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***Dora the Explorer, Latinidad, and the Crisis of Identity in the  
Transition to Neoliberalism***

An Undergraduate Thesis  
Presented to  
The Media Studies Program  
Vassar College  
Poughkeepsie, New York

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Media Studies

Thesis Advisor:  
Eva Woods Peiró

by

**Ilan Berkman**  
April 2019

Dedicated to Boots the Monkey–

I always imagined we would be great friends.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In my first year at Vassar, I made a video for my sketch comedy troupe entitled *Dora Noir*. The video was a parody trailer for a film noir-style *Dora the Explorer* movie, in which Dora descends into the seedy underbelly of her city's crime world to rescue her kidnapped partner, Boots, from the clutches of the evil mob boss, Swiper the Fox.

I do not recall where this idea first came from. But I do remember that it made perfect sense to me at the time to recast Dora as the lonely, anarchic hero of a noir story. I had always found there to be something unsettling about *Dora the Explorer*. Maybe it was the fact that Dora represented to me the commercialization of childhood – the idyll of youthfulness cast under the shadow of capitalism. Maybe it was her lawlessness, her lack of supervision. Maybe I just did not trust how much she smiled.

After writing this thesis, and spending a year unraveling Dora's symbolic construction, I now have a better understanding of where my feelings of discomfort towards her came from, and what she has to do with opaque terms like “neoliberalism,” “selfhood,” or “hegemony.” None of this would have been possible without my thesis adviser, Eva Woods Peiró. Thank you for your guidance, patience, and support, and for introducing me to the scholarship that brought blurry ideologies, rhetoric, and global phenomena into focus for the first time.

Thank you to everyone else who helped me along this process as well. To Dina Charnin, for helping steer me towards this topic in the first place. To Alexander Kupfer, for demonstrating to me the importance of considering the machinery of the media industry. To Mario Cesareo, for teaching me how to tackle critically a system as complex and overwhelming as capitalism. To

my Media Studies adviser, Peter Antelyes, and my Hispanic Studies adviser, Andy Bush, for their years of mentorship, academic guidance, and emotional support, and for pushing me to think not only about *what* and *how* to learn, but also *why* to do so in the first place.

Next, I want to thank all of my friends who I have subjected to hours of complaining about this project. To my housemates, Michael Eacobacci, Ellis Igneri, Kyle McConaughy, and Ethan Pierce, who likely never want to hear the words “*Dora the Explorer*” or “neoliberalism” again. To my fellow consultants at the Vassar College Writing Center, Schuyler Osgood, Jamie Anderson, and Annie Shriver, who have offered invaluable comment on my drafts. A second “thank you” to Annie especially, for coupling her insightful feedback always with endless kindness, companionship, encouragement, and snacks.

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# CHAPTER 1

## “¡Lo hicimos!”: The Rhetoric and Internal Instability of *Dora the Explorer*’s Commodified Latinidad

### The Success of *Dora the Explorer* and the Polysemy of “Difference”

Since the year 2000, *Dora the Explorer* has captured the imagination of parents and preschoolers alike. Dora’s wide, friendly brown eyes, recognizable haircut, and characteristic pink shirt have bored their way into popular culture across the globe. Parents and marketers herald her as a champion of multiculturalism, Latinx<sup>1</sup> identity, and the Spanish language.

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<sup>1</sup>An important word on terminology:

Recognizing how powerful labels can be in creating, delineating, organizing, or erasing identity, I aim to be cautious in my use of terms like “Hispanic,” “Latino/a,” and “Latinx.” These descriptors are useful, but also inherently reductive, as they refer to panethnic identities that erase cultural, ethnic, national, linguistic, and racial differences. There is a long history of discourse and disagreement surrounding these terms, and their respective levels of acceptability have continued to shift over time. To oversimplify their definitions, “Hispanic” generally refers to those from Spain or Spanish-speaking parts of Latin America, and is a term made popular through the U.S. government census, rooted in a neocolonial effort to reassert Spain’s linguistic and cultural centrality after the fall of its colonial empire in 1898 (Simón; Woods Peiró). “Latino/a,” on the other hand, which was offered as an updated replacement for “Hispanic,” usually refers to people from Spanish and Portuguese-speaking Latin America, but not from Spain or Portugal (Simón). “Latinx” is a more recent invention, which has been proposed as even more inclusive than the previous two, because it negates the gender binary. Given the historical confusion between these terms, they will sometimes appear as synonyms in this thesis, especially when used in quotations from other scholars. When given the choice, however, I will prefer to use “Latinx,” as it is the most inclusive and up-to-date term available to me. For more information on the historical development of these terms, Yara Simón’s article, “Hispanic vs. Latino vs. Latinx: A Brief History of How These Words Originated,” offers a helpful starting place.



However, for a character so tightly intertwined, at least in the public imagination, with notions of Latinidad<sup>2</sup> and the Spanish language, the story of Dora's creation is somewhat surprising. After the continuous success of Nickelodeon's previous experiments with interactive television programming for children, producer Chris Gifford, with his colleagues Valerie Walsh and Eric Weiner, set out to create a show that would similarly inspire audience participation (Arrieta). Their protagonist continued to evolve over time, changing from "a bunny who would go on a trip with his mommy" and overcome obstacles along the way, into other woodland creatures, and then, eventually, into a little non-Latina girl (Williams and Gifford; Arrieta). It was not until Brown Johnson, a Nickelodeon executive fresh out of a conference at which she had learned about Latinx people's underrepresentation on children's television, asked that Gifford's team make their lead character a Spanish-speaking Latina girl, that Dora Marquéz was born (Arrieta). Dora took her first name from *exploradora*, the Spanish feminine word for "explorer." Her surname was chosen to honor the celebrated Colombian author Gabriel García Marquéz (Arrieta). She was to embark on journeys through her animated world, using her bilingualism and the help of her young viewers to solve problems. "One of our goals with Dora," Johnson explains, "was to position the whole idea of being multicultural as being super-special" (Arrieta). Recognizing the lack of Latinx people on their team, Johnson adds that *Dora the Explorer's* creators and producers brought in "more consultants in this show than any other show in the entire universe," many of them Latinx people, to offer their expertise on pedagogy, history, sociology, culture, music, language and more (Arrieta). Together, the team constructed

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<sup>2</sup>For my purposes in this thesis, I will use the term "Latinidad" according to the definition presented by Angharad N. Valdivia: "the process of being, becoming, and/or performing belonging within a Latina/o [or Latinx] diaspora" (Valdivia, "The Gendered Face" 53). I will, however, go on to demonstrate that, in the case of *Dora the Explorer*, very particular notions of "Latinidad" are constructed for commercial purposes.

Dora as a “pan-Latino character, so she [could] be a source of pride and identity for anyone of a Latino background,” explains one key creative figure, historian Carlos Cortés (Arrieta). In the year 2000, Nickelodeon released their new Latina heroine to the public.

Whether or not one chooses to accept executives’ claims that the creation of a Latina protagonist like Dora was motivated, first and foremost, by benevolent dreams of promoting linguistic and ethnic diversity and increasing Latinx representation on the children’s programming schedule, the marketing appeal of this move is undeniable. The Hispanic minority in the United States has been steadily increasing for decades, from 22.4 million people in 1990, to 35.3 million in Dora’s year of release in 2000 (a 57.9 percent increase, notably greater than the total U.S. population’s increase of only 13.2 percent in that same period), to an estimated 55 million people – or 17 percent of the total U.S. population – in 2016 (Guzmán; “Hispanics in the US”). The Census Bureau projects that by the year 2060, this number will be as high as 119 million people, or 28 percent of the national population (“Hispanics in the US”). A 2013 Nielsen report highlights the fundamental role of Hispanic women in this demographic growth, predicting that they will account for 30 percent of the U.S. female population by 2060, whereas non-Hispanic white women will slide to only 43 percent (“Latina Power Shift”).

The importance of the Spanish language to this population, and to the country, cannot be understated, either. A 2012 study by the Pew Research Center found that “95% of Hispanics believe it is very important (75%) or somewhat important (20%) for future generations of Hispanics in the U.S. to be able to speak Spanish” (“When Labels”). The 2016 census estimated that Spanish is the second most-used language in the nation behind English, spoken by 38 million Hispanic people and 2.6 million non-Hispanics, (“Hispanics in the US”). 57.5 percent of English-speaking Hispanic people in the United States are bilingual in both English and Spanish

(“Hispanics in the US”). Globally, there are 460 million native speakers of Spanish, compared to 379 million native speakers of English (Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig).

Not only is the U.S. Latinx population massive (and growing) in size, but so, too, is its power in the U.S. economy, both as consumers and producers. A 2016 study found that, “As consumers, Latinos wield more than \$1.3 trillion in buying power, and the number of affluent Latinx households is growing much faster than for the overall population” (McGirt). A 2017 study commissioned by the Latino Donor Collaborative found that in 2015, Latinx workers in the United States were responsible for a \$2.13 trillion gross domestic product (GDP) (Schink and Hayes-Bautista). This Latinx GDP, if it belonged to its own country, would have been the seventh largest in the world – larger than the GDPs of Italy, Brazil, Canada, or India, and just smaller than that of the United Kingdom or France (Schink and Hayes-Bautista).

Such statistics demonstrate just how formidable of a social and economic force the Latinx population is in the United States. *Dora the Explorer*'s release in 2000 locates her within a larger trend of television and media executives realizing the economic necessity and appeal of targeting this demographic. Television executives began addressing Spanish-speakers as a potential market as early as the 1950s. Advertisers' belief that Hispanic viewers would prefer to watch Spanish-language content over English programming, regardless of their fluency in English, facilitated the growth of the U.S.-produced Spanish-language television industry (Moran 295). As the Latinx population continued to grow in size and power, however, the necessity of addressing them in other sectors of the television industry continued to increase accordingly, until, in the words of Marjorie Cohn, an executive vice president of programming for Nickelodeon, “A few years ago, we decided to reach out to Latinos... We couldn't afford to ignore them” (Jiménez).

Nickelodeon has long distinguished itself from competitors by its willingness to represent diversity on children's television. The symbiotically-intertwined children's media and toy industries have, for the most part, functioned in line with the same philosophies since the 1950s. They consistently prioritize white, affluent children as their primary source of capital, churning out male protagonists and action figures, and relying heavily on gender stereotypes and "the symbolic annihilation of girl characters" to dictate their designs (Seiter and Mayer 121). Ellen Seiter and Vicki Mayer's study of Nickelodeon's programming in the 1990s found, however, that the network took unconventional steps in that decade by casting more female leads, and by creating more Latinx, Asian American and African American characters (Seiter and Mayer 120-121). When representing Latinx people, Nickelodeon "deliberately sought qualified producers and conscientiously pursued Latino families as a potentially lucrative market" (Seiter and Mayer 132). With this radical approach, Nickelodeon not only defied industry presumptions by not losing viewership, but "positioned itself favorably" with regard to Latinx representation, jumping "well ahead of the networks, most other cable channels, and most advertisers" (Seiter and Mayer 121, 132).

Nickelodeon's non-traditional approach found its biggest success in 2000 with the release of *Dora the Explorer*. Dora's debut episode earned the highest ratings of any premier in the history of the Nick Jr. network (Navarro). Within a year, she held the highest ratings of any commercial television program for preschoolers, ages 2 to 5 (Navarro). As part of a Nick Jr. package that aired in the Saturday morning block on CBS, *Dora the Explorer* increased CBS's preschool audience by 51 percent in that same year (Navarro). Eager to capitalize on all this success, Nickelodeon began developing Dora's line of toys and apparel almost immediately (Navarro). Pretty soon, Dora had become a cultural phenomenon. On November 11, 2002, she

appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine (Diaz-Wionczek et al. 204). Her 2003 show, “Dora the Explorer Live,” became Radio City Music Hall’s highest-grossing family show ever, and in 2005 she became Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade’s first ever Latina character (Diaz-Wionczek et al. 204).

These achievements came, much to Nickelodeon’s excitement, without loss of their non-Latinx viewership. In fact, Nickelodeon officials announced that in the first year, Latinx people accounted for only 5 to 15 percent of the total audience for Nickelodeon’s three “Latin-themed” programs, *Dora the Explorer*, *The Brothers García* (released in 2000), and *Taina* (released in early 2001) (Navarro). Dora has since become a model for the financial benefits of Latin-themed and bilingual programming, launching what Erynn Massi de Casanova describes as “a recent wave of animated educational children’s programs featuring Latino main characters and dialogue in Spanish” (Massi de Casanova 159).

Though Nickelodeon holds this trailblazing record of diversifying representation on television, this is more an outcome of their branding and research strategies than it is a political agenda. Nickelodeon has always aimed to produce content that feels relevant to their young viewers’ lived experiences and realities. Realizing that their audience comes from varied backgrounds, their approach to audience research actively emphasizes diversity. Bruce Friend, vice president of Worldwide Research and Planning, explains,

We [at Nickelodeon] oversample a bit with minorities. We’ve had some distinct groups of minorities as test groups. We skew the norms in terms of their representation in the population. But the multicultural focus groups give us different kinds of information. We ask them how Nickelodeon fits into their lives. We don’t have a problem with representation and thus need the focus groups. It’s the opposite. We’re very strong in this area. We want to further our understanding of our appeal. We recognize our audience is not homogeneous. (Seiter and Mayer 126)

The results of such surveys undoubtedly incite increased representational diversity, and the repeated success of this methodology encourages Nickelodeon to continue using it. Certainly, given the well-documented power and tendency of media representations to reproduce hegemony and traditional social hierarchies, Nickelodeon's diversity-focused approach to content development is an inherently political tactic. However, their rhetoric around the issue is decidedly *apolitical*, or even *anti-political*. The Nickelodeon party line, reiterated over and over again by interviewees in Seiter and Mayer's study, is that in Nickelodeon shows, race (or gender, or ethnicity, or any other such social category) is not a primary issue, but is rather evoked as an easy way of suggesting that their characters come from different backgrounds, yet can still learn from and relate to one another. Seiter and Mayer explain, "Race, in this rhetoric, is a 'difference' on par with having a single mother, or living in an apartment, or being gifted with a special talent" (126). Nickelodeon treats race as an easily iconized form of "otherness," without addressing the historical particularities, narratives, and problematics associated with racial divisions. They disavow the political slants such characterizations necessarily add to their shows, and absolve themselves of political responsibility by focusing attention and praise on their positive depictions of a generalized "Difference."<sup>3</sup>

De-historicizing and delocalizing racial, ethnic, gendered, and other social differences is useful to Nickelodeon not only in that it allows the network to sidestep fiery debates over the politics of representation, but also, importantly, because it enables Nickelodeon's programs to transfer smoothly to an additional, almost infinite market: the global market. John Fiske argues that a television program can only become popular if it is an "open text" in the sense used by

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<sup>3</sup> From here onward, I will use the capitalized form "Difference" to refer specifically to the reductive, generalized, and fetishized image of otherness that I have outlined above.

Umberto Eco – that is to say, if it leaves space for polysemic interpretation (Fiske 392). Only such openness makes it possible for myriad subcultures, each with their own notions of identity, to derive meaning from the same singular text (Fiske 392). Fiske qualifies this claim by acknowledging that television texts are not “anarchically open,” meaning they *do* define certain parameters of meaning-making. He writes,

The diverse subcultures in a society are defined only by their relations (possibly oppositional) to the centers of domination, [and] so, too, the multiple meanings of a [popular] text... can be defined only by their relationships (possibly oppositional) to the dominant ideology as it is structured in that text (Fiske 392).

Fiske’s analysis suggests one (possible and partial) explanation of how Nickelodeon designs its programs with the potential for popularity in mind; Difference is an excellent structuring device for welcoming polysemy, as it is a universally recognizable idea. Its valence does shift drastically by circumstance, but anywhere domination exists, so, too, must some notion of Difference exist, because the ideology of domination always requires differentiation and negotiation between the in-group and the out-group, the central and the marginalized, the acceptable and the forbidden, or the dominant and the dominated. Nickelodeon offers its own blueprints for the range of ways Difference should be understood and treated. The particular forms of interpretation that viewers around the world select from this set of possible meanings, however, depend on the relations of power present in their own societies. The fact that Nickelodeon’s shows – regardless of how the network may market their premises – are not really about exploring and raising the voices of specific underserved groups, so much as they are about connecting with wide audiences through the polysemic potential contained within the idea of Difference, will become abundantly clear when we examine transnational co-productions or translations of these programs.

To do so, let us return to the example of *Dora the Explorer*. As I have mentioned before, Dora's Latinidad is absolutely central to her design, branding, and success in the United States. Given the long and fraught histories of negotiation between Latinx peoples and dominant discourses regarding national identity, Dora's persona as a capable, relatable, and adorable bilingual Latina girl with her very own show implies a complex nexus of particular possible meanings to United States audiences. As I will later explore in more depth, *Dora the Explorer* codes Latinidad for American audiences through a range of specific cultural, phenotypical, geographical, historical, and other signifiers (for example, her Latin-infused background music, her brown skin, eyes, and hair, and the settings she traverses that evoke locations across South, Central, and North America). The most prominent of these signifiers is linguistic; Latinidad and the Spanish language are inextricably intertwined within the U.S. popular imagination. This is why, creator Chris Gifford explains, "within every *Dora the Explorer* episode we try to include some cultural pieces, in addition to a Spanish language element" (Williams and Gifford). "Of course," Gifford continues, "that [Spanish] piece is more important in [the U.S.]. Around the world it's not as big a thing because around the world Dora's still Latina, but she's teaching another language like English. We don't teach so much as she models using two languages" (Williams and Gifford).

Such is the case, for example, in Israel, where Dora speaks Hebrew and teaches English instead of Spanish. Though this may seem an innocent-enough change, it actually highlights that the designing principle behind Dora is not the promotion of Spanish, Latinidad, and a historically-underrepresented population, as Dora's branding in the United States purports, but rather the effort to structure a culturally imperialist and widely marketable program around the iconization of Difference as a polysemic keystone. Dafna Lemish, a Professor of Communication



at the Southern Illinois University Carbondale, explains the curiosity of Israeli Dora's language practices clearly. She says,

...this is a very interesting twist, because learning English is "aiming up," rather than "aiming down." What I mean by this is that while in the U.S. Dora is trying to raise the value of Spanish to its rightful position, in Israel English is already very highly valued and is looked up at as a high-status and upper-mobility language. For Dora to have the same effect as it has in the U.S. with Spanish, it should have taught in Israel, for example, Russian – a language of a huge group of immigrants (about 15 percent of the population), which is perceived as a minority language of lower status... So I think that, culturally, Russian in Israel would have been the equivalent of Spanish in the U.S... (Valdivia, "The Gendered Face" 60).

In the global market, *Dora The Explorer* abandons its alleged mission of uplifting Spanish and Latinidad. Though foreign viewers may (or even may not) recognize Dora's Latinidad, its horizon of possible meanings necessarily shifts in every new setting, and sometimes Spanish is not even involved. Only *Dora the Explorer's* core narrative of de-specified Difference as a harmless and inviting force remains constant (Valdivia, "The Gendered Face" 60).

*Dora the Explorer's* global success makes further examination of its international reproductions a worthy endeavor, especially if one is interested in examining the U.S.'s cultural imperialism worldwide. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I now turn my attention back to the valence of her Difference in the context of the United States. Dora does not register as a generic "other" in the U.S.; her otherness is, to U.S. viewers, conspicuously, and famously, "Latina." But what is the exact nature of Dora's Latinidad? How have her creators designed her in such a way as to maximize her marketability? With what rhetoric have they worked to legitimize these decisions? I address these questions in the next section.

## **Panethnicity vs. Authenticity, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Conquest**

Unlike in the global marketplace, where Dora's Latinidad sometimes recedes to the background and leaves her as a mere icon of generalized Difference, in the United States, where her show was created, Dora dons her Latinidad like a badge of honor. She is Nick Jr.'s proud Latina heroine. She adventures through her Latin-infused universe, overcoming every obstacle with the help of her Spanish-English bilingualism (and also, of course, with her friends Boots, Map, Backpack, and the audience). Behind the scenes, Dora's producers consult with experts in Spanish and Latin American cultures, to make their depiction of her Latinidad as accessible as possible to viewers, and also, in the words of Dora's creator Chris Gifford, "as authentic as we can" (Ratner-Arias; Guidotti-Hernández, "Dora the Explorer" 215).

In order to make Dora marketable to the widest possible audience, Dora's producers took the tact of rendering her as panethnic – that is, they blurred lines of cultural and national identities in order to envelop as many Latinx-identifying communities in Dora's Latinidad as possible. At the advice of historian Carlos Cortés, Dora's creators decided to avoid specifying Dora's national origin (Ratner-Arias). Instead they placed her in a fictional and unnamed world full of mixed Latinx signifiers, which cannot be located on any map, but recall real-world locations and elements. Cortés argued that this would allow all Latinx children to see in Dora a hero they related to and were proud of, while non-Latinx children could "embrace someone different" (Ratner Arias). Dora's creators enthusiastically admit to designing Dora according to this logic – that is, to giving her what they called "pan-Latino appeal" (Guidotti-Hernández, "Dora the Explorer" 216). Their phenotypical design decisions reflect this same intentionality; for example, they changed Dora's eye color from green to brown "after content supervisor Dolly

Espinal pointed out that a majority of Latinos have brown eyes” (Banet-Weiser 167). Though delocalizing, de-historicizing, and de-specifying Dora’s identity in these ways may be a financially advantageous tactic, it creates a glaring contradiction that destabilizes Dora’s character when partnered with her alleged “authenticity.” To create a panethnic stereotype of Latinidad, and then to label it as “authentic,” is to erase, reduce, essentialize, and fetishize a multitude of national, cultural, ethnic, racial, historical, and linguistic identities, and then to claim that the product still perfectly mirrors reality. It is to try to stabilize “identity” itself, when identity is always a fluid process of construction and reconstruction, and an ongoing interfacing between external and internal realities.

Describing Dora’s panethnicized Latinidad as “authentic” means claiming that she truthfully and holistically represents the identities of all of her Latinx viewers, when this could not be further from the truth. For example, a crucial step in making Dora panethnic was to strip her of any specific country of origin, but a 2012 survey by the Pew Research Center found that “When it comes to describing their identity, most Hispanics prefer their family’s country of origin over panethnic terms,” and only 24 percent of respondents “say they use the terms “Hispanic” or “Latino” most often to describe their identity,” (“When Labels”). If we take the term “authenticity” to mean fidelity to Latinx peoples’ diverse realities, these statistics alone make it clear that Dora’s panethnicity fails to represent Latinidad authentically. Furthermore, this is only one of many places where her creators’ claims to authenticity collapse under the weight of Dora’s stereotypical construction. Thus, configuring Dora to be panethnic while also convincing audiences of her authenticity means juggling two discrepant rhetorical strategies that threaten to undercut one another at all times.

The question, then, is why the show chooses to maintain both of these rhetorical approaches in its design and marketing, even when the tension between them renders the show's protagonist unstable. To begin developing an answer, let us examine how *Dora the Explorer* constructs panethnicity in the first place.

One of the key decisions in the panethnicizing of Dora, as I have mentioned above, was to strip her of traceable national identity. This same avoidance of specificity extends to all other aspects of her universe's design as well, which is filled instead with referents that signify a nebulous Latin-ness (that is, a hazy sense of *Latinidad*) through their associations with different Latinx countries and cultures. On her journeys, Dora passes tropical elements like palm trees, coconuts, and sandy beaches, as well as Mesoamerican pyramids and neo-Mayan cities, and even North American vegetation (Rodríguez 86). The friends she meets along her way are usually animals with similarly variable and vaguely-Latinx implied origins, each of whom have different levels of fluency in English, Spanish, or both. Recurring characters include "Isa the Iguana, Boots the Monkey, Benny the Bull, the Fiesta Trio (a band of insects), Señor Tucán, Tico the Squirrel," and Dora's antagonist, Swiper the Fox, the "only character who cannot speak a word of Spanish" (Rodríguez 82). Other minor characters, like Season 1 Episode 21's Coquí, a singing frog native to Puerto Rico, also require Dora's help (Navarro). All of these elements combine in a blend of temporally and geospatially incongruous meanings, cast under the same reductive descriptor of "*Latinidad*."

Dora's adventures move mostly to the rhythms of Cuban salsa and marimba, but musical styles and narratives from other parts of the world find their way into the show as well, sometimes, for example, through the bluesy leitmotif of the Map, or other times as central plot points. Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández analyzes one particular episode, entitled "Dora La

Músico”<sup>4</sup> (2001), wherein certain musical traditions take on a foremost textual role. In this episode, Dora and Boots work to help residents of a local *pueblo* reclaim their instruments, which have been locked in a box by a man named Señor Shush,<sup>5</sup> so that the townsfolk may continue their *parranda*, or “parade of musical instruments” (Guidotti-Hernández, “Dora the Explorer” 219-220). Guidotti-Hernández reads the *parranda* performed in this episode as a descendent of the Puerto Rican *parranda* (a celebratory tradition associated with Christmas and Día de los Reyes, which also carries a history of disguised resistance to colonial policing), as well as the Venezuelan *parranda* (a tradition held to honor certain patron saints, that is also linked to colonial resistance and memories of oppression and slavery), and also of the Afro-Cuban *comparsa* (a musical tradition performed during Lent and Carnival, which maintains “an oppositional quality because the European-origin majority characterized it as a barbaric African form of cultural expression located in the past”) (Guidotti-Hernández, “Dora the Explorer” 222-223). *Dora the Explorer* visually erases blackness, Afro-Latinidad, and religion – all essential facets of the histories behind the *parranda* and *comparsa* (Guidotti-Hernández, “Dora the Explorer” 223). “Dora la Música” even shifts the *parranda* and *comparsa* from their chiefly urban origins, as Dora’s parade moves through both the countryside and the town (Guidotti-Hernández, “Dora the Explorer” 224). Despite these visual omissions and modifications, the narratives of Señor Shush’s effort to silence the townspeople, Dora’s resistance to oppression through music, and the magical act of liberation that the *parranderos* perform by playing their music, reference “the history of repression of Afro-Latino traditions” and acknowledge

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<sup>4</sup> This translates to “Dora the Musician.”

<sup>5</sup> Señor Shush, who hates music and demands *silencio*, visually resembles the late salsa icon Tito Puente – an ironic, and somewhat esoteric, cultural joke (Guidotti-Hernández, “Dora the Explorer” 219-220).

“blackness as a part of a larger history of the Americas” (Guidotti-Hernández, “Dora the Explorer” 223-224).

On one hand, Guidotti-Hernández argues that the indirect references to Afro-Latinidad and blackness, and even to historical figures like salsa superstar Tito Puente, create “[challenges] to the imagined, monolithic Latino/a subject,” because they reveal the erasure and reduction involved in generating a panethnic Latinidad (Guidotti-Hernández, “Dora the Explorer” 225, 229). On the other hand, these encoded signifiers can only become challenges if viewers are familiar enough with the particular embedded cultural, racial, ethnic, and national histories to be capable of recognizing them. Most viewers are not. To unacquainted audiences, “the *parranda* and *comparsa* just look like depoliticized celebrations and not acts of self-determination” (Guidotti-Hernández, “Dora the Explorer” 224). Most of Dora’s audience members do not notice the erasure, blending, and trimming of histories and meanings that go into the manufacturing of any *Dora the Explorer* episode. In most cases, the panethnic product emerges as convincing, and victorious.

Furthermore, even viewers who can effectively decode embedded references do not necessarily perceive them as challenges. Viewers might instead identify even *more* closely with Dora after finding certain aspects of their own cultural heritage represented onscreen, regardless of how flimsily. Thus, whether these signifiers are read as destabilizing the panethnicizing efforts of *Dora the Explorer*, or instead as participating in them, the encoded meanings always exist in some relation to the panethnic Latinidad proffered by the show. This is precisely as Fiske warned us in his quotation about non- “anarchically open” texts. In the case of Dora, I argue that the “center of domination” Fiske mentions *is* this panethnic Latinidad, or whoever is responsible for creating and selling it (Fiske 392). Certain viewers might, indeed, be conscious enough of the

encoded meanings to recognize their instability and feel alienated by them, but for the most part these signifiers remain subtle enough to add “Latin-flavor” to the show without calling too much attention to themselves. The rest of the time these meanings actually succeed, perhaps counterintuitively, at winning *more* self-identification from knowledgeable viewers, who enjoy the little representation of themselves that they *do* find embedded. Dora’s panethnicization of Latinidad therefore maintains and reinforces its dominance far more than it threatens to destabilize itself.

The landscapes, characters, music, and plot narratives of *Dora the Explorer*’s universe demonstrate just how deep within the architecture of the show the effort to create a panethnic Latinidad is entrenched. Certainly, these elements are all also important parts of *Dora the Explorer*’s branding and merchandising efforts. But there remains another key piece of Dora’s design that merits examination, given its primary importance as a purported legitimizer of Dora’s generic Latinidad, as a marketing device that Nickelodeon uses to distinguish the show from others on television, and as a trailblazer that inspired future imitators. This piece is Dora’s use of Spanish.

Like the other elements discussed above, Dora’s Spanish works in service of panethnic reduction by omitting any geographical, cultural, or socioeconomic markers. Dora’s teaching and speaking of Spanish is central to her branding, and an essential facet of her universe’s construction. Dora’s world is inhabited by speakers of English and Spanish, and her bilingualism is what empowers her to communicate with the characters she meets, to solve problems and reach her destinations, and to move freely through space. As Brown Johnson, an executive creative director at Nickelodeon, describes, “Spanish becomes through Dora this sort of magical thing. The ability to speak another language [becomes] really cool and powerful” (Moran 296).

Dora's Spanish makes her special, but is itself entirely neutral. Dora speaks a universal, unaccented Spanish, which cannot be traced to any specific geographical origin.<sup>6</sup> In her analysis of the linguistic practices of various bilingual children's shows, Erynn Masi de Casanova writes that "*Dora* takes an instrumental view of language, meaning that Spanish is not linked to ideas about Latino culture, but is shown as a skill that can be acquired by young viewers, a form of non-specific cultural capital" (Masi de Casanova 160). This quotation might be misleading in saying that "Spanish is not linked to ideas about Latino culture," because *Dora the Explorer* very much marks Dora's Spanish ability as an essential component of her Latinidad. However, as Masi de Casanova astutely notes, this link is built between Dora's Spanish and her Latina *identity*, rather than between her Spanish and some definite Latinx *culture*. Indeed, as Masi de Casanova explains, Spanish in *Dora the Explorer* avoids cultural specificity altogether, instead presenting itself as a learn-able skill that allows anyone to engage with Latinidad, and grants tangible social advantages for those who acquire it.

In other words, Dora's knowledge of Spanish grants her a certain authority within her universe, and promises the same authority to viewers that acquire her same Spanish knowledge. I use the term "authority" here in the sense articulated by Kathryn A. Woolard, who defines authoritative language as one that enables its speakers to "command and convince an audience, whether that language has institutionally-recognized legitimacy or not" (Woolard 1).<sup>7</sup> Woolard

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<sup>6</sup> This lack of singular place of origin extends behind the scenes as well, to Dora's casting. Dora's first voice actress, Kathleen Hertez, was the daughter of Peruvian parents (Rodríguez 86). Her second voice actress, Caitlin Sanchez, was born in New Jersey and has Cuban grandparents (Rodríguez 86). Her third voice actress, Fátima Ptacek, is from New York, and is the daughter of an Ecuadorian mother, and a father with Norwegian, Czechoslovakian, Irish, and Colombian heritage ("Nine-Year-Old")

<sup>7</sup> Woolard's analysis focuses on Catalonia, a case study in which Spanish is the hegemonic language. In my study of *Dora the Explorer* and the United States, however, English is the



identifies two discrete ideological complexes that are most often responsible for designating linguistic authority within modern western societies: *authenticity*, and *anonymity* (Woolard 1). “The ideology of *authenticity*,” Woolard writes, “locates the value of a language in its relationship to a particular community. That which is authentic is viewed as the genuine expression of such a community, or of an essential Self. Within the logic of authenticity, a speech variety must be perceived as deeply rooted in social and geographical territory in order to have value” (Woolard 2). Authenticity rewards those who speak with linguistic markers that locate them within specific communities or spaces – particular accents, terminology, grammatical structures, etc.

The ideological complex of linguistic authenticity thus works in direct contrast to that of *anonymity*, the other system that Woolard identifies, and the one along which Dora’s linguistic practices are mapped. Woolard explains that, “In contrast to minoritized languages, hegemonic languages in modern society often rest their authority on anonymity,” a system that mandates that speakers, in order to participate within the public sphere, must use an unmarked, shared language defined in accordance with bourgeois linguistic norms (Woolard 3). She writes,

This modern “public” supposedly includes everyone, but it abstracts away from each person's private and interested individual characteristics to distill a common or general voice (Gal/Woolard 2001: 6). The social roots of the public in any specific speaking position are ideologically represented as transcended, if not entirely absent. The disembodied, disinterested public, freed through rational discourse from the constraints of a socially specific perspective, supposedly achieves a superior “aperspectival objectivity” that has been called “a view from nowhere” (Nagel 1986). From this viewpoint, the tenets of dominant ideologies in the modern public sphere appear not to belong to any identifiable individuals but rather seem to be socially neutral, universally available, natural and objective truths. In a sense then, they are anonymous. (Woolard 4-5)

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hegemonic language, not Spanish. Even so, Woolard’s theoretical framework still translates effectively to this other case.

Woolard's dissection of the ideology of anonymity is useful for understanding *Dora the Explorer* on three tiers at once. First, it demonstrates that Dora's specific language practices (for example, her absence of locatable accent, and her avoidance of culturally- or regionally-specific terminology in favor of globally-shared vocabulary) acquire linguistic authority from their anonymity. Secondly, it reveals that in speaking and teaching these linguistic practices directly to the audience, Dora configures herself and every one of her viewers as part of the same public, regardless of their individual historical, cultural and linguistic circumstances. She welcomes children (read: consumers) from any English- and/or Spanish-speaking background to participate alongside her, if they are willing to subscribe to the linguistic norms of this "neutral" public space. Last, but certainly not least importantly, Woolard's analysis highlights how the ideology of anonymity enables the individuals or groups who dictate "dominant ideologies" to mask their own influence in the public space's construction through the rhetoric of neutrality, objectivity, and universal availability (Woolard 4-5).

Dora's linguistic practices thus participate, in tandem with the other aforementioned aspects of her design, in a larger effort by her creators to construct an image of Latinidad that is non-specific and delocalized. The commercial advantages of this construction are clear; it allows Dora's generic Latinidad to be marketed widely, to Latinx and non-Latinx communities alike. Furthermore, Woolard's analysis demonstrates how such anonymity can offer authority to Dora's characterization. The question remains, however, why do Dora's creators continue to employ talk of authenticity, when it runs in direct contradiction to the ideology of anonymity? Why create such internal instability, such tension?

The answer, I contend, is that authenticity serves, in the case of *Dora the Explorer*, as a key rhetorical tool that enables hegemonic forces and ideologies to legitimize themselves while

simultaneously masking their own involvement in the construction of Dora's commercialized Latinidad. In her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Louise Pratt offers language that is useful to us here: the term “*anti-conquest*.” She writes, “I use this term to refer to the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony” (Pratt 8-9). Though Pratt looks expressly at travel writing meant for European audiences, her “European bourgeois subjects” may in practicality be replaced with any dominant hegemonic group. What is important here is that the term “anti-conquest” refers to sets of techniques by which hegemony reproduces itself while evading critique and resistance.

Such techniques are of vital importance for the maintenance of hegemonic ideologies because, as Antonio Gramsci famously noted, hegemony functions not by pure top-down coercion or manipulation, but rather by garnering the acceptance, and (preferably) willing participation, of those it subjugates.<sup>8</sup> Gramsci describes hegemony as,

The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (Gramsci 12)

T.J. Jackson Lears reminds us that Gramsci's claims do not end there, however; Gramsci's deconstructions of consent, consciousness, public discourse, and the relationship between cultural hegemony and dominance, are far more complex than commonly appreciated. Lears and Gramsci remind us that it is not enough to say that dominant groups foist ideas on social and

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that Gramsci discusses hegemony as it relates to state power, whereas our focus here is on corporate power. That said, as corporate power and state power collapse ever further into one another within our current era of neoliberal capitalism (an idea that will be explained more thoroughly in the following chapters), this distinction becomes increasingly irrelevant. Thus, Gramsci's explication of hegemony remains useful here.

cultural life, and then simply convince the masses to believe them. To Gramsci, “consent and force nearly always coexist” in a delicate balance that differs depending on the specific needs of different regimes (Lears 568). Ruling groups never successfully brainwash all subordinate groups into complete and equal consent, nor need they; in order to maintain their dominance, ruling groups must only keep a certain degree of control, which they may accomplish through direct force, direct persuasion, or through subtler methods, like “selective accommodation to the desires of subordinate groups,” or rendering certain “forms of experience readily available to consciousness while ignoring or suppressing others” (Lears 568-577). Pratt’s notion of anti-conquest fits in here as a descriptor of a range of techniques by which ruling groups might uphold their dominance, while serving the dual purpose of persuading their subordinates and mystifying their own intentions.

Together, Pratt, Gramsci, and Lears provide convincing rationale for the inclusion of the rhetoric of authenticity within the design and presentation of Dora, despite the instabilities it creates. Labeling Dora’s panethnic Latinidad as “authentic” is an act of anti-conquest. First, it legitimizes Dora as belonging to a certain real-life identity, and thus as a figure that children can relate to and identify with as they would in the real world, despite the fact that Dora’s particular “Latinidad” exists nowhere in society besides in the Nickelodeon board rooms where it was concocted. Secondly, this rhetoric hides the profit-driven move of constructing a fictional Latinidad by casting it as an altruistic act, motivated by purposes of social uplift – in this way, it asserts hegemonic innocence. These exact rhetorical strategies underlie the ways Nickelodeon executives speak about their actions – recall, for example, the aforementioned statement by Marjorie Cohn, who said “A few years ago, we decided to reach out to Latinos... It started with our commitment to representing the audience that watches Nick, to be relevant and authentic. We

couldn't afford to ignore them" (Jiménez). Herb Scannell, the Puerto Rican vice president of MTV Networks and a key figure in the development of *Dora the Explorer* and its spinoff series, *Go Diego Go*, uses similar language, saying, "Nickelodeon has gone out of its way to capture the Latino audience by being authentic, and by embracing culture and language in our programming mix" (Jiménez). The impulse to target Latinx audiences for financial gain seeps through both of these statements (while acknowledgment of the appeal of simultaneously targeting non-Latinx white children is omitted). However, both executives make the rhetorical move of skimming quickly over Nickelodeon's profit-motivated decisions, in order to paint them instead as laudable "commitments" to representational equity, multiculturalism and multilingualism. To make this turn, both executives rely on the legitimizing weight of the word "authentic." Of course, as Masi de Casanova notes, their claims directly conflict with the fact that white children compose *Dora's* biggest audience, and her creators and producers are non-Latinx people (Masi de Casanova 162).

Admittedly, this anti-conquest rhetoric does not work on everyone. A simple internet search of *Dora the Explorer* reveals just as many people who trumpet *Dora* as a positive icon as it does individuals who critique her for the same reasons I do, among others. Lois Leveen of *Bitch Magazine* writes, "Dora is less a global citizen than a global commodity, a marketing dream of multicultural merchandise that simultaneously appeals to Anglo and Latino parents and children" (Leveen). Blogger Allison L. Goodman writes that the show "exemplifies the dumbing down of U.S. society and culture" (Goodman). This list of critics continues. What Gramsci helps us understand, however, is that hegemony does not require unanimous consent. It only demands *sufficient* consent. If selectively accommodating certain percentages of a subordinate group (exemplified, in this case, by non-Latinx producers and creators bringing in Latinx consultants in

order to develop a show that targets the Latinx market) is enough to attract more viewers than it alienates, and reaffirms dominant ideologies more than it creates resistance, then the work of hegemony is done. *Dora the Explorer's* global success, both financially and culturally, proves that in its case, the calculations come out overwhelmingly in favor of hegemony.

As I have aimed to demonstrate, applying Pratt's notion of anti-conquest, and Gramsci's and Lears's explications of hegemony's functioning, is useful because it reveals how the rhetoric of authenticity that *Dora the Explorer* employs turns its protagonist into a palatable spokeswoman, or a smokescreen of innocence, to disguise the profit-based interests of larger hegemonic interests and institutions. But now we find ourselves facing a bigger question; what are these institutions? Who are these powers? In the next section, I will endeavor to provide an answer. I will argue that the masked hegemonic power in question is an ever-expanding mediatic enclosure that parallels and replicates the logics and processes of global capitalism. I will argue that *Dora* represents an attempt by agents of the mediatic enclosure to commodify, produce and sell a fictional and mass-marketable image of Latinidad, and I will demonstrate that these agents try to mask this effort (and the contradictions embedded inherently within it) through familiar techniques of anti-conquest and hegemonic reproduction.

### **The Mediatic Enclosure and the Commodification of Latinidad Under Global Capitalism**

To understand where *Dora the Explorer* and other such shows fit into wider hegemonic structures and relationships of today's world and economy, it is necessary to first understand "enclosure," a process fundamental to the establishment and continued functioning of capitalism.

Beginning in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and coming to completion by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>, England underwent *the enclosure movement* – the process by which powerful individuals divvied up communally shared lands, or the *commons*, and consolidated them into private properties (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). This transition marked the beginning of agrarian capitalism (Andrejevic 302).<sup>9</sup> Marx describes the violence and force by which workers were separated from their means of production – in this case, from the common lands that were converted into modern private property – as “primitive accumulation,” and illuminates the coercive methods by which the new owners managed to restructure society’s labor relations into a capitalist system (Andrejevic 302). The enclosure movement promised workers the sort of damaging “freedoms” that are most fundamental to the functions of capitalism. Stripped of their access to the previously shared lands, the new working class became “free [to] enter into a labor contract under terms advantageous to employers and exploitative to workers (that is to say terms that workers wouldn’t voluntarily agree to absent the coercion imposed by the expropriation of the commons)” (Andrejevic 302). Industrialization only amplified the tangibility of the enclosure, as workers’ labor contracts brought them into factories and other such privately-owned physical spaces, wherein their confinement, regulation, and surveillance became increasingly concrete (Andrejevic 303).

The forcible stripping of the means of production from workers, then, was the precondition that enabled the establishment of an enclosure, under which resources were

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<sup>9</sup> Jim McGuigan does clarify that “capitalism had emerged historically in various financial and mercantile manifestations before the enclosures of common land during the eighteenth century,” but agrees that “it only became truly systemic on a societal basis [in the nineteenth century] when the principles of free trade and mass production were put into practice with gusto in Britain by the industrial bourgeoisie,” through state actions to facilitate business without governmental interference, and, when necessary, to defend capitalist exploitation through military force and gun-boat diplomacy (McGuigan 226).

converted into capital or capital-producing machines and people were transformed into capitalists or wage-laborers. As Mark Andrejevic reminds us, however, “The notion of *primitive* accumulation can be misleading insofar as it implies enclosure is a temporally discrete and prior process... rather than an ongoing process” (Andrejevic 303). Modern capitalism in fact depends on the constant expansion of its enclosures’ horizons. It seeks constantly to create and integrate new forms and sources of capital, to accelerate the flow and production of capital, and, importantly, to “win [the working class’s] popular consent to, and the consequent naturalization of, the distribution of property crucial to the exploitation of waged labor” (Andrejevic 303-304). Andrejevic’s essay on *Surveillance in the Digital Enclosure* works to illuminate and demystify a more recent enclosure process that has already come to dominate the modern era: the enclosure of the digital sphere. Andrejevic locates his notion of the *digital enclosure* within the “second enclosure” movement, a term coined by legal scholar James Boyle to describe attempts to expropriate, regulate, privatize, and commodify “information and intellectual property,” or what Boyle calls the “enclosure of the intangible commons of the mind” (Andrejevic 301).

Andrejevic’s essay tracks the many ways that the digital enclosure parallels and replicates the processes of primitive accumulation, of production of new types of commodities and capital, and of centralizing private ownership over (digital) spaces that separates users from their means of production (their data), converts these users into laborers optimized for capitalistic productivity, and then dictates users’ movements, interactions, access, communication, and degree of privacy. Furthermore, Andrejevic highlights the rhetorical techniques that the digital enclosure employs to gain users’ consent and naturalize their exploitation. He cites, for example, the potent metaphors that internet corporations employ to evoke notions of unrestricted expansiveness, unlimited potential for discovery and self-determination, and total freedom within



the digital space. These are terms like “the cloud,” or “cyberspace,” or the adventurous names of search engines that offer access to the Internet, like “Internet Explorer” or Apple’s “Safari” (Andrejevic 296). In reality, however, the Internet is not an open frontier, but rather a mostly privately owned, closely controlled, and tightly enclosed space.

Such slippery and contradictory rhetoric is necessary, of course, because coercing workers to accept the conditions of enclosure is a difficult task. Under enclosure, workers are exploited, restricted, and surveilled. To convince them that they are free, and that continuing to work for the system that exploits them is actually in their best interest, therefore requires extensive ideological and rhetorical naturalization efforts. Self-contradiction is thus an essential cornerstone at the very base of the capitalist system, and consequently, also of the commodities the system produces. To maintain sufficient consent despite this irreconcilability, capitalists obscure their duplicitous intent beneath layers of rhetorical shrouding. Hence, the metaphors Andrejevic identifies that work to mystify the digital realm, and disguise the increasingly centralized and authoritarian economic powers that control the Internet. And hence, the layers of rhetoric that I began to unpeel in the prior sections, which mask the irresolvable tensions within Nickelodeon’s *Dora the Explorer*.

Perhaps the greatest rhetorical turn of all is the notion that Steven Stoll labels “the great delusion” – the “false belief that continuous economic growth is possible and will lead to world prosperity” (Wolff 331). This idea justifies both morally and theoretically the true goals of capitalism, which Karl Marx identified as the pursuit of profits, and/or the self-expansion of capital (accumulation) (Bakir and Campbell 324). Capitalism functions only as long as it continuously expands and speeds the production and flow of capital. Perhaps, at one point in time, the quest for economic growth did indeed align with efforts to improve human lives. No

longer. Deleuze and Guattari observe that, whereas entrepreneurs used to endeavor to fulfill people's legitimate needs, and marketers mainly intended to raise public awareness of their product, most of today's consumers in wealthier nations already have their basic needs met (cited in Wolff 331). Rather than slow expansion, however, marketing and entrepreneurship now generates and sells what Marx identified as *imaginary needs* (Wolff 331). The outcomes of this, rather than world prosperity, is ecological destruction and increased social inequality. As Kenya Wolff notes, "The fact is that 12% of the earth's population controls over 60% of the world's consumer spending... The problem with capitalism is that the inequity it creates leaves impoverished nations unable to purchase the goods they need and the wealthy with income but without legitimate needs" (Wolff 331).

Once again, contradiction emerges as a central feature of capitalism. In order to sell, marketers must now convince consumers that personal (and universal) happiness and fulfillment will come from purchasing products that they do not need. However, at the same time, marketers must make sure that these promises never come true. They need consumers to want more, and suffer from never getting enough (Wolff 333). And these marketers, like the executives behind *Dora the Explorer*, want to convert these contradictions and anxieties into financial gain. Fortunately, this is well within capitalism's toolbox; in fact, Deleuze and Guattari argue that "capitalism has 'made a habit of feeding on the contradictions' it creates and 'on the anxieties it engenders'" (Wolff 334). Wolff explains,

It is capitalism's schizophrenic tendencies that can lead to anxiety and crisis. Capitalism stems from the merging of two separate flows, the flow of capital and the flow of labor. Because these two flows are unbalanced and incapable of reaching equilibrium, they are in constant motion, often producing spillage that allows for lines of flight to escape. The corporate capitalist assemblage<sup>10</sup> takes advantage of these lines of flight, using them to shift flows of desire toward accumulation and consumption. (Wolff 334)

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<sup>10</sup> [Read: enclosure]

We can see this “taking advantage” wherever marketers needle at, or create, their consumers’ insecurities. Wolff points, for example, to the beauty, diet, and fashion industries, which generate billions of dollars by torturing consumers’ body-images and senses of self-worth (Wolff 334). Children (and thus by extension, their parents’ wallets), Wolff also notes, are particularly susceptible to attacks by marketers on their emotional vulnerabilities and unstable senses of identity (Wolff 334).

Such pricking and prodding is, of course, a delicate endeavor, because marketers must provoke insecurities that they can also claim to be able to cure with their products, without hurting the consumers to the point of losing business to a competitor. After all, the logic of the capitalist marketplace bestows some agency upon the consumer. As McGuigan summarizes, “Competitive business gives the consumer what he or she wants, matching supply with demand. Choice is vital in the sphere of consumption; the consumer is sovereign” (McGuigan 225). The consumer’s power is very real, and should not be overlooked. Even a preschooler-aged consumer holds a degree of influence over a media conglomerate as massive as Viacom (the mass media conglomeration that owns Nickelodeon). During development, *Dora the Explorer*’s creators screen each episode by focus groups of young children multiple times (Woodard). And increasingly, companies around the world are working to humanize themselves and their brands, and (purporting) to interact with their consumers not as distanced suppliers of a good or service, but rather as attentive friends who seek to build relationships with and improve the lives of their customers. It is important to recognize, however, that within a capitalist marketplace, the dynamics between companies and their consumers, as well as their workers, are never purely altruistic. The relationships are competitive by nature. The success of any contrary idea is merely a product of effective rhetoric yet again obscuring internal tensions.

The power of the consumer always exists within the sorts of relations of hegemony described by Gramsci, in which coercion and resistance coexist in a state of constant push-and-pull (McGuigan 227). Furthermore, we must not forget that the power of the consumer exists within a state of enclosure, and so is necessarily limited, monitored, and controlled. Nickelodeon, under Viacom, might be responsive to young viewers' opinions on its content, because it is in its best interest to design each episode of *Dora the Explorer* in the way that will most attract preschoolers and their parents' cash. Still, the corporation is ultimately in control of what content it feeds its viewers in the first place.

Driven by motives of profit and accumulation, the enclosure goes on expanding. That is, it constantly expands its horizons, incorporating new sources of production and labor into the networks of capitalism, reproducing itself as far as it has space to expand. Deleuze and Guattari argue that, if left unchecked, capitalism thus has no logical endpoint before "the successful takeover of all forms of life," (Wolff 322). Building on their perspective, Wolff warns that "the danger is the relentless pace at which capitalism expands limits, dismantles existing structures and reterritorializes them to serve its purpose" (Wolff 334). She laments that capitalism leaves nothing as sacred; "Joy, love, community, knowledge, nature are not of value to the machine [of capitalism]" (Wolff 334). With this in mind, it stands to reason that as the enclosure expands, it eventually comes to subsume its underlings' very own individual and collective subjectivities. Wolff, citing Deleuze and Guattari, warns of this process when she writes, "Capitalism is able to break up pre-existing identities and instantly re-fashion them into capital or commodity." She continues, "For example, a child in the neoliberal assemblage has a numeric value as a 'future

worker' and a 'future (and current)' consumer"<sup>11</sup> (Wolff 334). *Dora the Explorer* has already given us one small illustration of Wolff's example through the aforementioned development focus groups, which treat children as agency-wielding economic actors. But more important for our analysis now is the way the show underscores Wolff's first point, by exemplifying the way *Latinidad* can be re-fashioned into a commodity.

*Dora the Explorer* is an example of identity-commodification in action. People understand themselves, their communities, and those outside of themselves through media. Media representations do not merely reflect the relations and members of real-world society; they play a central role in shaping this society, and in molding audiences' senses of identity (Wright and Roberts 573). Focusing more narrowly on ethnically-diverse children's television programs, Erynn Masi de Casanova adds that "Non-Latino children may use [children's] shows to construct ideas about Latinos (with repercussions for interaction with Latino/a children), and Latino children may compare the characters to people in their families and communities (with consequences for identity and self-concept)" (Masi de Casanova 160). Given the central role of televisual and other media representations as engines of our wider cultural imagination, invisibility within the media equates, on a symbolic level, to a sort of cultural non-existence.

The conspicuous lack of (positive) Latinx representation in the children's television of past decades, and in US media more generally, can therefore be understood as a kind of violent erasure. If we conceive of media visibility as a sort of symbolic commons, increasingly privatized under major media conglomerations, then the effacing of Latinx representation on television appears as a kind of capitalist accumulation – a "stripping" of a common resource

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<sup>11</sup> We will return in detail to this recasting of childhood identity in terms of consumption power in Chapter 3.

necessary for survival by way of exclusion and erasure. This is not to say that there was *no* Latinx or Spanish-language representation on mainstream American television prior to *Dora the Explorer*. The PBS show *Carrascolendas* (1970-1976) “became the first network bilingual television program in the United States to address the needs of Hispanic children and one of the earliest programs to do so within a multicultural context” (in the words of its creator), and PBS’s *Sesame Street* (first aired in 1969) did similarly revolutionary work for Latinx visibility on television (Kinsky 106; Masi de Casanova 161). That being said, before *Dora the Explorer*’s release in 2000, positive Latinx representation was minimal (at best) on the children’s television schedule. The show’s unprecedented success situates it as the trailblazer at the very front of a recent boom in bilingual television, a growing trend that has yielded new networks like Sorpresa! (a Spanish children’s network, launched in 2003), V-me, (PBS’s Spanish counterpart, launched in 2007), and the bilingual networks SiTv and Mun2, as well as other bilingual or “Latinx-themed” children’s programs like *Maya & Miguel* (2004), *Go, Diego, Go* (2005), *Handy Manny* (2006), and *El Tigre: The Adventures of Manny Rivera* (2007) (Kinsky 107-108).

At the time of *Dora the Explorer*’s release, then, the lack of Latinx visibility on children’s television meant that the preconditions were already set for expanding a kind of enclosure that foreclosed possibilities for Latinidad. Private corporations like Nickelodeon had essentially stripped Latinx spectatorship of a primary (symbolic) means of production for identity. This lack created a need, and by extension a market of consumers: the “Latinx market” discussed earlier in this chapter. The conditions were ripe for Nickelodeon, as a major player within the mediatic enclosure, to posit a commodified version of Latinidad to fill the void and sell to audiences. Nickelodeon assumed the role of “Definer of Latinidad,” and constructed *Dora*’s commodified Latinidad to be panethnic, de-historicized, delocalized, and deracialized.

The creators fashioned it through linguistic, phenotypic, geospatial, and musical signifiers, and marked it as a generic form of “Difference” or “otherness” in order to make it palatable from a hegemonic, Anglo frame of reference. Ultimately, the show devised its image of Latinidad to maximize audience (and profit) both nationally and internationally, and to do so without challenging the dominance of white audiences. With the enclosure and commodification of Latinidad now almost complete, *Dora the Explorer* cemented its version of Latinidad by describing this fictionalized identity as “authentic.” Dora is thus the televisual embodiment of anti-conquest rhetoric, sold as a commodity at the center of a multi-billion-dollar franchise.

## CHAPTER 2

“Who do we ask for help when we don’t know which way to go?”:

### Identity as Crisis in the Transition to Neoliberal Capitalism

*Economics are the method;  
the object is to change the heart and soul.*

*-Margaret Thatcher*

Every episode of *Dora the Explorer* begins in a similar fashion. Dora encounters a problem that she needs to solve, or a mission that she needs to undertake. Before she begins her journey, however, she asks an important question – “who do we ask for help when we don’t know which way to go?” The answer is always the same: Map, Dora’s singing companion. Map outlines the places Dora will need to visit on the way to her ultimate destination. Just like Dora needs to take the time to understand her path, it is necessary for us to now do the same. Chapter 1 posed a problem, which was *Dora the Explorer*’s unstable rhetoric, under which Nickelodeon, as an agent of the expanding mediatic enclosure, works to commodify Latinidad. To reach our ultimate destination – a conception of how and why Latinidad is commodified in such a fashion – we must similarly pay attention to the direction in which identity itself is headed in this historical moment. To do so, we must understand the epochal transition we have been experiencing over the past few decades, which extends into all aspects of American economics, politics, culture, and society. This is the shift toward neoliberalism.

In the introduction to their *Handbook of Neoliberalism*, Springer, Birch, and MacLeavy write, “There is no shortage of writing on the topic [of neoliberalism], but how can we be entirely certain that we are engaging in the same conversation?” (Springer et al. 2). As these authors are acknowledging, “neoliberalism” is one of those nebulous terms that seems to appear



everywhere in the scholarship of recent decades. Usually, it is accompanied by a sense of dread and paranoia, by scholars examining topics as diverse as urban spaces, race, gender, sexuality, class, homelessness, labor, citizenship, discourse, biotechnology, migration, nature, or violence, and discovering that far-reaching problems in each of these fields reveal links to a pernicious and particular, but poorly-defined, socio-cultural-politico-economic ideology (Springer et al. 2).

These scholars agree that this ideology is hegemonic in the modern era, and has something to do with both national and transnational relations, though it seems to emerge in distinct forms across the globe rather than ever conforming to some clearly drawn paradigm (Springer et al. 2).

Neoliberalism is associated with an extensive list of major political figures from around the world, such as Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Augusto Pinochet, Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, Boris Yeltsin, Manmohan Singh, Jian Zemin, Junichiro Koizumi, and John Howard, all of whom engaged with its doctrines in divergent and site-specific ways (Steger and Roy x). It is identified as responsible for crashing economies and political regimes from turn-of-the-century Argentina (see, for example, Teubal 2004), to the United States in 2008 (see, for example, Welch 2012), to the more recent Eurozone Crisis (see, for example, Palley 2013). Its dominance in the globalized world of today is obvious, but it has so far proven too slippery of a concept for scholars to pin down with total consensus.

That said, neoliberalism is, first and foremost, a politico-economic ideology that pursues a free market in which individuality and competition reign supreme, and the government does not interfere (McGuigan 228). However, most scholars now use the term to also encompass the ways this doctrine has expanded beyond its initial purposes, and come to extend into all facets of social, economic, and political life (Springer et al. 2). McGuigan writes, “Neoliberal political economy imagines that the free-play of market forces – the ineluctable laws of supply and

demand that operate unencumbered according to the never actually existing model of ‘perfect competition’ – is the magical elixir for prosperity” (McGuigan 224).

While the terms “neoliberalism” and “capitalism” are often confused, they in fact belong to two distinct (albeit related) categories. “Capitalism” refers to a *system*, or set of relations and practices, that works in service of producing and accumulating wealth. “Neoliberalism,” on the other hand, is an *ideology*, a set of beliefs, that contends that the key to human flourishing and problem-solving is to encourage the natural processes of capitalism within a free market (Gilbert). This ideology is so powerful because it reorganizes *all* facets of life – from government policy to cultural values to social relationships to individual subjectivity itself – in line with the logics of the capitalist marketplace (Springer et al. 2). This chapter is most interested in the ideological aspect: in the ways that neoliberal ideology constructs an ideal “self” that is designed to best correspond to the processes and goals of free-market capitalism, and whose values and behaviors then become the model for individual, communal, and national notions of selfhood within society.

Though most scholars agree that neoliberalism now dominates global economics and politics, it has not always been this way. Different forms of capitalism, and thus distinct capitalist philosophies, existed even before the enclosure movement that privatized common lands in Britain (McGuigan 226). Tracing the major shifts in capitalism is useful, first, because it reminds us that our current state is not inevitable, without beginning, or permanent. Second, if my project is to understand the pressures plaguing notions of individual, communal, and national selfhood today, and if, as I contend, selves are largely constructed by sweeping ideologies rooted in particular forms of politico-economic arrangement, then it is necessary to know both where our current politico-economic system has come from, and where it is going.

In his essay “The Neoliberal Self,” Jim McGuigan outlines a few epochal phases of capitalism’s development. He calls the period that ensued after the enclosure movement’s completion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the age of *liberal capitalism*. This era was characterized by governmental relinquishment of power, and the spreading of the industrial bourgeoisie’s values of free trade and mass production across Britain and the globe (McGuigan 226). Eventually, McGuigan describes, “periodic downturns in the trade cycle,” along with challenges like labor movements, socialism, and communism in the early 1900s, began to destabilize the ascendancy of liberal capitalism (McGuigan 226).

Thus began the shift towards *organised capitalism*, or what Katharyne Mitchell refers to as the “economic regime or period of capital accumulation [of] high Fordism” (Mitchell 392).

McGuigan explains that,

[D]uring the Depression of the 1930s, unregulated markets and irresponsible speculation were denounced universally. A period of state intervention in Western capitalism was ushered in, including Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’ and the construction of social-democratic welfare states in Europe. At that time, belief in the efficacy of large-scale state intervention was shared by Keynesian liberals, social democrats, socialists, communists and fascists alike. The remarkable consensus around this expanded form of *organised capitalism* contributed greatly to the post Second World War ‘golden age’ of rapidly advancing affluence and moves toward equalisation of opportunities and rewards on both sides of the Atlantic. (McGuigan 227).

Under organised capitalism, post-war America enjoyed astonishing economic growth and prosperity. Soon enough, however, organised capitalism reached the point of its own decline.

McGuigan marks the end of organised capitalism as the moment of transition into our current era of *neoliberal capitalism*. Hikes in oil prices by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) caused a crisis in the 1970s, and in response, the “USA led the way, accompanied by Britain, in dismantling the post-war settlement of egalitarian reform, including variously, institutionalised collective bargaining for higher wages and better working

conditions, and ‘the social wage’ of relatively generous welfare entitlements and so on” (McGuigan 227). In these “former Northern and Western heartlands of capitalism,” the deindustrialization trend spelled the end of the previous phase of capitalism (McGuigan 227). During the period of high Fordism, the United States’ economy had shielded itself from outside competition, and flourished (Mitchell 392). Now, however, industries turned away from their former approach of Fordist vertical integration, instead focusing their efforts on building networks and outsourcing labor to cheaper markets in the Global South and Global East to cut manufacturing costs (McGuigan 227). The processes of transnational neoliberal capitalism continued to gain traction and authority over the following decades, and maintains its hegemonic position today.

In addition to succinctly summarizing the major shifts that have led to the establishment of neoliberal capitalism, McGuigan joins a chorus of other scholars who assert, with varying degrees of belief in causality, that individual selfhood and notions of the “ideal” self shift depending on the hegemonic ideologies and the material conditions and relations of any given historical moment (McGuigan 230). The transition from one mode of capitalist accumulation to another, then, demands a corresponding reformulation of how the “self” should look, think, and behave. Examining idealized subjectivities as symbolic figures, and studying the ways the once-sovereign ideal self is undermined or replaced by newer, upstart notions of ideal selfhood, is therefore a useful method for considering larger ideological and politico-economic paradigm shifts. Put more simply, recognizing the ideal self that the ideology of neoliberal capitalism most naturally fosters, in contrast to the self that was best optimized for the conditions of organised capitalism, enables us to better comprehend the underlying ideologies of each of these regimes,

and to better understand the anxieties and tensions that put pressure on identity construction in the current moment.

McGuigan's essay attempts to start sketching the titular Neoliberal Self – the ideal modern subjectivity, who symbolically incarnates neoliberal capitalism itself. Though “As an idea type, the [N]eoliberal [S]elf cannot be found concretely in a ‘pure’ form” in the real world, McGuigan characterizes the Neoliberal Self in order to highlight it as a new symbolic construction that has emerged in the transition from organised capitalism to the newer capitalist model (McGuigan 223). My interest in this imagined Neoliberal Self is in how it reveals the underlying ideologies of our society, as well as their ties to our current form of capitalism and their breaks with the ideologies of the past.

Like McGuigan, Katharyne Mitchell also attempts to tackle this apparent shift in idealized, socially-conditioned subjectivity. She does so by examining the institution she deems most influential in “both the formation and maintenance of democratic communities (through the creation of subjects interpellated through the liberal values and norms of the modern nation): the institution of education” (Mitchell 389). She identifies the oft-touted value of *multiculturalism* as a key tool, and symptom, of organised capitalism (Mitchell 392). Tracking changes in three case-study countries – England, Canada, and the United States – Mitchell describes the period as a time of meteoric economic growth in Western nations, facilitated by governmental policies and regulations that shielded national economies from international competition, during which a major influx of immigrants from non-Western nations destabilized previously hegemonic notions of cultural nationalism (Mitchell 392). She argues that,

Multiculturalism, in this context, could operate effectively as an instrument of state formation on a number of levels, including serving as a national narrative of coherence in the face of immigrant ‘difference’, as a broad technology of state control (of difference), and as one of many capillaries of disciplinary power/knowledge concerning the formation

of the ‘well-schooled’ subject educated in liberal tolerance and willing to work for national unity within this philosophical framework. In all of this, but especially in the constitution of national citizens able and willing to work *through* difference *for* the nation, multiculturalism was a strategic partner in the growth and expansion of a Fordist regime of accumulation around the world” (Mitchell 392).

Multiculturalism, thus, was a product and engine of a particular politico-economic arrangement that sought some method for maintaining national unity despite increasing difference, and so converted diversity itself into the *basis* of that unity. The motivating factor behind this ideological and rhetorical turn, however, was the necessity of making an increasingly diverse population work together in order for Fordist capitalism to continue growing and accumulating.

Shows like *Dora the Explorer*, as well as her popular predecessors, contemporaries, and descendants (from ever-influential, diversity-focused PBS programs like *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company*, to Latinx-themed shows across other networks like *Handy Manny*, *Maya and Miguel*, *Nina’s World*, and *Go, Diego, Go!*, to other diversity-centered programs like *Ni-Hao, Kai-lan* and *Doc McStuffins*) have played into this Fordist rhetorical technique, upholding multiculturalism and diversity as central values. Extending the trend that Mitchell observes in educational institutions across her three case studies, such television shows present multicultural appreciation and collaboration as their principal pedagogical aims and, moreover, as moral imperatives. Even though multiculturalism and diversity may seem like favorable values to promote, Mitchell and McGuigan’s analyses suggest the necessity of questioning such campaigning as efforts of conscious normative conditioning, within a larger project aimed at constructing ideals of identity that better serve a certain type of capitalist accumulation.

Over the past few decades, however, global economies have shifted towards the new regime of neoliberal capitalism (McGuigan 227). The “multicultural self,” or “multicultural citizen” of a nation united (in theory) by diversity, therefore, is in the process of losing its

relevance as the ideal capitalist subject. Even so, multiculturalism remains at the center of many conversations surrounding national identity, citizenship, and pedagogy, across the political spectrum. To Walter Benn Michaels, author of *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*, our continued focus on diversity as a topic of discourse is a dangerous impediment to the pursuit of equality. Michaels's compelling, if at times inflammatory, book makes an aggressive claim: that "the least important thing about us – our identity – is the thing we have become most committed to talk about, and that this commitment is, especially from the standpoint of a left politics, a profound mistake." The most pressing underlying issue, he asserts, is that of growing economic inequality under neoliberal capitalism (Michaels 19).

Michaels makes the case that the political left's attempts to promote diversity and rectify historical racial and ethnic injustices, and to use these issues as their sites of battle against the political right, actually work in tandem with the right, rather than in opposition to it. This is because they distract from the ever-growing class gap. He summarizes, "While some cultural conservatives may wish that everyone should be assimilated to their fantasy of one truly American culture, and while the supposed radicals of the "tenured left" [liberal intellectuals] continue to struggle for what they hope will finally become a truly inclusive multiculturalism, the really radical idea of redistributing wealth becomes almost literally unthinkable" (Michaels 15). Michaels' argument makes a distinction between that which he sees as socially constructed and thus essentially arbitrary, and that which is based in material realities, with neoliberal capitalism only seeing value in the latter. Michaels's argument is that differences of identity eventually boil down to nothingness, whereas class differences are based in tangible, substantive, *material* inequalities. Discourse that equates the two, therefore, serves neoliberal capitalism's

purposes by blinding us to the ways the system's processes distribute resources unequally, or even by leading us to normalize (or even celebrate!) these injustices. "[Classes] are not like races and cultures, and treating them as if they were like races or cultures – different but equal – is one of our strategies for managing inequality rather than minimizing it or eliminating it," he writes. "White is not [inherently] better than black, but rich is definitely better than poor" (Michaels 10).

Michaels' analysis reflects an anxiety that our thinking has become, effectively, outdated. Questions of multiculturalism and diversity, which both the political right and left continue to debate (though they often reach different conclusions), are questions of citizenship and selfhood within Fordist organised capitalism. The questions Michaels prefers to direct our attention to, on the other hand, are those he thinks will help us see behind the curtain of the ideologies of the neoliberal capitalist regime. His call echoes those of McGuigan and Mitchell when they begin to sketch the ideal subject or citizen of neoliberalism. McGuigan characterizes his "Neoliberal Self" as one of "hedonism," of "flexibility, adaptability, and instant transformation," and of compulsory individualization as opposed to individualism.<sup>12</sup> He describes the Neoliberal Self as "a competitive individual who is exceptionally self-reliant and rather indifferent to the fact that his or her predicament is shared with others – and, therefore, incapable of organising as a group to do anything about it. Such a person must be 'cool' in the circumstances, selfishly resourceful

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<sup>12</sup>McGuigan makes a distinction here between *individualism*, the "bourgeois ideal of personal freedom," and *individualisation*, which he describes as "a matter of institutionalised obligation, not free choice" (McGuigan 234). The individualised person has to take complete responsibility over their choices in life, and for the consequences of those choices. However, these choices are rarely made freely, due to consequences of chance, or due to structural inequalities. The individualizing neoliberal world does not care. "The individual is penalised harshly not only for personal failure but also for sheer bad luck in a highly competitive and relentlessly harsh social environment" (McGuigan 234). So, though the individualised self may relish in its perceived freedom, it is in fact "condemned to freedom and lonely responsibility," and thus "is exactly the kind of self cultivated by neoliberalism, combining freewheeling consumer sovereignty with enterprising business acumen" (McGuigan 234).



and fit in order to survive under social-Darwinian conditions” (McGuigan 232-236). Mitchell’s “strategic cosmopolitan,” similarly, is a “nodal agent in the expanding networks of the global economy” and “the new, superior footsoldier of global capitalism,” one who has acquired a sort of “individual patriotism” and “the ‘complex skills’ necessary for individual success in the global economy,” and is “motivated not by ideals of national unity in diversity, but by understandings of global competitiveness, and the necessity to strategically adapt as an individual to rapidly shifting personal and national contexts” (Mitchell 388-400). In simpler terms, the ideal neoliberal subject is ruthlessly competitive and capable, networked and flexible, and driven, above all, by a desire for wealth.

For individuals or groups who subscribe to neoliberal capitalism (wittingly or not), socially constructed individual differences mean nothing compared to cold, hard, material measures of productivity and accumulation. As the above characterizations note, neoliberal ideology fetishizes individual competitiveness within the market. No other collective groupings remain relevant. Thus, Michaels explains, “A society free not only of racism but of sexism and of heterosexism is a neoliberal utopia where all the irrelevant grounds for inequality (your identity) have been eliminated and whatever inequalities are left are therefore legitimated” (Michaels 75). The elimination of social discrimination along lines of identity certainly sounds, at first, like a desirable future, but Michael warns that the trend toward “neoliberal utopia” is actually a march toward dystopia. He fears that when we rely solely on the capitalist market to produce justice, the consequence is increased inequality, exploitation, and oppression (Michaels 76). The rich simply get richer, and the poor get poorer. The “self” is dehumanized, reduced to a mere economic agent. According to neoliberal ideology, these results are justified.

Michaels' fears regarding this natural theoretical endpoint of the neoliberal trajectory, and the elimination of all non-economic difference that it would entail, are well-founded. He and other scholars concerned with the material injustices of the neoliberal capitalist trend overstep, however, in dismissing the continuing legacies of racism, heteropatriarchy, and colonialism too quickly. Certainly, we have seen that neoliberalism has become the dominant ideology of the day over the past few decades, and that the global expansion of its doctrine and enclosures shows no sign of slowing. That being said, the transition to a fully transnational neoliberal regime of accumulation is as of yet incomplete, and writing as if it is mischaracterizes today's reality. Furthermore, I agree that we *should* center materialist relations in our discourse to a greater degree, but believe that doing so at the complete expense of identity would mean ignoring the ways that categories like race and gender continue to determine and enforce the structural inequality of material resources' distribution. Those groups which have historically benefited from the social, economic, and political lines drawn along constructed distinctions of identity are loath to surrender the power, capital, and control they reap from these differences.

In practice, racialized and patriarchal colonial legacies continually undermine the race-less, culture-less, and sex-less theoretical "neoliberal utopia" that Michaels cautions against. Or perhaps more accurately, they continue to determine the relations of power and resource allocation within the current neoliberal regime. Therefore, the structures established by these legacies remain entrenched within any identity constructed by neoliberal ideology. For an example, we may observe the dominant technology of the modern era: The Internet.<sup>13</sup> The

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<sup>13</sup> Tara McPherson explains that the rise of digital computation and technology "exists in tight feedback loops with the rise of new forms of political organization post-World War II – including neoliberalism... as well as with the rise of modern genetics...[and] with shifting racial codes" (McPherson 80). The decision to adopt digital technology as opposed to analog technology was one we made collectively, she explains, but represents an active choice to

introduction and societal acceptance of the Internet came with dreams of a new egalitarian, universally-accessible realm. To this day, the conception remains pervasive that, in the words of Joe Lockard, “The online world is the new City of God, an anti-identitarian world... In the electronic city, race, class and gender aren’t governing elements of worklives lived daily; rather they are nothing more than facilitators or impediments to technological diffusion and market expansion” (Lockard 173-174). This account mirrors Michaels’ description of his “Neoliberal Utopia,” because neoliberal utopia is precisely what the Internet promised us. In the words of a 1997 television commercial by the MCI Communication Corp., entitled “Anthem,” “There is no race. There are no genders. There is no age. There are no infirmities. There are only minds. Utopia? No, Internet” (Lockard 180).

Lisa Nakamura’s examination of this advertisement highlights the deeply paradoxical nature of such promises about the Internet, however. Behind its utopian narration, the

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abandon our very humanity. After all, she writes, “The digital privileges the discrete and the modular; the analog represents continuity. As humans, we perceive the world analogically, as a series of continuous gradation of color, sound, and tastes (McPherson 79). The consequences of this decision are profound, and have received far more scholarly attention than I can acknowledge here. I will, however, mention one key observation made by Douglas Rushkoff in *Program or Be Programmed: Ten Commands for a Digital Age*. Rushkoff explains that unlike humans, our digital technologies “are biased away from time, and toward asynchronicity... Instead of operating in time, computers operate from decision to decision, choice to choice” (Rushkoff 24). Rushkoff argues that we have allowed the logic of these technologies to reconfigure our lives. He writes that “instead of optimizing our machines for humanity...we are optimizing humans for machinery” (Rushkoff 15). We have decided to be “always on,” always accessible via the internet, our cellphones, etc., and so have become slaves to notifications and digital commands, which every day come faster and faster and in greater numbers, overwhelming our emotional and nervous systems (Rushkoff 30). This acceleration aligns with the ideologies of neoliberal capitalism, which accelerate flows of capital, production, consumption, and identity. In other words, rather than creating technologies that preserve our humanity as temporal beings, we are choosing to use technologies that transform us into dehumanized neoliberal beings, always at work, and always accelerating our productivity. However, the fact that our adoption of these technologies was an active decision, not an inevitability, renders the system vulnerable; we can unmake the system through conscious effort, just as we once made it.

commercial flashes a disorienting montage of iconized diversity – a series of shots of people of different ages, races, and physical capabilities. These are the very differences that MCI, as “the fastest Internet network” and the “largest Internet network,” pledges to erase (“MCI TV”) The advertisement, thus, adopts an (ostensibly) progressive tone to position MCI’s product as the key to achieving, and expanding globally, the social equality and universal access that are central to the ideals of “American” democracy, and that MCI (purportedly) makes possible through disembodiment (Nakamura 255-256). While claiming to erase difference, however, the advertisement uses visual imagery that actually reinforces these very same notions of difference. Comparing “Anthem” to other 1997 advertisements by Compaq, IBM, and Origin, Nakamura identifies this irony as a recurring pattern. “These ads claim a world without boundaries for us, their consumers and target audience, and by so doing they show us exactly where and what these boundaries really are,” she writes. “These boundaries are ethnic and racial ones. Rather than being effaced, these dividing lines are evoked over and over again. In addition, the ads sanitize and idealize their depictions of the Other and Otherness by deleting all references that might threaten their status as timeless icons” (Nakamura 259).

From its earliest days, then, the rhetoric that ushered in the Internet and has continued to sustain it assumed the guise of “The Great Equalizer,” while in reality reasserting the lines between the exoticized and iconized “Others” and the “not-Others” from a Western, white, heteropatriarchal frame of reference. As usual, such rhetoric does not emerge from nowhere; it reflects the relations of labor and power behind it. It is not surprising, for example, that in the same year “Anthem” aired (1997), a survey found that over 82 percent of the Internet’s content was published in English, despite only 6 percent of the world population being native English speakers (Lockard 178). Meanwhile, about 1.1 percent of online content was published in

Spanish, though about 15 percent of the world population was composed of native Spanish speakers (Lockard 178). Even linguistically, then, access to the resources and public forums of the Internet were, and continue to be, distributed in accordance with traditional hierarchies.

No matter what advertising agencies tell us, the social delineations and hierarchal dynamics of power and capital that exist in the physical world have not disappeared; they have simply been translated into the virtual realm, where they are brought fully into the digital enclosure under the watchful eyes of the private companies that own the Internet's physical infrastructure and most popular sites. These companies are dominated by traditionally powerful groups. For example, a survey by CNNMoney managed to acquire government reports of workforce diversity data from between 2006 and 2010 for five Silicon Valley tech companies (of the twenty they tried to investigate), and found that of the 682 people in officer or manager positions, 578 (about 85 percent) were male, and 477 of these people (about 70 percent of the total) were white ("How Diverse"). Lockard writes, "Two different public spheres are emerging, the online and the offline, together with a struggle between privileged universalism and unprivileged" (Lockard 180). Indeed, we treat these as separate spheres, but the online sphere is in fact an enclosure, owned, supported, and structured by the material realities and hierarchal relations of the offline sphere. We must not forget, after all, that the Internet realm is upheld not by magic, but by physical infrastructure under private ownership: cables, wires, warehouses, etcetera.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, as Lockard continues, "Freedom to speak in the new electronic world, let alone the global language with which to speak, remains unattainable because of international

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<sup>14</sup> Certain photographers, journalists, writers, map-makers, and filmmakers have taken it upon themselves to demystify the Internet by documenting its material foundations. For examples, see Peter Garritano's "The Internet" photography collection, Dave Greer's "Internet" photography collection, Timo Arnall's film, *Internet Machine*, or Ingrid Burrington's book, *Networks of New York: An Internet Infrastructure Field Guide*.

economic orders built upon centuries of colonialism and racialism” (Lockard 180). Caught up in the tide of neoliberalism, the agents of the digital enclosure do not care to disassemble these economic orders, but rather work just to convert them into capital. “Thus,” laments Nakamura “the transnational language, the one designed to end all barriers between speakers, the speech that everyone can pronounce and that cannot be translated or incorporated into another tongue, turns out not to be Esperanto but rather IBM-speak, the language of American corporate technology” (Nakamura 261). Down to a level as fundamental as our language usage, we see here how neoliberal profit-driven corporations and colonial and racial histories together work to shape our current identities.

Lockard eloquently summarizes, “The offline public sphere constitutes itself in that still-haunting world of racialism never undone; the online sphere speaks the languages of the past as it attempts to enunciate a future” (Lockard 180). Within this quotation lies a primary flaw in the theoretical approaches of Michaels and his peers, who write as if the transition from the Fordist period of capital accumulation to the neoliberal regime is a dramatic step into a new historical and politico-economic phase. The shifts and development of global capitalism are never smooth or direct. Joseba Gabilonda wrote that “When Foucault proclaimed the death of ‘Man’ in 1966, he did not realize that capitalism does not get rid of its old technologies and apparatuses; instead it exports them to the Third World;” even this declaration, argue Sharada Balachandran Orihuela and Andrew Carl Hageman, oversimplifies the process of technological change as a linear process (Orihuela and Hageman, 176). As the choice tool of the modern economy, the Internet functions as an apt symbol for neoliberal development, ideology, and rhetoric more generally. In this role, it demonstrates that neoliberalism is not a new ruler, a new regime that has overthrown

the past and offers a radical new future. It is rather a palimpsest, an order that inscribes upon that which came before but does not necessarily disassemble it.

So, to return to the central concern of this chapter, what do agents of neoliberalism do when faced with the problem of identity, which stands in the way of neoliberal ideology's trajectory toward an identity-less (dys)topia? Their first approach, it seems, is what I will call the *passive mode*: to change nothing at all, to reassert preexisting structural hierarchies that have been drawn along lines of identity, and to evade criticism by shrouding this perpetuation of inequality under layers of utopian rhetoric. As explored above, even though our public spheres have largely been

translated into an online a-racial transcendence...we all continue to use the language of racialism because it underlies contemporary history and because we lack another language. This echoing referentiality arises because we live in a physical world still defined by the forever obsolescent but unnegated history of race, race, and race. At best, the online world is ignoring rather than unlearning – or better *undoing* – the social catastrophes created by racialism. (Lockard 177)

This “ignoring” extends to all corners of the neoliberal world, from Silicon Valley offices to the children's television programming schedule, where whiteness maintains its privileged position as the default, and displays of diversity generally remain constrained to icons of tamed, tokenized “Otherness” operating within a white world.

The second technique (though these delineations are admittedly forced, the lines between them blurred and overlapping) is what I will dub an *offensive mode*. This term encompasses direct efforts to package identities – be those individual or communal – into commodities or viable markets for the purpose of selling them. When Nickelodeon, for example, chose to turn the lead character of *Dora the Explorer* into a Latina girl in a blatant attempt to access what they perceived as a promising and largely untapped Latinx market, they were operating according to neoliberal thinking. They were pinpointing a community demarcated according to notions of

embodied identity (ethnic, cultural, racial, linguistic, etc.) that exist due to centuries of colonization and racialization. They were then fetishizing it in such a way as to maximize the number of people it might include (by constructing or reinforcing the idea of a “panethnic Latinx figure”), and converting this community into a market to be mined for financial gain. Finally, they were slathering this profit-driven process in a varnish of progressive, utopian rhetoric.

Neoliberal capitalism’s core drive is creating new sources of capital and incorporating them within the capitalist enclosure. Identity categories provide ample opportunities for monetization and profit, and so neoliberal capitalists take advantage of them – hence the offensive scheme. Furthermore, neoliberal ideology in its purest form requires only that competition continues; it is unconcerned with who the winners and losers are specifically. Thus, as long as identity hierarchies do not interrupt production, agents of neoliberalism do not care to disassemble them – hence the passive scheme. Even so, as Michaels, McGuigan, and Mitchell articulated, identity categories that are not directly based in material realities (who has more money, who has less) are ultimately roadblocks in the path of neoliberalism. The logical endpoint of neoliberal ideology is a world without identity, wherein every person is an individual economic actor within a global marketplace, with no loyalty to anyone or anything beside the profit-motive and competitive spirit. The persistence of identity categories, be those cultural, racial, ethnic, gendered, sexual, or national, therefore poses a threat to the neoliberal regime’s rise to ascendancy. The problem for neoliberals, however, is that identity is not easily erased. On a structural level, those who have used identity to lay claim to power are unwilling to surrender their privilege. On a human level, people rely on such categories of identity to make sense of their own lived experiences, to organize and connect, and to find meaning and fulfillment to their lives.



Fordist organised capitalists tried to use multiculturalism as a device for resolving these obstacles, to limited success. Neoliberal capitalists, meanwhile, have endeavored either to fetishize, or to make more malleable, the categories of identity; as Jonah Peretti explains, “[L]ate capitalism not only accelerates the flow of capital, but also accelerates the rate at which subjects assume identities. . . . The Internet [for example] is one of many late capitalist phenomena that allow for more flexible, rapid, and profitable mechanisms of identity formation” (Lockard 182). Even so, neither of these maneuvers succeed in eliminating identity.

Thus, the persistence of embodied identities continuously undermines the neoliberal project. We find ourselves today caught in a historical, politico-economic moment of transition from the Fordist regime of the post-World War II era, where multiculturalism was the mechanism of choice for coping with the problem of identity, to a transnational neoliberal system which seeks to supersede the bounds of identity and recast everything in terms of *laissez faire* economics. We are in the gray area, where the rhetoric, ideologies, modes of production, and technologies of the past coexist and collide with those of the future. Certainly, though we still hold multiculturalism as a favorite topic of discourse, we are well on our way toward subscribing fully to neoliberal ideology. Our behaviors and practices in all spheres of life, from the test-based accountability system in our schools, to our shopping habits, to our “leisure” hours spent checking work emails, already overwhelmingly reflect neoliberal thinking (De Lissovoy 423). Thus, despite “widespread cynicism about [neoliberalism’s] official rationales and amid widespread suspicion about its fairness and transparency,” the fact that the “ideology is effective in the forms of life themselves – in our actual practices – rather than in the ensemble of our convictions. . . . [means that] it can coexist easily with critical assessments” (De Lissovoy 426). In other words, neoliberal ideology may function “*less through the beliefs that it promotes, and*

*more through the procedures that it repeats*" (De Lissovoy 428). Even so, identity continues to act as a roadblock in neoliberalism's path to total domination.

Nowhere is the crisis of identity in the transition toward transnational neoliberal capitalism clearer than in recent debates and policymaking regarding immigration and the United States border. Of the many categories of identity under siege by neoliberalism, a central one is national identity. What does it mean to be "American" in a world where economies and labor are globalized, where massive transnational corporations take on responsibilities once held by the government, and where technologies like the Internet make physical borders increasingly obsolete? What does it mean to "American" when the traditional structures of privilege that have long organized American society feel the pressures of an ideology that values every person only in terms of their individual capital-producing capacity and consumer purchasing power? What does it mean to be "American" when "America" becomes no longer a relevant category? These are among the anxieties underlying every call, for example, by Donald Trump's supporters to "Make America Great Again," or every statement by talking heads concerned about "illegal immigration."

Where and when the passive and offensive modes fail, purveyors of neoliberalism take another approach, a more *defensive* posture. Unable to do away with certain categories of identity, they commodify them, demarcating specific channels in which identity may manifest, and dictating precisely what these manifestations may look like. They then reframe these identities in terms of citizenship, not in accordance with traditional notions of the nation per se, but instead in terms of the market. The new modern citizen is the "consumer-citizen," their status granted by their participation in the neoliberal capitalist system. In the following chapter, I examine *Dora the Explorer* and her fellow Latinx-themed children's programs as sites for

training the next generation of consumer-citizens in the beliefs and practices of neoliberalism, and for teaching them where the limits of a Latinx identity – that does not threaten the system – are allowed to lie.

## CHAPTER 3

### Watch and Learn!: Training the Child Consumer-Citizen and Securing the Borders of Latinidad

For those of us who are anxious about the ways notions of ideal selfhood, identity, and citizenship are shifting, the advancement of neoliberal capitalism seems like a supremely difficult, if not impossible, tide to hold back. This is primarily because the systems of neoliberal capitalism are what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would describe as “rhizomatic.” The Deleuzoguattarian “rhizome” is an intricate and fluid network that is constantly making new connections, wherein “any point...can be connected to anything other, and must be” (Deleuze and Guattari 7). Like a map, the rhizome is “open and connectable in all its dimensions” (Deleuze and Guattari 2). It may be entered at any point. It has no hierarchy, no beginning, no end, and no precise center. It “is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple...it is comprised not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion” (Deleuze and Guattari 21). Breaking this network, or escaping from it, is tremendously challenging because of the “principle of asignifying rupture,” which states that “a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (Deleuze and Guattari 9). Therefore, where the persistence of identity or traditional conceptualizations of citizenship hinder the system’s expansion, the system adapts to overcome the impediment. That may be through the “passive” or “offensive modes” described in Chapter 2, or through more “defensive” modes, which function to absorb these obstacles – such as embodied identity –into the rhizomatic system itself. This chapter will be concerned primarily with these “defensive” processes.

The realization of neoliberalism's rhizomatic expansion and takeover of economic, political, social, and cultural structures depends, first, largely on the ability of its proponents to render its values, discourses, and conditions as common sense. This is not unique to neoliberalism, but rather a fundamental feature of any successful ideology. As Rebecca Kukla asserts, ideologies are

systems of ideas that function to culturally inscribe a *naturalized* understanding of some social phenomenon that actually has its origins in a history of interests, human actions, and contingent social conditions. In other words, ideology masks this contingent social history, and it does so by giving the phenomenon in question the status of a natural or given fact—a fixed feature of our metaphysical landscape rather than a historical product subject to normative critique. Most important, ideology naturalizes the way that people or groups of people are socially positioned as subjects of various norms and possessors of normatively defined identities. (Kukla 68)

Kukla goes on to explain that whether ideologies “explicitly assert that some social phenomenon is natural or originless,” or instead simply “deflect attention away from the possibility of interrogating its origins,” the end result is the same – a sense that the phenomenon in question is natural and inevitable (Kukla 68). In this way, ideologies forestall criticism that could otherwise dismantle them. Once established and accepted as inevitable and natural, an ideology may be reproduced, and its discourses used to reorganize social conditions and relations, with near impunity. Ideological naturalization is therefore a priority for neoliberal capitalists.

Enacting this naturalization is a difficult task, however, and requires concerted efforts to train workers and audiences in the values, social organization, and practices of neoliberalism, even at the same time as this very ideology subjugates these people. Louis Althusser identifies two types of apparatuses that safeguard the dominance of the ruling ideology: “the repressive state apparatus (RSA: the army and the police) and the ideological state apparatus (ISA: educational institutions, the family, the media, etc.)” (Wright and Roberts 571). ISAs are key devices in the process of ideological naturalization, because they “generate consent to the

political and cultural status quo,” and are diverse in their approaches to this project (Wright and Roberts 571). Althusser targets his critical attention especially at the institution of education, which he argues performs ideological conditioning on people during their most malleable phase of life (childhood), while enjoying popular assumption of its social and political neutrality (Wright and Roberts 571). This presumption, that schools naturally serve to develop individuals’ skills and channel people into the social roles where they will best contribute to society’s functionality and progress, is an example of ideological naturalization already underway. From its naturalized position, the educational institution can continue its work as an ISA without obstruction, actively reproducing certain practices, discourses, ways of imagining, and value systems, while masking the social histories that generated them.

In their analysis and comparison of multiple children’s television shows produced by the American Public Broadcasting System (PBS), including *Thomas & Friends*, *Bob the Builder*, *Barney*, and *Sesame Street*, Benjamin Wright and Michael Roberts extend Althusser’s analysis to children’s television. They contend that children’s television programming functions as an ISA in a similar way to the traditional educational institution of the school (Wright and Roberts 572). Much like the school, children’s television programs – *especially* those that are publically produced – enjoy society’s assumption of good will and economic or cultural neutrality, while actually, the authors claim, training their viewers in certain (neoliberal) ideological systems. Wright and Roberts emphasize, moreover, that children’s television’s role “is all the more pressing because children are presented with ‘‘know-how’ wrapped in the ruling ideology’ at an even younger age [through television than through schools, at] (two to five years old),” and receive this messaging with even more frequency, given that “children on average spend more time per year watching television than attending school” (Wright and Roberts 572, 570).

Children's television programming is therefore a formidable ISA worthy of examination and critique. Furthermore, its influence on its viewers' identity-construction processes should not be underestimated. Drawing upon Althusser, Stuart Hall asserts that identity is "constituted, not outside but within representation; and hence [we should think] of cinema [or television], not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects" (cited in Wright and Roberts 573). For a child, whose identity is already very much in flux by virtue of their young age, this subjectivity-constitutive and ideology-naturalizing power of television and media holds incredible sway.

Wright and Roberts' analysis demonstrates how children's television programming begins indoctrinating children in neoliberal ideology and behavior from as early an age as possible, implicating them from infancy in the dominant political and economic systems, and in the associated relations of production, wealth, power, and violence. This reality runs contrary to what Steven Mintz calls the "Romantic vision of childhood," the popular idea that children exist in a sphere outside of racial, class, and gendered politics, and should "be sheltered from adult realities such as death, profanity, and sexuality" (Chávez and Kiley 2629). The overwhelming tendency to perceive of children as innocent and separate from economic, political, social, and cultural processes, I would contend, is yet another example of naturalized ideology. It facilitates the economic and political exploitation and ideological conditioning of this particularly impressionable demographic, while diverting attention from children's real economic, political, social, and cultural power.

One corporation that has distinguished itself by acknowledging and taking advantage of children's often-neglected politico-economic power is Nickelodeon, the network behind *Dora the Explorer*. In its earliest years, Nickelodeon produced content designed to secure parental

approval, but suffered unsustainably low subscription rates. In 1984, under the new leadership of general manager Geraldine Laybourne, the network opened itself to commercial sponsors, and restructured and rebranded itself as the home exclusively of programming that kids want for *themselves*. (Banet-Weiser 214-215). In the words of Laybourne herself, “For kids, it is ‘us versus them’ in the grown-up world: you’re either for kids or against them. Either you think kids should be quiet and behave or you believe kids should stand up for themselves and be free to play around, explore, and be who they really are. We were on the kids’ side and we wanted them to know it” (Banet-Weiser 215). This new approach proved, and continues to prove, incredibly successful, driving Nickelodeon’s meteoric rise within the children’s television market.

Ironically, though Laybourne’s rhetoric (and Nickelodeon’s marketing material more generally) emphasizes children’s right to self-definition and self-expression, embedded within it are attempts to construct the identity of “kids” in a very particular way. First, it configures “childhood as a discrete realm, not only separate from adults but situated oppositionally... [which] has allowed Nickelodeon to claim that it escapes the dynamic... where childhood is both defined and supported as a specific means to affirm *adult* identity” (Banet-Weiser 216). Unlike Mintz’s Romantic view of childhood, however, Nickelodeon’s treatment of childhood as distinct from adulthood does not strip children of their agency within the political, economic, social, and cultural worlds of adults. Quite the opposite, in fact. For an example, Banet-Weiser offers *Nick News*, Nickelodeon’s news show that was designed for children, yet willingly tackled such issues as the September 11 attacks, the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, and the realities facing children during the war in Afghanistan. Nickelodeon also provided a public forum for children to voice their opinions about the program and its topics of discussion online, on Nickelodeon’s message board (Banet-Weiser 220). Following cultural scholar Henry Jenkins, Banet-Weiser argues that



such a show more-or-less successfully negotiated the tensions involved in configuring children as political agents, an act that inherently demands “more than simply an acknowledgement that children can think for themselves;” it also “requires providing children with the active *means* to think for themselves.” She explains, “*Nick News* seems to provide these means for some children by encouraging them to be more informed about the world, or to take an active role in their communities” (Banet-Weiser 220-221). *Nick News* exhibits one moment of rhetorical maneuvering in which Nickelodeon was able to affirm children’s political agency, while maintaining the construction of “childhood” as a realm, or perspective, separate from adulthood.

In a related and perhaps even more important process, Nickelodeon configures children as influential economic agents, similarly empowered yet distinct from adults. Banet-Weiser summarizes, “Nickelodeon’s self-conscious address about kids’ ‘as kids’ is as much about the *purchasing* power of kids as it is about the *political* power of kids; in fact, these two discourses inform and constitute each other” (Banet-Weiser 223). To advertisers, children represent three markets at once: they are a market in and of themselves, they hold sway over their families, and they constitute a potential market for future sales (Cohn 2001). A 2012 Digitas advertising report found that kids and “tweens” wield a total purchasing power of \$1.2 trillion a year (Chávez and Kiley 2618). In recent years, advertisers have become increasingly eager to tap into the massive financial opportunity that children present. This is evidenced, for example, by the Center for a New American Dream’s finding (as reported by Edward Cohn in 2001) that “American companies spend about \$2 billion each year advertising to kids -- more than 20 times what they spent ten years ago” (Cohn 2001). By treating children as active agents with their own formidable consuming power, Nickelodeon opens access for itself to all three of the markets constituted by children.

Furthermore, the rhetorical importance of recognizing children as a distinct consumer market cannot be overstated, in terms of its relevance to identity-construction. If, as Chapter 2 began to explain, traditional defining factors of citizenship and identity become unstable or even obsolete within the neoliberal economy, then consumption capacity becomes a new way of claiming citizenship and of locating oneself within the new horizons of viable identities. In other words, neoliberal capitalism has brought conventional notions of *civil citizenship* – citizenship delineated by territorial boundaries, political participation and voting, or by grander ideals of “Habermasian liberal democracy [like] rational discourse, rights and liberties, and political freedom” – into “tension with another, more visible kind of citizenship, that of *consumer citizenship*” (Banet-Weiser 210, 232). Therefore, Nickelodeon’s recognition of children as a demographic to be marketed to 1) constructs a certain identity group (“kids,” defined by age or generation, placed in direct opposition to “adults,” with a particular perspective and economic, political, social, and cultural role), 2) demarcates the acceptable boundaries of this identity, and then 3) bestows a certain degree of social power on this group as a direct response to their participation within the processes of consumerism (Banet-Weiser 223).

Banet-Weiser’s analysis emphasizes how within Nickelodeon’s rhetoric, political power and consumption power collapse into one another, configuring children as a new generation of consumer-citizens, and that this form of citizenship or identity is fraught with tensions. I contend that Nickelodeon therefore functions as a microcosmic example of neoliberal ideology and processes in action. Just as the political agent and the economic agent (consumer) merge in Nickelodeon’s discourse, so, too, do the political and the economic integrate on a larger scale within the neoliberal state, as the government (the public sphere) surrenders more and more of its power and responsibilities to the forces of the free market (private sphere).

To further return to the ideas posited in Chapter 2, the process by which identity and citizenship are recast in terms of marketable demographics and consumer participation, as exemplified by Nickelodeon, fits under the description of what I called the “defensive mode.” This process is, I argue, of primary importance to the survival and reproduction of neoliberalism. It allows for previous categories of identification to be deconstructed, preserved, or renovated as *commodities* or *markets*. This not only solves the previously discussed problem of identity (especially embodied identity) clashing with neoliberalism; it in fact becomes a mechanism for further indoctrination. It transforms individuals into subjects who understand themselves as natural consumer-citizens, and cooperate with ISAs such as children’s television programming in a constant cycle of production, marketing, self-identification, and consumption.

Of course, it would be overly simplistic to claim that participation within the consumer market is enough to fully constitute citizenship within the current era. Rather, as Banet-Weiser elucidates,

...it is this *tension*, between political and consumer rights, that most profoundly characterizes a modern sense of citizenship for both adults and children. For children, who are culturally situated outside formal, legal political rights, consumption habits take on perhaps even added significance in the construction of citizenship. In other words, while it is certainly true that political rights remain an important democratic freedom in the construction of citizenship, it is also the case that these older forms of understanding oneself as a citizen have been reformulated in the context of modern consumer culture...Indeed, political participation and consumption are mutually constitutive practices; they rely upon each other for their logic. That is to say, freedom of choice is still a relevant social category, but situated within consumer culture this kind of freedom encompasses more than simply private, political choices within the public sphere. It also indicates the freedom to choose one particular commodity over others, or the choice to belong to a specific community of consumers. (Banet-Weiser 230)

The final point that Banet-Weiser makes in the passage above is particularly important. It highlights yet again the recurring, and deeply problematic, contradiction allowed by the process of enclosure, and then masked typically by utopian rhetoric. Within the mediatic enclosures of

neoliberal capitalism, individuals express political agency, and imagine their own communal identities, by participating in consumer culture. They enjoy the “freedom” to choose which commodities they purchase, or which identity groupings to self-identify with. Yet, though their input might be heeded to some degree, the consumers ultimately do not get to control what commodities are presented to them as options in the first place; private companies do that. Nor do the consumers get to determine for themselves what identity may look like; corporations, advertisers, and media networks like Nickelodeon determine the boundaries of identity on the individuals’ behalf, most often by drawing the borders of different markets or demographics.

This is the core of my critique in this thesis. By breaking apart the rhetoric of children’s television programs like *Dora the Explorer*, itself a product created and distributed within a larger mediatic enclosure governed by the ideology of neoliberal capitalism, I aim to illuminate how such apparatuses function to construct and naturalize a limited set of forms in which Latinidad is permitted to manifest. These constructed identities are designed so as to be understandable within the logic and values of the consumer marketplace, and furthermore, so as to leave long-standing social hierarchies unchallenged. This functions to nullify the potential threat that embodied identity poses both to neoliberal ideology and to traditional hegemonic structures, and instead to absorb these new “commodified” identities as productive participants within the continuous processes of neoliberal capitalism.

The first step in disseminating these carefully constructed and bounded notions of Latinidad is, of course, to embed them within media objects distributed to the public – for example, in episodes of *Dora the Explorer*. Recalling Umberto Eco and John Fiske from Chapter 1, the challenge immediately becomes encoding these images in a way that is “open” enough (in the Eco-ian sense) to maximize audience reception, but not so expansive as to be “anarchically

open,” in the words of Fiske (Fiske 392). In other words, media objects are made to be *polysemic*, meaning that they allow multiple interpretations of their embedded texts to coexist so that a wider audience may connect with them. They are not made to be *pluralistic*, however; they do not allow *any* and *all* interpretations to be considered valid. This distinction between polysemy and pluralism is especially important at this point in our analysis, because it explains how seemingly “open” media texts can carry within them tightly restricted meanings that uphold hegemonic ideologies. Following Stuart Hall, Wright and Roberts warn that mistaking polysemy for pluralism “is a serious mistake, because it glosses over the ‘structure of dominance’ that exists in capitalist media production.” They continue, “Pluralism assumes that the media audience is merely a collection of individuals with roughly equal power, and more problematically, pluralism ignores the structural power of capitalist producers who encode texts” (Wright and Roberts 574). Hall identifies three positions from which a viewer might decode the meanings infused by capitalist producers into any given media text. Like Wright and Roberts, I am concerned here primarily with the first: the “dominant-hegemonic position.” Hall defines this as “When the viewer takes the... meaning from, say, a television newscast...full and straight and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded” (Wright and Roberts 574). When Nickelodeon executives code specific forms of Latinidad into an episode of a show like *Dora the Explorer*, and then audience members directly decode and internalize this restricted range of potential meanings, the viewers are operating from this first position. They are upholding the hegemonic relationship between themselves and the capitalist producers behind the scenes.

Once this limited set of possible decodable interpretations is established, this highly mediated negotiation proclaims the only valid notions of what Latinidad can mean both in the

media and, by extension, in the wider world. Nickelodeon and *Dora the Explorer*, as agents of the wider mediatic enclosure, posit this constructed, fictionalized Latinidad (or these Latinidades), and then encourages the people – Latinx and non-Latinx alike – to “freely” accept this as the true Latinidad, even when this works against their own best interests or preexisting senses of identity. Gaining consent at this step is crucial, and precarious. It is negotiated through a variety of systems and on a multitude of different symbolic battlegrounds, some of which were discussed in Chapter 1’s conversation about Gramsci, Pratt, and Lears. One mechanism that is particularly useful for facilitating this process, and for spreading ideological messages more generally, is what Althusser calls “*interpellation*.” “Interpellation is a process whereby individuals respond to and acknowledge ideologies and recognize themselves as subjects through ideology... [situating] both addressee and sender within a larger structure of social relations in general” (Wright and Roberts 572). The moment of recognition on the part of the addressee is what transforms that person into a consenting subject, through the process of “*hailing*,” which Althusser explains through the example of

“...the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’ ... the hailed individual will turn around. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion he becomes a subject. Why? Because he recognized that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him” ... It is through an individual’s moment of recognition that ideology is able to ‘recruit’ that individual as a subject and this, in turn, grants the ideology legitimacy... It is this recognition that the individual is a subject, argues Althusser, that ultimately allows the individual to ‘freely choose’ subjection, to essentially *not* be free, or to believe that an ideology is one’s own... (Wright and Roberts 572)

If my argument is not only that the major corporations that compose the mediatic enclosure encode strategically designed and controlled representations of Latinidad into their products, but also that these constructions are effective at influencing viewers’ understandings of their own identities, social positions, and ideological belief systems, then it is essential to understand how this influence is achieved. Althusser’s concepts of interpellation and hailing provide a

convincing theory to describe the process by which viewers identify with, consent to, and internalize encoded ideological messages.

### **Hailing in Action and the Ethnicization of Labor**

In her article “Mediated Resistance: The Construction of Neoliberal Citizenship in the Immigrant Rights Movement,” Beth Baker-Cristales identifies and analyzes a historical event that clearly grounds and demonstrates the aforementioned hailing process, in which the mediatic enclosure delineates the boundaries of Latinidad and the Latinx community, and does so in accordance with the principles of neoliberalism and consumer citizenship. She also successfully demonstrates how hailed subjects come to enforce these boundaries upon themselves. Baker-Cristales’s piece examines the massive, one-million-person march through Los Angeles, California that took place on March 25, 2006. The marchers’ purpose was to protest H.R. 4437, or the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, a federal bill designed to “increase penalties for undocumented passage into the United States and funding for border security measures, as well as criminalize the rendering of social services to undocumented migrants” (Baker-Cristales 61; “H.R.4437”). Buoyed by the energy generated on March 25<sup>th</sup>, a number of other massive demonstrations and boycotts occurred across the United States on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006, in cities including Los Angeles, Chicago, New York City, and Phoenix. These movements were designated as “El Gran Paro Americano” (“The Great American Boycott”) and “A Day without an Immigrant.” Taking a more militant posture by employing tools of resistance like boycotts, these demonstrations aimed to counter xenophobic immigration

policymaking by highlighting the indispensable role of migrant workers within the United States' economy and society (Brayton 335).

One key point of interest to both Baker-Cristales and people involved on all sides of the March 25 event was the role of Spanish-language mass and news media in marshalling and steering the protests. Isabel Molina Guzmán explains that “The ethnic news media in relation to the general market media play an important role in determining the socially constructed borders of the imagined community, a conceptualization of community that recognizes both its elasticity and limitations” (Baker-Cristales 63). The March 25<sup>th</sup> protest certainly supports this claim. As Baker-Cristales outlines, a combination of Spanish and English media outlets collaborated in mobilizing and informing protestors (Baker-Cristales 67). This cooperation proved incredibly effective, as evidenced by the sheer number of people who learned about and chose to join the marches – most of them self-identifying Latinx people – through the wide reach of these media outlets. This speaks to the power of media (and, by extension, the wider mediatic enclosure) to define, organize, and motivate communities. Equally interesting, however, was the way these same media outlets decided the specific tactics, symbolic vocabularies, and acceptable modes of self-presentation employed by protestors. Abiding by the counsel of their mass media mobilizers, protestors marched peacefully; no clashes with police occurred during the March 25<sup>th</sup> demonstration, and only one occurred during the May 1 marches. Almost all the protestors wore white shirts, and most waved American flags (though the occasional flag from various Latin American nations did appear) (Baker-Cristales 64). As Baker-Cristales explains, “public protest is more than simply a political act; it is a representational act” – a method for defining and shaping meaning and creating identity, and also “a way of enacting and performing citizenship, and of asserting and embodying an understanding of self and collectivity” (Baker-Cristales 69-



70). The representational intentions of these protests in particular were agreed upon and outlined by the media outlets that organized them, and visibly expressed in the posters, t-shirts, and slogans of the protestors. While fighting their political battle against exclusionary policy decisions, the protestors presented themselves as “hard working, peaceful, clean, self-possessed, law abiding and well behaved” people, unified as a community through their shared experience of immigration and united in their patriotism (Baker-Cristales 68-73). In essence, they were fighting to justify their inclusion within the United States economy and society by presenting themselves as model workers and citizens, and directly combatting stereotypes that associate Latinx immigrants with laziness and unproductivity, or criminality and terrorism.

Herein lies a problem, however. As Baker-Cristales notes, instead of “providing a more radical critique of the politics of citizenship,” this self-positioning was *reactive* (Baker-Cristales 69). It engaged with a few specific negative stereotypes of Latinx immigrants, but did not attack the core hegemonic structures and ideologies that oppress Latinx people by rhetorically boxing them into a certain imagined community, and then creating stereotypes around it. Instead, the protests’ symbolic maneuvers simply redrew, or perhaps reaffirmed, the imagined boundaries of Latinidad. For example, they encouraged protestors to renounce their individual national heritages in the name of constructing a unified community, in an analogous process to the creation of the panethnic “Latinidad” described in Chapter 1’s analysis of *Dora the Explorer*.

Next, the protests’ tactics essentially proposed a new stereotype or proper social role for the members of this constructed community – that of model neoliberal citizens, demanding the right to submit to and participate in the capitalist system of labor, production, and consumption. As impressively organized and politically effective as these protests may have been, they questioned a *symptom* of life as a non-hegemonic group within the enclosures of neoliberal

capitalism, not the *source*. At the behest of agents of the mediatic enclosure, the protestors symbolically fought for their own right – their own “freedom” – to be exploited and subjugated. Unknowingly, they were asking to be “hailed” in the Althusserian sense. This is a striking real-world example of neoliberal ideology and existing power structures being proffered by arms of the mediatic enclosure, and then naturalized, consented to, and reproduced by the subjects themselves.

Sean Brayton draws a link between the rhetoric of the 2006 demonstrations and a children’s program broadcast by the Walt Disney Company only months later. *Handy Manny* aired on September 16, 2006, “at the particular moment when the ‘Latino threat narrative’ reach[ed] its first apogee of the new millennium” (Brayton 337). Like the protests, *Handy Manny* does the rhetorical work of calling for social, political, economic, and cultural inclusion by replacing stereotypes of Latinx immigrants as threatening or lazy with images of them as model citizens and laborers. The show revolves around Manuel “Manny” Garcia, a Latino manual laborer, and his anthropomorphic, Spanish-speaking tools, who work together at a repair shop in the multicultural town of Sheetrock Hills. In most episodes, Manny and his tools come to the rescue of their neighbors, who call for assistance with some manual project (installing an oven for a Mexican neighbor in Episode 1, replacing light bulbs at the town cinema in Episode 5, planting a garden in Episode 23, renovating the town’s elementary school, town hall, and community center in Episodes 6, 12, and 2, respectively, etc.). Notably, most of his assignments are relatively small and straightforward projects done by hand, in contrast to the technically complex, capital-demanding construction projects undertaken by Bob the Builder, the more famous Anglo lead of a different children’s television show (Brayton 339-341). Manny works even on his supposed off-days, and never receives monetary compensation for his work; the

satisfaction of his neighbors, including other migrant Latinx laborers like the gardener Abuelito, the Argentinean carwash attendant Mr. Ayala, and the Mexican cook Mrs. Portillo, is payment enough. So is the appreciation he receives from his town, which goes so far as to award the dependable worker with the “Good Citizenship of the Year” trophy (Manny himself had previously fixed that very same trophy) (Brayton 339-341). Like Dora, Manny’s ethnicity is not directly addressed, but the show is infused with various signifiers of panethnic Latinidad, including common usage of Spanish terms and phrases, a theme song performed by the popular Chicano rock band Los Lobos, voicing by the famous Venezuelan-American actor Wilmer Valderrama, and insinuations that Manny is Mexican-American due to his participation in cultural traditions like Cinco de Mayo and Tardeada (Brayton 340-341).

As Brayton’s analysis illuminates, however, labor itself functions within the show as the most significant marker of ethnicity. Manny’s legal status is never directly addressed, but his labor confers citizenship upon him insofar as it wins him inclusion and esteem within the Sheetrock Hills economy. Even so, his labor simultaneously confines him within the social position of an “Other” that has been rendered palatable, non-threatening, and even supportive of traditional notions of Anglo citizenship and hegemonic hierarchy. Describing what she calls the “ethnicization” of labor, Rey Chow writes that

A laborer becomes ethnicized because she is commodified in specific ways, because she has to pay for her living by performing certain kinds of work, while these kinds of work, despite being generated from within that society, continue to reduce the one who performs them to the position of the outsider, the ethnic. (cited in Brayton 342)

The types of labor Manny generally performs match the types of labor that are largely ascribed to Mexican and other Latinx migrants within both the United States’ cultural imaginary and structural reality. Citing Gomez-Quinones and Maciel, Brayton writes, “In North America, Latina/o migrants are particularly concentrated in jobs considered unattractive, demeaning,

dangerous, dirty, temporary, or comparatively poorly paid – i.e. ‘Mexican work’” (Brayton 342). *Handy Manny* sanitizes, or “Disney-fies,” these relations and conditions of labor in line with neoliberal ideology. Manny is the paradigmatic submissive neoliberal citizen. A skilled, dependable laborer willing to work at any moment, for the sheer pleasure of working, Manny’s place and worth within society is entirely determined by the production of his labor. Furthermore, traditional racial hierarchies that mark him as ethnically “other” remain intact, simply hidden behind the guise of a diverse multicultural utopia and in terms of economic labor relations. Like the media outlets that organized the March 25, 2006 protests, Brayton’s analysis demonstrates that *Handy Manny* improves Latinx visibility in the media and combats harmful stereotypes that paint Latinx migrants as detriments to the US economy and society, but does so by constructing a tightly controlled, toothless, commodified Latinidad that fits within the hegemonic Anglo cultural imagination and the logic of the neoliberal market. *Handy Manny* teaches its viewers to work and enjoy their exploitation with a smile.

We may therefore understand the ethnicization of labor as an effective “defensive” strategy for neutralizing the threat that embodied identity presents to neoliberal capitalism. Unable to do away with ethnicity, and unwilling to try, given that power and capital remain distributed along hierarchies built around ethnicity, those at the top of the neoliberal system can “ethnicize labor” in order to recast ethnicity itself in terms of the marketplace. Put simply, ethnic identity becomes, essentially, an economic category. Ethnicity is thereby reduced, reconstructed, and re-naturalized in a way that promotes the processes of neoliberal capitalism, rather than destabilizes them.

## **On Latinx Child Labor: The Case of Disney**

So far in this chapter, I began with Kukla's idea that ideologies work to naturalize social phenomena and structures that in reality, are based in particular social histories, conditions, and dynamics. I then followed Althusser's explanation of ISAs, such as media outlets and children's television programming, as particular apparatuses that further the process of ideological naturalization. The main phenomenon of interest in this thesis as a whole is identity, and in particular Latinidad. Thus, I have been interested in the slick rhetoric by which the media posits limited configurations in which certain identities (such as "childhood," "Latinidad," or "American citizenship") may exist, – configurations that always seem to reflect neoliberal values and avoid dismantling existing hierarchies – and then encourage spectators to consent to the terms of these arrangements and reproduce them for themselves. My first example, Nickelodeon's branding approach, demonstrated the neoliberal capitalist tendency to create "demographics" consisting of "consumer-citizens," who are empowered (but also controlled) politically, socially, and culturally by virtue of their economic capacities. My second example, the massive 2006 protests against anti-immigration legislature, demonstrated, first, the efficacy of mass media as an ISA to organize individuals into carefully and intentionally drawn "identity" groups, and second, to convince them to consent to and self-enforce the boundaries of this constructed identity, even when doing so contributes to their own subjugation within established systems of hegemony. My third example, *Handy Manny*, refocused on Latinx-themed children's programming in particular, to demonstrate how this ISA naturalizes a similar construction of "model Latinidad" that is based around neoliberal values and practices, and that continues the

ethnic “othering” of Latinx people from a hegemonic, Anglo frame of reference, under the veneer of multiculturalism.

In critiquing how powerful media corporations like Nickelodeon and Disney commodify and exploit childhood identity and Latinx identity, however, another category demands addressing: the exploitation of actual Latinx child laborers in the production of children’s television content. Examination of this category exposes, yet again, a continued effort to channel Latinidad into specific, easily controlled configurations, where it may be taken advantage of for financial gain. Christopher Chávez and Aleah Kiley’s 2016 case study of Disney supports this claim. They summarize their findings as follows:

We found that Latino children perform labor on behalf of the corporation in three ways: as subscribers to Disney’s cable networks, as actors in programming designed to deliver those subscribers, and as beneficiaries of corporate goodwill in communications aimed at Disney’s various corporate stakeholders, including investors, legislators, and the media...[in addition, we] found that the logic by which Disney assigns various forms of labor to different types of Latino children helps to advance the company’s economic goals, rendering Latino children hypervisible in some spaces and invisible in others. (Chávez and Kiley, 2619-2620)

The nature of each of these distinct forms of labor is revealed to be exploitative when we recognize that the Latinx children performing the labor are not its main beneficiaries. In the 1980s, the emergence of cable television offered the possibility that more people of color might be able to make their voices heard in the wider media landscape. Unfortunately, Chávez and Kiley explain, deregulatory policies like the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which “empowered already dominant networks by lifting regulatory restrictions to open competition between the telephone, cable, satellite, broadcast, and utility companies,” encouraged further centralization of power over media, and thus, the continued obstruction and erasure of non-hegemonic perspectives (Chávez and Kiley 2618). Representation of Latinidad on television, therefore,

remains the prerogative of corporations like Disney or Nickelodeon that hold “little equity in the Latino community.” In some cases, such as with *Dora the Explorer*, networks may enlist the guidance of Latinx experts to assist their majority non-Latinx executives in developing content (see Chapter 1); in other cases, however, they construct representations of Latinidad without any Latinx assistance in the process (Chávez and Kiley 2618). In either of these situations, we can see the effects of neoliberal policy at work, as capital, power, and ownership over the means of production (both physical and symbolic/representational) are consolidated, while historical hegemonic structures and relations are reproduced.

Images of Latinidad on a network like Disney, then, are generated not from motives of Latinx self-determination and self-representation on television, but rather from a perspective that continues to privilege white, middle-class Americans. Strategic representations of Latinidad are a means to the end of profit, and in this case, the real source of profit is viewership. Chávez and Kiley explain that,

Consistent with Smythe’s (1977) argument that the real commodity that is being exchanged in the marketplace is not the television show or the advertised product but the audience itself, Disney generates revenue by delivering children to marketers through programming. Disney’s capacity to deliver children in vast quantities to cable companies and marketers ensures that greater revenue can be generated in licensing fees and sponsorship dollars. (Chávez and Kiley 2620)

Audience delivery capacity thus becomes a key parameter in designing the specific notions of Latinidad that a network like Disney is willing to purvey, an observation consistent throughout all of the authors’ aforementioned findings.

The first type of Latinx-performed labor the authors identify – subscribing to Disney – is exactly that: the labor of being a member of a “commodified” audience. The second, that of participating as highly visible actors intended to deliver audiences, involves an even more

intensive effort to delineate Latinidad through careful casting. “Disney’s ideal Latino child actor is a young woman, a ‘spectacular body’” the authors explain, “in which their ethnic identity intersects with commercial interests” (Chávez and Kiley 2626). This ethnic identity is distanced from any outward signifiers of Latinidad, however; actresses of this category (for example, Bella Thorne or Selena Gomez) are typically “either phenotypically white or light brown and with no traceable accents” (Chávez and Kiley 2626). Not only, as Angharad N. Valdivia argues, are ethnicity and femininity both highly commodifiable, but this ethnic ambiguity allows these actresses to reach multiple audiences by shifting fluidly in and out of “mainstream” Anglo roles, while maintaining the ability to take advantage of their Latinx identity when beneficial to the network or themselves (Valdivia, *Latino/as* 108; Chávez and Kiley 2626).

The third category of labor that Chávez and Kiley identify is the type performed by the so-called “Disempowered Latino Child.” The author describes this figure as a character whose “authentic” ethnic “otherness” (from a white American perspective) is made as conspicuous as possible. This child tends to have, for example, darker skin, a heavy accent, and a recognizably Spanish surname. Often, he or she exists in challenging socioeconomic conditions. “This is the Latino child,” the authors write, “whose image dominates Disney’s corporate communications and is meant to signify Disney’s goodwill,” social responsibility, and participation within the mythical color-blind, multicultural utopia of the United States (Chávez and Kiley 2628-2629). This figure represents an iconized, commodified form of ethnic difference used for both advertising purposes and for rhetorically masking the network’s true aim – production of capital – under the guise of social concern.

Though each of these types of labor differ in their most immediate purposes, and in terms of which specific individuals they render visible or invisible, they all share the same ultimate



goal – maximization of profit for Disney – and exemplify the narrow roles in which the mediatic enclosure allows Latinidad to exist. As an ISA, and especially one targeting children, the choices Disney’s programming makes in terms of when, why, and where it allows Latinx identities to be seen, and how these identities are designed and reduced, have powerful instructional effects on viewers’ sense of selfhood, and serve to further naturalize neoliberal ideology and traditional social hierarchies. These choices, we have seen, have been left primarily in the hands of non-Latinx people in executive positions within massive media conglomerations, whose consolidation of capital, market share, and sociopolitical and sociocultural power has been facilitated by neoliberal policymaking, and whose ultimate motive is profit through audience acquisition. Consenting to the terms of these bounded, constructed, commodified notions of Latinidad is therefore a form of labor performed on behalf of the corporations. Whether we, as consumers, give our consent by actively accepting these fictionalized Latinidades as “authentic” (a tool of rhetorical legitimization used by *Dora the Explorer*, explored in Chapter 1), or by internalizing stereotypes based off of these televisual representations, or even by purchasing products that employ and reaffirm these constricted images of what Latinx identity may be, we allow ourselves to be exploited as both consumers and ideology (re)producers within the mediatic enclosure.

### **Coping with Movement Within Enclosure**

We may think of these efforts to channel Latinidad into circumscribed forms as extensions of the ideology and concerns underlying the capitalist enclosure process more

generally. After all, both are ultimately about *control*. Enclosure, as explained in Chapter 1, works by bringing people and resources into a confined space (physical or metaphoric), in which their behavior is closely monitored, limited, and directed, with the end goal of producing ever more capital. The tricky part for capitalists is gaining sufficient consent from the tightly regulated workers and audiences, such that they do not challenge the systems that exploit them, and that they eventually come to consider their conditions so natural that they reproduce their own exploitation. That which is controlled is useful to the enclosure; that which moves freely is a threat (be that people, thoughts, or other). Of course, the exception to this rule is capital. In the neoliberal economy, capital is meant to flow unencumbered across borders at an ever-accelerating pace, at the same time that the laborers who produce it remain stuck in their confinement. This is why, even as the US economy has become more and more transnational in recent decades, these developments have corresponded with increasing anxiety over border securitization and institution of more biometric measures for monitoring people's movement.

Concern about movement, and about masking conditions of tight enclosure under claims of free movement, is a feature of countless media products of the neoliberal capitalist era. Examining the way freedom of movement is negotiated in a given media object is therefore a potentially fruitful method for unraveling the neoliberal ideological agenda embedded within it. Consider again, for example, the previously mentioned metaphors of movement so deliberately attached to the internet – a virtual “space” where one “*surfs* the World Wide Web” through browsers like Apple *Safari* and Internet *Explorer*. Or consider the other key “explorer” addressed in this thesis: Dora herself.

As the show's title suggests, movement and exploration are principal themes of *Dora the Explorer*. Every episode follows Dora as she traverses new parts of the world, meeting

characters, slipping between languages, and overcoming challenges. The places Dora “explores” are both narrative and televisual centers of attention, and her movement between them is what characterizes her, defines her, and empowers her. If the aim of enclosure is to establish spatial boundaries and allow only capital to flow freely, Dora seems to take on the role of capital itself. This is an apt metaphor for a figure who is really a consumer commodity herself, sold across the world in the form of toys, clothing, video games, television episodes, films, live concerts, etc. Despite the online chatrooms wherein people have tried to fix Dora to a specific country of origin, *Dora the Explorer* mixes signifiers from disparate geographic locations – mostly those associated in some way with Latinidad – and refuses to label Dora as from anywhere in particular. This makes her, effectively, from “everywhere.”<sup>15</sup> Guidotti-Hernández writes that in the show, “multiple landscapes make categories of nation-space and citizenship unstable, yet vernacular and local... [and] The shifting landscape becomes a contact zone, ‘where bodies and identity resist stable categories and meaning as ambivalent, contradictory, and historically shifting’... [and where] space...is itself a field where meaning is produced” (Guidotti-Hernández, “Dora the Explorer” 220-221).

Dora’s freedom to navigate space marks her as an empowered figure, especially as a Latina child. Despite her age, she journeys unsupervised and with total self-sufficiency, exemplifying Nickelodeon’s rhetorical approach of configuring children as a category with its own agency within the wider political, social, cultural, and economic world. Dora “moves through space uninhibited and unpoliced” (Guidotti-Hernández, “Dora the Explorer” 217). Her gender adds no additional risk to her travels as it might in the real world, nor does it tie her down into domestic labor like many televisual representations of adult women. “Her brown body,”

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<sup>15</sup> This idea is further explored in Chapter 1.

meanwhile, “is not criminalized as are the majority of Latinos we see on television in this post-9/11 period of racial profiling” (Guidotti-Hernández, “Dora the Explorer” 214, 217-218).

Furthermore, Guidotti-Hernández notes the irony of the fact that Dora uses a map (in this case a peppy character who rides in her backpack and offers directions and a song in each episode) to navigate geographies, solve problems, and provide aid to others. Cartography was, and continues to be, one of key tools for facilitating the conquest and colonization of the Americas. Thus, Guidotti-Hernández explains,

Dora creates a cognitive map as movement through space marks time and creates a coherent narrative. Repetition based on the map defines the space as bilingual. As maps have facilitated political and economic power, Dora’s work with the map solidifies her position as a representative of global Latino/a citizenship and feminist agency, instead of as a limited, spatially colonized body. (Guidotti-Hernández, “Dora the Explorer” 221)

Dora’s freedom of movement is what differentiates her as a uniquely empowered figure on television; she is empowered as a child, as a girl, as a Latinx person, and as a global citizen. This is fundamental not only to her design and characterization, but also to the ways she is marketed and heralded as a progressive multicultural icon.

But the stability even of this utopian, magical, supposedly progressive construction fails under closer inspection, for Dora’s freedom of movement remains structured within the terms of neoliberal capitalism. First of all, though her conspicuous independence and individualism carry positive associations within the United States cultural imagination, they are products of a “corporate-generated [feminism].” Guidotti-Hernández warns, “corporate-generated feminisms are dangerous because they ‘assemble signs which connote independence, participation in the workforce, individual freedom, and self-control,’ but only through the consumption of goods and services” (Guidotti-Hernández, “Dora the Explorer” 214). Furthermore, the panethnicization of Latinidad in *Dora the Explorer* evokes the discourse of mestizaje, which necessarily includes

associated colonial hierarchies and histories connected to Afro-Latinidad and indigeneity, and out of which Dora's social mobility emerges as a sign of "a particular amount of privilege (social, class, and economic) that is most closely associated with whiteness rather than black or indigenous identities" (Guidotti-Hernández, "Dora the Explorer" 216). Dora's access to tools like her map and singing backpack further solidifies her socially mobile, presumably middle-class identity (Guidotti-Hernández, "Dora the Explorer" 218). Yet even though her privilege – garnered, as a proper neoliberal subject, through economic status and the legacies of racial hegemony – allows Dora social mobility, Guidotti-Hernández argues that this mobility remains constrained as "horizontal, not vertical," meaning "Dora moves across social strata instead of up and down class hierarchies" (Guidotti-Hernández, "Dora the Explorer" 218). Thus, Dora's highly-touted "free" movement is afforded to her by her position and participation within consumer culture and the capitalist system, but is limited in its range, and takes place only within a circumscribed televisual universe. In this sense, she epitomizes the sort of restrictive "freedom" of movement afforded to citizens within the capitalist enclosure.

In its obsession with regulation, surveillance, and control, the modern neoliberal state affords this "freedom" of movement *only* to citizens. Non-citizens are supposed to be prevented from moving freely altogether. This is the purpose behind the increasing policing and utilization of biometric identification measures at the US's national borders, including tools like passports, national ID cards and licenses, or trusted traveler status programs. Many of these have been implemented within the post-9/11 discursive trend that emphasizes national securitization. Josiah Heyman explains, "securitization of a given issue represents an extreme striving for order. Disorder is so severe that it is comparable to the death threat of attack, and only a war-preparation form of response can maintain or regain order. The border...lends itself to such

order-making visions” (cited in Duran 220). In the fury of the securitization current, the right to access certain spaces and resources becomes a question not of “who you are or who you may be (identification), but rather whether or not you have been authorized to access these” privileges (Duran 225). Those who exist or move outside and across constructed borders without authorization – such as undocumented migrants, refugees, or indigenous communities (groups that Peter Andreas unites under the umbrella term “clandestine transnational actors,” or CTAs) – thus become recast within the national imagination as threats (Duran 220). Similarly, anyone who behaves in a way antagonistic to the values and continued processes of neoliberal capitalism and culture (with the traditional hegemonic hierarchies still embedded and intact, of course) is cast as criminal. These “threats” and “criminals” are then set to be persecuted and castigated as such.

Within the fervor of border securitization and fears over global immigration crises, citizenship, and national identity, – all of which scholars have shown to be anxieties that are intimately related to, or even products of, the epochal shift toward transnational neoliberalism – anti-Latinx sentiment and xenophobia has taken center stage in national conversation. These attitudes have been processed directly through the language of crime and legality; as Melissa Jeanette Pujol writes, “Accusing immigrants of crimes allows for society to exclude them with impunity. We cannot discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity, but we certainly do so on the basis of criminality, and with legal justification” (Pujol 20). Consider, for example, an infamous campaign speech given by now-President Donald Trump in June of 2015, transcribed unabridged below. Trump said, to cheers and applause,

When do we beat Mexico at the border? They’re laughing at us, at our stupidity. And now they are beating us economically. They are not our friend, believe me. But they’re killing us economically. The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else’s problems. [Responding to cheers] Thank you. It’s true, and these are the best and the

finest. When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we're getting. And it only makes common sense. It only makes common sense. They're sending us not the right people. It's coming from more than Mexico. It's coming from all over South and Latin America, and it's coming probably— probably— from the Middle East. But we don't know. Because we have no protection and we have no competence, we don't know what's happening. And it's got to stop and it's got to stop fast" (Schwartz)

This quotation alone contains all of the neoliberal anxieties I described above. The very first question configures the relationship between Mexico and the United States as purely oppositional, as if securitization against Mexican migrants is a war effort and the national border its main battleground. Next, Trump signals that Mexico, the US's supposed enemy, is defeating the US at the very heart of the neoliberal state, at the place which organizes all of American neoliberal capitalist society: the economy.

Trump goes on to target the individual migrants, acknowledging that though some might be "good people," individual identity does not matter because those people are, first and foremost, CTAs, whose assumed criminality threatens the State's survival. He continues with a claim of ideological naturalization: "It only makes common sense. It only makes common sense." Trump then expands the threat of Latinx CTA migration to include "all over South and Latin America," participating in the construction of a panethnicizing notion of Latinidad that offers Latinx people only two options: to conform to the bounds of a certain commodified, controllable identity that does not threaten racialized, class-based, and patriarchal hegemony, or otherwise to be dismissed as enemies of the state.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Trump concludes with a call to action on the basis that the United States is failing to maintain the core principles of both

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<sup>16</sup> Trump adds to this statement a touch of islamophobia and antisemitism, for good measure.

enclosure and neoliberal selfhood: “Because we have no protection and we have no competence, we don’t know what’s happening.” And like with any other problem that the neoliberal system faces, he demands that a solution must be found “fast.”

### **Stereotyping, Controlling, and Destroying the Threatening “Other”**

These negative stereotypes of Latinx people that Trump reinforces are certainly not of his own creation, however. They are the same notions that demonstrators combatted in the protests of March 2006, when they argued for migrants’ social inclusion by asserting their non-criminality, self-restraint, and economic productivity. And these stereotypes build upon reductive representations of Latinidad that have haunted Hollywood, children’s animation, and national culture since the earliest days of United States cinema. Ramírez Berg identifies six principal archetypal representations of Latinx/Mexican people in Hollywood: “the Mexican ‘bandido’ bandit, the buffoon, and the ‘Latin lover’ for men; and the harlot, the female clown, and the ‘dark lady’ for women”. Updating that list to include other more recent archetypes, Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier add “‘cholo’ gangsters and drug traffickers (updated versions of the evil ‘bandido’) or Mexican gardeners and landscapers (for Chicano or ‘Mexican’ males); then housemaids, cleaning ladies, and domestic workers (for Latina women); or Mexican-accented Chihuahua dogs, more generally” (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier 6). Notice that each of these newer additions accord with neoliberal conceptions of possible social positions. The outdoor or indoor laborer archetypes all offer a viable channel for Latinidad based around productive participation in the economic system, without challenging existing racial, ethnic, or



class hierarchies. This is the category Manny from *Handy Manny* belongs to, for example. The cholo and drug trafficker representations, meanwhile, emphasize the other usual constructed channel for Latinidad, that which Trump reaffirms and which casts those who resist enclosure and transgress social, cultural, and/or territorial boundaries as criminals.

Even within the realm of children's cartoons, neoliberal ideology reinforces and teaches that "criminal" transgressors must be dealt with militantly. Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier offer analysis of a useful example to support this claim. They examine the antagonist of the popular 2013 children's film *Despicable Me 2*, a Mexican supervillain named "El Macho." El Macho, and his civilian alter-ego Eduardo Pérez, are an amalgamation – or more aptly, barrage – of racist, xenophobic, and panethnicizing Mexican and Latinx stereotypes. The duplicitous and evil Pérez, masquerading as a productive citizen, owns a restaurant called Salsa & Salsa. The establishment serves Mexican food and live salsa music, and has the head of a black bull at the door. (The film ignores, of course, the clash among signifiers given that salsa music is associated mostly with other non-Mexican Latinx communities, that the bull is the national symbol of Spain, and that exported steak is more often associated with countries like Argentina or Uruguay than Mexico) (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier 14-15). In one scene, Pérez throws a Cinco de Mayo party, at which the film's protagonist, Gru, eats guacamole from a sombrero constructed from a tortilla chip shell. In another, he orders 200 cupcakes adorned with the Mexican flag, and shows off his Mexican flag chest tattoo (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier 14) In other scenes, Pérez's son Antonio, a Latin Lover archetype who, like his father, code-switches often between Spanish and English, mesmerizes female restaurant-goers with his salsa dancing, and breaks the heart of Gru's daughter (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier 15-16)

The stereotyping only worsens when Gru confirms his suspicion that Pérez is the international terrorist El Macho, a hairy, potbellied, mustachioed man who wears gold chains and a Mexican wrestling mask, and reenacts tropes of the Bandido archetype. He is seen in flashbacks, for example, shooting pistols, stealing from banks, and robbing a saloon that is itself named “El Bandido.” “El Macho is also depicted drinking snake poison, crushing the shot glass with his teeth, breaking through a wall, and overall demonstrating an inhumane, savage, and threatening masculinity” (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier 14).

El Macho’s monstrosity constitutes a chief area of concern for Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier. They cite numerous scholars whose works highlight the construction (and complexity) of the Self-versus-Other dichotomy, and the way this opposition is used for purposes such as unevenly distributing privileges or motivating nationalistic behavior and discourse (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier 3). They also cite various scholars whose works stress the symbolic construction of the Other as monstrous and culturally inferior, and how this monstrosity, “born out of our American history [and] out of the central anxieties and obsessions that have been part of the United States from colonial times to the present,” is used to inform, motivate, and justify our sense of selfhood, our understandings of unfamiliar groups, and our actions against them, going as far as imperialistic genocide (in the case of the Native Americans, for example) (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier 4). “A monster,” Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier explain, “is the inassimilable Other” (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier 16). El Macho, standing in for Latinidad (or that is, for any Latinidad that is not safely controlled and subjugated), assumes this role.

This dehumanizing, racist, and xenophobia representation of Mexican-ness and Latinidad, I contend, is firmly embedded within, shaped by, and produced by neoliberal

ideology. This is evidenced, for example, by El Macho's choice of crime, which I read as a direct threat and challenge to neoliberal capitalism. El Macho's goal is world domination and destruction. His strategy is to abduct Gru's "minions," the delightful army of tiny workers who cheerfully perform labor on Gru's behalf, and to then transform them into "ruthless purple monsters" that will devastate the world. As a symbol of Mexican-ness, El Macho's approach plays on the attitude that Mexicans "steal" jobs from American citizens, but then magnifies it; "El Macho goes further than stealing jobs – he steals the workforce" (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier 16). This is, of course, the worst nightmare of neoliberal capitalists. And the movie codes this nightmare as intimately linked to Latinidad. Even the secret fortress from which El Macho surveys his monstrous, no-longer-laboring army is designed to look like an Aztec castle (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier 17).

Near the end of the film, the heroes kill El Macho and a minion dressed as a hunter jumps upon his corpse, so that the "audience sees El Macho," once and for all, "as a lifeless beast, a dangerous animal, a monster, even representing 'Latinidad,' but never a human being" (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Avant-Mier 17-18). In this way, even this (purportedly) lighthearted children's movie trains its young viewers in neoliberal ideology, further naturalizing the idea that those uncontrollable and criminal Others, those monsters who threaten the processes of capitalism and/or hegemonic hierarchies, *deserve* swift, merciless, and total destruction, and *will* receive it. This children's media object and the countless others like it function as ISAs, echoing the same neoliberalism-infused, xenophobic warnings and calls to action given by the United States' current executive leader during (and after) his electoral campaign.

The crime of uncontrollability is often punished with just as much physical brutality in the real world as it is in *Despicable Me 2*. When killing the threat is not the decided-upon

response, however, neoliberal America often turns to disciplinary structures like the prison system. Though the prison as an institution has held an important place within American society since long before the 1970s and 1980s, the transformation of American society into a complete carceral state accelerated rapidly over the decades of transition into neoliberal capitalism. In the early 1970s, America ranked toward the lower end of global incarceration rates, with about 90 imprisoned people for every 100,000 residents, compared to a wider twentieth-century average of 100 incarcerated people for every 100,000 persons (Simon 471). By the end of the year 2000, however, this number had risen to nearly 500 imprisoned Americans per 100,000 citizens (Simon 471). Today, the United States has the highest incarceration rate of any nation, with 698 prisoners per 100,000 residents, or a total of some 2.3 million people currently behind bars (Sawyer and Wagner). Much scholarship and research has gone into demystifying the profit machinery of the prison-industrial complex, as well as highlighting the mechanisms by which the prison system reflects and reproduces hierarchies of traditional racial and socioeconomic hegemony, and creates obedient citizen-subjects under the rhetorical guise of securitization and justice. The statistics are telling (and horrifying) enough on their own. For example, one of the many disturbing findings of a 2016 report by The Sentencing Project was that African Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at a rate 5.1-times higher than that of white Americans on a national level, and more than 10-times higher in five states, while Latinos are incarcerated at a rate that is 1.4-times higher than that of white people (Nellis 3).

The prison institution is relevant in my discussion here for multiple reasons. First, because it upholds hegemony in ways that continue to privilege whiteness and de-privilege Latinidad. Second, because of its role in the neoliberal securitization craze that drives, and is driven by, debates over the US-Mexico border, Latinx immigration and refugees, and larger

questions of citizenship and national identity. The prison institution also bears mention here, furthermore, because it seems like a particularly apt metaphor, or at least like a very fitting tool of social organization and control, for the neoliberal state. The jailhouse is the epitome of enclosure. It is a space in which bodies, movement, identities, and resources are meticulously and brutally surveilled, monitored, and directed. It is a space of ideological, symbolic, and physical violence that is justified and naturalized by rhetoric of public safety and justice. It claims to act as the protector of civil society, stripping this responsibility from the government, as prisons (like other social services including welfare and education) have been increasingly privatized in recent decades.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the prison institution illustrates capitalism's flexibility, in that it transforms even those individuals deemed unproductive, resistant, or threatening to capitalist society into sources of capital themselves (Wolff 334). Incarcerated people become tradeable commodities within the prison-industrial complex. They also perform highly exploited labor within their prisons, which is what allows prisons to function in the first place. A 2017 study by the Prison Policy Initiative found that,

On average, incarcerated people earn between 86 cents and \$3.45 *per day* for the most common prison jobs. In at least five states, those jobs pay nothing at all. Moreover, work in prison is compulsory, with little regulation or oversight, and incarcerated workers have few rights and protections. Forcing people to work for low or no pay and no benefits allows prisons to shift the costs of incarceration to incarcerated people – hiding the true cost of running prisons from most Americans. (Sawyer and Wagner)

Like the theoretical enclosure outlined in Chapter 1, the prison is both a product and a tool of neoliberal capitalism. It is a physical enclosure that entraps people and resources while accelerating the pace of capital production and flow, and that converts everyone within its walls into exploited laborers whose very labor reproduces the system that exploits them.

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<sup>17</sup>These claims of social concern and responsibility parallel those made by major private media corporations like Disney and Nickelodeon, as discussed previously in this chapter.

Today, the most dominant negative narratives about Latinx people have everything to do with fear of unauthorized movement, as media outlets and public figures like Donald Trump incite national anxiety over the unregulated movement of Latinx migrants and refugees. In such a context, the national emphasis on tools that physically restrict movement and create tangible enclosures – apparatuses like prison cells, or border walls – makes perfect sense. The securitization craze becomes a vicious cycle, because the more that people disobey or bypass its mechanisms, the more the sense of danger increases, and the more the craze is reinforced. Perhaps this pattern suggests a rationale for why and how the United States has now reached a cultural moment in which Latinx migrant children register as such a threat to society, that the government is willing to separate them from their families by the thousands, and even incarcerate them in metal cages (Chen; Merchant)

### **In Summary**

At this point, we have seen the variety of modes in which neoliberal capitalism deals with identity. The neoliberal state conditions its citizens to understand themselves as consumer-citizens, with their social positions, freedoms, and privileges defined by their participation in consumer culture. In practice, however, these privileges are still distributed along the lines of hegemonic hierarchies, which are largely drawn around traditional categories like ethnicity and race. Such categories of embodied identity are inconsistent with neoliberal ideology in its purest form. Therefore, under neoliberal capitalism, these identities are transformed and recast in terms of the marketplace, and sold to audiences through the ISAs that compose the mediatic enclosure,

such as children's media programs. Audiences are then compelled to consent to these restricted forms of identity (for example, the commodified Latinidades of *Dora the Explorer* or *Handy Manny*). The punishments for dissent or nonconformity are merciless. Resist, and RSAs like the prison system might forcibly convert you into a source of capital. Resist in too threatening a fashion, however, and you might be destroyed altogether. Watch, learn, obey, consume.

## CHAPTER 4

### Dora the Bad Hombrecita: Concluding Thoughts

By teasing apart the “very small” – the tightly-knit rhetoric of a singular preschool children’s television show – this thesis has tried to gain access to the “very biggest of the big:” the dynamics of hegemonic power, the social, cultural, political, and economics effects of an epochal shift from one form of capitalism to another, the ideological foundations behind such notions as Latinidad, citizenship, and freedom, and the ever-growing mediatic enclosure that tries to dictate how we, its subjects and consumers, understand our own identities. This thesis has not endeavored to be a comprehensive deconstruction or explication of any one of these massive key terms, ideas, or trends. Rather, it has attempted to situate itself at the intersection between them, and to cast some light, however incomplete, on the layers of ideology and rhetoric that are embedded within even the most seemingly innocuous products of the neoliberal capitalist marketplace.

This thesis began with the image of Dora as she is marketed: a joyful, empowered Latina girl with a global brand, free to embark on her own adventures and eager to help others. As we have unpacked her symbolic construction, however, we have discovered her empowerment to be mostly illusory, a product of careful rhetoric and naturalized ideology. Therefore, perhaps the best way to conclude this thesis, and to review its claims and foci, is to examine a very different vision of Dora – a visualization of her at her predestined endpoint under the brutal ideology of neoliberalism. To that end, I offer the following violent, distressing, and provocative image of our favorite cartoon subject:





Image retrieved from <https://www.dailyherald.com/article/20100521/entlife/305219860/>

This image was created by Debbie Groben of Sarasota, Florida, who entered it into a Photoshop contest on the fake news website FreakingNews.com in May of 2010 (Carlson 1; Cipriaso). Only a few months prior, on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Arizona had passed the controversial immigration law SB 1070, which “Requires officials and agencies to reasonably attempt to determine the immigration status of a person involved in a lawful contact where reasonable suspicion exists regarding the immigration status of the person, except if the determination may hinder or obstruct an investigation.” In other words, Arizona had mandated that its law-enforcement officials *must* check people’s citizenship status given any reason to question it (Guidotti-Hernández, “The Precarity”). Groben’s meme, along with others like it, quickly began to circulate online and across national media in response to the law, making it as far as television news broadcasts.<sup>18</sup> People on both sides of the political debate regarding undocumented immigration appropriated the image for their own purposes (Cipriaso). For promoters of anti-immigration legislation, the criminalized Dora played into trends of xenophobic fear-mongering, and perhaps worked to desensitize viewers to the violence done to migrants. Immigration-reform activists, on the other hand, “flipped the script with these images [of Dora as an “illegal” immigrant], seeing Dora as a means of expressing the absurdity and irony of suggesting that all Latino/as are like Dora and thus all the same.” (Guidotti-Hernández, “The Precarity”).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For example, Cincinnati’s WLWT News 5 television station ran a news story about the image, available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ba3VqzFb-Tc>

<sup>19</sup> Dora is not the only fictional children’s cartoon character to have been dragged into political discourse in this way. Handy Manny has received similar allegations of being an “illegal” immigrant, as has Nickelodeon’s Chinese-American character Kai-Lan (Brayton 340; Carlson 3). Tinky Winky, the purple Teletubby with the triangle symbol on its head who “[carries] a magic purse-like bag” was condemned “in 1999 by American televangelist Jerry Falwell as being a gay role model for children,” while *Sesame Street*’s Bert and Ernie have similarly been implicated in debates over same-sex marriage. The producers of both shows have publically responded to such claims, insisting that these characters are not gay. The *Smurfs* have also been read as “inclusive



*A young protestor wearing the image on May 1, 2010 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, at an immigration rally against Arizona's State Bill 1070. Photography courtesy of Lori Rodriguez (Estrada 77).*

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of obvious gay archetypes,” as well as “described as a Marxist fable or metaphor for socialism” (Carlson 3).

Unpacking this image gives us a useful opportunity to recapitulate the principal arguments of this thesis as a whole, and also to gesture toward the future direction of this project: an intersectional feminist reading of the physical brutalization of young, brown women's bodies as depicted in this picture.

The first issue raised by the meme is that it uses Dora's image to stand in for all of Latinidad, enabling it to throw a blanket political critique at all Latinx people simultaneously. University of Cincinnati sociology professor Erynn Masi de Casanova says, "Dora is kind of like a blank screen onto which people can project their thoughts and feelings about Latinos" (Fisher). Yet rather than a "blank screen," Dora here is a precisely manufactured icon of a fictionalized notion of Latinidad, designed to maximize audience reach, profit, and to configure Latinidad in a way that upholds the dominance of the hegemonic white frame of reference. Dora's rendering as panethnic reduces the entire range of Latinx identities, histories, and heritages into one singular, commodified identity, limited in its potential interpretations. The fact that this particular notion of Latinidad is so recognizable to the meme's viewers speaks not only to *Dora the Explorer's* global success, but also to the effectiveness of the rhetoric of authenticity and sanitized "diversity" that the franchise uses to justify its panethnicization effort.

In order to fully understand this image, however, we need to understand not only the particulars of *what* it uses Dora's likeness to represent (a fictionalized Latinidad), but also *why* Dora/Latinidad is configured in this way, and *who* is responsible for designing it as such. The answer to the final question, it seems, is not merely the individual Nickelodeon executives who created Dora, but rather the larger mediatic enclosure in which these individual actors participate. In a world where media visibility is becoming an increasingly integral part of identity-construction – where the right to exist as an image is becoming more and more

interchangeable with the right to exist at all – media representation acts as a sort of common resource necessary for symbolic survival. We have seen how *Dora the Explorer* replicates the capitalist enclosure process, and how it exemplifies the course by which agents of the mediatic enclosure take identity – in this case, Latinidad specifically – and transform and reduce it into a commodity, securely limited in its potential for (re-)interpretation. The product of that commodification process is the image of Dora we see before us, and the prescribed set of conceptions of Latinidad embedded within it.

With Dora firmly set as the icon of an enclosure-generated Latinidad meant to subsume all Latinx identities, the violence implied against her in this meme represents implied violence against all Latinx people. Furthermore, we may read it as implied violence against the ideal of multiculturalism itself. As Chapter 2 examined, Dora's emergence occurred about three decades into the change from Fordist organised capitalism to transnational neoliberal capitalism. This transition has brought with it a corresponding shift in notions of ideal selfhood. The multicultural self of the past is giving way to a newer strategic cosmopolitan self, driven by the same ruthless competitiveness and profit motive as the neoliberal marketplace. We have seen how categories of embodied identity that once were central to multiculturalism now present a crisis to neoliberalism, as neoliberal ideology in its purest form demands the elimination of any identity not determined by economic standing and participation. Yet we have also seen that in practice, neoliberal capitalism fails to do away with the lasting legacies of colonization, racialization, and patriarchy. *Dora the Explorer* works to negotiate this transition by outwardly displaying a multicultural focus, while inwardly encoding lessons on neoliberal ideology for consumption by its young viewers. Dora as a character, then, at least superficially, reminds us that we still find multiculturalism compelling – that multiculturalism as an ideal has not yet disappeared in full.

The meme, however, bashes violently through Dora's multicultural veneer. It shows no "multicultural appreciation" or "respect" for her history, ethnicity, race, gender, or age. It is concerned only with punishing her for transgressions against the neoliberal state. It does so by enacting violence: the same violence incited by such rhetoric as the Trump speech quoted in Chapter 3.

Dora's alleged crimes, the meme suggests, are twofold. One is her mere existence as an empowered Latina figure, a sore point for the hegemonic groups whose identity-based dominance, and consequent understanding of selfhood, citizenship, and society, are threatened by the epochal shift. Notice that in the meme, one of Dora's crimes is listed as "resisting arrest." She has been convicted, in other words, of refusing to submit to those in power. The meme aims to strip her of her power, to force her "spectacular" ethnic and gendered body into conforming to the familiar trope of the criminalized brown body so often represented in the media.

Dora's other offense, meanwhile, is "Illegal Border Crossing." In other words, the meme convicts her of a crime against neoliberal enclosure itself: of moving without authorization. The freedom with which she moves in her television show marks her here as a CTA, an individual who refuses to adhere to the tight regulation and surveillance of the neoliberal state. Just like in the real world, this image renders anxiety over such uncontrollability as an issue of *security*. It employs the same stereotypes of Latinx people as threats to the US and the neoliberal system that we have seen in countless other movies and television shows, and even in the speeches of our current president. It proposes, yet again, the same familiar punishments for neoliberal transgressions: overt demonization and dehumanization (notice that her ID number is 666 666 666, a symbol of the devil or antichrist), physical brutalization (notice her black eye and bloodied face), and incarceration.

Of course, Dora is not only an icon of Latinidad and a gendered and racialized body, but she is also a symbol of childhood. The violence depicted against a young Latina girl lends the meme much of its emotional impact. This thesis has addressed the topic of childhood with particular focus on countering the myth of children as an innocent and detached group, in order to bare children's political, economic, and cultural power and agency within neoliberal society. By dragging Dora into national debates over immigration, this meme affirms the fact of children's implication in the political realm – a reality made abundantly clear through such recent hot-button issues as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) policy or the continuing separation of migrant families at the US-Mexico border. Dora's depiction in the meme also registers as a tragic blow against neoliberal "social concern," because, as Chávez and Kiley write, "[in the media] Latino children are distinguished from Latino adults who connote hypersexualization and violence... [whereas] children are filled with the possibility of becoming good consumer-citizens" (Chávez and Kiley 2629). This meme's condemnation of Dora for transgressing boundaries and resisting neoliberal order asserts, therefore, that her Latinidad itself devastates any possibility of her being able to consent to and abide by the rules of the neoliberal state, and thus disqualifies her from any claim to citizenship. It is xenophobia at its finest, driven, here, by the anxieties produced by the transition to the transnational neoliberal capitalism.

Finally, we notice that despite her horrific injuries, Dora continues to smile and shrug, seemingly unfazed. This works as a fitting metaphor, for as we have seen, such contradiction and disavowal of injurious realities is key to neoliberal capitalism's self-reproduction. Neoliberal capitalism is a system that does violence to workers and consumers through exploitation, while convincing those it has harmed (exploited) – particularly gendered, brown and black bodies – to continue endlessly producing and consuming, to shrug off the pain, and to just keep smiling.

The questions remain: what do we do with identity in this moment of crisis and transition? Who should have the right and means to construct identity, and how should this be done? How do we resist the natural tendencies of capitalism to exploit people and create inequity, and to expand its enclosures until nothing is left to consume? How should we conceive of citizenship as our world economies, societies, and cultures become increasingly transnational? The answers to these important questions are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, by uncovering the rhetoric, ideologies, and power dynamics embedded within seemingly innocuous media objects like *Dora the Explorer*, I hope to have unearthed some potential battlefields on which opposition to the rise of neoliberalism can be enacted. These resistance efforts will have to take place beyond the borders of enclosure. They will need to find ways to redefine ideas like identity and citizenship outside the terms of neoliberal capitalism. Only time will tell, however, what the most fruitful of these methods will be, and whether or not they will be able to hold strong against the tide of enclosure's tireless expansion.



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