the military than in the civilian sector” (emphasis added, 85).

Arguably, the undergirding premise guiding Asch et al.’s (2009) assertion that Blacks and Latinos are better suited to military service, hinges distinctly on race and ethnicity. Asch et al. (2009) advance race and ethnicity as not only observable and measurable characteristics of potential enlistees, but as substantiated indications of their future performance in the military. Throughout their study, Asch et al. (2009) propose ways in which the DoD should consider race and ethnicity in their recruiting decisions. On the one hand, Asch et al. (2009) contend that it is “the DoD’s obligation to avoid racial discrimination” (xxi). And yet, based on their analysis of
Hispanic youth in particular, Asch et al. (2009) provide a long and detailed explanation for why targeted recruitment is necessary for the DoD to pursue—even if it means enlisting less qualified or “more marginal” Hispanic recruits, specifically claiming:

The implication of this analysis is that targeting the recruitment of more marginal Hispanic recruits is not likely to have adverse effects on retention or promotion speed. In fact, the analysis suggests that, at the margin, faced with the decision to recruit minorities over identical white recruits, the services would gain more person-years, via greater retention, by favoring minorities because of greater retention. In the case of Hispanics, greater retention is an additional way to improve Hispanic representation. As Hispanics stay longer, their relative representation in the enlisted force increases. Furthermore, we note that untargeted recruitment of marginal recruits would hurt retention and promotion rates (ibid).

Based specifically on their previous inference that discontinuing the targeted recruitment of less qualified recruits would hurt retention and promotion within the US military, Asch et al. (2009) also emphasize that:

[i]n terms of military outcomes (such as retention rates and promotion speed), the effect of ethnicity is more significant than the effect of standards. Hispanics usually have higher retention rates and faster promotion speeds than their white counterparts. (The only exception is promotion in the Navy). Moreover, lower-quality Hispanic recruits (i.e., those with somewhat lower AFQT scores, less education, and greater weight) often compare well to their higher-quality white counterparts. These results suggest that these Hispanic recruits may be better matched to the military’s demands and lifestyle, or have better opportunities in the military than in the civilian sector. The results for black recruits are roughly the same as for Hispanic recruits (emphasis added, 117).

Here, Asch et al. (2009) demonstrate the distinct significance they place on the effects of race and ethnicity as determining factors in military outcomes. They provide evidence for these alleged strong effects by arguing that race and ethnicity overwhelmingly trump the effects of education, weight, and AFQT scores—observably, when it comes to recruits of color in particular (Asch et al. 2009: 78, 80). In other words, Asch et al. (2009) suggest that the racial and ethnic background of potential recruits is a greater predictor of retention and promotion rates than the isolated effects of either education, weight, or AFQT scores (ibid). Moreover, Asch et
al. (2009) use this strong effects argument about race and ethnicity to validate their overarching claims that if the military lowers enlistment standards in these areas (AFQT, education, and weight) it will subsequently have little effect on promotion and retention rates (118). The alleged strong effects and race and ethnicity (as they specifically relate to promotion and retention) that are emphasized in the Asch et al. (2009) study, are strategically advanced here as the trump card that nullifies other standard disqualifiers (i.e., lower AFQT scores, no high school diploma, being overweight) which could potentially lower the quality of the military overall. This produces a justification for the military and the DoD to proceed with Asch et al.’s (2009) proposed strategies to relax standards in AFQT, education, and weight in order to enlist a greater number of lower-quality Hispanic and Black recruits; therefore, bringing the military and DoD closer to meeting their goals to recruit more Blacks and Hispanics.

It appears that through their findings in this study, Asch et al. (2009) are presenting evidence about Black and Hispanics recruits that conveniently depicts them as better suited for military enlistment by proxy of their ethnic and racial minority status regardless of whether they are marginally qualified or not, as this allows them to build a case for why the DoD should increasingly and more aggressively recruit from this pool of potential recruits—even over “higher-aptitude white recruits” (xxii). In fact, Asch et al. (2009) specifically call out to this point in their assessment of experimental programs that the Army has already put in motion to enlist a greater proportion of marginally qualified applicants, and they explain that recruiting incentives can be used to specifically target even more Black and Hispanic youth:

A disproportionate percentage of the lower-aptitude Army recruits are black or Hispanic. We found that lower-aptitude minorities have better retention than higher-aptitude white recruits, all else being equal. An implication of our analysis is that the armed services,
while avoiding overt discrimination, should develop recruiting incentives attractive to Hispanics and blacks (xxii-xxiii).

Again, by emphasizing the superior retention rates of “lower-aptitude minorities,” Asch et al. (2009) are able to provide a rationale for why the military recruiters’ target should remain centered on these particular groups. And yet, the rationale provided here for targeting lower-aptitude minorities appears to conflict with prior studies as well as Asch et al. ’s (2009) own comparative analysis of outcomes previously observed from lower-quality versus higher-quality recruits. Hence, Asch et al. (2009) reveal:

As found in past studies, our analysis indicates that higher-quality recruits tend to stay longer and be promoted faster. In the case of AFQT, the positive relationship between AFQT and retention is strongest for white recruits. Those who fail to complete high school have lower retention relative to high school graduates, regardless of race or ethnicity. Those who are overweight, especially 20 pounds overweight relative to the service standard, have lower retention than those within five pounds of the standard. Overweight recruits have poorer outcomes, regardless of race and ethnicity. For example, Hispanics in the Navy who are more than 20 pounds overweight have a promotion of rate of 19 percent to E-5 within six years, compared with a promotion rate of 23 percent for Hispanics who are within five pounds of the Navy’s weight standard (xx).

In addition to Asch et al. ’s (2009) affirmation that the strongest positive relationship between AFQT scores and retention exists among white recruits, they also found that on average “blacks and Hispanics score lower on the AFQT than do whites”114, that given NLSY data that controls

113 Asch et al. (2009) proceed to list a number of incentives that could potentially entice more Black and Hispanic recruits to enlist, stating:

In the longer term, the analysis suggests that identifying and targeting the motivated of the least-qualified group of Hispanics is a good approach, and is consistent with current efforts like the Army’s Tier Two Attrition Screen program. For the most-qualified group, the military must find ways to compete with excellent civilian opportunities. This will include emphasizing the nonpecuniary benefits of service, such as leadership opportunities, higher span of responsibility, and opportunities to serve one’s country. Finally, for applicants in the middle range, college seems quite important, especially two-year college for Hispanic youth. Since many do not complete college, and many work while in college, more exploration is needed as to whether these individuals lack resources or have lower educational expectations. In either case, military service as part of one’s educational path, along with the suite of educational benefits available to those who serve, could be marketed more heavily to this group.

Educational benefits are only one of many recruiting resources. Little is known about how the supply of Hispanic and black recruits responds to other recruiting resources, such as enlistment bonuses, as well as to external factors including the Iraq war, the civilian economy, and college opportunities. Such information would be useful for developing policy options to increase the supply of Hispanic and black recruits (xxii-xxiii).

114 Even among Black and Hispanic high school graduates, Asch et al. (2009) expose that a great percentage does not meet the minimum standards for the AFQT. Thus, they detail how: “A large percentage of blacks and Hispanic high school graduates also
for height “blacks and Hispanics are heavier than whites”\textsuperscript{115}, that “Blacks and Hispanics are more likely to have children at an early age and so are less likely to meet the military’s enlistment standards with respect to dependents”\textsuperscript{116}, that NLSY97 data shows that there are a greater number of white recruits eligible to enlist based on the military’s moral requirements\textsuperscript{117}, and that their sampling of NLSY97 data showed that “a much higher percentage of whites graduate from high school and score in Category II [on AFQT] and above than do blacks or Hispanics”\textsuperscript{118} (28, 34, 38, 88). The MLDC report (2011) also shows that in regard to those eligible to meet the enlistment standards set by the Marine Corps: “racial and ethnic minorities (except for others) and women make up a smaller fraction of the eligible population than they do of the total 17-29-year-old U.S. population because they are, on average, less likely to meet the requirements” (31).\textsuperscript{119}

Thus, presented with aforementioned data from the MLDC report (2011) and Asch et al.’s (2009) study, one might deduce that White recruits actually seem to be better suited for the military or that White recruits may be better matched to the military’s demands and lifestyle,
given that the military specifically prefers high school graduates, recruits who score (on the AFQT) in Category IIIB or higher, recruits who are citizens, and recruits who can pass weight standards—among other aforementioned eligibility standards that a greater proportion of White recruits appear to meet over Hispanic and Black recruits (Asch et al. 2009: xviii, 52, 55, 117). Furthermore, it bears noting that if Hispanics and Blacks are so much better suited to military service, then why must Asch et al. (2009) recommend that the military relax enlistment standards in order to incorporate a greater proportion of Black and Hispanic recruits? Also, if Hispanics and Blacks are better suited to the military, then why it is necessary to implement so many incentives (i.e., cash bonuses, green card incentives), waivers (i.e., for number of dependents, moral character, substance use, medical) and special programs (e.g., Delayed Entry Program, or the Army’s Tier Two Attrition Screen program, English Language Training Programs such as FLRI or Foreign Language Recruiting Initiative) in order to enlist a greater proportion of Hispanics and Blacks for military service? Moreover, when the military claims that it must target more Black or Hispanic recruits because it must approximate the diversity of the US population, where does the recruitment of noncitizens fit into this logic—as this particular group is invariably precluded from the representative diversity of the general US population as a direct result of their noncitizen status?

In many ways, the Asch et al. (2005, 2009) studies and the MLDC report (2011) make it exceedingly apparent that the recommendations of these studies are meant to substantiate and propagate what the military has already been doing for some time. The evidence these studies provide is being strategically deployed to craft justifications for why and how the military should

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120 RAND researcher and senior economist, Beth J. Asch, has also advanced this claim in the press release for the Asch et al. (2009) study, emphasizing that: “The U.S. Congress has said that the U.S. military should closely mirror the racial and ethnic makeup of the nation, creating the need to enlist more Hispanics. The RAND study examines why Hispanics are underrepresented in the military and discusses possible solutions” (<http://www.rand.org/news/press/2009/01/14.html>).
continue to aggressively target ethnic and racial minorities recruits. By explicitly granting assurances to the DoD that relaxing standards for Blacks and Hispanic recruits will not have a negative effect on military quality or performance, it is clear that this directive ostensibly clears the path for the military to continue to pursue “lower-quality” Black and Hispanic recruits—who are rebranded and reformulated as “better suited” recruits in the Asch et al. (2009) study. And yet, these recommendations on behalf of Asch et al. (2009) contradict their own findings as well as those of previous studies, which reveal that blacks and Hispanics are less likely to meet enlistment eligibility standards. As such, it makes little sense to claim that the ethnic and racial minority segments of the US population—particularly Blacks and Hispanics—are better suited to the military, when a far greater proportion of potential White recruits meet enlistment standards across the board. If, in fact, White recruits are better suited to the military and are eligible to meet enlistment standards in greater numbers, then why is the military not aggressively targeting them for recruitment? Ultimately, by emphasizing that lower-quality Blacks and Hispanics demonstrate better retention and promotion rates than higher-quality Whites, it allows Asch et al. (2009) to make a case for why the DoD should relax their standards and more aggressively target these lower-quality Blacks and Hispanics over higher-quality White recruits. This argument also supports the MLDC’s (2011) recommendations for the DoD to seek additional funding to more aggressively pursue “underrepresented groups” (read: minorities/women) through advertising and outreach programs that are increasingly targeting a younger demographic both inside of schools (K-12) and in communities at large. Debatably, it is not the case the Blacks and Latinos are better suited to the military, rather that constructed knowledge—validated through data, studies, and reports about Blacks and Latinos—directly supports the military’s actions to steadily target the youngest and most economically vulnerable among “underrepresented groups” for
military service. This validation of data and constructed knowledge is integral to the DoD’s ability to seek increased funding to support more targeted advertising, “educational” outreach programs, and policies that will ensure their ability to carry their message into schools, communities, and disseminate it to increasingly younger populations nationwide. Although military conscription may have ended in 1973, some have perceptively indicated that people of color still serve as a brown shield \(^{121}\) (<http://vimeo.com/17170947>) for the US military and that in many ways there is still a poverty draft \(^{122}\) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiascxU9qwA>) in place.

**Why aren’t Latinos Overrepresented in the US Military?**

In the RAND (2009) study on Hispanic military enlistment, Asch et al. proposed that in theory Hispanics should be *overrepresented* in the US military. Asch et al. (2009) cited a poll administered by the Department of Defense administered in 2007 (to youth in the US between the ages of 18-24), which sought to grasp the propensity of Hispanic youth to join the military. Based on this DoD poll from 2007, Asch et al. (2009) indicated that Hispanic youth were more

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121 In Marco Amador’s (2010) documentary titled, “Yo Soy El Army” (Big Noise Films/Producciones Cimarrón), community organizer and former Santee High School (South Central Los Angeles, California) teacher, Ron Gochez described the presence of the US military at the school where he worked, explaining:

“There were Marines on campus who came in with a Humvee—you know, camouflage—it looked like a scene out of Iraq. But they were not in Iraq there were at lunch time in the middle of our campus—you know, passing out propaganda to our kids—you know, having a little pull-up bar, the whole deal. So, we’re here in a way to counter that with students here who are going to be passing out flyers to give the other side of the coin, right. These kids are going to be cannon fodder. They are going to be sending these kids off to Iraq, off to Afghanistan, or where ever else the government—you know, regardless of whether it’s Democrat or Republican—they’re all the same, imperialist governments, they are going to go and they are going to attack future countries and who are going to the first ones, front lines, like always—Operation Brown Shield—young Raza or African students—are going to be thrown into the front lines to defend American capital, while living in one of the poorest parts of America” (<http://vimeo.com/17170947>).

122 In the Mun2’s docu-series report titled, “For My Country? Latinos in the Military,” National Lawyers Guild Student Rights Advocate, Jim Lafferty, and RAND Corporation researcher, Beth J. Asch, offered somewhat opposing views on the existence of a poverty draft within the US military. On the one hand, Jim Lafferty argued that, “In Vietnam, even with the draft, you had a highly disproportionate number of people of color—those days African Americans—fighting and dying in Vietnam—way out of proportion to their representation of the population. Today, in the so-called “all volunteer” Army, which is really a poverty draft, you have a higher number of kids, especially Latinos, fighting and dying in places like Iraq.” In contrast, Beth J. Asch asserted that, “The concept of a poverty draft is misleading, because a surprising finding is, in fact, that kids from the lowest income tend not to join, why? Because those kids tend not to, for example, graduate high school—so, they don’t qualify. Even the ones who do graduate from high school, often qualify for need-based aid at colleges. So who do we see joining? It’s the ones in the middle—those who have middle income, who often don’t qualify for any aid for college” (emphasis added, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiascxU9qwA>).
inclined than any other demographic to “express a positive attitude toward the military” (xv). Furthermore, the poll showed that 12.6% of Hispanic participants “were probably or definitely going to join the military” as opposed to the 10.1% Black and 6.6% White participants who responded the same (Defense Human Resources Activity 2008 cited in Asch et al. 2009: xv). Taking these poll responses into account, Asch et al. (2009) determined that “the underrepresentation of Hispanics is puzzling” and that given “the more positive attitude of Hispanics toward the military would suggest that, all else being equal, Hispanics should be overrepresented, not underrepresented” (emphasis added, xv). Furthermore, Asch et al. (2009) expressed disbelief over the fact that Hispanics were not overrepresented in the US military based on their tenuous economic position within the civilian labor market (67). Ultimately, Asch et al. (2009) argued that the US military actually offered Blacks and Hispanics more of a “color blind,” “ethnicity blind,” “pure meritocracy” than the civilian labor market (67). As such, Asch et al. posited, “[b]lacks and Hispanics will have lower civilian earning than otherwise identical whites. This will cause the military to look relatively more attractive to minorities. That is the conventional explanation of the higher-than-expected enlistment rates of blacks” (ibid). On another level, Asch et al. expressed concern that even though Blacks and Hispanics are faced with similar economic barriers in the civilian market, Hispanic recruitment has lagged behind that of African Americans (Segal and Segal 2004: 23; Asch et al. 2009:115). Thus, Asch et al. (2009) pointed to some external factors (i.e., family perceptions of the military, non-military opportunities available to highly qualified Hispanics) that could presumably account for this recruitment disparity between these minority groups (115). Asch et al. (2009) also recommended that future research concerning Hispanic recruitment and enlistment “pay close attention to the role of the family in determining attitudes toward the military as a career,” and also investigate
“how Hispanic and black recruits respond to educational benefits and other recruiting resources” to determine “which resources are the most effective with each population group” (120).

Among college educated Hispanics, Asch et al. (2009) suggested that US military heavily market its educational benefits to those attending two-year colleges—as they could potentially be the most responsive group based on the presumption that they lack economic resources for higher education (xxii). Throughout the RAND study (2009), there were many instances in which an economic model was advanced to explain why it was necessary to increase the “supply” of Blacks and Hispanics in the military as a matter of public policy—as Blacks and Hispanics were discursively constructed as cogs in the military’s supply and demand chain (120). Moreover, there were also many instances where arguments were espoused about the military’s prime competition for these targeted populations in which, college and civilian labor market opportunities, for instance, were constructed as a problem or barrier that the military needed to somehow overcome in order to more effectively reach Blacks and Hispanics (Asch et al. 2009: xxi, 120). It stands to reason that the military would increasingly want to target the most economically vulnerable populations among Blacks and Hispanics, as the likelihood of having to compete with other civilian market opportunities available to these groups would be relatively lower. And the fact that potentially greater civilian market opportunities available to Blacks and Hispanics (i.e., more college or job opportunities) are being constructed as implied barriers in any way, shape, or form is highly problematic.123 Additionally, it is also problematic that those most economically vulnerable in the civilian labor and educational markets become prime

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123 The contention that higher educational achievement could potentially decrease enlistment rates has been previously acknowledged by the military. Journalist, Deborah Davis (2007), explained that during the early 1980s the US military increasingly began to interrogate the relationship between race, ethnicity, and propensity to enlist in the military. Through studies commissioned by the military between 1975-1999, such as the Youth Attitude Tracking Survey, they found “a correlation between the rising educational achievement of blacks and lower enlistment rates, and between the low educational achievement of Latinos (particularly if their first language was not English) and rising enlistment rates” (<http://www.metroactive.com/metro/09.19.07/news-0738.html>).
military targets based on their race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic standing alone. For the DoD and the US military, the primary concern is to increase the proportion of Hispanic recruits among their ranks regardless of the opportunities afforded to these recruits outside of the military—it is their ultimate goal to overcome any and all barriers to recruitment and enlistment. While, it may be easier for the military to target those who presumably have fewer options in terms of education, jobs, potential earnings, and economic security—as these enlistees will presumably rely on the military for economic security not only in the short-term, but over the long run as well through reenlistment—it does not make these targeted groups “better suited” to military service. Ultimately, the conclusions drawn from the Asch et al. (2009) study about who is better suited to serve, or who should be overrepresented among the military ranks, is highly racialized, classed, and gendered. In turn, the targeted strategies that Asch et al. (2009) implore the DoD to pursue, work to attract more Hispanics to military service and also work to discursively construct Hispanics as the most attractive and desirable of targets.

For Your Entertainment: US Army Strong Dog Tags, Military Propaganda, and Targeted Recruitment Tactics

Part of the strategy that Asch et al. (2009) propose that the DoD enact, in order to overcome the barriers to recruiting a greater proportion of Hispanics, directly involves “marketing more heavily to this group” (xxiii). Adding to their argument that Hispanics are “better suited” to military service, Asch et al. (2009) also promote advertising as one of the critical ways in which the DoD can make the military look more attractive to minorities—particularly to the Latin(o/a) demographic in the US (67). Proof of this approach is demonstrated through the deployment of the military’s marketing strategies for the US Army at Daddy Yankee’s reggaetón concert at the Allstate Arena. Immediately following Daddy Yankee’s final stage performance of the night, attendees steadily ushered outside of the concert venue in droves
on their way to the parking lot. En route to the parking lot and directly outside of the Allstate Arena, the US military had set up a large tent display overseen by US military recruiters who were directly engaging concert attendees as they left the venue (see Figure 6.19). In addition to the prominent US Army tent display located in front of the concert venue, there was also a Hummer vehicle parked next to it that was fully decked out with US Army logos and the “Army Strong” ad campaign tagline (see Figures 6.20–6.21). As a key demographic target for the US Army, it is clear that Latino concert attendees were being directly hailed outside of the Allstate Arena through highly visible US Army signage that specifically targeted Spanish language dominant and bilingual speakers. In addition to the strategically placed US Army Strong Humvee and the copious display of advertising taglines alluding to the virtues of “strength” and “leadership” presumably gained through military service, the US Army’s recruiters also directly engaged Daddy Yankee’s fans by enticing them with Daddy Yankee dog tags (see Figure 6.22).

One of the bilingual male US Army recruiters addressed the crowd vociferously in Spanish and English and asked who was interested in taking home a free Daddy Yankee dog tag as a concert memento. The catch was that if you wanted the Daddy Yankee dog tag, you had to fill out a form detailing your personal identification and contact information for Army recruiters to follow-up with you after the concert. That night there was a long line extending past the Allstate Arena building of concert-goers waiting to fill out the Army recruiter forms in anticipation of receiving their Daddy Yankee dog tags. There were also several concert attendees lined up to take pictures next to the US Army Strong Humvee, which at one point had its doors propped wide open, lights blazing bright, loud music bumping from the speakers, and flashy rims spinning on all tires.
Observably, the US Army’s marketing tactics worked effectively on two fronts. Through a combination of overt bilingual displays along with interactive stations strategically set up to draw in crowds through entertainment and gift incentives, US Army recruiters were able to approach and directly engage concert-goers casually in a setting that was presented as an innocuous and seamless extension of Daddy Yankee’s reggaetón concert entertainment. Addressing a mostly Latino audience in this context at an all ages and family-oriented event, the US Army was able to reach and appeal to a large and highly concentrated group of Latinos—ranging in ages and including children (see Figure 6.21)—by essentially capitalizing on the entertainment platform that Daddy Yankee had already set the stage for throughout his concert as he depicted the military in a glamorized and seemingly glorified light. In addition, the integration of the Daddy Yankee dog tags was particularly effective strategy at drawing out the attention of Daddy Yankee’s youngest fans and admirers as they noticeably coaxed their parents to wait in line for them to be able to walk away from the concert content with their Daddy Yankee souvenir. These are the same Daddy Yankee fans that are presumably also the least cognizant of the full implications of granting the US military with access to private and personal information as well as permission to be contacted for recruitment. Daddy Yankee’s reggaetón concert event provides an illustrative example of how the military has been implementing strategies that appointed commissions such as the MLDC have specifically devised for improving targeted recruitment—in this case—the MLDC’s suggestion to the DoD and the US military to direct their advertising campaigns to minority audiences through minority-focused media and entertainment outlets. And yet, it remains to be seen whether or not these same recruitment strategies are being carried out by the US military at concerts traditionally conceived as “general-

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124 The Allstate Arena in Rosemont, IL is one of the Chicagoland area’s largest entertainment venues with at least 18,500 seats and an additional 48 luxury suites (<http://www.allstatearena.com/arena-info/>).
market” [read: White, non-Latino] pop concerts, such as Britney Spears, Lady Gaga, Justin Beiber, Taylor Swift, or the Rolling Stones?

In many ways, the US Army tent setup at Daddy Yankee’s concert bears striking resemblance to similar military outreach efforts that have been carried out at Latino festivals, as well as at other music events specifically centered around salsa, reggaetón, or hip hop. For example, The New York Times examined the US Army’s sponsorship of the Tropical Music Festival in the Bronx, New York during the summer of 2007. At this event there were also a considerable share of Army recruiters seen passing out t-shirts, dog tags, and pens to passers-by from an Army tent/display booth in exchange for their contact information (Santos 2007). Journalist, Fernanda Santos, described a scene at the event in which, “Most of those clustered around the stage, about 200 people who swayed animatedly to the beat of salsa and reggaetón, seemed oblivious to the Army’s presence, or simply did not care about it, regardless of how they felt about the war” (ibid). And yet, among at least 200 festival attendees, there were two locally elected officials, Assemblyman Jose Rivera and City Councilwomen Melissa Mark-Viverito, who disputed the glaring presence of the Army as well as the military’s sponsorship of this community event. Assemblyman Rivera argued, “We should not be allowing our public recreational space to be used for recruiting our youngsters to get killed in Iraq” and Councilwoman Mark-Viverito emphasized, “Our children are not for sale” (ibid). Mark-Viverito also noticed the Army’s increased efforts to recruit from the lower-income areas of the city with a greater concentration of minority residents (ibid). This observation was reinforced by the fact that a recruitment station had then just recently opened on 103rd Street in East Harlem—a predominantly Latino neighborhood—to add to the other 46 Army recruitment stations spread out across the five boroughs in New York (ibid). Santos (2007) also specified that, “Brooklyn led
the city last year [2006] in new Army recruits, with 391, followed by Queens (261), the Bronx (230), Manhattan (109), and Staten Island (53) (ibid).

While the targeted recruitment of minority populations has proved particularly effective in lower-income minority communities of New York City, Martin and Steuter (2010) have also observed that periods of severe economic decline have bolstered the US military’s ability to attract recruits. As such, Martin and Steuter (2010) recall that: “[w]ith the economic crisis of 2008-2010, the U.S. military suddenly had no difficulty meeting its recruiting target” (147). However, this upsurge in recruitment between 2008-2010 immediately followed the period between 2005-2007 in which the US Army, in particular, had failed to meet its recruitment goals (Asch et al. 2009: xxii).

Since 2003, Martin and Steuter have observed the US military’s increasing reliance on advertising to promote particular branches of the military, but also to target particular groups for military service in those branches. Furthermore, Martin and Steuter (2010) detail that, “In 2003, the military’s recruiting and advertising budget was $590 million, and they requested $20.5 billion for 2009, aiming to recruit an additional 80,000 enlistees. Significantly, this would cost taxpayers eighty times more than the 1998 budget that enlisted over twice as many” (147). During 2005 and 2006, targeted ad campaigns were created and launched by major firms such as Leo Burnett and McCann Erickson to penetrate the Hispanic market and increasingly target African Americans as well (Martin and Steuter 2010: 146-147). For example, Martin and Steuter note that, “With plummeting support for the war in Iraq and increased personnel needs, the military awarded a $1.35 billion contract in December 2005 to McCann Erickson Worldwide, a subsidiary of Interpublic Group, which launched a new campaign, Army Strong, on Veterans’
Day, 2006\textsuperscript{125} (147). Consequently, it was the “Army Strong” advertising campaign tagline that was consistently emphasized during and after Daddy Yankee’s concert, that was also notably present at the Tropical Music Festival in the Bronx, and which was seamlessly integrated into the narrative structure of the aforementioned \textit{2rslvj} episode on \textit{mun2} as well as in the various displays ads online at <www.mun2.tv>. Hence, it stands to reason that the demonstrated success of previous ad campaigns such as “Army of One” and “Army Strong,” have only encouraged the US military to continue to rely on such efforts to engage targeted groups.

While the US Army’s presence at the Daddy Yankee reggaetón concert effectively illustrates how the US military has adapted their advertising strategies to directly engage bicultural Latino millennials, other studies have addressed how the military has used \textit{hip-hop} music as a means to target African American youth. For example, Martin and Steuter (2010) highlighted the military ads that Leo Burnett Worldwide strategically placed in \textit{hip-hop} magazines such as \textit{XXL} that “depicted a black soldier sitting, showing the ropes to the white soldier” (146). They also pointed to a similar approach in \textit{hip-hop} magazine, \textit{The Source}, whereby:

\textit{With the help from \textit{The Source}\textsuperscript{126} magazine, the U.S. military is targeting \textit{hip-hop} fans with custom made Hammers, throwback jerseys and trucker hats. The yellow Hummer, spray-painted with two black men in military uniform, is the vehicle of choice for the U.S. Army’s ‘Take It to the Streets campaign’—a sponsored mission aimed at recruiting young African Americans into the military ranks (Chery 2003 cited in Martin and Steuter 2010: 147).}

Journalist, Ed Morales (2004), also described how this “Taking It to the Streets” ad campaign has previously appeared at NAACP functions and been integrated into MTV’s “Spring Break”

\textsuperscript{125} According to \textit{New York Times} journalist, Fernanda Santos (2007), “the Army said it recruited about 80,600 people in the 2006 fiscal year, or some 7,000 more than in the previous fiscal year” (<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/30/nyregion/30concert.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print>).

\textsuperscript{126} Journalist, Ed Morales (2004), has detailed how \textit{The Source} magazine was a co-sponsor of the “Campus Combat Tour” in the fall of 2003. According to Morales, the Campus Combat Tour “appeared at five college campuses with high percentages of black students. It culminated with a battle between rappers who were judged by the tour’s co-sponsor, the popular \textit{hip-hop} magazine \textit{The Source}” (<https://www.progressive.org/media_826>).
and BET’s “Spring Bling” media programming events (<https://www.progressive.org/media_826>). Morales explained that Viral Marketing group initially launched the “Taking It to the Streets” campaign in 2003 specifically “to recruit black and Latino youth” (ibid). Moreover, Morales directly called this campaign out as “an obvious attempt to seduce urban youth, many of whom have little or no job prospects” (ibid). And yet, military sociologist David Segal, has debated whether more recent efforts to specifically target Latinos elicits “The fear is that the military is going to try to replace, consciously or unconsciously, African-Americans with Hispanics” (Alvarez 2006). Judging from the most recent recommendations of the (MLDC) Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2011) as well as Asch et al.’s (2009) suggestions for the DoD to continue targeting “better suited” Blacks and Latinos for military service, it is clear that both groups will remain a prolonged military target in the future. Also, casualty statistics from 2004 suggested that enlistees from ethnic and racial minority groups had suffered a disproportionate percentage of the casualties of war, particularly in Iraq, as “32 percent of those who have died at enemy hands, or from accidents, suicide or illness, have been identified as being from a member of a minority group” and “Of those wounded in action, 30 percent have been people of color,” yet as of 2004 Blacks and Latinos only made up “25 percent of the U.S. population” (Morales 2004). Hence, it is plausible that the recruitment strategies that the DoD has been increasingly deploying to more aggressively target Blacks and Latinos have been effective in providing the US military with a brown shield to protect and safeguard the imperial governments, policies, and actions that are supported by the US across the globe. And yet, notably this has been afforded to the military at the cost of enlisting noncitizens, conducting outreach at schools from K-12, targeting those most economically vulnerable, and recruiting based distinctly on race and ethnicity.
The Army’s marked presence at Daddy Yankee’s concert confirms the ways in which the US military is effectively inserting itself into the public consciousness through popular culture. As Daddy Yankee’s tour moved on from city to city and across several large Latino markets, he continued to perform his stage show while simultaneously endorsing a pro-military agenda. In their book, *Pop Culture Goes to War: Enlisting and Resisting Militarism in the War on Terror*, Martin and Steuter (2010) perceptively address how analogous examples from popular culture also connect to ways in which “permanent war has been or can be normalized through the culture” (146). In order to challenge this normalization through popular culture, it is critical to engage not only how these discourses are being produced and disseminated, but to interrogate whose interests they serve and furthermore to examine the effects that they have on society at large. It is arguably the case that military has justified its aggressive recruitment strategies aimed at Latinos based on their exponential growth since the 1990s, and yet it is hardly justifiable that the demographic growth of Latinos or any other minority group should be used a viable reason to target these particular groups for military operations, duty, or service. The comprehensive impact of specifically targeting these groups must be assessed outside of the anticipated interests they serve for the US military. Furthermore, the many covert and overt strategies used by the military to target these groups must be deconstructed in order to dismantle military ideologies and propaganda that are seemingly able to seep into all parts of everyday life—and increasingly so via popular culture.
Figures

Figure 6.1 Daddy Yankee fans capture shots of his provocative US Army helicopter stage entrance.
Figure 6.2 The spotlight illuminates the US Army helicopter as Daddy Yankee is also revealed through the open door of the chopper.
Figure 6.3 Daddy Yankee emerges from the US Army helicopter in a cloud of smoke and receives thunderous applause from his fans in the audience.
Figure 6.4 Daddy Yankee poses for fans and takes in their enthusiastic reception before launching into his full stage act.
Figure 6.5 Image text reads: “TENGO PODER MUNDIAL, PUEDO PONERTE EN STOP” [“I HAVE GLOBAL POWER, I CAN PUT YOU ON PAUSE”]
Figure 6.6 Daddy Yankee’s featured cover story for the May 19, 2007, *Billboard* magazine issue.
Figure 6.7 Univision’s “Hurban” Radio Station in Chicago, La Kalle 93.5, Tagline: “Yo Soy La Kalle” [I am the street]
Figure 6.8 Daddy Yankee’s corporate sponsor CITGO gasoline invents the constructed term “Latinotón” as a play on words derived from reggaetón.
Figure 6.9 Author posing with Daddy Yankee-branded signage for Orbit gum—another corporate sponsor of The Big Boss tour.
Figure 6.10 Author with CITGO signage carrying tagline with a muddled English translation: Energía Latina. Energía Solidaria. [Latin Energy. Solidarity Energy.]
Figure 6.11 Orbit’s interactive text-based marketing campaign that directly engaged audience participants by allowing them to live stream text messages onto a projector screen before the concert started.
Figure 6.12 Panoramic view of the audience also capturing the corporate banner signage posted across the Allstate Arena in the background.
Figure 6.13 Screen shot from Daddy Yankee’s “The Big Boss” Tour promotional video uploaded to YouTube.
Figure 6.14 Episode of video countdown show, 2rslvj, originally broadcast on cable network mun2.
Figure 6.15 First ad frame of beaming mother and son in decorated military uniform, captioned: Mi hijo siempre quiso ser líder. [My son always wanted to be a leader.]

Figure 6.16 Second ad frame centers on the “Army Strong” tagline with copy that reads: Se hizo líder como oficial del U.S. Army. Vea cómo el liderazgo lo lleva al triunfo. [He became a leader as an official in the U.S. Army. See how his leadership takes him to triumph.]
Figure 6.17 Third ad frame conveys its message completely in English.

Figure 6.18 A variation on the previous sequence of frames, with ad copy in Spanish: La alta responsabilidad de un oficial del U.S. Army es fuente de inspiracion. Descubra como sus hijos pueden hacerse lideres. [The high level of responsibility of a U.S. Army officer is a source of inspiration. Discover how your children can be leaders.]
Figure 6.19 US Army recruiters stand guard outside of the Allstate Arena anticipating the crowds set to emerge from the Daddy Yankee concert.
Figure 6.20 Military propaganda posted directly in front of the US Army’s silver Hummer vehicle displays the following ad copy: “Estan entrenados para ser mas de soldados. Estan entrenados para la vida.” [They are trained to be more than soldiers. They are trained for life.]
Figure 6.21 A young girl poses for pictures next to the US Army Strong Humvee, which attracted the attention of several Daddy Yankee concert-goers who posed for similar shots outside of the Allstate Arena.
Figure 6.22 US Army recruiters entice Daddy Yankee’s concert attendees with a free Daddy Yankee dog tag in exchange for their personal identification and contact information. The dog tag reads: DADDY YANKEE, ALLSTATE ARENA, 8/31/2007, ARMY STRONG
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSIONS

Final Discussion

This dissertation has interrogated the complex ways that reggaetón’s commercial crossover has been produced via mainstream media and the advertising and culture industries, but also how audiences, fans, and anti-fans have mediated this genre locally, globally, and within the context of online spaces. Each chapter has attempted to contribute to the existing and foundational body of literature on reggaetón music. And yet, in order to extend this literature and make critical interventions, it was necessary to bridge the gap between Latin American and Latina/o communication studies, media studies, popular music studies, audience studies, digital/new media studies, fan studies, and visual culture studies.

Overall, this dissertation has provided an effective case study for engaging the major cultural processes, or circuits of culture, through which reggaetón has come to be globally represented, negotiated, produced, consumed, and regulated. The advertising and culture industries have attempted multiple strategies and deployed several discursive constructs to sanitize, rebrand, and commodify the genre in efforts to directly target a growing market of pan-Latin/(o/a) millennials and capitalize on their rapidly increasing purchasing power. And yet, a closer examination of these market strategies reveals the ways in which they mimic and remain obedient to a familiar set of tropes and tropicalizations that have been previously identified in scholarship on Hispanic marketing and Latinos/as in the media. Notably, within the specific context of reggaetón’s global crossover, it has been critically important to shed light on the ways that marketers and gatekeepers of the culture industries have discursively constructed reggaetón as pan-Latin (i.e., Reggaetón Latino, Latin Urban) in order to expand its market reach from local to global circuits of production, distribution, consumption, and reception.
By tracing reggaetón’s trajectory from Puerto Rican underground rap to a now global commodity, this study also highlights the ways that various local media, governments, and institutions have previously moved to censor and ban this musical form—calling it immoral, sexually explicit, and a dangerous corrupting force within “civil” society. However, reggaetón has continued to transform and hybridize over time—demonstrating that as a popular diasporic musical form it is as much a reaction through as it is to the culture industries, governments, gatekeepers, and institutions that have attempted to contain and regulate it. Moreover, reggaetón has provided a means of expression for its producers, artists, audiences, and fans—as well as a space through which to negotiate their complex and hybrid identities and culture.

In many ways, reggaetón’s crossover illustrates how Latinos remain excluded and/or marginalized from the US mainstream. In order for reggaetón to be recognized and read by “mainstream” audiences (read: non-Latino), the mainstream media, advertising, and culture industries incorporated the genre into familiar Latin pop categories that these audiences could recognize. Drawing from a highly recognizable formula deployed to promote previous Latin crossover acts, reggaetón was touted as the latest “Latin Boom” or “Latin Explosion” within the Latin music industry. As a result, national radio and satellite stations created the Hurban (Hispanic + Urban) programming format to carve out an audience and target market for reggaetón and other similarly branded Latin urban genres. In turn, this later developed into a “Latin Urban” boom/explosion, in which Hispanic marketing expertise was wielded to produce advertising campaigns and product endorsement deals specifically seeking to capitalize on reggaetón’s crossover success to target its audiences as consumers of similarly branded “Latin Urban” goods (i.e., hair gel, tequila, shoes/retail, cars, clothing, telecom services). This Latin market boon precipitated by reggaetón’s phenomenal and global commercial success shifted the
spotlight onto the bicultural Latino millennial market that was predominantly consuming reggaetón in the US. Hispanic marketing in the US had also directed its attention away from “Hispanic” consumers (read: older generation and immigrant/foreign-born) and toward younger Latino millennials (read: bilingual/bicultural, US native, 2nd generation and higher)—also geared toward MELs “Mostly English Latinos.” Arguably, it is reggaetón’s commercial crossover that helped to highlight the significance of this target demographic—often referred to as an “untapped gold mine” within Hispanic marketing literature. And yet, Hispanic marketing “experts” continue to address MELs and bicultural Latino millennials using the same outmoded market models that present homogenous representations of Latinos as traditional, culturally grounded, communal, and family-oriented—disregarding the actual diversity and hybridity of Latinos in the US.

This study helps elucidate the in many ways “crossover” discursively functions as a means to maintain the status quo in terms of relegating Latinos to permanent outsider status in the US. The marginal representation of Latinos in US mainstream media has been amply documented in Latino/a communication studies scholarship and in empirical data that has tracked diversity across legacy and digital media industries in the US (i.e., news, film, television, video games). While reggaeton was given front-page news coverage in the US shortly after its commercial crossover in 2004, this media attention was short-lived and is in no way reflective of any movement toward representative parity for Latinos in media or in mainstream society. In fact, reggaetón’s short blip on the mainstream media’s radar underscores how far Latinos actually stand from gaining representative parity in mainstream media. Furthermore, the Hispanic market is also extremely fickle as far as determining which segments of the Latino population are being addressed and which segments are being ignored. As such, it is increasingly
apparent that bicultural Latino millennials currently have a growing target on their backs, while Spanish-dominant non-millennials have receded to the backdrop of the Hispanic market. It is also evident that perceived growth within particular segments of the Latino population and purchasing power remain the two long-standing markers and indicators of where Hispanic marketing experts and media industry gatekeepers will turn their attention next. While selling “lo Latino” through reggaetón may have been hot for a time, it is clear that the duration of reggaetón’s crossover success was being closely monitored to predict and plan the next Latino crossover and explosion. What reggaetón’s crossover has exposed are the ways in which the mainstream media and the advertising and culture industries collude in discursively producing hype around Latin booms, explosions, and crossover as a means to promote and sell more pan-Latin branded products (i.e., music, merchandise, ancillary products) across the globe. There is a long-standing history of celebratory discourse around Latin “crossover” acts in the US mainstream media. This now includes media representations of reggaetón artists (i.e., Daddy Yankee) as celebrated Latin crossover acts, as American Dream (read: myth) successes, and as signposts of Latinos who have earned their purported US mainstream acceptance through their exemplary capitalist achievements. And yet, these representations only reify Arlene Dávila’s (2008) perceptive assertion that Latinos gain representative and visibility in the US “only as a market, never as a people” (89).

Ultimately, it is my hope that this dissertation has exposed some of the ways in which Latinidad has been commodified and marketed through the global crossover of reggaetón. In this study, it was my intention to specifically draw attention to how reggaetón has been represented by mainstream media, negotiated by fans/anti-fans, produced by the culture industries, consumed by audiences, and regulated by various institutions and governing bodies. In doing so, I proposed
to interrogate and reveal how the advertising and culture industries have been specifically constructing target audiences and market segments for reggaetón. In particular, the music industry is known for producing racially and ethnically segmented markets, genres, and audiences. This was also the case with reggaetón’s commercial crossover. Through the commodification of Puerto Rican underground rap, reggaetón was developed as a commercialized genre under the Latin urban umbrella category. This sub-genre of “Latin urban” derived from the historically racialized and classed “urban” market segmentation previously constructed around Hip Hop and Rap in the US. The advertising and culture industries had expanded the reach of Hip Hop to global audiences in the early 2000s by deploying “urban” branding strategies and market segmentation, which was then exported globally and helped to sell products that were similarly marketed and branded with the caché of “urban cool.” Interrogating the branding of reggaetón as “Latin urban” and “pan-Latin,” against “urban” market branding helps to highlight some of the shared similarities.

In future research, I plan to take a more in-depth look at the ways that MELS (mostly English Latinos) and second generation and higher, bicultural, Latino millennials have been increasingly segmented by race/ethnicity, class, and language and hailed accordingly by the advertising and culture industries through discourses of Latin Urban “authencity.” There are several targeted marketing strategies evident in the global marketplace that deploy “Latin urban” discursive constructions as a means to disproportionately target “Latin urban” branded consumers—marked and segmented by race, class, and language—for inferior goods (i.e., liquor, tobacco, fast food). Some of these marketing strategies geared toward MELS and bicultural Latino millennials were visible throughout reggaetón’s commercial crossover, but further study on this area of research is needed.
It is critically important to deconstruct and work to dismantle the overt and covert marketing strategies used to disproportionately target the Latino population for the consumption of inferior goods, as this could lead to potentially harmful effects among this group. It is equally important to remain critically observant to the ways in the advertising and culture industries ostensibly sell to us through us. As this study’s final chapter on Daddy Yankee’s endorsement of the US military to Latinos has demonstrated, there are extremely high stakes at hand—as Blacks and Latinos are clear targets for the US military, which has used Hip Hop, reggaetón, and its artists to promote the agendas of the Department of Defense and serve its interests at any cost. I also intend to pursue more in-depth research concerning the linkage between the ways in which inferior products are sold to Latinos through pan-Latin branding strategies, and am subsequently devoted to gauging how Latinos come to be interpellated as disposable bodies based on their racialized, classed, gendered, and ethnically marked subjectivities. Accordingly, I intend to explore these linkages through further research on the military’s targeted recruitment strategies directed toward racial and ethnic minority populations in the US.

Overall, this dissertation seeks to contribute to audience studies, fan studies, visual culture studies, and digital media/new media studies by putting these bodies of literature in conversation with one another. Addressing issues of representation and reception, I propose a theoretical framework for understanding how transnational music audiences are rearticulating new meanings for globally commercialized musical forms online. Additionally, this project raises broader questions about how cultural identity is being negotiated through and against Latin-branded media and popular culture—as Latinos continually struggle for mainstream representation and visibility outside of the narrow forms offered through the market constructs of the culture industries. The advertising and culture industries often rely on one-dimensional or
“one size fits all” marketing campaigns to engage and address Latino consumers—as this is the most cost effective approach. Similarly, US mainstream media remains wedded to representations of Latinos that often subvert their diverse experiences and identities as complex and hybrid individuals. Hence, this study directs its focus toward anti-fans/fans of reggaeton that are so often interpellated by constraining market constructs and media representations of Latinidad. Notably, anti-fans of reggaetón, who participated in the online music forum under investigation, used this space to speak back in frustration to the marginal forms of representation that seek to address, target, and interpellate them. These anti-fans asserted their own musical taste cultures—which often get drowned out by the superfluous media attention and visibility given to commercially viable music forms such as reggaetón. As such, I emphasize the importance of deploying an intersectional analysis within fan studies research. There are several complex layers of mediation, such as cultural resistance to a particular media text, which have been largely ignored within fans studies research. This is particularly salient, in the case of the anti-fans in this study, as their proverbial hate for reggaetón extends beyond Jonathan Gray’s (2003) description of anti-fans as “those who strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel” (70). While, reggaetón’s anti-fans proclaim their dislike of reggaetón’s aesthetic content, I argue that they also assert cultural resistance to the homogeneous representations of Latinidad that reggaetón’s crossover has proliferated globally. Furthermore, I contend that these anti-fans also resist being hailed as the target market for reggaetón based on shared demographics alone such as language or ethnicity. It is important for fan studies to begin to adopt a more intersectional approach to begin to grapple with these complexities and to engage these intersecting layers of mediation in future research.
Exploring the backlash against reggaetón formed a critical part of this study. It was important to highlight the digital production and creation of Spanish-language dominant anti-fans/fans of reggaetón online, as English persists as the lingua franca of the Internet and Spanish-language dominant Internet users are often ignored as interactive subjects online. The digital visual culture of these anti-fans effectively highlights the importance of being attentive not only to how the advertising and culture industries construct the audiences for reggaeton, but to also interrogate how anti-fans use digital spaces to challenge the discursive authority of the gatekeepers of the media, advertising, and culture industries. Although these anti-fans produce and circulate digital content online that is far from being considered “high art,” these digital images form part of a gift economy and an active and participatory culture online. As such, this digital visual culture should not be overlooked by visual culture studies. The anti-reggaetón movement online is amorphous, fluid and comprised of a dispersed and actively changing network of Internet sites. Within these sites there are also observable interpersonal dynamics and relationships that emerge in relation to shared anti-fandom, including gatekeeping and policing practices, established hierarchies, as well overt racism, misogyny, sexism, classism, nationalism, and homophobia. Thus, the findings of this study affirm the ways in which online behaviors and practices parallel offline realities as well. And yet, more research is needed to address the ways in which race, ethnicity, class, gender, nation, and religion are negotiated and policed online. Also, within digital/new media studies, a glaring gap in research exists in relation to Latinos online. This study seeks to contribute to filling this gap and emphasizes the need for more research in this area. While there is much research to be done in the areas that I have previously outlined throughout this dissertation, it is my intention to emphasize the continued need for interdisciplinary research and methods in conducting this kind of work.
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