

ABSTRACT

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TOO MUCH TO BELONG: LATINA/O
RACIALIZATION, OBESITY EPIDEMIC
DISCOURSE, AND UNASSIMILABLE
CORPOREAL EXCESS

Ellen Cassandra Griff, Doctor of Philosophy, 2016

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This project examines the discursive constructions of Latina/o bodies as excessive in order to examine how Latinas/os are excluded from belonging to the U.S. nation-state. By approaching Latina/o Studies from a Fat Studies perspective, it works to more adequately address the role of embodiment in determining processes of racialization that directly impact Latinas/os in the United States, especially in light of the role of race and racism in “obesity epidemic” discourse. This dissertation argues that cultural and even physiological explanations about the Latina/o propensity for “overweight” and “obesity” create a discourse that marks the Latina/o body as demonstrating an unassimilable corporeal excess. In turn, the rhetoric of “diversity” and “multiculturalism” are rendered inapplicable to Latinas/os, as demonstrated by both nativist and seemingly pro-immigrant discourses that posit Latina/o physical excess in the form of fatness as detrimental and even dangerous to the U.S. nation-state.

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By

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Dedication

For all the fat, brown kids and the families of all kinds who love them. We belong.

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Chapter 1: Placing Fat Studies and Latina/o Studies in Conversation

I. Introduction: Bridging Disciplinary Gaps

The headline of an October 2013 CNN article supposedly in “honor of Hispanic Heritage Month,” juxtaposes the exoticized attractiveness of Latinas/os with the specter of danger and ugliness that is fat. Reading “Beautiful but deadly: Latinos’ curves put them at risk,” the headline is accompanied by a photograph of a woman, presumably a Latina woman, sitting on the ground with her back to the camera (Rodriguez 2013). We see only her lower back, clad in a green shirt and low-rise denim jeans, which ostensibly fail to contain her “curves,” thus rendering her soft roundness questionable in its value and its beauty, as the very first commenter on the article notes: “curvy? Really? That’s FAT” (Rodriguez 2013).

I begin with this popular news press article as it is one of many that serve to join images of Latinas/os with narratives of fatness and, more precisely, obesity¹. The article goes on to conflate cultural tropes attributable to the Latina/o community such as poverty, a preference for higher body weights, and—ironically—acculturation to American foodways with a seemingly meteoric rise in “obesity” rates and health risks associated with being “overweight” or “obese.” Hispanic heritage, therefore, is closely tied to the so-called “obesity epidemic” as to be Latina/o is also to be at risk whether culturally or genetically for developing a body that is characterized by a dangerous or even deadly corporeal excess. As Latinas/os, their foodways, their alleged cultural preferences, and even their genetics are repeatedly linked to the “obesity epidemic” via media coverage, it is impossible to ignore this rhetorical addition to the popular images of Latinas/os in the United States. I argue that alongside the Latina bombshell and the Latin lover we now have the Latina/o fatty, an uncontained, undesirable body marked not by its sexual availability, but by excess, illness, and a refusal (or inability) to be disciplined.

The rise in this cultural trope necessitates a reconsideration of the disciplinary boundaries between Latina/o Studies and the field of Fat Studies. The racialization of fatness and “obesity” coupled with the “fattening” of the Latina/o subject suggests that there is a link between the development of discourse about Latinas/os in the United States and the rhetoric of the “obesity epidemic.” At its core, this dissertation is developed with the intent to address what I understand as a gap between two disciplines, Fat Studies and Latina/o Studies. American Studies offers the possibility for engaging two seemingly disparate fields by crafting an interdisciplinary project. Fat Studies, a relatively recent intervention into questions of identity, power, and embodiment, understands fatness not as a social or medical problem that requires intervention. Rather, Fat Studies scholars theorize fatness as an aspect of human diversity, experience, and identity. Furthermore, the field understands reactions to, policies about, and industries focused on fatness or “obesity” as objects for analysis. Latina/o Studies is also an interdisciplinary field which takes the experiences of Latinas/os in the United States as its core focus. Latina/o Studies, having its political roots in Chicana/o and Puerto Rican studies, examines constructs of identity as well as immigration and migration, diaspora, citizenship and belonging.

I argue that these fields have very little overlap, with the exception of recent work by April Herndon, whose work on the impact of anti-obesity policy on families of color begins to address some of these intersections. In general, Fat Studies has generally been silent on questions of Latinas/os and body size and weight. While Fat Studies as a field does welcome discussions of fat and race, the conceptualization of race has largely maintained a focus on Blackness. Additionally, Latina/o Studies has had different gaps in study, with the majority of research about fatness focusing on “obesity” and health outcomes in Latina/o communities. In other

words, Latina/o Studies scholars have generally embraced the medical model of fatness or “obesity” as something that must be fixed.

This project, therefore, offers an intervention into both of these fields, but with a special focus on the possibilities created by applying a Fat Studies lens to the questions of racialized belonging and citizenship so central to Latina/o Studies. Furthermore, I argue that both cultural and physiological explanations about the Latina/o propensity for “overweight” and “obesity” create a discourse that marks the Latina/o body as demonstrating an unassimilable due to constructions of excess. In turn, the rhetoric of “diversity” and “multiculturalism” are rendered inapplicable to Latinas/os, as demonstrated by both nativist and seemingly pro-immigrant discourses that posit Latina/o physical excess in the form of fatness as detrimental and even dangerous to the U.S. nation-state. I begin this project by interrogating the shared theoretical underpinnings of Latina/o Studies and Fat Studies, as both fields examine the interplay between embodied identities and the role of discourse in shaping attitudes about embodied subjects. After this review of the literature, I present the core research questions and broad theoretical frames that shape the dissertation. I then move on to methodological underpinnings of the dissertation, and close with a new theoretical frame with which to consider discourses of belonging and non-belonging, unassimilable corporeal excess.

II. Embodiment in Fat Studies and Latina/o Studies

Arguably, Fat Studies’ focus on questions of the body and embodiment are due to the ways in which Fat Studies scholars have borrowed from Fat Activism and Fat Acceptance movements to understand the fat body and the shared experiences engendered by virtue of living as a fat person rather than a pre-determined racial or ethnic identity as a site for community building. As Amy Erdman Farrell argues in *Fat Shame*, as fat activists came together around the

“identification” of their bodies as fat, the body remains the locus and source of organization and community building. Thus, the Boston Area Fat Liberation Group’s contribution to *Our Bodies, Ourselves* “includ[es] the following suggestions: ‘Take up all of the space your body occupies—no more hunching or slumping to try to look smaller’” (Farrell 2011, 148).

This focus on the fat individual and the fat body is echoed in the work of Susan Bordo, whose *Unbearable Weight*—while written before the institutionalization of Fat Studies—is canonized as a useful, early text in which Bordo argues that “the body that we experience and conceptualize is always mediated by constructs, associations, images of a cultural nature” (Bordo 2004, 35). Additionally, her understanding of “body shape and size [as] (1) the designation of social position, such as class status or gender role; and (2) the outer indication of the spiritual, moral, or emotional state of the individual” shapes much of the later Fat Studies scholarship that takes on the body rather than a group or cultural identity as a useful category for considering oppression, discrimination, and power differentials in the United States (Bordo 2004, 187).

In 2001, Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco published *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*, an anthology that marks the reinvigoration of fatness and body size as worthy of scholarly examination. For LeBesco and Braziel, theoretical interventions into fatness as both transgressive and a site of oppression center on the body. Refusals to conform to societal standards are enacted via one’s body, but the negative attitudes toward fatness in the form of ridicule, harassment, and various forms of violence are also executed on both the imagined and lived fat body. As Braziel argues in “Deterritorializing the Fat Female Body,” fat is understood as “an excessive corporeality,” one which conjures images of “attack” and “pollution” so that the fat (female, especially) body becomes the site onto which fears of bodily transgression are mapped (Braziel and LeBesco 2001, 239). Furthermore, the sexualized viewing

of the fat female body by simple virtue of its gendering, renders it “the site of performative excess—she is the unbound carnality of hypercorporeity” (Braziel and LeBesco, 235). The excess of fatness or “obesity,” Jan Jagodzinski notes, is also racialized as representative of the “aesthetics of Otherness of many non-western agricultural societies,” demonstrating how fatness is understood beyond simply numbers on a scale (2003). Fatness is imagined as performing aspects of an individual or group identity and is thought to give the viewer intimate knowledge of the fat subject.

LeBesco’s 2004 *Revolting Bodies? The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity* also centers the body, specifically as a site of identity. She borrows from Elizabeth Grosz to argue that if “‘bodies speak without necessarily talking because they become coded with and as signs...[t]hey become intextuated, narrativized; simultaneously, social codes, laws, norms, and ideals become incarnated,’ then it is worth considering how these social codes, norms, ideals, and signs present themselves narratively on culturally invisible fat bodies” (LeBesco 2004, 6-7). Thus, the body functions as a key site of inquiry not only because of how people experience their own bodies, but also because the body is a site of meaning-making.

This is also true in Latina/o Studies, as scholars center questions concerning the body and construct a language about the body in order to consider the ways in which their presence in the United States is understood by non-Latinas/os. Furthermore, the body is also a key site in questioning and defining the “‘dimensions’ or ‘the directions in motion’ of history and culture and geography and language and self-named identities” that compose ideas of Latinidad (Rodriguez 2003, 22). Thus, the undesirability of the Latina/o community as a whole is distilled and directed toward the reproductive Latina body as the biological “ground zero” for a potential foreign invasion. Jonathan Inda’s work in particular frames projects of violence and eradication

in terms the hyperfocus on Latina/o bodies not in terms of life, but rather in terms of death. He turns to Foucault's biopower, arguing that "[b]iopower does not just foster life; it also routinely does away with it in order to preserve. The counterpart of the power to secure an individual's continued existence is therefore the power to expose an entire population to death (or at least to multiplying its risk of death)" (Inda 2006, 135). In particular, he focuses on "the federal government's efforts to police and control the U.S.-Mexico border and former governor Pete Wilson's repeated attempts to deny undocumented immigrants access to prenatal care" as key examples of violences enacted upon Latina/o bodies in the United States (Inda 2006, 135). His work demonstrates the ways in which the protection of a white, American "social body" has led to "[a]ttempts to exclude the immigrant from the body politic [which] imply that illegal lives are expendable--that the lives of undocumented immigrants and their children are not quite worth living" (Inda 2006, 135). Furthermore, his characterization of anti-immigrant sentiment and policy as "border prophylactics" exposes roles of eugenics in the eradication of the Latina/o body from the U.S. body politic before it even enters.

While Inda focuses on the more palpable consequences of anti-Latina/o sentiment and nativist policies, other scholars in Latina/o Studies examine the Latina/o body through a popular culture lens, extrapolating larger questions about race, gender, and sexuality from the media focus on particular Latina/o bodies. In Myra Mendible's edited collection, *From Bananas to Buttocks: The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture*, authors focus on iconic Latinas and the media obsessions with their bodies in order to critically assess the often unabashed sexualization of the Latina female body. As Mendible argues, "such a project is especially pertinent in light of recent celebrations of the 'Latina body' (buttocks, curves) evidenced in cultural phenomena from the plastic surgery craze [...] to an explosion of on-line porn sites promising intimate access to

‘hot’ Latina bodies” (Mendible 2010, 2). As the body is a key site of consumption, it must necessarily be the site of negotiation and contestation. Furthermore, as Frances Negrón-Muntaner argues, a focused hypersexualization of the Latina body resubstantiates the corporeal as a site of identity and difference. In her discussion of the media hype surrounding Jennifer Lopez’s buttocks she writes “the rear end is where our Puerto Ricanness is stored,” suggesting that the physical body itself is understood as evidence of national, ethnic, and racial identity (Negrón-Muntaner 2004, 238).

Thus, for both Fat Studies and Latina/o Studies, the body’s place as a central theoretical underpinning speaks to the importance of the corporeal in the examination of both identity politics and racial formation. While Fat Studies as a field has tended (with a few notable exceptions) to downplay the role of racial formation in discourse surrounding fatness and anti-fat oppression, the field’s theoretical focus on formulations of excess bodies provides possibilities for understanding the racial ideologies surrounding Latina/o bodies in terms of size and shape. As Omi and Winant argue, “[r]acial ideology is constructed from pre-existing conceptual (or, if one prefers, ‘discursive’) elements,” which shape the potential narratives surrounding individuals and groups (Omi and Winant 2014, 14). The role of discourse, therefore, cannot be understated in Latina/o Studies due to the importance of race and ethnicity as analytics. At the same time, Fat Studies’ focus on ideologies of the body also privileges discourse, providing an important theoretical and methodological bridge between the two fields.

III. Discursive Formations in Fat and Latina/o Studies

The vast majority of Fat Studies scholarship begins with the premise that the terms “overweight” and “obese” reflect a socially constructed preoccupation with defining normalcy. The very idea of “over” weight suggests the possibility of a “normal” or “appropriate” weight

that can and must be achieved, and most Fat Studies scholars intentionally eschew this discursive formulation, opting instead for “fat” as a simple, less value-laden descriptor. As Marilyn Wann writes in the introduction to *The Fat Studies Reader*, the so-called obesity epidemic is very much an epidemic rooted in discourse. She argues that “it is not meaningful to call weights 'normal' or 'abnormal’” and in fact, “[c]alling fat people 'obese' medicalized human diversity [and] inspires a misplaced search for a 'cure' for naturally occurring difference. Far from generating sympathy, medicalization of weight fuels anti-fat prejudice and discrimination” (Wann 2009, 14-15).

LeBesco and Braziel further elaborate this point, explaining that “the concept of obesity (as currently understood) is historical, not ahistorical or universal” (Braziel and LeBesco 2001, 2). Thus, it becomes clear that “obesity” and “overweight” are understood within the Fat Studies literature as part of a state project of “the regulation of populations” and individual bodies (Foucault 1980, 145). The medicalization of fat also situates this highly definitional project within a “normalizing society [which] is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life” (Foucault 1980, 144). As health is understood to maintain human (or state) life, medicalizing discourses function to define what is healthy and what is not, as well as who is healthy and who is not.

Similarly, much of the literature in Latina/o Studies is explicitly engaged with examining the construction of Latina/o bodies within the media and policy. Thus, the field’s tendency toward utilizing popular culture as a main site of inquiry is a project dedicated to understanding the ways in which bodies are constructed, produced, and defined. As Isabel Molina-Guzman explains, this methodology is “grounded in a Foucauldian approach” in which “discourse refers not to language or social interaction, but to relatively well-bounded areas of social knowledge. The popular media, which are widely distributed and globally consumed, effectively work to

create discourse about Latinidad” (Molina-Guzmán 2010, 8). This discourse helps define the Latina/o body especially because—returning briefly to Myra Mendible’s *From Bananas to Buttocks*—“there is no such thing as ‘the Latina body’” (Mendible 2010, 1). The diversity of Latina/o physical appearance is often elided in popular media representations of Latinas/os that visually and discursively construct the Latina/o body, most often as hyper-sexualized, potentially dangerous, excessive, and undoubtedly foreign. There is, therefore, such a thing as the Latina/o body, but it is built in terms of discourse rather than lived, embodied experience.

For authors like Jonathan Inda and Leo Chavez, however, turning to immigration law and policy rather than popular culture allows them analyze the ways in which Latina/o bodies come to be defined by the language present in legal discourse and policy. Like Molina-Guzman, Inda in particular bases his theoretical framework on Foucault’s work, specifically his concept of biopower. In “The Value of Immigrant Life,” Inda argues that the U.S. nation-state’s rendering of Mexican immigrants (and Latinas/os by extension) as “illegal immigrants” is part of a project of biopower in which the state determines who may live and who may die based on the definitional powers of categories such as citizen and criminal (Inda 2007, 139-140). Thus, the state’s construction of the immigrant as a threatening outsider via discourse (“illegal alien,” “criminal alien,” “invader”) is a major part of the state’s project allowing the exponential expansion of funding to border policing, the refusal of medical care and human rights, and the more than occasional deaths of immigrants to be understood as protecting the life of the state and its properly defined citizens (Inda 2007, 141).

As Jonathan Inda’s discussion of biopower suggests, the project of *definition* is almost always accompanied by a project of *discipline*. Bodies are defined as one thing or another for the purposes of maintaining order via discipline and control. In Latina/o Studies, the most commonly

discussed disciplining mechanism is immigration and deportation. This project of categorization inevitably leads to the disciplining of immigrant bodies through immigration and naturalization processes that privilege European, heterosexual women and deportation proceedings and detentions that excise or imprison those who dare enter the nation despite being identified as not eligible for citizenship due to race, class, financial status, gender, or sexual orientation. As Lisa Marie Cacho explains, definitional processes render certain bodies “ineligible for personhood” and therefore subject to disciplinary measures such as incarceration, deportation, and—as Jonathan Inda points out—death (Cacho 2012, 6).

Critiques of the disciplinary project are also an important aspect of Fat Studies scholarship. Scholars in the field argue that the definitional, normalizing discourses of “overweight,” “obese,” and the general medicalization of fat render the fat body as *abnormal* and therefore an acceptable target for eradication. Pat Lyons argues the medical impetus for weight loss is quite literally a “prescription for harm” as “[f]rom a medical ethics standpoint, the diet and weight loss industry has quite a history--from outright fraud and diet scams to expensive programs developed at leading medical centers that resulted in patient deaths” (Lyons 2009, 106). She and others argue that the social and medical imperative for weight loss has major impacts on fat or formerly fat bodies, which are offered dangerous medical supplements, diets, and risky bariatric surgeries in the name of losing weight. Fatness is not allowed to exist and must always be understood as en route to thinness. Thus, fat bodies are removed from the body politic by virtue of being understood as temporary (or as Le’ a Kent puts it, a “before” image) or by being changed by weight loss so that they are no longer fat (Kent 2001, 131). Fatness is always grounds for eradication, if not of the whole body, but of the aspects of the body that cross an imagined threshold into excess.

IV. Citizenship and Belonging in Latina/o Studies and Fat Studies

I contend that a theoretical and methodological focus on the discursive construction of the citizen and the body politic provides an important bridge between Fat Studies and Latina/o Studies. As Nicholas DeGenova writes, “[i]f the institution of citizenship defines a kind of membership to the state and so appears within purportedly democratic states such as the United States to be so broadly directed toward inclusion, it is likewise always also a definition by default of those who are not citizens, and thus outsiders, ‘foreigners,’ or ‘aliens’” (De Genova 2002, 216). Thus, in the construction of a citizenry or an ideal citizen, it is necessary also to create an image of the non-ideal or non-citizen against which a proper citizen subject may be measured. In the United States, processes of racialization are by far the most common route for separating the citizen from the non-citizen, as people of color and those racialized as immigrants are most commonly targeted as not belonging to the nation-state. This is particularly true for Latinas and Latinos with a particular focus on those of Mexican descent who, despite actual citizenship status, have traditionally “appeared symbolically in the discourse of immigration reform as the racialized specter of the illegal alien” (Ngai 2014, 247).

Although Latinas and Latinos may, of course, formally be American citizens by birth or naturalization, the coding of the citizen’s body as white (and usually male) and the “superimposing [of] a new native/foreigner binary on the traditional understanding of race” precludes the possibility of a Latina/o body from laying claim to a sense of belonging (Oboler 2007, 119). Furthermore, as Lisa Marie Cacho explains, the discursive construction of Latina/o immigration as “illegal” alongside discourse of Latina/o gangs and criminality is another key method by which Latina/o bodies are rendered illegible for citizenship. If “to be criminalized is to be prevented from being law abiding,” Latina/o bodies simply cannot be understood to belong

to the U.S. body politic as citizens, whether civil, political, or social (Cacho 2012, 30). At issue here is the discursive construction of a particularly American body that is phenotypically (and even genotypically) legible as belonging to the nation-state. Brown bodies, racialized as clear others, cannot be understood as citizens due to a formulation of always already foreign.

However, race is closely connected to other aspects of embodiment such as ability, gender, age, and body size, all of which collude to produce both citizens and non-citizens. As Charlotte Biltekoff argues, the so-called War on Obesity “perpetuates perceptions that Blacks, Latinos, and the poor are physically unfit and not fit for citizenship” (Biltekoff 2007, 42) Thus, foreignness, otherness, and an inferiority incompatible with American citizenship came to be mapped onto the fat and therefore biologically and culturally different body. Fatness becomes decidedly un-American, and—to borrow from Goffman—an “abomination of the body” which rather than solely “expos[ing] something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier,” is understood to signal an antithetical relationship to citizenship (Goffman 2009, 1). As Jonathan Inda points out, this project of inclusion and exclusion from the body politic is an example of biopower, which “functions as a mechanism for distinguishing those bodily interests that can be represented in the polity from those which cannot, from those against whom society must be defended” (Inda 2007, 139).

The fat body, coded as racially different or foreign is therefore “incompatible” with the body politic of the citizenry. As April Herndon writes, “[i]n order to be a proper American one must meet a certain corporeal standard,” a standard that fat bodies will always fail to embody (Herndon 2005, 128). The discursive construction of fat as unhealthy also helps solidify the perceived incompatibility of the fat body with the U.S. nation-state. In her study of the conflation between disease and immigrant communities in Los Angeles between 1879 and 1939, Natalia

Molina argues that during this period, “health and hygiene norms increasingly became standards for ‘Americanness,’ and health officers helped determine who was considered part of the body politic. They had the power to restrict people’s sense of social membership and shape their relationship to the nation-state” (Molina 2006, 2). I argue that the medicalization of fatness in which fat shifts from a physical feature to a marker of disease or an “epidemic” follows this same trajectory. As diseased bodies, fat bodies are understood as falling outside the purview of an acceptable American body.

Citizenship and belonging, I argue, are only within reach of bodies that remain within the bounds of acceptability and are not discursively constructed as “too” much of one thing or another. It is necessary to engage questions of excess corporeality in both Latina/o Studies and Fat Studies to better understand the role of the body in discourses that shape the practices of belonging to the U.S. nation-state. By virtue of embodied difference often rendered legible in terms of size (of which physical size and family size are the most obvious) the discourse of the obesity “epidemic” and Latina/o unassimilability are linked and in fact come to inform one another in the present.

V. Theoretical Interventions: Latina/o Racialization and Unassimilable Corporeal Excess

Building upon Omi and Winant’s assertion that racialization “signif[ies] the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group,” I argue that the racial meanings mapped onto Latinas/os must be understood in terms of two “ideological process[es]”: unassimilability (marked by foreignness) and corporeal or embodied excess (Omi and Winant 2014, 111). These two ideological and discursive processes shape the terms and possibilities of Latina/o presence in the United States, specifically in terms of informal citizenship and belonging. I will begin by mapping the ideological process of unassimilability as

it uniquely applies to Latinas/os in the United States and then move to narrating the role of embodied excess in determining the unassimilable “nature” of Latinas/os.

Although the racial logics of the United States have historically been “heavily framed by the Black-White paradigm,” the socio-historical legacies of Spanish colonization, American imperialist projects in Latin America, and non-forced (but still often coercive) migration to the United States, has led to racial formations of Latinas/os to differ in key ways from those of African-Americans (Molina 2013, 525). In particular, authors such as Mae Ngai and Natalia Molina have highlighted the role of debates surrounding immigration in constructing racial narratives about Latinas/os that maintain foreignness as a central tenet. There should no doubt that histories of Black enslavement also shaped the racialization of Latina/o and Mexican laborers in particular. Yet, the characterization of Latina/o labor as “deportable” and “disposable” couples with the aforementioned imperialist histories and their resulting linguistic and cultural impacts to mark Latinas/os as centrally defined by their presumed origination from and potential return to outside the United States (Molina 2010, 163-165).

While the use of the terms *Hispanic* and *Latina/o* have, in Suzanne Oboler’s words, created a “single ‘ethnic’ category” that blurs the racial and national diversity of Latinas/os in the United States, the “racialized specter of the illegal alien” contributes to a formulation of Latinas/os as always foreign, and—despite formal citizenship status—always illegal (Oboler 2007, 3; Ngai 2014, 247). As Lisa Marie Cacho has argued, the concept of “illegal” immigration has led to a tautological formation that narrates Latinas/os as criminal outsiders whose supposed criminal nature—which is evidenced by their mere presence-- figuratively (and often literally) precludes them from both formal and informal citizenship (Cacho 2012, 43). D. Robert DeChaine’s work on “fence logic” takes this idea a step further, coining the term “alienization,”

meaning “a bordering project that draws force from a variety of common linguistic and nonlinguistic resources to render individuals and groups abject and unassimilable--irredeemable others whose putative exclusion from the national body is virtually absolute” (DeChaine 2009, 45).

A key aspect of othering discourses, I argue, is tied to the notion of the body politic. As Natalia Molina notes between 1879 and 1939, “health and hygiene norms increasingly became standards for 'Americanness,' and health officers helped determine who was considered part of the body politic. They had the power to restrict people's sense of social membership and shape their relationship to the nation-state” (Molina 2006, 2). The body, therefore, became a site onto which citizenship could be read or unread, with particular norms functioning as symbols of belonging. Bodies or aspects of the body that fell outside these restrictive terms were therefore marked as different, foreign, and un-American. Size and the excess corporeality associated with fatness, Amy Erdman Farrell demonstrates, functions as one these markers of difference and unassimilability. In *Fat Shame*, she argues that at the same moment of growing anti-immigrant sentiment against Irish and Eastern European immigrants in the 1800s and 1900s, fatness became “[o]ne of the key bodily signs of inferiority for scientists and thinkers” and “became clearly identified as a physical trait that marked its bearers as people lower on the evolutionary and racial scale--Africans, 'native' peoples, immigrants, criminals, and prostitutes” (Farrell 2011, 64). Foreignness, otherness, and an inferiority incompatible with American citizenship came to be mapped onto the fat and therefore biologically and culturally different body.

The racialization of supposed physiological difference and belonging has been central to work on understanding the role of embodiment in the determining what, exactly, the American body-politic looks like. As Andrea Shaw has argued, “obesity” has been an important symbol of

Black women's difference, as "the fat black woman's body is triply removed from the West's conceptualization of normalcy and situated beyond the outskirts of normative boundaries, which makes its incorporation into the body politic an impossible undertaking" (Shaw 2005, 151). Citing Patricia Hill Collins' work, Shaw notes that the Mammy image—the most familiar visual trope of fat, female, Blackness—functions to simultaneously distance *and* domesticate Blackness, making Black women simultaneously outside the bounds of belonging and undeniably tied to white notions of home and nation (Shaw 151, 145-147). Similarly, Maria Figueroa notes the role of fatness as a marker of racial otherness for Latina women in her reading of Alma Lopez's play (and eventual film), *Real Women Have Curves*, arguing that the play "discloses the 'outside' [body]: the 'fat,' Mexicana/Chicana/Latina, immigrant and working-class body, physically and historically existing on the margins of society as a body that matters" (Figueroa 2003, 272). Furthermore, for both African-Americans and Latinas/os, the near-constant affirmation of these groups as "disproportionately" affected by "obesity" has situated African-Americans and Latinas/os as similar in their difference—their minority status is, in part, defined by their embodied excess.

Although discourses of fatness have shaped the racialization processes for African-Americans and Latinas/os similarly, it is important to understand the ways in which alternative racial narratives and histories have led the racial narratives of Latinas/os and African-Americans to diverge at key points. As noted above, authors such as Leo Chavez, Natalia Molina, and Mae Ngai have argued that the discursive construction of foreignness has become particularly important to the racialization processes surrounding Latinas/os. Foreignness and its dependent notions of cultural, racial, and embodied difference have led to rhetoric about Latina/o body size and type being labeled as particularly and peculiarly un-American. In other words, fatness and

foreignness have combined into a unique ideological construct that serves to render Latina/o bodies as unassimilable due to their real or imagined corporeal excess. The excess mapped onto Latina/o bodies is read as marker of difference incompatible with the American body politic, thus rendering discourses of assimilation and belonging to the U.S. nation-state contingent upon the retainment or “achievement” of an acceptably-sized body.

In the field of Latina/o Studies and the political and activist work undertaken by those who fight for the rights, dignity, and safety of a growing immigrant and native-born population, discourses of belonging and citizenship are often central. Yet, the centrality of formal citizenship and the very real legal and social necessity of securing paths to formal citizenship often obscures the ways informal modes of belonging and the very language of belonging shape the lives and experiences of U.S. Latinas/os as well as the policies that determine our well-being. This project works to examine the role of discourse in shaping the Latina/o body as unassimilable in its excess and therefore always in danger of rejection from the body-politic.

VI. Research Questions and Theoretical Frameworks

In this dissertation, I ask the following key research questions:

- 1.) How is modern public discourse about “obesity” applied to debates surrounding Latinas/os and Latina/o immigration?
- 2.) How does the characterization of Latinas/os as “excessive” situate Latinas/os as embodiments of the “obesity epidemic?”
- 3.) How is “obesity” used to shape ideas of the ideal American citizen body?
- 4.) How do characterizations of Latinas/os as an “obese” population shape the terms by which Latinas/os may be imagined as belonging to the U.S. nation-state?

In order to answer these questions, I pull from a number of theoretical frameworks. An overarching frame for this project comes from Arlene Dávila's assertion of citizenship as a historically bound ideological structure, rather than as a *prima facie* category (2012, 11). In other words, citizenship and the structures of belonging it supposedly guarantees are socially constructed, often to the benefit of other ideological structures of racism, xenophobia and nativism. Therefore, processes of Latina/o racialization are central to my work, as I argue that Latinas/os are constructed not as Americans, but as foreigners marked by cultural difference, physical otherness, and the specter of illegality.

The racial projects that shape ideas surrounding Latinas/os in the United States are largely discursive, in that language, rhetoric, and the repetition and reinforcement of discourse create the ideological structures that impact policy and lived experience. In particular, I use D. Robert DeChaine's characterization of alienization as "an unstable hegemonic process" that "provides a national community with a repertoire of symbolic resources for naming" to theorize the linkages between narratives of fatness and foreignness (DeChaine 2009, 48). These symbolic resources generally take the form of anti-immigrant, racist, nativist, and xenophobic discourse that highlights the "otherness" of the target group and, as Lisa M. Gring-Pemble notes, solidifies the notion of *all* Latinas/os as an outsider underclass against whom insider-status can be defined (Gring-Pemble 2012, 625-626). At the same time, discourses of "overweight" and "obese" are also broadly applied to Latina/o communities, therefore rendering fatness as another symbolic resource which may be used to reinforce ideas of Latina/o difference. As Amy Erdman Farrell's examination of excess and fatness demonstrate, "obesity" rhetoric is highly racialized and functions to differentiate insider bodies as white and outsider bodies as non-white (Farrell 2011, 64). In the following review of Fat Studies and Latina/o Studies literature, I focus on the ways in

which both fields provide theoretical and methodological frames for understanding processes of identity, the role of discourse in developing ideology, and the constructed nature of citizenship and belonging.

In general, discourse that links “obesity” and Latinas/os does so from a largely biomedical or public health perspective, often expressing concern or alarm about the percentage of Latinas/os who are deemed “overweight” or “obese.” As a result, the negative connotations of fat and “obesity” have eroded (or perhaps simply elided) the potential usefulness of fatness as an analytical tool in discussion of race and anti-racism. As Christine Halse argues in her discussion of “bio-citizenship,” “the notion of a normative BMI has survived as a ‘virtue discourse’ that describes and defines weight, bodies and individuals” (Halse 2008, 47). Scholars such as Julie Guthman and Melanie DuPuis along with Kathleen LeBesco situate the moral connotations of fatness within neoliberal discourses that, along with placing blame on the fat subject, cite fatness as a reasoning or justification for state intervention or, conversely, the refusal of state assistance (Guthman and DuPuis, 443-444; LeBesco 2004, 156-159).

Furthermore, as Saguy and Riley point out, the framing of “obesity” as a moral issue means that “the relatively higher rate of obesity among poor and minority groups may be invoked to blame individuals—instead of structural issues such as poverty, lack of health insurance, or violence—for their poor health” (Saguy and Riley 2005, 912). Thus, as this line of inquiry suggests, fatness—almost always discussed in the value-laden terms of “overweight” and “obesity”—signals moral failures and is, in fact, a tool utilized by nativist and racist discourses to demonstrate the divergent and inferior nature of people of color. Citing the highly adaptable nature of racist discourse via George Lipsitz, April Herndon rightly points out that “it hardly seems a coincidence that at a time when medicalized or biologically based accounts of race

and/or poverty have fallen out of vogue, arguments about the classed and raced nature of those hardest struck by the obesity epidemic have gained popularity” (Herndon 2005, 136).

I argue that it is precisely *because* of the use of anti-obesity rhetoric in the perpetuation of racism and nativism that this project is urgently necessary. At its core, this project engages the intersections between race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and embodiment in order to better understand the role of each in determining both formal and informal belonging to the U.S. nation-state. By situating fatness and discourse around “overweight” and “obesity” at the center of an inquiry into the racial processes which construct the categories of “Latina/o” and “citizen,” this project lays bare the racist undertones of the current American obsession with weight control and loss. Furthermore, the project also seeks to expand the conversation surrounding processes of racialization to include body size and type as central rather than peripheral to what Omi and Winant term “racial categories” (Omi and Winant 2014, 4). In particular, my focus on the racialization of Latinas/os as an unassimilable and divergent racial/ethnic group marked as such by their real or imagined fatness has important implications for understanding the roles of race, embodiment, and discourse in shaping notion of American belonging.

This project demonstrates that belonging is in no way a static construct and in fact changes as various groups and identities come to the fore as subjects of discussion in the American popular imaginary. Furthermore, this project shifts the focus of identity and identity formation away from internal notions of self in order to better understand the external modes of identification, thus providing a foundational understanding of belonging that is predicated on the realities of hegemonic structures of ideology. In other words, this project understands American Studies’ focus on “everyday experience” in terms of the ideologies—shaped and reflected by discourse—that are used to determine and segregate subaltern and/or minority subjects from a

supposedly “American” citizenry. As certain identities shift in and out of focus, the question of “what *is* American?” must be reexamined beyond the simplistic terms of formal citizenship, opening the question to address the processes by which the everyday experiences of belonging and non-belonging are often determined by the discourses that permeate the realm of both the popular and the political.

VII. Primary Source Materials and Methodology

In order to examine these processes, my dissertation offers an analysis of primarily public discourse. Public discourse, I argue, is highly accessible, easily and rapidly reproducible, and therefore comprises DeChaine’s “repertoire of symbolic resources for naming” (DeChaine 2009, 48). In particular, public discourse is used to name those who are “Americans” and those who are not, often by offering narratives of otherness via the internet, social media, television, and other outlets. The primary source archive for this project begins with the 1994 launching of C. Everett Koop’s *Shape Up America!* and ends with political rhetoric from the 2015-2016 presidential campaign. This time period represents the convergence of two major trends in public discourse: anti-fat and anti-Latina/o immigrant discourse.

I categorize the public discourse into three broad types: public media discourse, online discourse, and political rhetoric. Public media discourse includes a number of news and popular media outlets as well as a public “reports” from Latina/o serving institutions like LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and others. These are often the first hits gathered by, for example, Google’s algorithms when searching for information about Latinas/os and obesity that are *not* considered academic resources. Online discourse encompassed stories and opinion pieces on highly conservative “news” sites such as Breitbart or the Daily Caller, as well as the highly repetitive replication of content via

“reblogging,” linking, and simply rewrites of original sources. Furthermore, online discourse also encompasses the comments on news and opinion pieces, which offers both immediate and often uncensored or anonymous contributions to online discourse as well as insight into the ways in which *readers* interpret, respond to, and rearticulate public media discourse and online discourse. Finally, this project also examines political rhetoric and rhetoricians whose highly public and political presence shape public understanding of ideology as well as the policies potentially set forth.

I understand the building of this public discourse archive as delving into the genealogy of the linkages between anti-fat and anti-Latina/o and immigrant discourse. As Foucault argues, tracing the genealogy of an ideological construct is “gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangles and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times” (1991 [1971], 76). This dissertation functions to construct an archive of anti-fat and anti-Latina/o immigrant discourse that, while already present, is often difficult to visualize in terms of the linkages and convergences between the two discourses.

The analysis of this archive is based on Teun van Dijk’s definition of Critical Discourse Analysis as “a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (2001, 352). Critical Discourse Analysis’ core assertions that discourse “does ideological work” and “power relations are discursive” provide a methodological underpinning for examining the role of discourse and rhetoric in producing ideological barriers to belonging. I argue that anti-obesity and anti-Latina/o immigrant “text and

talk” enact ideological work, especially around shaping ideas about who can and cannot be a member of the nation state.

VIII. Chapter Outline

Chapter 2, entitled “Excessive Others: Citizenship, Race, and Unassimilable Corporeal Excess” lays the theoretical groundwork for the overall project, in order to broaden the conversation about belonging to include the body and rhetorical deployments of “excess” as they are linked to iterations of citizenship. I begin by briefly reviewing literature on citizenship in order to re-establish citizenship as an ideological category that is not separate from belonging but in fact functions as a tool or technology of determining who can and cannot belong. The next section of this chapter focuses on the development of modern nativist rhetoric, focusing on the debate around the term “illegal” in order to further examine how current language shapes the idea of an ideal or “correct” citizenry. I then move on to discuss the body politic, connecting a preoccupation with physical, embodied difference to the development of the category of non-citizen. Finally, this chapter ends by introducing what I am terming “unassimilable corporeal excess,” a key theoretical framework that will shape the remainder of this project.

Chapter 3, “The War Against Fat (Immigrants): Militaristic Rhetoric and the Creation of the Fat Enemy Immigrant,” examines the use of language about war, national security, invasion, and threat as this discourse is increasingly applied to “overweight” and “obesity” as well as Latina/o immigrants and immigration. This chapter begins by aggregating the use of terms such as “war” and “war on/against,” “invader/invasion,” and “threat to national security” in order to trace the development of these discourses as they have been used in media discussions of obesity and immigration. The chapter continues with a discussion of the implications of this rhetoric for both conceptual “groups,” arguing that the language of militarism implicates fatness and

Latinas/os as dangerous, threatening, and—most importantly—enemy categories. Importantly, this militaristic language relies on a construction of both groups as excessive—in their presence, their general size, and their potential to overwhelm the nation-state. Furthermore, the designation of “enemy,” I argue, stands in direct contention with the category of “citizen,” thus reifying racialized and sized notions of the proper citizen.

My next chapter, entitled “Curing a Sick Nation: Modern Discursive Constructions of Fat and Latina/o Immigration” continues the discussion started in the previous chapter, shifting focus to the discursive construction of fatness and immigration as “epidemics” or signs of an ill and/or weakening nation. This chapter specifically argues that this rhetorical treatment of weight and immigration relies on an understanding of the U.S. nation-state as an embodied yet strictly delimited whole, one that is susceptible to illness, disability, and death. Thus, this chapter also approaches discourses of illness from a dual Disability and Fat Studies perspective in order to understand first how the “body politic” and “citizen body” are constructed and second how fears of disability and death are applied to fat bodies and immigrant bodies. In particular, this chapter argues that a fear of bodily breeches, permeable borders, and a discourse of “crippling” shape modern debates about immigration and fatness, with both conceptual groups standing in for anxieties about infirmity and change.

My final chapter, entitled, “The American Nightmare: Contingent Futurity and the Real Danger of Obesity Rhetoric” examines the role of anti-obesity rhetoric in the construction and deployment of the “American Dream,” specifically as it is applied to Latina/o communities in the United States. As Nancy E. Hill and Kathryn Torres define it, “[t]he American Dream is the premise that one can achieve success and prosperity through determination, hard work, and courage—an open system for mobility” (Hill and Torres 2010, 95). In particular, the American

Dream is a rhetorical strategy linked to discourse of the United States as the “land of opportunity for all those who want to improve their own and their family’s lot” (Ono and Sloop 3). I use American Dream rhetoric to frame my discussion of anti-fat rhetoric in Latina/o-serving public discourse, arguing that anti-fat language is often used as a strategy to claim the rights and services associated with belonging.

This chapter then moves on to argue that the fantasy rhetoric of the American Dream and the construction of the United States as a land of opportunity has also presented a unique set of problems for Latinas/os in terms of contingent belonging, in which Latina/o presence in the United States relies first on their ability to assimilate and conform to corporeal standards of thinness. Furthermore, this contingent futurity has its roots in expectations of Latina/o labor and utility, both of which are called into question by modern anti-obesity rhetoric that imagines fat bodies as useless at best and dangerous at worst.

Chapter 2: Excessive Others: Citizenship, Race, and Unassimilable Corporeal Excess

I. Introduction: Belonging to the Nation State

At its core, this project is an examination of belonging in the United States. The ability to belong has been a central theoretical question for many scholars in Latina/o Studies, as the movements of individuals to and from the United States as well as the shifting of borders and boundaries has necessitated a near-constant negotiation of rights, protections, and responsibilities both to the state and by the state. Much of this negotiation process occurs in the public sphere, via discourse and rhetoric through which ideological categories such as “citizen” and “foreigner” are constructed. This chapter, therefore, lays the theoretical groundwork for the overall project, in order to broaden the conversation about belonging to include the body and rhetorical deployments of “excess” as they are linked to iterations of citizenship. I begin by briefly reviewing literature on citizenship in order to re-establish citizenship as an ideological category. I argue that citizenship is not separate from belonging but in fact functions as a means to define the types of people and bodies that can lay claim to the rights and privileges afforded by belonging to the nation-state. The next section of this chapter focuses on the development of modern nativist rhetoric, specifically the debate around the term “illegal,” as it shapes perceptions of an ideal or “correct” citizenry. I then move on to discuss the body politic, connecting preoccupations with physical, embodied difference to the “non-citizen.”

II. Theorizing Citizenship and Belonging

Citizenship, Arlene Dávila argues, is “far from the universal juridical category it is still often thought to be” and in fact functions as an ideological structure that “ultimately determine[s] who is or is not part of a given nation and on what grounds” (Dávila 2012, 11) Thus, the category of citizenship varies widely from place to place, and as Mae Ngai’s work demonstrates,

from individual case to case. This chapter opens with a brief exploration of both formal and informal citizenship, arguing that while formal citizenship is often lauded as the goal or ultimate marker of American belonging, the informal, discursive and practical nature of belonging is equally and, at times, more pertinent to Latinas/os than formal documentation. In other words, while formal citizenship is often couched in terms of granting “important rights and responsibilities,” it is often simply a legal marker of belonging and commonality that, once achieved, only theoretically allows the subject access to these rights and responsibilities.

Rather, as Mae Ngai argues, the historical trajectory of American immigration, citizenship, and naturalization law relied heavily on “commonalities of language, customs, and experience” in the 1700s and 1800s and evolved to a focus on “cultural homogeneity” by the early 1900s (Ngai 2014, 23). Formal, legal citizenship, therefore, did not bestow the requisite “commonality” and “homogeneity” that allowed immigrants to be folded into and included in the nation-state. Being understood, or—to borrow from Charles Taylor—“recognized,” as a member of the national in-group came first and functioned as a prerequisite for any potential benefits (Taylor 1997, 98). Modern constructs of belonging to the U.S. nation-state are not only characterized by, but rely upon, this lack of *prima facie* rights to divest formal citizenship of its potential to fulfill “oft-repeated narrative[s]” of the United States as a “land of opportunity” (DeChaine 2009, 44). Informal citizenship, defined succinctly by Harald Bauder as the “dimension of membership in a national community related to practices of identity and belonging” shapes the experiences of ethnic groups characterized by narratives of immigration, “illegality,” and unquestionable racial, cultural, and biological difference (Bauder 2008, 323).

Natalia Molina’s work on what she terms “racial scripts” argues that the allowance or denial of informal citizenship, in large part, stems from processes of racialization that posit the

individual or group in question as either racially assimilable to the nation-state or radically, impossibly different (Molina 2010). These scripts, Molina argues, are “the ways in which we think, talk about, and act toward one racialized group based on our experiences with other groups whose race differs from our own” (2010, 157). In the case of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, associations with other groups deemed non-white and therefore non-American shaped the possibilities for Mexican American as well as Latina/o citizenship. Similarly, Mae Ngai notes in her dissection of early immigration quota systems that “the law constructed a white American race, in which persons of European descent shared a common whiteness distinct from those deemed to be not white” (Ngai 2014, 25). Ngai links the development of immigration quota systems under the 1927 Johnson-Reed act to emphasis on discourses of “racial difference.” “The idea of ‘racial difference’,” she argues, “began to supplant that of racial superiority as the basis for exclusionary policies” as the national origins quota system determined which countries were “white” and which were not, thus “distinguish[ing] persons of ‘the colored races’ from ‘white’ persons from ‘white countries’” (Ngai 2014, 25). For those who were divested of potential whiteness and whose supposed racial difference was deemed demonstrative of their “backwardness and unassimilability,” the possibility of belonging to the nation-state was determined by formalized constructs of race and racial difference.

Molina also highlights the constructed nature of this system, situating Mexican racialization as “a node in a network of racial projects” in which Anglo-Americans engaged in strategic discursive projects which “compare[d] Mexicans to other groups who had already been defined and established as non-White, non-normative, and unfit for self-government” (Molina 2010, 157). This, of course, had major implications for formal citizenship processes, as the “racial status of immigrants was contested” in the federal court system, thus solidifying non-

white racial categories such as “Asian” (Ngai 2014, 38). Furthermore, this formalization of racial difference via the national origins quota system allowed an Anglo-American Congress “to transform immigration law into an instrument of mass racial engineering,” determining who could legally enter and remain in the United States on the basis of whiteness or non-whiteness (Ngai 2014, 25).

This project of categorization, Ngai points out, predicated an eventual expansion and solidification of whiteness “between 1925 and 1965,” as “it became possible to unmake the illegality of Italian, Polish, and other European illegal immigrants through the power of administrative discretion” (Ngai 2014, 89). Formalizing whiteness and its equivalencies to citizenship clarified the relationship between race and structures of belonging, which “contributed to a broader reformation of racial identity taking place, a process that reconstructed the ‘lower races of Europe’ into white ethnic Americans”(Ngai 2014, 89). At the same time, the racialization of Mexicans as “illegal” and “migratory agricultural laborers” whose presence in the nation-state was temporary at best and criminal at worst “gave powerful sway to the notion that Mexicans had no rightful presence on United States territory, no rightful claim of *belonging*” (Ngai 2014, 189, emphasis mine).

Thus, the insistence on whiteness as a racial pre-requisite for belonging to the nation-state combined with notions of Mexican (and by extension, Latina/o) racial difference to produce an informal structure of belonging. Within this structure, racialized identifiers (“immigrant,” “illegal,” “criminal”) come to determine the day-to-day interactions and experiences of belonging or non-belonging. In particular, discourse simultaneously determines and reflects the nature of informal citizenship and formal citizenship for Latinas/os in the United States, as

language determines who can and cannot be understood as belonging to the nation-state and also shapes the legal and extra-legal mechanisms of belonging.

III. Discourse and Belonging: Dropping the “I-Word,” Nativist Rhetoric, and the Making of a Citizenry

In 2010, the organizers of Race Forward: The Center for Racial Justice Innovation (formerly known as the Applied Research Center) began the “Drop the I-Word Campaign,” a social-media, online oriented campaign intended “to present the dehumanizing and inaccurate aspects of the i-word, give space for immigrants to tell their stories, and to highlight the history behind the term “illegal” and other dehumanizing language” (“Drop the I-Word Campaign” 2010). In a promotional video for the campaign, organizers argued that the word “illegal” is “a racial slur that breeds hate against whole groups of people” citing research stating that “in 2010, use of the word ‘illegals’ on television quadrupled from 2009” thus demonstrating the growing presence of the term in American popular culture (*Don’t Feed the Hate Machine* 2010). Race Forward’s focus on the word “illegal” echoes work by Otto Santa Ana, Leo Chavez, and Lisa Gring-Pemle, each of whom examine the role of discourse in shaping narratives about Latinas/os in the United States and the impact these narratives have in terms of social interaction, brushes with legal authorities, and policy decisions that impact the lived experiences of Latinas/os. Thus, “illegal” and similarly racialized terms are capable of “constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images, and practices, which provide ways to talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society” (Hall 1997, 6). As Leo Chavez argues, “[t]he historical lesson is that ‘illegality’ is socially, culturally, and politically” and, I would add, discursively constructed (Chavez 2013, 26).

The resulting “discursive formations,” therefore, impact the possible narratives about the presence of Latinas/os in the U.S. by “defin[ing] what is and is not appropriate in our formulation of, and our practices in relation to, a particular subject or site of social activity” (Hall 1997, 6). The term “illegal,” for example, produces a narrow pool of possible narratives for the Latina/o subject as already criminal due to their mere presence. Furthermore, the discourse of criminalization, as Lisa Marie Cacho argues, positions its subject as not a subject at all, but rather as “the object and target of law, never its authors or addressees” (Cacho 2012, 5). The denial of subjecthood, and the rights and responsibilities associated with formal citizenship divests those painted with the broad and often sloppy, ill-defined strokes of discursive formations of “illegal” from informal belonging to the nation-state. In particular, the racialized aspect of these formations, Lisa A. Flores notes, shapes the very nature of belonging and in fact, allows for informal constructs to supersede the formal. “[T]he explicit separation of race and nation in public commentaries, which occurred prior to this period and extends to the present,” she writes, “has provided rhetorical space for constructions of citizen and foreigner that belie reliance on legal definitions of citizenships” (Flores 2003, 382-382).

This “rhetorical space,” I argue, necessitates an examination of the relationship between informal citizenship and the language used to construct it. The structures of formal belonging are made legible often through their institutionalization, usually in the form of law (immigration law, green cards, work visas, etc.) and policy, whereas informal structures are not necessarily state-sanctioned or institutionalized. Rather, informal structures rely on informal enforcement, most often achieved under the guises of “free speech,” thus using language to demarcate boundaries where, legally, none exist. For example, as Lisa Gring-Pemble argues, the extreme speech practiced by supporters of the Virginia “anti-immigration group” Help Save Manassas (HSM)

“conflate[s] Latinos and undocumented immigrants” and thereby “underscore[s] the implicit connection between whiteness and citizenship/acceptance within [the] community” (Gring-Pemble 2012, 641). While Latinas/os may, of course, be formal citizens and while whiteness is no longer a legal prerequisite to citizenship, HSM’s rhetorical strategy constructs a new system of belonging that, while legally and formally toothless, sets up informal boundaries of who will be accepted into the community and who will be denied.

Of course, it must also be noted that the role of rhetoric and discursive constructs is rarely, if ever, limited to the informal. Rather, it can “becom[e] mainstream in so doing, may influence public policy, divide communities, and prevent meaningful public deliberation on controversial topics” (Gring-Pemble 2012, 625). As Leo Chavez argues, the production of a racial “Other” via discourse “constructs distinctions between citizens and noncitizens, elaborating a segmented citizenship in which some members of society are valued above others” (Chavez 2013, 42). “Informal” must not be confused with “meaningless,” as discourse and rhetoric can and do have the power to shape the lived experiences of their subjects and targets. In the case of anti-immigration or anti-immigrant discourse, the reproduction of structures of informal belonging through nativist and hate rhetoric is integral to the materialization and experience of non-belonging. Furthermore, by conflating “Latina/o” with “undocumented” or “illegal immigrant,” this rhetoric reproduces a racialized understanding of the citizen subject against whom Latinas/os are positioned. Thus, the specter of whiteness is reinscribed on the imagined citizen, narrowing the category of citizen and reinforcing the “understanding of the United States as a white nation,” with whiteness as a marker of both positive attributes and assured belonging (Gross 2009, 252).

IV. (Discursively) Constructing the Body Politic: Who’s In, Who’s Out

Jonathan X. Inda argues that modern biopolitics is characterized by “distinguish[ing] what is inside from what is outside, separating those bodily interests that can be represented in the polity from those which cannot” (Inda 2007, 138-139). Inda argues that Foucault’s bio-power “works to create a wedge between the normal and the pathological, conferring aberrance on individual or collective bodies and casting certain abnormalities as dangers to the body politic” via the institutionalization of “segregation and social hierarchization” (Inda 2007,139; Foucault 1980, 141). In other words, the notion of the “body politic,” in which the nation-state and the human body are analogous, requires categorizations of what can and cannot be part of or incorporated into the nation-state. The metaphor of the nation-state-as-body shapes the possible discourses surrounding questions of citizenship and belonging since, Otto Santa Ana argues, the body as metaphor conjures ideas of “an enclosed space,” which must also have borders and boundaries which maintain an inside (Santa Ana 2002, 255-257). However, this inner body is still vulnerable to that which is outside, disease and even invasion, an understanding that is “used to invoke traditional nativism against the country’s enemies, foreign and domestic, which unfortunately seem to include U.S. Latinos” (Santa Ana 2002, 259).

The body politic of the nation-state, therefore, is discursively constructed as something whose integrity must be protected, but also as a subject characterized by homogeneity and internal consistency rather than heterogeneity and the possibility of change. The “imagined community,” to borrow from Benedict Anderson, requires an imaginary synechdocal body that stands in and represents the larger body politic (Anderson 2006). The American body politic is imagined and represented as white, as early legal decisions about citizenship “constructed a white American race” (Ngai 2014, 25). The answer to the question, then, of “who’s in?,” or who can be understood as representative of or accepted into the body politic, rests on the conflation of

citizenship with whiteness. Thus, the cultural insistence on the whiteness of the body politic simultaneously necessitates and answers the question of “who’s out?” by insisting that racial difference is at once characterized as stemming from the outside *and* totally unassimilable should the body politics’ boundaries be breached.

This configuration of whiteness and belonging as one and the same therefore creates clearly racialized notions of outsiders, and as Neil Foley poignantly points out, an incentive for laying claim to whiteness—as Mexican-American organizations realized “race--specifically, being White--mattered far more than U.S. citizenship in the course of everyday life” (Foley 1997, 56). Despite light-skinned, middle- and upper-middle class Mexicans’ attempts to forge this “Faustian pact with whiteness,” modern nativist discourse has worked hard to maintain a highly racialized definition of outsiders, relying on a simplified shorthand in which “immigrant” is equivalent to “Latina/o,” regardless of the diverse and ever-changing movements of individuals into the United States (Foley 1997, 53; Gring-Pemble 2012, 640). In particular, Gring-Pemble argues, “qualities of hate speech (depicting victims as interchangeable members of an entire class of people) make the slip among undocumented, documented, and Latino immigrants easy” by using racial markers to simultaneously delineate one category (Latina/o) from another (white) (Gring-Pemble 2012, 641).

These racial markers are explicitly linked to the body, with aspects of embodiment such as phenotype (skin color, eye/hair color, height/weight), presumed genotype and genetic markers, and bodily comportment used to differentiate insider/outsider bodies. For example, Leo Chavez highlights the reduction of Latina women to the bodies and their reproductive systems in particular, arguing that Latinas are, in a hearkening to Cartesian dualism, characterized as “irrational [and] illogical” and ruled by their sexuality and excessive fertility (Chavez 2013, 74-

75). The “Latina threat,” therefore, is a threatening body in which the womb-as-weapon represents the all the potential dangers of outsider bodies to the body politic. This body is “exotic” (read: foreign) and capable of the rapid reproduction of culturally, phenotypically, and genotypically divergent bodies that will inevitably infiltrate and change the cultural and genetic make-up of the imagined white American body politic (Chavez 2013, 74-75). This reproduction is understood as pathological based on associations of Latina women with excess, as Latinas are imagined as excessively sexual and therefore likely to produce “too many” to be supported by the nuclear family system.

V. The Beginnings of a Discourse: Ideas and Ideologies About Norms and Excess

The pathologizing of Latinas as overly reproductive relies on the moralization of quantity, which renders “too many” children a sign of racialized moral turpitude. An excess of children suggests an inability or refusal to recognize the line between enough and too many. Similarly, discussions around fatness almost uniformly revolve around invocations of excess and the meanings associated with “too many” or “too much.” Excess, denoting “an amount that is more than the usual or necessary amount” or “behavior that is considered wrong because it goes beyond what is usual, normal, or proper,” is an inherently moralistic term, relying on societally determined bounds of what is deemed “usual,” “normal,” and “proper” (“Excess” 2016). The attribution of excess weight, excess consumption, and excess indulgence to individual bodies connote moral impropriety and failure. As Farrell notes, the historical work of Hillel Schwartz and Peter Stearns links “concern over consumer excess” in the late 19th century and early 20th century to “expression in the disparagement of fat bodies, both of the wealthy and greedy ‘fat cat’ and of the middle-class fat person, unable to regulate the abundance of the modern world. In

other words, the fat person stood as the symbol par excellence of the sin of gluttony” (Farrell 2011, 45-46).

The body, therefore, became the clear expression of the impropriety of the individual, as fatness was understood to literally signal a lack of control and an inability or refusal to engage in proper habits of consumption and exercise. These narrations of fatness and excess, however, focused on the moral failures of middle-class white individuals, situating their excessiveness not as a problem of race, but of the new temptations wrought by industrialization and an expanding consumer culture. Yet, Farrell argues the anxiety surrounding these fat, white, middle-class bodies was not solely rooted in worries about “modernity and excess” (Farrell 2011, 58). Rather, “obesity” in the burgeoning white middle-class “became seen as unable to manage the modern world precisely because of its association with inferior bodies, or, to use the language of the ‘obesity experts’ of the time, with the primitive, the abnormal, and the uncivilized” (Farrell 2011, 59).

Excess, therefore, remains ideologically linked to notions of difference, wherein the presence of “too” much of something clearly situates the excessive individual as outside the bounds of desirability, permissibility, and even possibility. The very notion of excess requires the presence of both the antonymic lack but also, and perhaps more importantly, the moderate, normal, and proper. Excess marks the body of the other, but first requires the ideological construction of the self for whom the body is “normal” and properly moderated.

As Lennard J. Davis notes, “with the concept of the norm comes the concept of deviations or extremes,” and these designations of deviation and extremity serving to better define the ideal and acceptable body (Davis 1995, 29). Davis’ work in Disability Studies links the development of “conceiving of the population as norm and non-norm” to projects of eugenics

that sought to “redefine the concept of ‘ideal’ in relation to the general population” (Davis 1995, 30). He argues that the “application of the idea of the norm to the human body creates the idea of deviance or a ‘deviant’ body. Second, the idea of the norm pushes the normal variation of the body through a stricter template guiding the way the body ‘should’ be” (Davis 1995, 34). This “template,” as Amy Erdman Farrell demonstrates, relied on linkages between thinness and whiteness, as “the moral outrage against fat the developed in the 19th century [...] had everything to do with the construction of whiteness and the racial identities of white ‘mainstream’ American and Britons” (Farrell 2011, 59). Constructions of excess as demonstrative of inferior, failed, and deficient people were “linked to the typographies and detailed descriptions of those designated as ‘inferior’ on the human classification schemes of evolutionary scientists. In other words, fat was not white” (Farrell 2011, 60).

VI. The Excessive Other

As Farrell writes in her historical cataloging of anti-fat stigma in the United States, “[t]he use of fatness as a marker of the less civilized body not only could be found in late 19th- and early 20th-century comic representations of white women and black men and women, but also in cartoons ridiculing ‘ethnic’ Americans, particularly recent immigrants” (Farrell 2011, 76). While the immigrant communities she cites during this time period are largely Irish and Southern or Eastern European, her analysis of cartoons and postcards depicting fat immigrants clearly links fatness to otherness and thinness to notions of the American self. “Thin,” she explains, “signifies the upstanding citizen, fat the cheating, stupid, and coarse immigrant” (Farrell 2011, 79).

Beyond these popular culture representations of fatness, Farrell also examines the early 20th century medicalization of body size and the racial assumptions made by physicians and researchers who theorized about and treated fat patients. In particular, she argues that despite

seemingly radical differences between theories of fatness that linked body size to biological difference versus cultural and behavioral difference, both of these frameworks “always wound up ‘proving’ the inferiority of the fat person” (Farrell 2011, 81). Furthermore, she explains that this search for a root cause of fatness in immigrant communities was not value-free, and in fact only served to crystalize the impropriety and unacceptable nature of fat, immigrant bodies. Regardless of whether researchers pinpointed “inferior culture” or “inferior bodies,” the stigma attached fatness and physical excess ensured that “the blame continued to reside with the person, whose body or culture revealed an inferiority and lack of civilization” (Farrell 2011, 81).

Farrell understands fatness as part of the racial formations that shaped ideas about immigrant outsiders and determined in what ways their presence was depicted in both popular culture and medical literature. As she writes, “the idea of fat as a morbid, primitive tendency has indeed multiplied and gathered force, creating a powerful barrier for those who wish to claim their own rights as citizens, as ‘fully civilized’ bodies worthy of rights, respect, and freedom” (Farrell 2011, 81). The following sections consider fatness and “obesity” as a socially constructed idea linked to other iterations of excess that are central to the racialized imaginary of bodies of color.

VII. The Role of Excess and Evolution in Racial Formations

As Omi and Winant define it, racial formation is “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (Omi and Winant 2014, 55). This process, they note, is one of “historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized” (Omi and Winant 2014, 55-56). Thus, as Amy Erdman Farrell’s discussion of the historical dimensions of fat representations demonstrates, fatness and the excesses it signifies are a key aspect of this overarching representational and organizational

paradigm. Thinness, she argues, “became identified as a physical trait marking those who were higher on the evolutionary and racial scale—aristocrats, white people, men. Fatness, then, served as yet another attribute demarcating the divide between civilization and primitive cultures, whiteness and blackness, good and bad” (Farrell 2011, 64).

Of particular importance to the racial project of this era was the linking of fatness and blackness and, by extension, peoples deemed non- or not-quite white. In the case of the so-called “Venus Hottentot,” the size of her body and of particular aspects of her body including her breasts, labia, and buttocks were understood by scientists and observers as divergent from those of “presumably ‘typical’ Europeans” (Farrell 2011, 65). Farrell’s work pays close attention to the ways in which language describing Baartman seemed to obsessively focus on the supposedly excessive size of her body, and the composition of this excess not as skin, muscle, or bone, but of fat (Farrell 2011, 66). Furthermore, she argues, this notion of Saartjie (Sara) Baartman’s excessive fatness has not abated even in modern discussions about her life and death. She cites Janell Hobson’s work in which she “points out how contemporary scholars replicate an imperialistic, racist, and sexist language of scientific objectivity when they refer to Sara Baartman as ‘suffering from steatopygia’” (Farrell 2011, 66). This medicalized description of Baartman’s body does little to remedy the historical depictions of her body as abnormal based on white, European bodily standards. In fact, Farrell returns to a modern definition of “steatopygia as an ‘excessive’ development of fat on the buttocks, as opposed, of course, to a normal accumulation that happens on some people” (Farrell 2011, 66). These “some people,” inevitably, are white Europeans whose bodies are understood to denote norms of size and fat distribution.

Among others, Kathleen LeBesco examines modern iterations of fatness as an attribute of blackness, citing a popular press article that mourns the “predicament of white weight gainers

who find themselves suddenly keeping company with black and Latino folks” (LeBesco 2004, 50). She notes that article’s insistence on linking fatness to race reifies ideas that excess is the marker of non-white individuals, and that at its core “‘the problem’ [is] the adoption by the general (read: white) population of the kind of adipose tissue formerly held chiefly by unpreferred (black and Latino) minority groups” (LeBesco 2004, 50). LeBesco, too, connects this project of racial formation to eugenics, suggesting that “[o]ne might interpret the reinvigorated efforts to wipe out obesity as a sort of modern-day eugenics campaign: keep us pure by keeping us free of the ‘maladies’ experienced by cultural Others” (LeBesco 2004, 50). Importantly, while anxieties about immigration and the presence of people of color in the United States are often expressed through concerns about their body weight, the association of class and poverty with obesity only appears to matter when the poor person in question is a person of color. In other words, poor whites’ fatness is not necessarily a reason for removal based on an assumption of foreignness or otherness. Rather, in the case of working class or poor fat white people, fatness is imagined in a neoliberal framework of fault and blame (i.e. they are fat because they are lazy) or as a shameful example of American failure to correctly perform whiteness.

In her reading of white, hegemonic beauty standards and practices, she also challenges arguments that stereotype Black and Latina women as more accepting of fatness, arguing that much of this research, especially when conducted by outsiders to these communities “is a forbiddingly neat way to cut them off from the rest of society, to limit their economic and social range” (LeBesco 2004, 52). The unexamined, blanket assumption that Black and Latina women are accepting of their size couples with anti-obesity rhetoric that characterizes fat people as lazy, complacent, and unwilling to work toward weight loss to reinforce stereotypes about women of color as problematic, non-laboring subjects. Furthermore, the ubiquity of this argument is

disturbingly reminiscent of what Farrell notes as the cultural/behavioral model of fatness during the 19th and early 20th centuries. In both cases, fatness is a racialized descriptor of otherness, and in its contemporary invocation, “perceived to be aligned with black and Latino racial minorities and is thus undesirable for the righteous (white) citizen” (LeBesco 2004, 53).

VII. Feminine Sexual Excess

As Amy Erdman Farrell notes in her discussion of the excesses attributed to non-white and non-Western European women, “[a] fat body, then, was a primitive body, lower on the scale of civilization and highly sexual” (Farrell 2011, 68). She cites the work of Cesare Lombroso, whose writings posited criminality and criminal behavior as “inborn” genetic traits, borne out by the bodies of female criminals, especially prostitutes (Farrell 2011, 66). In particular, Farrell teases out Lombroso’s assertions that white prostitutes’ bodies were “positive monsters of fatty tissue” and that this fatness “was a telltale sign of atavism,” a condition that signaled the non-whiteness of these highly sexual and licentious women (Farrell 2011, 67-68).

In Farrell’s reading of dieting books and postcards from the early 1900s, she notes the ways in which notions of race and “primitivism” were used to shame women whose bodies were understood to place them dangerously close to people of color on the evolutionary scale. She argues that discourses of “civilization” were thinly veiled references to racial difference as white, Western European and American male commentators trained their sights on white women in their quest to codify racial hierarchies and white, male superiority. In particular, thinness became a marker of civilization and fatness a sign of atavistic and unevolved embodiment, as demonstrated by the ubiquitous depiction of the fat, female buttocks. Farrell argues that “their [white women’s] huge buttocks are reminiscent of the early 19th-century representations of the ‘Hottentot Venus’” and therefore linked fatness and Blackness, allowing viewers in on the joke

that “[f]at white women showing off their fat buttocks meant they were primitive, ‘black,’ and overly sexual” (Farrell 2011, 73).

Farrell links these images to Patricia Hill Collins’ work on “‘controlling images’ of black women as mammies, jezebels, and matriarchs,” noting that understandings of the Black female body as “‘out of control’ and certainly in ‘excess’ of white, normative standards” (Farrell 2011, 75). Ideas of “the body in excess [are] key to these representations of racial inferiority,” and are used to “hold fat [white] women in contempt” as well as to “imply that it is [white] men’s responsibility to discipline fat [white] women” (Farrell 2011, 73-75). This rhetorical technique serves to maintain white men’s overarching superiority while at the same time reifying racialized connotations of bodily “excess.” Excessive, racialized femininity also becomes codified as “other” or divergent from the white, male norm. As Farrell points out, “the connotation of fat as female, primitive, and sexual has often evoked a mixture of attraction and repulsion” in so-called “civilized” white communities, and this admixture is at least in part characterized by calls or impulses to control these excessive bodies by means of disciplinary action (Farrell 2011, 74-75). Thus, women’s excess is something that must be “tamed” via sexual violence as well as weight-loss projects (Farrell 2011, 73).

Furthermore, Farrell argues, alongside images that portray fatness as a particularly feminine sexual excess appears the specter of the “working-class and poor men [who] seem to enjoy the fat women” (Farrell 2011, 73). These men, exemplified by the stylized caricature of the hobo (whose artistic depiction incidentally resembles a blackface minstrel), are the very opposite of the “civilized,” “middle-class,” “white” men for whom proper white women should be pining. LeBesco, too, notes the role of sexual attraction despite (or because of) a woman’s fatness in drawing lines between white norms of propriety and so-called “primitive” desires. She argues

that in mainstream discussions examining “black attitudes about fat bodies” the supposed acceptance and desire for fat women are “fetishiz[ed]” to the point of caricature (LeBesco 2004, 52). Much like the “hobos” in postcards in Farrell’s historical archives, these essentialist representations of Black male desire function to further differentiate “civilized” white desire from that of the “primitive, out-of-control impulses” of non-white and working-class men (Farrell 2011, 73).

IX. “There are way too many, and there shouldn’t be any”: Constructions of Numerical Excess

On a July 23 taping of Fox News’ “The Kelly File,” political commentator Ann Coulter argued that the “motto” for immigration policy in the United States “should be: ‘There are way too many, and there shouldn’t be any. It even rhymes’” (*Coulter Rips Illegal Immigration* 2015). Her attempt at sloganeering is anything but facetious, as she links the idea of “too many” immigrants to the denial of immigration reform that would allow immigrants to participate in the United States’ political process. She repeats the familiar refrain that “illegal” immigrants “have no right to even be in this country,” thus reifying the idea that the only good immigrant is one who does not exist (*Coulter Rips Illegal Immigration* 2015). She maintains this thread of numerical excess in a May 2013 opinion piece on her personal website, arguing that “Marco Rubio’s amnesty bill will soon make it [the number of documented “Hispanics” living in the U.S.] 80 million. First, there are at least 11 million illegal immigrants, a majority from Mexico, who will be instantly legalized. Then we’ll get their entire extended families under our chain migration system” (Coulter 2013). Coulter’s fear, it seems, is one of living in a country where the majority of citizens do not reflect her idea of who can and cannot be considered an American. In other words, Coulter situates the power to shape and impact the nation-state in terms of

numbers, and within her understanding of the “proper” number of Latina/o immigrants, even one constitutes an excess. This positions Latinas/os as always already in excess simply by virtue of their presence. While Coulter’s bombastic, highly conservative rhetoric enjoys significant media coverage, she cannot be said to represent the nation as a whole. However, her popularity with conservative media outlets such as Breitbart News, Fox News, and others is important to consider when examining public rhetoric surrounding Latinas/os and immigration.

Otto Santa Ana’s work on the role of metaphor in immigration and anti-immigration discourse sheds light on the role of excess and numerical excess in particular in shaping the language used to debate the place of Latina/o immigrants in the United States. In *Brown Tide Rising*, he argues that the “dominant metaphor” present in discussions of immigration and Latina/o immigration in particular is that of “immigration as dangerous waters” (Santa Ana 2002, 72). This metaphor, he explains, is characterized by two subcategories with the first being “volume, which emphasizes the relative numbers of immigrants. Individuals are lost in the mass sense of these volume terms” (Santa Ana 2002, 73). This emphasis on numbers functions to “transform aggregates of individuals into an undifferentiated mass quantity,” a mass “that is not human” (Santa Ana 2002, 76). Santa Ana’s breakdown of this metaphor demonstrates the ways in which fears of numerical or quantitative excess combine with American xenophobia to shape modern discourses about immigration.

“The impending flood,” he argues, “is taken to be washing away something basic to America” by virtue of sheer volume. The “cultural alarm” raised by pundits emphasizing the “excessive” movement of “too many” immigrants of color “reflect[s] the perceived threat to Anglo-American hegemony” as well as “Anglo-American cultural dominance” (Santa Ana 2002, 78). Returning briefly to Ann Coulter’s statements, the presence of what Santa Ana characterizes

as “panic” becomes clear. I argue that it is necessary to understand this panic as one perpetuated and heightened by the invocation of “too many” as a discursive tool. While excessive individual bodies also pose a threat to white American power, an excessive *number* of bodies provides a different landscape of fear, one often expressed by worries of being “outnumbered” and “taken over” by an outside Other. In her May 2013 opinion piece, Coulter’s terror at the idea that the United States will not “be more or less the ethnic composition that it always was” is expressed in terms of ratios such as her uncited “50-1 Latin American-to-European ratio” and the “30 times as many Mexican as British immigrants” (Coulter 2013). She clearly differentiates between desirable and undesirable immigrants in terms of country of origin (as code for racial background) and expresses concern that with numbers like these, America will “become Mexico” as excessive numbers of Mexican immigrants—here, a telling slippage between “Latin American” and “Mexican”—take over the country by sheer force of numbers.

XI. Population Bombs and Latina “Breeders”: Numerical Excess, Scarcity, and Space

While Ann Coulter’s concerns about the excessive presence of Latinas/os and Latina/o immigrants centers on a fear of losing the war on immigration, numerical excess is more often successfully paired with warnings of scarcity in order to galvanize listeners to the anti-immigration/immigrant cause. In his discussion of discourses representing Latina women’s reproduction as “dangerous[ly],” “pathological[ly],” and “abnormal[ly]” excessive, Leo Chavez cites supporters of California’s Proposition 187, “which sought to curb undocumented immigration by denying undocumented immigrants social services, particularly prenatal care and education for their children” (Chavez 2013, 72). Chavez argues that Latina women’s reproduction is constructed as a threat to the well-being of American citizens as organizers

characterize these women and their children as social leeches who “become citizens and all those children use social services.” (Chavez 2013, 72).

In her analysis of extreme right-wing group Mothers Against Illegal Aliens (MAIA), Mary Romero notes the ways in which language about citizens’ access to resources becomes a rhetorical strategy intended to incite fear and anxiety. “MAIA,” she argues, “depends on white nativists to understand the coded reference to affirmative action and frame immigration as another case of people of color receiving unearned benefits at their expense” (Romero 2008, 1377). Furthermore, MAIA argues that immigrants’ children are “used by a mother to ‘steal’ from the mouths of ‘legal children’ in the USA” (Romero 2008, 1378). Additional MAIA missives argue that Latina mothers “go on food sta[mps] and welfare, and Americans have to pay for that,” an argument that relies on notions of scarcity to construct a potential danger (Romero 2011, 58). This rhetorical strategy, I argue, is particularly persuasive when aimed at working-class or poor Americans, for whom scarcity is a fact of everyday life. When MAIA writers and speakers invoke government-aid programs, they do so with the understanding that for those who rely on these programs or those who fear government intervention in their paychecks, the immigrant threat is best constructed as an economic threat. If there is simply not enough to go around, then resources must be protected and given only to the deserving. In this case, the deserving are understood as insiders who already belong to the nation-state.

Priscilla Huang’s work details the linkages of this particular brand of nativism and 20th century environmentalism in which “nativists adopted environmental rhetoric to argue that population stabilization was needed because the country’s population was growing at a rate that threatened to upside the delicate balance of the environment” (Huang 2008, 393). In particular, she notes the relationship between the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), the

Sierra Club, and supporters of Proposition 187 to highlight what she terms “the greening of hate,” in which “anti-immigrant ‘activists’ assert that immigrant population growth is the major cause of environmental degradation in the United States. Central to their theory is the belief that the planet is running out of natural resources and nearing its ‘carrying capacity’” (Huang 2008, 394-395). In this case, the finite resources nativists seek to “protect” are imagined as environmental. Huang argues that for these “immigration restrictionists,” immigrants are constructed as “a drain on public resources” as well as damaging, invasive pests who are responsible for “causing other environmental consequences of over-consumption including urban sprawl and traffic jams” (Huang 2008, 395-396). Tellingly, a 2006 FAIR report “identifies ‘Less Space, More Diversity’ among its list of negative outcomes of immigration,” thus clarifying their understanding of the relationship between “diverse” communities of color and space (Huang 2008, 398).

For FAIR and other environmental nativists, the question of immigration is directly linked to fears of spatial and resource scarcity, and “any external force that ‘takes away’ from one side of the public benefits or natural resource ‘equation’ must be promptly removed” (Huang 2008, 398). Immigrants, and Latina immigrants in particular, who have been imagined in terms of excessive reproduction, are “blame[d] for *breeding* a host of social problems including excess government spending and environmental degradation” (Huang 2008, 398, emphasis added). Otto Santa Ana characterizes this discourse as laden with the “immigrant as burden” metaphor, which often relies on understanding the nation-state as a closed system with finite resources, similar to a family or a house (Santa Ana 2002, 96). In this construction, the immigrant is understood as an outsider whose presence forces the closed system to stretch its pre-allotted resources in order to accommodate the newcomer.

The immigrant is, therefore, an “extra” body that threatens a supposedly delicate balance between supply and demand and takes up space that would otherwise “belong” to a “member” of the closed system. I argue that this particular form of nativist rhetoric constructs Latina/o immigrants as excessive based upon an ideological belief that there is not “enough” in the United States: not enough space, not enough money, not enough social services, not enough food, and not enough of a slew of resources to which nativist, white Americans can lay claim whenever they deem necessary. Importantly, as Priscilla Huang notes, white Americans can never been understood as excess within this ideological system and can, instead, blithely perpetuate a “double standard” regarding population growth. Citing the “predominantly white religious groups” like the Quiverfull movement, evangelical Protestants, and Mormons as well as conservative pundits who press white women into childbearing service with warnings of a majority Latina/o population, Huang demonstrates that only outsiders are painted with the rhetorical brush of excess (Huang 2008, 404). “[C]onservatives,” she writes, “like to shift attention away from their own childbearing patterns by accusing immigrant women of having *too many* children and *burdening* the environment and the U.S. government” (Huang 2008, 406; emphasis added).

XII. Fitting In: Theorizing Racialized Latina/o Excess as Unassimilable Difference

The privileging of an acceptable body within certain bounds of weight, size, and numerical presence, I argue, has become an important organizing theme of modern American discourse around various topics including health and healthcare, beauty and physical attractiveness, political effectiveness, intelligence, and the simple right to exist as part of the American nation-state. The discursive construction of excess is decidedly negative. To be read as associated with excess is to be read as existing or performing in a manner than is unacceptable

and therefore open to any number of disciplinary techniques ranging from critique and ridicule at best and harm, violence, or outright physical destruction at worst. The conflation of excess with physicality and the body as Farrell, LeBesco and other Fat Studies scholars demonstrate, produces an ideological construct in which the embodied subject becomes the target for negative discourse. The discourses and rhetoric that posit some bodies and groups as normal and others as excessive serves to define the citizen and non-citizen body.

I turn now to the presence of excess as a rhetorical trope and strategy within anti-immigration discourse, having first examined the links between rhetoric of belonging, citizenship, and the construction of excess. Fears and admonitions of excess have become a rallying cry of contemporary anti-immigrant and anti-obesity campaigns in the United States, as discourse that positions undesirable subjects as existing outside the bounds of normalcy and propriety reproduces notions of “fit” and “fitness.” To “fit,” in its verb form, is “to be the right size and shape for (someone or something)” or “to go into or through a particular space” (“Fit” 2016). At the same time, the term also describes something or someone as “proper or acceptable: morally or socially correct,” “suitable for a specified purpose,” and/or “physically healthy and strong” (“Fit” 2016). Thus, discourse of “fitting in,” especially as it applies to social and national circumstances, denotes the necessity of the physical form (the body) to be both acceptably sized and acceptably useful for the space in question (the nation-state). Therefore, in the current moment of anti-obesity sentiment, the characterization of subjects as existing beyond the bounds of “fit” or “fitness” and its various connotations, serves to solidify the boundaries of belonging and non-belonging.

As Natalia Molina points out, social Darwinism laid the groundwork for notions of the “fit” citizen in the United States, in which proponents argued for “a concept of fitness that

suggested that the most ‘fit’ humans (defined as those who made the most money and thus lived the most comfortably) were the natural rulers of society” (Molina 2006, 49). Yet, this particular form of fitness was a category reserved for white Americans as “[t]he Americanization efforts of the 1920s were abandoned as health officials in the 1930s adopted racial assumptions emphasizing more immutable biological traits that rendered Mexicans unassimilable” (Molina 2006, 14). By the 1950s, theories of biological difference were supplanted by theories of “poor family dynamics and psychological problems,” as in the case of psychologist Hilde Bruch’s work (Herndon 2005, 138). Overweight and obesity came to be understood as “problems of assimilation” by which Bruch “catalogued and measured how well immigrants were *fitting* into American society” (Herndon 2005, 138; emphasis mine). In the quest to define the American “ideal” (and by extension, the ideal American) “complete Americanization and weight became a stand-in for assimilation and belonging” (Herndon 2005, 139). While Bruch’s work focused on European immigrants, the conflation of weight and belonging has enjoyed a resurgence in its application to Latina/o immigrants, as discourses of “immutable biological” difference and “psychological” and behavioral causes of overweight and obesity combine and mutate. In particular, the focus on “assimilation” or “assimilability” remain at the center of conversations surrounding immigrant viability to the U.S. nation-state.

Therefore, as categories of citizenship and belonging narrowed, a focus on the body’s ability or inability to conform to set ideals of size, the occupation of space, and the use of resources produced a fervent nationalism in which having a “superior” body became part of the requirements for citizenship. To have a body that is “too” large is to have a body that cannot be easily assimilated into the nation-state. It is a body that is marked by difference rather than sameness, and a difference that is not simply new or unusual, but quantitatively and measurably

marked as inferior. At the same time larger bodies are read as too large to incorporate, their largeness is also understood as symptomatic of lack—a paucity of self-control, evolution, intelligence, and even Americanness.

In particular, the conflation of Latina/o bodies with embodied excess engages similar rhetorical tropes as used in “obesity epidemic” discourse. As Jana Evans Braziel argues in “Deterritorializing the Fat Female Body,” fat is understood as “an excessive corporeality,” one which conjures images of “attack” and “pollution” so that the fat body becomes the site onto which fears of bodily transgression are mapped (Braziel 2001, 239). Furthermore, fatness is discursively constructed in terms of what I conceptualize as “too”-ness. In other words, fat bodies are too big to be allowed, a notion that becomes particularly clear when one considers the discursive impact of the words “overweight” and “obese” which, as many Fat Studies scholars point out, suggests a “normal” or acceptable weight which one has exceeded.

At the same moment that “normal” and “average” bodies are rendered ideologically acceptable by the positive discourse both shaping and surrounding them, it becomes possible to define bodies outside these boundaries in terms of their excess. The “normal” body is one that belongs, one that may be understood as a citizen of the body-politic. The abnormal or outsider body is too fat, weighs too much, or is one of too many of these too different people who exist beyond the bounds of the ideal body that has become a firmly entrenched American ideology. The too-ness of the Latina/o body is characterized as existing outside the realm of possible belonging, especially in terms of assimilation. In particular, discourses around excess and too-ness reproduce and reconfigure obesity-epidemic discourse to demonstrate the danger of Latina/o excess and to articulate what I am terming the “unassimilable corporeal excess” of the Latina/o body and the various Latina/o communities in the United States. Thus, I argue, by virtue of

embodied difference often rendered legible in terms of size (of which physical size and family size are the most obvious) the discourse of the obesity “epidemic” and Latina/o unassimilability are linked and in fact come to co-constitute one another in the present.

As a modern discursive construct, unassimilable corporeal excess highlights the ways in which language of size, amount, and degree are used to posit Latina/o bodies as—to borrow from Mae Ngai—“impossible subjects” whose bodies cannot be imagined to “fit” into the United States nation-state. While these bodies may be present, anti-immigrant and nativist discourse focuses on highlighting spatial and resource limitations that can and will be overburdened by the presence of overly large bodies. Furthermore, these discourses link imagined excesses of the Latina/o body in particular to racially-coded traits and characteristics such as “cultural” and biological differences, thus justifying fears of Latina/o presence as concerns of patriotism, “Americanness,” and the moral goods associated with assimilation. I argue that within critical engagements with immigration, race, and citizenship, centering excess provides ways to better understand how Latinas/os in particular are affected by seemingly race-neutral concepts such as the “obesity epidemic.” Because I use unassimilable corporeal excess as an organizing framework for this project, it is important to note that regardless of whether or not an individual’s body fits the medicalized categories of “overweight” or “obese,” the “specter of obesity,” as Charlotte Biltekoff points out, shapes the conversations about and treatment of Latina/o bodies (Biltekoff 2007, 41).

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on examples of such “excess” discourse within recent discussions of Latina/o presence and immigration in the United States, demonstrating the deployment of unassimilable corporeal excess in modern, everyday discussions of Latinas/os in the United States. In particular, these chapters center two discursive trends—war and disease—in order to

examine how racially-inflected rhetoric of excess, belonging, and assimilation collude in conversations about Latina/o presence in the United States and the so-called “rise in obesity.”

Chapter 3: The War Against Fat (Immigrants): Militaristic Rhetoric and the Creation of the Fat Enemy Immigrant

I. Introduction: Human Collateral and the Call to Arms in the “War Against Obesity”

In mid-September 1997, “two of the nation’s most popular dietary drugs,” Redux (dexfenfluramine) and Pondimin (fenfluramine) were recalled by parent companies American Home Products Corporation and Interneuron Pharmaceuticals, Incorporated (Liu 1997). Prompted by research conducted by the Mayo Clinic that “reported 24 cases of rare valvular diseases in women taking the fen-phen regimen” in July of 1997 as well as “66 additional reports of heart valve disease” received by the Food and Drug Association, the recall theoretically should have stopped the diet industry in its tracks. Even the death of 30-year-old Mary J. Linnen did little to stall the industry’s growth, as American Home Products successfully reached a financial settlement with her family in early 2000 (“Suit In Fen-Phen Death” 2000). Linnen, widely reported to have taken the drug combination marketed as Fen-Phen for only 24 days in order to lose weight for her wedding, died of primary pulmonary hypertension, a disease which progressed rapidly from her November 1996 diagnosis to her death in February 1997 (Liu 1997; “American Home Products Settles” 2000).

Despite the alarming number of complications reported as well as the media interest in the deaths of Linnen and 35 year old Mary Marisa Smith—whose family settled with American Home Products for an undisclosed amount in June 1999—former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop refused to back down. On September 19, 1997, just days after the recall of dexfenfluramine and fenfluramine hit the national news headlines, Koop’s Shape Up America! issued a press release entitled “In Spite of Diet Drug Withdrawal, the War on Obesity Must Continue Says Dr. C. Everett Koop” (Koop 1997). In this press release, Koop “urged overweight

Americans and the country's physicians not to give up on the war against obesity because the stakes -- in terms of disability and disease -- are much too high” (Koop 1997). Koop’s statement also urged readers not to direct anger or frustration at the Food and Drug Administration, explaining that “agency acted responsibly and consulted the leading obesity researchers and medical authorities before reaching its decision” to approve the drugs in the first place (Koop 1997). He explained that “[t]here are no reasons for recriminations: FDA did its job and did it well” (Koop 1997).

The majority of this press release, however, was used to reiterate the core tenets of Koop’s “War on Obesity.” He asks the American public to ignore the very real deaths of Linnen and Smith, and the disabling effects of the diet drugs and industry Shape Up America! supported in favor of stopping the phantom “300,000 lives lost each year” to “obesity.”ⁱⁱ Arguing that “obesity” is the “second leading cause of preventable death in this country,” Koop successfully shifts the focus from one “enemy” to another, explaining that the deaths of these 300,000 Americans “is why the war on obesity must go on unabated” (Koop 1997). The 1994 founding of Shape Up America! coincides with Koop’s declaration of a “war” against fatness, a turn of phrase that has gained immense traction in the last 20 years, providing a justification for a multi-billion dollar weight loss market, television shows centered on the humiliation and abuse of fat people, and violent rhetorical and physical attacks on fat individuals. In other words, by sending America to “war” against “obesity,” Koop and Shape Up America! literally provided a battle cry for our modern focus on fatness and—ultimately—fat people as the enemy.

This chapter examines the rhetoric of militarism that surrounds discussions of obesity in the United States, and links this rhetoric to anti-immigrant discourse that similarly posits the United States as embroiled in a “war” against immigration and immigrants. I begin by comparing

the use of what I am terming “war language” in popular representations of “obesity” and immigration, examining the trajectory of this rhetoric from C. Everett Koop’s launching of *Shape Up America!* in 1994 to the present, with a focus on the overlap between the two, especially in far-right, conservative, and nativist rhetoric. I then link militaristic rhetoric to national anxieties surrounding excess, arguing that a fear of excessive *others* in particular shapes and is shaped by the metaphors of “war” and “battle.” The configuration of binaries such as “us” versus “them,” “American” versus “un-American,” and “patriot” versus “enemy” often rely on the conflation of excess with difference.

As I previously argued, the subject deemed “excessive” becomes the other, but during wartime, the other is also the enemy. Drawing on April Herndon and Charlotte Biltekoff’s work, I will also examine the “War on Obesity” and the “War on Immigration” in terms of the most prominent battle of the 2000s, the “War on Terror.” Finally, I end this chapter by examining the designation of “citizen” during these concurrent rhetorical wars, arguing that the waging of “wars” against “obesity” and immigration relies upon the interpellation of non-citizens as “threats” to the nation-state and capable of inducing danger, fear, panic, and ultimately, terror. At its core, this chapter examines “war” as a useful rhetorical strategy in both producing and soothing American anxieties around changing demographics and body types.

II. The 1990s: Surgeon General Koop and the Waging of “War” Against Obesity

Contemporary discourse about obesity relies heavily on the idea that the nation is “at war” with rising body weights. The modern incarnation of this discourse begins on Tuesday, December 6, 1994 when then First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton introduced former Surgeon General Dr. C. Everett Koop at a ceremony held in the White House Rose Garden. In her remarks about Dr. Koop, she focused on the importance of preventative care as well as

individual responsibility for health, citing the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports as exemplary of the “ethos of personal responsibility” (First Lady’s Office and Speechwriting 1994). She also characterizes Koop’s work on “the AIDS crisis, the dangers of smoking, [and] the epidemic of youth violence” as exemplary of his “commitment to public health issues,” yet immediately shifts from a discussion of health as public to private, explaining that “he always reminds us to be more responsible for our own health” (First Lady’s Office and Speechwriting 1994). She ends her introduction by literally underlining the importance of “private” and “personal responsibility” in “physical fitness,” “nutrition, and health,” citing Shape Up America! as a new, integral part of those goals (First Lady’s Office and Speechwriting 1994).

Although Clinton did not characterize physical fitness as the state of not being “overweight” or “obese,” the media coverage of Shape Up America! was rife with references to fat, undoubtedly based in Koop’s own remarks and Shape Up America’s press releases (Koop 1994). More importantly, while Clinton’s speech highlighted personal responsibility, press coverage and Shape Up America! missives firmly situate “obesity” and “fitness” in the public realm, using “war” as a rhetorical device to explain the goals of the program. For example, a December 6, 1994 press release from Shape Up America! describes Koop as launching “a new ‘*crusade*’ to *combat* obesity in America” (Koop 1994, emphasis added). Citing Koop’s remarks at the White House ceremony, the release calls Shape Up America! Koop’s “new ‘great crusade’ to place healthy weight and physical activity high on the national agenda” (Koop 1994). Three days after this press release, southern Florida Sun Sentinel writer Tom Kelly ended his editorial on Shape Up America! with this: “Koop loves a good *fight* and he has grabbed a flabby problem by the love handles this time” (Kelly 1994, emphasis added). Chicago Tribune writer Steven Pratt also covered Shape Up America!, with the headline “Anti-smoking *Crusader* Takes On

Fat” (Pratt 1994, emphasis added). In particular, Pratt draws linkages between Koop’s anti-smoking work, explaining that “[s]imilar to Koop’s war on smoking, which beefed up warnings on cigarette packs and helped push smokers out of offices and airplanes, the privately funded Shape Up campaign will focus on the workplace, schools, doctors’ offices and even on cereal boxes” (Pratt 1994). Koop’s highly neoliberal approach focused on personal responsibility and sought to punish those whose health was deemed the result of unhealthy choices, including gay men whose sexual practices he cited as the cause of the HIV/AIDS crisis (National Library of Medicine 2016).

After stepping down as Surgeon General in 1989, Koop’s focus shifted to “speaking out against obesity” with the launch of Shape Up America! in 1994 (Moore 2013). At a weight loss symposium in March 1995, Koop appeared to take the title of former Surgeon *General* literally, explaining that “he is putting in 90-hour workweeks in his war against the expanding waistline”(Loar 1995). Koop’s self-described “last crusade, a populist effort” more clearly demonstrates Koop’s own understanding of Shape Up America! and his role in fighting obesity (Pratt 1994). In his own public estimations as well as his portrayals in the media, Koop is very much a “general,” responsible for coordinating battles within the “war on obesity.” Indeed, in his 2013 obituary, his public persona as a military man is memorialized, as the only Surgeon General to wear the “admiral’s uniform that is bestowed to the surgeon general but that Koop’s predecessors had worn only on ceremonial occasions” (Stobbe and Cass 2013). Koop, therefore, is presented as the great crusader, galvanizing the general populace and transforming regular Americans into soldiers in this war. However, at the same moment he incites Americans to “wage war on obesity,” he also—as April Herndon notes—incites “a war against fat people” (Herndon 2005, 129). Two years later, Koop went on to deputize doctors in the “war on obesity,

as he and Shape Up America! “introduced new medical guidelines [...] urging doctors to treat obesity as a dangerous and chronic disease to be treated with diet, exercise, drugs, and even surgery” (“Former Surgeon General Wages War on Obesity” 1996).

These new guidelines are also “designed to help doctors determine which patients are obese and what type of treatment they need” (“Former Surgeon General Wages War on Obesity” 1996). Furthermore, Koop’s guidelines also “advise doctors to intervene if a patient’s BMI is 27 or greater” (“Former Surgeon General Wages War on Obesity” 1996). I argue that in the context of Koop’s “war on obesity,” these guidelines shift the focus from personal, individual responsibility and choice in favor of a chain of command approach. In other words, Koop and Shape Up America! issue orders, and doctors carry out these orders, “intervening” in the lives of patients and offering them new and potentially dangerous weapons to “fight” their weight—diets, medication, exercise programs, and bariatric surgery.

III. Weight Loss Resolutions for a New Millennium: 9/11 and New Tactics in the War on Obesity

By 2001, the “war on obesity” was renewed by its associations with the War on Terror after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. The somewhat sarcastic declaration of Surgeon General David Satcher’s “Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity” as a “fatwa on fat” or a “fatwar” by journalists linked fatness to the current American focus on war in the Middle East. As journalist Brian Doherty argued, in the months after September 11th, 2001, “the days of government bashing are over” as fearful and understandably shaken Americans turned toward their government for guidance, support, and ultimately, protection (Doherty 2001). “In the face of implacable external (and possibly internal) enemies to our safety and security,” he writes, “we all should recognize the vital importance of the federal

government” (Doherty 2001). Yet, he offers a critique of the equating of “obesity”—something he understands as being caused by “freely chosen decisions”—with the War on Terror, arguing simply that “[i]n the season of anthrax, government health officials have more important things to worry about” (Doherty 2001). Doherty was equally unamused by then Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson’s “request that all Americans—as their patriotic duty—lose 10 pounds” (Doherty 2001). As April Herndon notes, the militaristic rhetoric of Thompson and Satcher in the months immediately following 9/11 has its roots in Koop’s Shape Up America! (Herndon 2005, 128).

By 2013, this association between the “War on Obesity” and the “War on Terror” had not lost traction in the popular press. In June 2013, Huffington Post journalist Preetam Kaushik opened his “America and the War on Obesity” with a discussion of war in the Middle East, arguing that

“[r]egardless of where you stand politically, there is no denying that America's recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have thrown forward countless stories of heroism and examples of individuals who are ready to step up for the cause. There is another important war that Americans have been engaged in for some time now, at home, which is in need of some heroes. That's the war on obesity, especially in children.”

The remainder of the article links Shape Up America!, “hip beverage retailer Jamba Juice,” a fitness regime called the “ReSync Method,” and Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move! campaign as “examples” which he hopes will “motivate many more Americans to join this fight [so] the nation can still beat what is literally one of the biggest challenges facing it” (Kaushik 2013). In particular, Kaushik uses combat metaphors throughout his short piece, with six instances of

“war,” three instances of “fight,” and one use each of “battle” and “beat” all within a 600 word article (Kaushik 2013).

In addition to his obvious comparisons between “wars in Iraq and Afghanistan” and the “War on Obesity,” he also characterizes “some folks [...] in government, not-for profits, and businesses” as “heroes” who “have decided that it is time to fight the fat” (Kaushik 2013). These “heroes” are compared to those featured in “countless stories of heroism and examples of individuals who are ready to step up for the cause” in Afghanistan and Iraq. Presumably, the American “heroes” in Afghanistan and Iraq are those engaged in military service and combat, so this comparison renders Kaushik’s weight loss “heroes” as veritable soldiers in the “War on Obesity” (Kaushik 2013).

Importantly, his casting of Michelle Obama, Jamba Juice, Shape Up America! and ReSync Method developer Samir Becic as heroic soldiers in the “fight against fat” requires children to fill the role of innocents or potential victims who must be protected. The war with which he is most concerned is the “war on obesity, especially in children (Kaushik 2013). For his first two “heroes” in particular—Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move! and Jamba Juice—children are the “focus” with Let’s Move! winning “some important early battles” with “5,000 schools now meet[ing] health, nutrition and fitness standards” and the “creation of ‘Play Streets’ in 10 cities” (Kaushik 2013). Jamba Juice’s Team Up For a Healthy America is also cited as this program “invite[s] you to team up to improve childhood wellness” with celebrity partners such as “Body By Jake” Steinfeld, and “author/TV personality LaReine Chabut,” creator of the “Lose That Baby Fat!” fitness program”(“Team Up for a Healthy America – Celebrity Chat” 2016; Chabut 2016).

IV. The War on Obesity Goes Viral: “America’s Fattest” Lists and Conscripting a City

In late 2015, Oklahoma City and its mayor, Mick Cornett, became the focus of popular media interest as a feature article by Ian Birrell, written for Mosaic Science—a site which “encourage[s] you to share or republish our content”—became a relatively viral hit, with multiple republishings in The Huffington Post, The Independent, and numerous local newspapers and online magazines (“About Mosaic” 2016; Birrell 2015). The article, entitled “The Fat City That Declared War on Obesity” invites readers to “[m]eet the mayor who launched a healthy living *crusade*” (Birrell 2015, emphasis added). Mayor Mick Cornett is credited with “challeng[ing] citizens [of Oklahoma City] to join him on a diet. Using his flair for publicity after 20 years in television, he announced that he wanted Oklahoma City to lose one million pounds, doing so standing in front of the elephant enclosure at the local zoo” (Birrell 2015). His declaration also coincided with the early 2008 website entitled “This City is Going On a Diet,” which offers weight loss resources and chronicles the changes in infrastructure Cornett initiated to offer citizens new and safe opportunities for exercise (“OKC Million / This City Is Going on a Diet” 2016).

Importantly, Cornett explains that his 2007 decision to put his own city on the front lines of the “War on Obesity” stemmed from his encounter with “a list of the nation’s most obese populations” (Birrell 2015). This list, published in Men’s Fitness Magazine’s March 2007 issue, details the “Fittest and Fattest Cities in America,” citing metrics of fitness and fatness such as obesity rates, junk-food consumption, athleticism/athletic opportunities, and television viewing. Oklahoma City in particular was named “The City With the Worst Eating Habits” due to fast food consumption, doughnut and ice cream consumption, and “estimated consumption of fruits and vegetables [which] is among the lowest in our survey” (O’Connor and Lucia 2007). The 2007 version of the magazine’s “Fittest and Fattest” survey was the eighth of their annual

reports, each of which progressively garnered more and more interest and online republication. This city-naming and shaming tactic, I argue, is now used as a popular—and potentially “viral”—tactic for galvanizing individuals and city governments to lose weight. The yearly publication of this list is met with considerable online fanfare, reaching even The Weather Channel’s blog on “Seasonal Health Renewal” which asks “Do You Live in the Fattest City?” as well as rental website RentApplication.com (Kopman 2014; “Fattest Cities in America” 2015). Cities named in the list are subject to online reactions ranging from pithy jokes at the city’s expense (i.e. “Houston, we have a problem...”) to serious calls to “start slimming down” (Cohen 2013; Reynolds 2016).

The story of (formerly) fat Oklahoma City made the internet rounds precisely due to Mayor Cornett’s “successful” response to Men’s Fitness Magazine’s call to arms (Dehority 2012). A major part of Oklahoma City’s “war on obesity” played out in Cornett’s public challenge to citizens to collectively lose one million pounds. By 2010, Cornett congratulated citizens on “mov[ing] past the half-way point to reaching our goal of a million pounds,” and “[i]n January 2012 the city hit the mayor’s million-pound target – 47,000 people had signed up, losing on average more than 20 pounds apiece” (Cornett 2010; Birrell 2015). These 47,000 people and indeed, all Oklahoma City residents, are conscripted by Cornett and the city to act as soldiers battling “obesity” (Birrell 2015). As “plush sports facilities, nice parks and pleasant sidewalks can only go so far in fighting a culture of rampant obesity; many people need encouragement, help and even prodding to alter lethal lifestyles” (Birrell 2015). This “necessity” led to the creation of “an eight-strong team of outreach staff going to markets, sports events and even calling door-to-door in areas where data indicate people are in need of the most help” (Birrell 2015). These staff members, therefore, are city’s front line of defense against “obesity,”

sent into communities to identify the enemy—sedentary lifestyles, fast food, and people who “know nothing about nutrition” (Birrell 2015).

V. Targets in the War on Obesity: “Helping” Immigrants and Latinas/os Lose Weight

Importantly, Birrell’s article is framed by the story of one of these people who appear to “know nothing” about nutrition and weight, a 34 year old Guatemalan immigrant named Velveth Monterroso who, when she “arrived in the USA from her hometown in Guatemala, she weighed exactly 140 pounds” (Birrell 2015). Birrell narrates her weight gain over 10 years of living in the Oklahoma as a combination of poverty, necessity, but ultimately poor decision-making, as “she would skip breakfast and lunch while snacking all day on bits of burger and pizza” at her job as a cook (Birrell 2015). Furthermore, he explains, Monterroso would either “resort to fast food” or “often gorge on whatever was available [at home] rather than wait to cook a decent meal” (Birrell 2015). This description of Monterroso’s eating habits does little to challenge the idea “that obesity remains largely volitional and particularly a problem for weak people of color” (Herndon 2005, 136). Here, Monterroso’s weight gain and subsequent “obesity” are not used as an avenue for exploring exploitative labor practices that force a young, immigrant woman to skip meals during a work day or leave her so exhausted she cannot cook a meal when she finally returns home. Rather, Birrell portrays Monterroso as lazy despite her punishing work schedule, and physically and morally weak for not being able to summon the necessary energy to eat “correctly.”

Birrell’s sympathetic portrayal of the hardworking immigrant is tinged with disgust, as he further characterizes her as both lazy and gluttonous, willing to “resort” to fast food and “gorge” at home. Furthermore, he offers a critique of immigrants’ “ethnic” cuisine, as Monterroso’s family comes under fire for responding her the recent mother’s exhaustion by “encourag[ing] her

to drink lots of *atole*— a heavily sweetened corn-based drink popular in central America – to aid the breastfeeding of her new daughter, Susie. Sugar levels in her body soared, and on top of her obesity she became pre-diabetic” (Birrell 2015). As April Herndon notes, this eating “horror show” tactic is often leveled at people of color, and Latinas/os in particular to produce “an anthropological description of obesity as a result of poor parenting skills and misguided familial and cultural examples [rather] than an argument about class injustices” (Herndon 2005, 136). Furthermore, while Birrell explains that Monterroso “is a living embodiment of the obesity culture cursing the world’s wealthiest country,” her position as an immigrant to this country suggests that there is something uniquely problematic or even sinister about fat, Latina/o immigrants within Oklahoma City’s “War on Obesity” (Birrell 2015). His quoting of one outreach official demonstrates the imagined stakes of allowing immigrants to remain fat in Oklahoma City, as officials “make it clear that we don’t want to see their papers; we know many are undocumented. But *their health impacts the city’s health*” (Birrell 2015, emphasis added).

Birrell’s worries about immigrant Latinas/os’ health, therefore, are not based in an altruistic concern for immigrants’ well-being. Rather, immigrants are understood to pose some sort of danger to the city. Birrell’s interviewee states that immigrants’ health “impacts” the health of the city, *not* that immigrants are part of the city. In other words, immigrants are imagined as outsiders who pose a threat to Oklahoma City should they stay fat. While these impacts are unclear beyond the repeated references to Mayor Cornett’s embarrassment at Oklahoma City’s “obesity” rate, it is clear that Velveth Monterroso and those like her, living in “areas where data indicate people are in need of the most help” have been labeled as targets for intervention during the city’s “war on obesity” (Birrell 2015).

This intervention relies on the notion that “obesity is a condition of human causation and therefore necessitates a war against the *group of people* participating in the volitional behaviors that cause it” (Herndon 2005, 130). Furthermore, this functions as a type of “helpful discrimination,” a tactic commonly used in anti-fat discourse (Herndon 2005, 133). While admitting to targeting one group of people based on assumptions about class and race might, in other cases, lead to accusation of racial profiling and discrimination, in the case of the “war on obesity,” there is little reprisal. The confluence of “the war on obesity, the war on poverty, and the war on immigration” allows people like Velveth Monterroso to be targeted by the city and her doctors, and to be maligned by the press because she is named the enemy in each of these wars.

VI. Target Acquired: Latinas/os as Removable Enemies

While Velveth Monterroso is narrated as a “fixable” target who can be helped and even conscripted by the War on Obesity, those on the political Right tend to participate in discourse that does not even consider helping fat Latinas/os lose weight. Rather, language around war functions as a rhetorical strategy in support of deportation or, as Jonathan Inda puts it, “border prophylaxis,” the act of keeping all Latinas/os (fat or otherwise) out of the United States. In late 2015 into early 2016, “federal law enforcement launched raids deporting families back to unstable Central American countries over the Christmas holidays” (Walsh 2016). The media response was immediate, with writers linking raids and deportations to America’s long-standing “war on immigration.” Equally immediate was the response of individuals in online comments, who supported the raids and further clarified that, for many Americans, immigrants (legal or otherwise) were the enemy and the U.S. was at war on its own soil. As commenter “Bikerdoc” argued in the comments section of a Washington Post article about raids, “many Americans have

‘fear and outrage’ too, about their country being *hijacked* in a way they didn't ask for”

(Constable 2016, emphasis added).

The “fear and outrage” “Bikerdoc” expresses appears to be rooted in his or her worry that the United States is in danger from both an outside source (immigrants) and an inside source in the form of “a twisted agenda that seeks to validate criminality and law breaking and bring millions to this country the great majority of whom will either serve to lower wages, take jobs from Americans, and/or require billions in public support [sic].” Commenter “FortyFifteen” takes a similar approach, arguing that he or she will vote for Donald Trump because he is “not as offensive as *giving this country away* to illegals” (Constable 2016). These comments reveal a primary concern of many invested in the “war against immigration,” the idea that those in power or “real” Americans somehow stand to “lose” the United States to outsiders.

Mary Romero’s work on nativist group Mothers Against Illegal Aliens (MAIA) reveals a similar concern, as MAIA’s mission statement argues that white American patriots have two choices. They can either “watch from the sidelines” or “get involved [and] protect your family and country” as the U.S. government “gives away your livelihood, your future and your country” (Romero 2011, 56). Furthermore, MAIA argues that “our children and our country are at *risk* of being *eliminated*” (Romero 2011, 56). For MAIA and its leader and mouthpiece Michelle Dallacroce, the United States is in danger and requires white American women and mothers to show their patriotism by fighting the dual enemies of immigration and immigrants (Romero 2011, 56). MAIA’s nativism is rooted in this imagined “war” taking place in the United States, and categorizes women and children as the central enemies against whom white patriots must fire. Their rhetoric, Romero notes, relies heavily on militaristic language, as immigrants or “illegal aliens” are characterized as engaging in a “mass invasion” that threatens “the streets of

America; the neighborhoods and communities where we live; the malls and stores where we shop” as well as schools and churches (Romero 2011, 59).

In light of the resurgence of public anti-immigrant and nativist discourse during the 2015-2016 presidential election season, MAIA’s website was revamped to include recent statements and “blog posts” seemingly written by Dallacrose herself. Some of her more recent statements include memes supporting Donald Trump’s wish to build a wall between the U.S. and Mexico, as well as blogs purporting to prove that “MOTHERS AGAINST ILLEGAL ALIENS is on the right track!” (Mothers Against Illegal Aliens 2015). Additionally, MAIA’s “Our Message” sidebar (visible on every page of their updated website) argues that Congress and President Obama “must STOP ignoring current laws while rewarding an *occupation from a foreign land*” (Mothers Against Illegal Aliens 2016, emphasis added). MAIA also calls on the President to “STOP ignoring ‘The PEOPLE’ of the United States of America who they have sword [sic] and taken an oath to *defend!*” (Mothers Against Illegal Aliens 2016, emphasis added). Aside from the slippage between “sworn” and “sword,” the organization seems to understand their “mission” in highly militarized terms.

They fear invasion and “occupation” and feel that the government must act as though the United States is at war, defending “The PEOPLE” who are somehow threatened by the children of immigrants. “The PEOPLE” are defined through deixis, a rhetorical “process whereby expressions rely absolutely on context” (Wodak 2008, 61). In the case of nativist discourse deixis is used to “split American society into an in-group, us, and the Other” (Santa Ana 2002, 94). MAIA’s excessive use of deictic terms such as “we,” “our,” and “your” rely on an understanding of a “they” and “their” who simultaneously constitute an Other and a threat. For example, he website’s archives include posts tagged “Illegal Occupation,” a phrase used to

conjure images of military occupation during wartime. One of the posts under this category is an “URGENT MESSAGE” from Dallacroce, telling parents to “ACT NOW! PROTECT YOUR LITTLE ONES!” from “illegal aliens” in the American public school system (Mothers Against Illegal Aliens 2014). Dallacroce goes on to tell readers “IF YOU SIT BACK NOW IT WILL BE TOO LATE!” essentially producing a call to arms for “true” American patriots to take action and fight back against schoolchildren (Mothers Against Illegal Aliens 2014).

Dallacroce’s own page on MAIA’s website uses similar rhetoric, describing her as a “United States Air Force Veteran, mother and wife who has dedicated and devoted her life to PROTECT the AMERICAN FAMILIES AND CHILDREN AGAINST THE ILLEGAL INVASION OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND MEN WHO CONTINUE TO COME ILLEGALLY TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA” (“Meet Michelle Dallacroce” 2016).

This description highlights Dallacroce’s self-narrative as a soldier in the battle against immigrants, and uses her veteran status to posit her as the ultimate citizen-patriot. Furthermore, via this narrative, Dallacroce links her motherhood and military service, using both to exemplify her devotion to “protecting” the nation-state, especially vulnerable women, families, and children from dangerous “invaders.”

VII. Battling the Bulge: “Fat azz wetbacks,” “backward” Latinas/os, and The New Enemy

Ann Coulter’s May 26, 2015 interview with Jorge Ramos on the Fusion network’s “America with Jorge Ramos” briefly centralized “obesity” in the debates surrounding Latina/o immigration. After refusing to hug activist Gaby Pacheco, Coulter commented that when she gains control of immigration, she “will not admit overweight girls” (Boyle 2015). Blogger Libby Watson, writing for Media Matters, linked Coulter’s “despicable commentary” about Pacheco to

a May 27 interview with Sean Hannity in which Coulter “claimed that the US is ‘bringing in people from backward, primitive cultures’” (Watson 2015). Pacheco, deemed an “illegal alien” by conservative writers such as Breitbart’s Matt Boyle, became a lightning rod for insults about her weight and immigration status on conservative websites like Clash Daily. Commenters called Pacheco a “truck in a dress” and suggested that “illegals” diets “prohibit weight loss” because they eat nothing but “frijoles, papas, cervezas and tortillas” (Giles 2015). In response to “Acrifa’s” comment that “Ann would give immigration preference to horse-faced bleach-blond witches,” “bushwacko” responded “[m]uch better than fat azz [sic] wetbacks,” presumably referring to Pacheco (Giles 2015). A commenter identified only as “guest” argued,

“[d]oes anyone ever bother to notice the USA obesity problem was nowhere as bad as it is until we allowed 50 million illegals to invade our country. Most South of the border people are fat. Yes, there are obese Americans black and white, but good grief, Mexicans and South Americans are pretty fat overall compared to our American culture.”

“Guest’s” comment clarifies the imagined relationship between the “obesity epidemic” and immigration, as Latina/o immigrants are understood as quite literally importing the “obesity problem” over the border. In particular, “Guest” and other commenters appear to latch on to Coulter’s idea that the United States is “bringing in people from backward, primitive cultures,” and that Pacheco’s fatness is a clear example of Latinas/os’ primitive nature (Watson 2015). “Alleged Comment” asks the thread “[h]ave they developed anything or are they backwards (even going back thousands of years),” linking Pacheco and her fatness to a type of foreign atavism.

Other commenters seem to maintain similar sentiments, and celebrate the waging of war against fat Latinas/os such as Pacheco. “WesTexan’s” comments in response to user “CoulterWatch’s” assertion that “Coulter is often deliberately obnoxious, “[t]he more the merrier! [Coulter] knows her targets and hits them consistently” plays on the idea of Pacheco’s size, which makes her a physically larger target for Coulter to hit (Giles 2015). “CensoredSpeech” posted a cartoon of a U.S. Marine including the text “We’re surrounded... that simplifies our problem” (Figure 1) and called the U.S. a “[t]arget rich environment!” (Giles 2015).

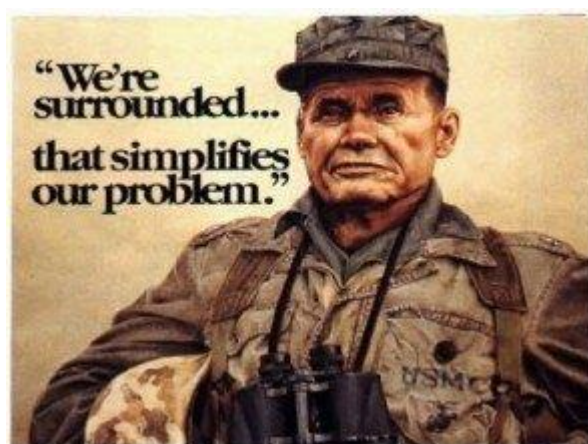


Figure 1: Image post by user “Censored Speech”

In other words, the physical size of Latinas/os like Pacheco makes them an easy target, and the supposedly excessive number of “illegals” also provides more opportunity for efficient and accurate attacks. “19gundog43” repeats this idea further down the comments thread, arguing that at his gym “every Hispanic there are [sic] seriously overweight” and that “[i]f/when ISIS chooses to attack American the lard a\$\$es here will never stand a chance. We will be on our own (just the way I like it!)” (Giles 2015). “19gundog43” sidesteps the idea of direct attacks against Latina/o “lard a\$\$es,” instead preferring to imagine them as expendable bodies who will be the first to die during a terrorist attack. His comments reveal a refusal to see “Hispanics” as Americans or even

potential Americans. Rather, “Hispanics” are—much like ISIS—an enemy to be disposed of by any means, including allowing their wholesale slaughter by terrorists.

VIII. Paranoia, “Too Fat to Fight,” and Fat Latina/o Youth as “Threats to National Security”

Yet, while “19gundog43’s” invocation of ISIS and terrorism situates fat Latinas/os as direct targets of terrorism, Charlotte Biltekoff notes that the “war against obesity also provides a focus for national unity and communal effort that the war on terror lacks,” and does so by maintaining a focus on bodies of color (Biltekoff 2007, 31). This focus “displaces the threat to domestic life [...] from irresponsible government policy to irresponsible behaviors in minority communities,” and distills anxieties about invasion and inadequate American defenses to a rabid concern with how much Latinas/os and African-Americans weigh (Biltekoff 2007, 31). In other words, fat Latinas/os are not usually considered victims or targets of terror, but perpetrators of similar forms of fear and anxiety.

Biltekoff also notes that the simultaneous anxieties around “invasion” and “health” coalesce on “minority bodies and behaviors they are already prone to considering unruly, chaotic, and or threatening” (Biltekoff 2007, 40). Surgeon General Richard Carmona’s 2003 interview with NPR solidified this link, explaining that “I’ve come to refer to it [obesity] as the terror within because it’s every bit as devastating as terrorism” (Edwards 2003, Biltekoff 2007). His comments reflect an important aspect of the modern rhetorical war against Latina/o immigration and “obesity.” Fears of outside invaders attacking an American nation-state that is deemed too fat to defend itself exacerbate prominent concerns about the supposed dangers of obesity and create an environment in which fat people and fat immigrants in particular are held up as examples of what is “wrong” with the United States.

As Charlotte Biltekoff argues, the “terror within” constituted by the obesity epidemic has its roots in burgeoning awareness “of [middle and upper class Americans’] dependence on the bodies of minority populations” (Biltekoff 2007, 41). While the need for Latina/o bodies in terms of the American consumption of Latina/o labor, cultural products (food, music, and fashion, for example), and military service might seem as though it should preclude the designation of “enemy” and “threat,” it in fact does not. Rather, as Leo Chavez notes, the “Latino Threat Narrative” relies on a narrative of difference and non-integration that does not necessarily preclude a recognition of Latina/o utility (Chavez 2013, 178). Yet, the anxiety surrounding Latina/o youth obesity suggests that part of the threat posed by Latinas/os is that they someday might *not* be useful to the nation-state. In particular, this concern appears to manifest most strongly in discussions of military service and the potential loss of a population of soldiers whose weight might prevent them from going into battle.

For example, in April 2015, CNN anchor Carol Costello interviewed Major General Allen Batschelet, the Commanding General for the United States Army Reserve Command for an opinion piece entitled “America: Too Fat to Fight” (Costello 2015). The resulting article begins with a dire warning: “[f]orget about rampant diabetes, heart attacks and joint problems -- the scariest consequence arising out of our losing battle with the bulge is the safety of our country” (Costello 2015). During their interview, Major General Batschelet explained that while he might not be ready to call it a “crisis” at this point, “[obesity] really becomes a national security issue” when ten percent of military applicants “didn’t qualify because they were overweight” (Costello 2015). The title and general argument of Costello’s article has its roots in a 2010 report issued by Mission: Readiness, a group of “retired Generals, Admirals, and other senior leaders of the United States Armed Forces” (“Too Fat to Fight” 2010). In “Too Fat to

Fight,” Mission: Readiness argues that “[b]eing overweight or obese turns out to be the leading medical reason why applicants fail to qualify for military service,” and for this reason, we must fight childhood obesity (“Too Fat to Fight” 2010). In 2012, Mission: Readiness released “Still Too Fat to Fight,” and in 2015, “Too Fat, Frail, and Out-of-Breath to Fight.”

In response to this most recent report, commenters on an article distributed by Minnesota CBS affiliate WCCO began to speculate on the political and demographic leanings of the “obese.” The conversation soon turned to issues of race, with commenter “SWDC” stating “[w]hen one thinks of the average Mexican and or Latino what image does one immediately think of?” in response to commenter “pkaboo’s” claim that “[c]hances are the obese tend to vote blue more than not, particularly if their obesity renders them welfare worthy. I’m sure either side has their fair share of fatties though” (“CBS Minnesota Disqus Page” 2015). Commenters on InfoWars’ coverage of the same article made similar connections, with commenter “norm” explaining that the answer to the question of why so few children and young people are “fit to fight” can be found by “[j]ust follow[ing] the demographic trend line according to the CDC” which proves that “Non-Hispanic blacks have the highest age-adjusted rates of obesity (47.8%) followed by Hispanics (42.5%), non-Hispanic whites (32.6%), and non-Hispanic Asians (10.8%)” (Jones 2015). In response, “Whatsmyname2” suggests that food is the issue, as “Soul food is a lot of meat and dairy and so is a lot of the Hispanic food really” (Jones 2015). Presumably, the large number of “obese” Hispanics and African-Americans is understood to explain why the country is—as a whole—now “too fat to fight.”

At least one commenter—“Noah172”—on The American Conservative’s discussion of “too fat to fight” also noted the danger of Latina/o and Black “obesity,” explaining that “Black and Hispanic (the latter having varying degrees of Amerindian admixture) have higher rates of

obesity (likely with a genetic/evolutionary aspect), and are overrepresented in the military (especially blacks) relative to their shares of the general population” (Dreher 2012). For “Noah172,” the “higher rates of obesity” combined with the overrepresentation of Black and Latina/o soldiers is a somewhat more nuanced cause for alarm, as American dependence on those bodies in particular for military service means that if they are “too fat to fight,” the threat to national security is very real. Commenters on “financial blog” Zero Hedge also set their sights on Latina/o populations as the source of the “obesity” problem in the military. “rgetty” commented that “blame te [sic] Mexicans if you saw the latest yahoo articoe [sic] of where the immigrants are from its shocking. almost every state the largest immigrant population is MEXICAN I dont have the link but when you see it its fucked up” (Durden 2014). Commenter “post turtle saver” argues that “no shit...those lists [of military recruits] practically scream ‘not fit for duty because poor Hispanic that eats beans, lard, and flour all day” (Durden 2014). “Wait What” responds that “at least it means those mexicans [sic] coming over illegally aren’t taking over our military. Sometimes you gotta take a win where you can get it” (Durden 2014).

The seamless logical jump to discussions of Latina/o “obesity” in discussions of “too fat to fight” demonstrates the ways in which the racialization of the “war against obesity” situates Latinas/os as the most problematically fat demographic group. Latina/o fatness—supposedly caused by culturally-specific foods and genetic predispositions to laziness and weight gain—is quickly taken up as the cause of American military weakness as Latinas/os are understood as incapable of defending the country they have “invaded.” Especially in what Charlotte Biltekoff calls the post-9/11 “culture of fear” in which Americans live in a “perpetual sense of the danger,” “obesity” comes to be characterized as a “danger to national security”(Biltekoff 2007, 32). Those groups who are most often characterized as “obese” are imagined as the very embodiment of that

threat. Thus, while “obesity” might be the enemy in the “war on obesity,” Latinas/os are rapidly becoming the face of the “terror within” (Biltekoff 2007, 29).

The consistent characterizations of Latinas/os as fatter than white Americans or more likely to be overweight than white Americans are an important and often overlooked component of the “cohesive set of ideas” that comprise the idea of difference and non-integration (Chavez 2013, 178). Latina/o bodies are imagined as physically different, and therefore uncontrollable and unpredictable, and in their uncontrolled excess, they are also marked as either refusing to integrate or simply unable to do so. The lack of control and predictability attached to Latina/o bodies supposedly more prone to “obesity” invokes an anxiety similar to that invoked by the threat of terrorism. This, coupled with the dependence on Latina/o bodies as laborers and soldiers, also produces concern that the country will not be adequately protected from terroristic outsiders by useful, yet disposable, outsiders.

The next chapter examines the prominent health discourses that characterize “obesity” as an illness while simultaneously linking Latinas/os and Latina/o immigration to dangerous American health crises. The chapter focuses on the conflation between Latinas/os and ill-health supposedly caused by obesity to help elucidate the role of health, disease, and illness discourses that reinforce notions of Latinas/os as more likely to be “obese.” Additionally, this chapter continues the discussion of simultaneous anti-fat and anti-Latina/o immigrant discourse in conservative and right-wing nativist rhetoric, while also demonstrating the use of anti-fat rhetoric as a tool for shifting focus and funds toward underserved communities.

Chapter 4: “Curing a Sick Nation:” Modern Discursive Constructions of Fat and Latina/o Immigration

I. Introduction

While the discourse of a “war on obesity” requires the construction of enemies, it also necessitates the building of weapons with which to fight the battle. The most prominent (yet ineffective) weapon in this war is the medicalization of fatness as “overweight” and “obesity,” illnesses that can and should be treated by medical interventions. Despite arguments that medicalizing fatness as obesity should “absolve individuals of responsibility for their condition and depersonalize disease,” this framework simply shifts the stigma of fatness and “implies the obligation of the sick person to get well” (Saguy and Riley 2005, 891). Sickness, therefore, is not a neutral state but one to which certain stigmas are attached, such as biological difference and inherently “flawed” bodies (Saguy and Riley 2005, 892). As Saguy and Riley argue, “framing obesity as a deadly disease suggests that fat people should seek medical treatment, even if it is risky and has a low probability of success” (Saguy and Riley 2005, 891). Under this medicalization model, the onus is placed on the fat individual and in this case, fat Latinas/os and the Latina/o community as a whole, to “fix” the problem of obesity. Additionally, sickness and its attached epidemic frameworks are “historically associated with fear and sudden widespread death” which allows for a modern usage of the “term *epidemic* as an emotionally charged metaphor” (Saguy and Riley 2005, 892).

This chapter examines the role of this metaphor along with discourses that posit fatness, immigration, and the bodies of these immigrants as “sick,” “ill,” “diseased,” and “dying.” These discourses shape notions of belonging and citizenship by, as Charles Rosenberg puts it, “cloth[ing] certain undesirable yet blandly tolerated social phenomena in the emotional urgency

associated with a ‘real’ epidemic” (Rosenberg 1992, 279). As fatness and immigration become linked in the popular imaginary to certain racialized bodies, health and illness discourses become tools with which stigmas around blame, risk, threat, and embodied difference are attached to Latina/o bodies and communities. This stigmatization justifies refusals to accept Latinas/os and Latina/o immigrants as truly American by framing them as sick and dying. In this formulation, they are useless at best, and draining at worst, as they presumably lead to increased healthcare costs and decreased labor productivity.

II. Nostalgia For a Healthy America: “Make America Great Again”

For many on the political Right, the ill or diseased state of the nation is imagined as a modern issue, allowing for a direct juxtaposition between a “sick” present and a “healthy” past. This is particularly true in public political rhetoric that uses anxiety about the nation-state to curry voter favor through promising to fix the nation-state. The media frenzy surrounding the 2015-2016 presidential campaign demonstrates the power of publicly presented discourse, especially that which is disseminated via social media such as Twitter. In particular, businessman and presidential hopeful Donald Trump’s resurrection of former president Ronald Reagan’s campaign slogan, “Let’s make America great again,” for his own campaign reflects the powerful pull of nostalgia in the contemporary political arena (“Make America Great Again! | Donald J Trump for President” 2016). Transforming the phrase from slogan to hashtag (#MakeAmericaGreatAgain #Trump2016), Trump and his supporters called on both Reagan era nostalgia and a more broad nostalgia for a “better” time when America was “great.” campaign demonstrates the power of giving voice

As Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles argue, “[n]ostalgia is a powerful political/rhetorical appeal because of its emotional resonance with an audience and because of the identification it

creates between political leaders and their audiences” (Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles 2000, 421). In Donald Trump’s case, it allows for a clearer identification between an economically-diverse base of white voters and a businessman whose net worth in 2015 stood at 4.5 *billion* dollars, a sum likely unimaginable to most of his voting audience (“Donald Trump - Forbes” 2016). While it must be noted that Donald Trump’s resonance during this political moment does not necessarily reflect core Republican or conservative values, the public interest in Trump does appear to lie in his appeals to an undercurrent of nostalgia linked to nativism xenophobia. In other words, as supporters tout the idea that Trump “says what everyone else is just thinking,” the transformation of (supposedly) privately-held values to public rhetoric in Trump’s campaign offers validation to nativist narratives of the American past (Sweeney 2016). Furthermore, Trump’s invocation of nostalgia for America’s past “greatness” functions to retroactively shape an idealized history in which the happiness and comfort of he and his supporters was once guaranteed. Trump deploys nostalgia in order to promote the idea that the past was a time during which white men’s power and comfort was guaranteed (Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles 2000, 421).

For Trump and his imagined audience, America’s “great” past was, in part, predicated on closed borders and an absence of “foreign workers” whose presence in the present “holds down salaries, keeps unemployment high, and makes it difficult for poor and working class Americans –including immigrants themselves and their children –to earn a middle class wage” (“Immigration Reform” 2016). Importantly, an aspect of this idealized past comes in the form of policies that include forcing Mexico to build a wall along the U.S.’s southern border, ending birthright citizenship, and generally continuing to criminalize immigration by “enhancing penalties for overstaying a visa” (“Immigration Reform” 2016).

This idealized past, however, demonstrates nostalgia's distinction from both memory and history, as "nostalgia *distorts the past for the sake of affect* and is more culturally specific and normative" (Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles 2000, 421). For example, Trump's platform requires an understanding of immigration as a modern inconvenience, one wrought by "amnesty, cheap labor and open borders" supposedly favored by the political left (Boyle 2015). This understanding of immigration as a modern aspect of the American nation-state is ahistorical at best, glossing over the presence and contributions of immigrants from the country's inception, especially Latino immigrants as part of the Bracero Program from 1942 to 1964. Furthermore, I argue that Trump's particular call for an affective past utilizes nostalgia's potential as "the means for holding onto and reaffirming identities which had been badly bruised by the turmoil of the times," in this case, native-born, most often *white* American identities (Davis 1977, 422).

III. Illness, Imported Disease, and a Dying Nation-State

Fred Davis' reading of nostalgia as a kind of salve for bruised identities can be seen in Trump and others' understanding of the modern U.S. nation-state as sick and dying. In November 2015, Trump released his memoir/political manifesto entitled *Crippled America: How to Make America Great Again*, relying on a metaphor which Disability Studies author and writer Stephen Kuusisto argues "is a Tea Party fiction: America is hobbled, not what it used to be, dependent on government, weak in the knees, no longer able to sit up and take nourishment" (Kuusisto 2015). This metaphor is common in Trump's press releases, including his "immigration plan," in which Trump cites a March 2015 CBS Moneywatch article that begins by arguing, "[i]f the middle-class is the economic backbone of America, then the country is developing osteoporosis" (Picchi 2015).

The current infirmity of the nation-state, therefore, is a disease caused by the “influx of *foreign workers*” who bring with them wage depression and poverty (“Immigration Reform” 2016, emphasis mine). I argue that Trump’s invocation of a progressive and often disabling illness such as osteoporosis reflects Otto Santa Ana’s assertion that “the Nation As Body metaphor continues to impose its antiquated logic on twenty-first-century citizen” and in fact, functions to link individual citizen bodies to a larger body politic (Santa Ana 2002, 259). The “crippling” effects of osteoporosis are meant to conjure images of a non-functional American economy as well as the native-born American laborers who are rendered unemployed by “our existing all-time historic record population of 42 million immigrants” (“Immigration Reform” 2016). Santa Ana situates this metaphoric rendering of immigration “within the medical model” in which immigration is imagined as a disease or a “societal affliction” (Santa Ana 2002, 71). Thus, the modern American state is now *unhealthy*, as the disease of immigration weakens the American economy and supposedly threatens the well-being of American citizens.

As Leo Chavez argues, “[i]mmigrants are said to penetrate the body of the nation metaphorically—in much the same way that germs penetrate the human body—and can, if left unchecked, weaken and even kill the nation by destroying its institutions” (Chavez 2013, 127). Markel and Stern note that during times of increased immigration and movement to the United States, Americans narrate “illness among immigrants already settled in the United States as an imported phenomenon” (Markel and Stern 2002, 758). Furthermore, Markel and Stern highlight the malleability and utility of this discourse, as classifications “that emphasized contagion, mental disorder, chronic disability, or even a *questionable physique*” have appeared again and again in 20th century anti-immigrant discourse (Markel and Stern 2002, 758; emphasis added). This anxiety over imported illness is a deeply disturbing aspect of American immigration history,

as the late 19th-century predecessors to modern immigration legislation allowed for the exclusion of “those persons suffering from a ‘loathsome or contagious disease’ and required steamship companies to inspect and disinfect all immigrants” (Markel and Stern 2002, 761). Yet, this historical precedent is not without modern examples, ranging from the exclusion of HIV-positive immigrants to arguments that “[t]he ongoing flood of invaders pouring across the Mexico-US border are coming from nations that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has officially warned of being the center of a Zika virus outbreak” (“Immigrants’ Come from Zika Alert Nations” 2016).

In contemporary debates around immigration, Latina/o immigrants in particular are imagined as disease vectors whose presence threatens to infect the previously “healthy” nation-state with both metaphorical and literal sickness. Ann Coulter’s arguments about Latina/o immigration and immigrants conjures this fear of immigrants as potential vectors of “illness, disease, parasites, and plagues that threaten the nation” (Chavez 2013, 127). In her 2013 opinion piece, Coulter explains that during what she understands as the heyday of immigration, “[f]rom around 1630 to 1966, immigrants sank or swam. About a third of them couldn’t make it in America and went home -- and those are the ones who weren’t rejected right off the boat for being sick, crippled or idiots” (Coulter 2013). Thus, in a stunningly insensitive moment of nostalgia, Coulter cites practices of eugenics that effectively barred ill or disabled immigrants from entering the country as evidence of a supposed “golden age” of immigration.

Similarly, Donald Trump has argued that along with “heroin, cocaine and other illicit drugs [...] tremendous *infectious disease* is pouring across the border. The United States has become a dumping ground for Mexico” (quoted in Walker 2015). This assertion has become a popular rhetorical tool for those seeking to limit immigration across the Mexico-U.S. border,

including Georgia Representative Phil Gingrey, who cited concerns about “swine flu, dengue fever, Ebola virus and tuberculosis” as well as arguing that “[m]any of the children who are coming across the border also lack basic vaccinations such as those to prevent chicken pox or measles” (Fox 2014). Despite Gingrey’s medical background as a physician, NBC Health Correspondent Maggie Fox argues that Gingrey’s 2014 letter of concern to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) “rests firmly on innuendo and fear-mongering [and] proudly continues this unethical tradition” (Fox 2014). In his letter, Gingrey requests “that the public be notified of” what he understands as the risks engendered by “the severe and dangerous nature” of unaccompanied minors crossing the Mexico-U.S. border (Gingrey 2014). He argues that “the diseases carried by these children may begin to spread too rapidly to control,” conjuring fears of “public health cris[es]” and uncontrolled epidemics that may start to infringe upon the health of the American public (Gingrey 2014).

For both Coulter and Trump, contemporary immigration policies and the presence of “immigrants from the Third World” such as Mexico and other Latin American countries rather than those “from the nations that historically provided our immigrants” have led America to its current state of illness (Coulter 2013). Coulter’s association of “[p]re-1965 immigrants” with majority white populations such as “England, our mother country,” Australia, and Canada and her insistence that these populations “were what made this country what it was” echoes Trump’s nostalgic and distorted view of a once-great America (Coulter 2013). Furthermore, Coulter reaffirms an imagined healthy nation once primarily open to and populated by healthy white immigrants and their descendants. I argue that in their anti-Latina/o immigrant fervor, Coulter and Trump link race and illness, thus racializing *health* as white and illness as a characteristic of Latina/o immigrant bodies and communities.

Like Coulter and Trump, Gingrey also posits the diseased state of immigrants as a type of foreign atavism, as “the United States has been successful in mitigating or eradicating many diseases, and others are not indigenous to this country” (Gingrey 2014). In other words, countries other than the United States are characterized by their lack of modernity, demonstrated by their inability to “mitigate” and “eradicate” diseases through medical technology. Immigrants’ presence in the United States threatens to undo Gingrey’s revised history of the United States’ rise to medical modernity by re-introducing “old” diseases to the American public as well as foreign or non-“indigenous” illnesses against which American bodies have no defenses (Gingrey 2014).

IV. Sick Brown Bodies: Obesity Epidemic Discourse in Narratives of Latina/o Health

While assertions that Mexicans and other immigrants from Latin America are carriers of infectious diseases has been challenged by media outlets and medical professionals, linkages between Latinas/os to other, non-communicable illnesses continue to dominate discussions of Latina/o health (Fox 2014). In particular, Latinas/os are often cited as more likely to be overweight or obese and Latina/o communities are often described as “disproportionately” overweight and obese. Many of these statistics rely heavily on Body Mass Index (BMI) as the standard by which “overweight,” “obesity,” and their presumed ill effects on health are determined (“Obesity - The Office of Minority Health” 2013). While the efficacy of BMI in determining health status and outcomes has long been questioned by Fat Studies scholars and others, this debate was reinvigorated in the popular press upon the publication of Tomiyama et al.’s 2016 article, which argued forcefully that when “[u]sing BMI categories as the main indicator of health, an estimated 74,936,678 US adults are misclassified as cardiometabolically unhealthy or cardiometabolically healthy” (Tomiyama et al. 2016).

Yet, despite the unclear relationship between body weight and health, Latinas/os are still depicted by medical professionals and media sources as a sick people based on the focus and popular proliferation of limited statistical data regarding their BMI. In September 2014, *The State of Obesity*, a yearly report aimed toward “rais[ing] awareness about the seriousness of the obesity epidemic” released an analysis entitled “Obesity Prevention in Latino Communities” (“Special Report: Racial and Ethnic Disparities” 2014). According to the report distributed by the Trust for America’s Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, “Latinos are the fastest growing population in the United States — it is estimated that nearly one in three children will be Latino by 2030 — so addressing these disparities is essential for the well-being of individuals and families and to help contain skyrocketing U.S. healthcare spending and increase the nation's productivity” (“Special Report: Racial and Ethnic Disparities” 2014) The “disparities” they reference include “inequities in access to healthcare, the quality of care received” as well as “higher rates of hunger and food insecurity, limited access to safe places to be physically active and targeted marketing of less nutritious foods” (“Special Report: Racial and Ethnic Disparities” 2014). Although these issues stand alone as clear indicators of inequality and health disparities for Latina/o communities, media reports distill these multiple structural issues into a single problem: “higher rates of obesity.” “Obesity,” therefore, becomes an indicator of all that is plaguing the Latina/o community. However, this conflation of social ills and structural inequality with the medicalized categories of “overweight” and “obese” oversimplifies and elides the causes and impacts of inequality and shifts the focus to individual bodies.

In 2010, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) partnered with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation—responsible for *The State of Obesity*—to launch the Latinos Living Healthy Initiative, “an effort to reduce childhood obesity among vulnerable populations”

with a special focus on Latinas/os. According to the initiative, “[c]hildhood obesity is currently the biggest *health* challenge our nation is facing, particularly among Hispanic youth (“Latinos Living Healthy Initiative” 2011, emphasis added). I highlight the initiative’s rhetorical focus on health, seen even in its name, to offer a critique of the conflation between body size and illness as it is so often applied to Latina/o communities. Importantly, both the special report on “Obesity in Latino Communities” and the Latinos Living Healthy Initiative cite “[s]everal factors can prevent many Latinos from participating in programs that could provide increased access to healthier choices” such as food insecurity, language barriers, legal vulnerability due to immigration status, and inactivity due to “[l]imited access to safe places to be physically active” (“Latinos Living Healthy Initiative” 2011). Yet, these “factors” are not understood as problems in and of themselves. Rather, they are narrated as both direct and indirect causes of weight gain and “obesity” which are in turn characterized as markers and causal factors of illness.

I argue that the special report on “Obesity in Latino Communities” takes as its focus “why inequities in obesity rates matter” rather than the more pressing questions of systemic racism that produce the social inequities cited above (“Special Report: Racial and Ethnic Disparities” 2014). In their construction of ill health and sickness, body weight and size are the objects of attack rather than direct results of systemic racism such as food deserts and lack of equitable access to health care. Much of this redirection of concern and effort centers on the notion that “obesity” is either 1.) a disease; or 2.) a direct cause of illness. Similarly, the Latinos Living Healthy Initiative argues (without citations) that “obesity is a risk factor for several diseases” but under this header suggest that “[d]iabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and stroke can be attributed to obesity” and “75% of hypertension cases can be attributed to obesity”

(2011). They also present statistics about “Latinos and Diabetes” without context, expecting that the link between type 2 diabetes and “obesity” is widely understood and irrefutable (2011).

The Latinos Living Healthy Initiative in particular utilizes “obesity” and “health” as proxies for larger issues impacting Latina/o youth. In their handout, under the heading “Hunger and Food Insecurity Contributes to the Onset of Obesity,” they link the “onset of obesity” with “poor behavioral and academic functioning” and school “absenteeism,” as childrens’ “obesity” prevents their regular attendance—and the academic achievement that could result (2011). While it is unclear whether LULAC and the Latinos Living Healthy Initiative are arguing that hunger/food insecurity or obesity are the cause of poor academic performance, it is clear that they are unwilling to consider the possibility of psychological and emotional barriers to academic performance and “good behavior” resulting from the bullying and harassment faced by many fat children. In other words, rigid definitions of health and self-responsibility for health outcomes form the foundations of key narratives surrounding Latina/o youth, situating Latinas/os as unhealthy not because of the multiple stigmas attached to fatness, but because of fatness itself (Pan et al. 2013).

V. “The Leading Cause of Death:” Obesity-Related Disease and Sounding the Alarm

The 2013 CNN Health article entitled “Beautiful but deadly: Latinos’ curves put them at risk” continues to use “obesity” as a proxy for other health issues, beginning with the death of 44-year-old Helen Casillas as her cousin “wonders” if Casillas “would still be alive today if she had been more aware of how her weight contributed to her diabetes” (Rodriguez 2013). In a since deleted blog post, Casillas’ cousin, Elma Dieppa argued that “[s]he refused to take care of herself by not watching what she ate or exercising” (Rodriguez 2013). While CNN reporter Cindy Y. Rodriguez characterizes this blog post as “honoring the woman [Dieppa] describes ‘as

the life of the party,” I argue that in its reproduction as part of “a three-part series about health issues in the Latino community in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month” serves to blame Casillas for her own death (Rodriguez 2013). The woman remembered as “the life of the party” is criticized in death for her refusal to “believe she was obese” and “heed the warnings” of medical professionals who called for “an aggressive approach to her weight loss” (Rodriguez 2013). The remainder of the article expands on this theme of blame, suggesting that while many Latinas/os lack access to preventative care, Latinas/os are also “raised to be self-reliant” and therefore do not visit doctors and are “the ethnic group least likely to use prescription medicine in 2010”(Rodriguez 2013). Furthermore, despite healthcare providers’ argument that “the health care system needs to change so physicians don’t struggle to get their patients the treatment they deserve,” the article ends with a re-articulation of Casillas’ compliance in her own demise (Rodriguez 2013). Casillas’ death is characterized as one “that could have been prevented” but not by her physicians or better access to healthcare, but by her own admission of obesity (Rodriguez 2013).

I argue that this popular press article demonstrates the role of alarmist, anti-obesity narratives that, under the guise of discussing the health, lives, and lifestyles of Latinas/os, reproduce narratives of impending Latina/o death. At the same moment that the mere presence of Latinas/os is understood as a cause for concern, worries about the prevalence of “obesity-related” deaths are also a defining feature of health discourses surrounding Latinas/os. As April Herndon argues, “[f]or those already marginalized within US culture—including women, people of color, immigrants, working-class and poor people—being fat can be yet one more badge of stigma” (Herndon 2005, 129). This stigma, I argue, is one based on Latina/o propensity for sickness and death as the war against obesity is “waged against those bodies and identities

most easily identified with the disease” (Herndon 2005, 137). Importantly, much of this concern can be found in the literature of organizations focusing on the well-being of Latinas/os, suggesting that obesity-epidemic discourse has made significant inroads into the narrative construction of Latina/o life—and death—in the United States.

For example, in 2010, the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL) released a policy brief entitled “Hispanic Obesity: An American Crisis.” The pamphlet’s cover includes the title in what can only be described as “threat level: high” orange, flanked on either side by two scales, both of which are pointing to 200, presumably in pounds (Martinez et al. 2010). The NHCSL President, Illinois Senator Iris Y. Martinez opens the pamphlet by discussing the need for such a project, arguing that “Latino obesity is not just about esthetic concerns. With rising obesity comes an increase in *morbid diseases* including heart disease, diabetes, and cancer—all of which are already overrepresented among Latino communities and cause *early death*” (Martinez et al. 2010, emphasis added). Similarly, the pamphlet argues that according to the Centers for Disease Control, “many of [the top ten causes of death in the Latino community] are obesity-related diseases” (Martinez et al. 2010, 12). This alarming revelation is paired with what Charlotte Cooper describes as a “headless fatty,” in this case a light-skinned, presumably Latina woman wearing workout clothes and standing in profile. The focus of the photograph is her protruding belly which, as Cooper notes is one of the “symbols of cultural fear” embedded in anti-obesity discourse (Cooper 2007). In particular, I argue that this fear is a fear of death and an oversimplification of the role of body size in morbidity and mortality. In other words, “Hispanic Obesity: An American Crisis” characterizes obesity as a death sentence, using variations of the words “death” and “die” as well as “morbid” over 30 times throughout the document (Martinez et al. 2010).

A key aspect of this association of body size and death comes from the construction of the “obesity-related disease.” The definitions and lists of “obesity-related diseases” varies widely, often including diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, high cholesterol level, “some forms of cancer,” “premature mortality and disability,” sexual function and satisfaction, and even mental and emotional health issues such as depression and anxiety (“Obesity Causes: CDC” 2015; “Health Risks: Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health” 2016). The phrase “obesity-related” appears 19 times in the NCHSL’s “Hispanic Obesity,” reproducing alarmist discourses that posit body size and weight as a clear causal factor in what many fear most: disease and death. As Amy Erdman Farrell argues, contemporary discussions of “obesity” are usually health-focused and “deliberately alarmist, suggesting imminent danger and sure catastrophe if not addressed” (Farrell 2011, 8). She notes the “apocalyptic” and deliberately misleading tone of media representations of fatness that medicalize fatness and demonize high body weight as a health risk or a proven causal factor in illness and death (Farrell 2011, 8).

VI. Dangerously Fat: Future Costs and Labor Lost

For Latinas/os in particular, the invocation of illness and death in anti-obesity discourse specifically targeting this group often reifies constructions of Latinas/os as relevant to the nation-state only in terms of their futurity. The 2014 “Obesity Prevention in Latino Communities” opens with this concern about the future racial/ethnic makeup of the United States, telling readers that “Latinos are the fastest growing population in the United States,” thus suggesting that the stakes of Latina/o obesity are high based on the future number of Latinas/os in the United States (“Special Report: Racial and Ethnic Disparities” 2014). The report situates the size of the Latina/o population as requiring vigilance in two ways: first, readers and policymakers must take note of how many of there will be and second, they must be aware of the literal sizes

of individual bodies. In both cases, the danger of Latina/o excess is one characterized by what *could* happen in the future. I argue that within discourses of Latina/o “obesity” and health, Latinas/os are generally imagined in terms of their potential ability to provide services and labor to the nation-state. “Obesity” and the health issues related to it understood as barriers to Latinas/os’ potential utility. Thus, the Latina/o “threat” posed by obesity is two-fold, as Latinas/os are imagined both as overconsumers of social goods and services, as well as poor or non-producers of goods and capital.

For example, in response to the question about “why obesity rates matter,” the authors of “Obesity Prevention in Latino Communities” argue that “[r]educing health disparities among Latinos is important for the future health of the country” (“Special Report: Racial and Ethnic Disparities” 2014). Thus, the importance of Latinas/os is first and foremost linked to their potential to damage the nation-state. While it could be argued that this line of thinking situates Latinas/os as acceptable citizen-subjects, the concern with “sav[ing] billions of dollars in healthcare costs — because the U.S. Latino population is expected to grow from 18 percent in 2012 to more than 30 percent in 2060” suggests that the acceptance of Latinas/os is conditional (“Special Report: Racial and Ethnic Disparities” 2014). Being too costly could endanger Latinas/os’ claim to belonging. The same document goes on to argue that “[e]liminating health inequalities could lead to reduced medical expenditures of \$54 billion to \$61 billion a year” (“Special Report: Racial and Ethnic Disparities” 2014). The hand-wringing over Latina/o health, therefore, is rooted in concerns about the potential financial drain Latinas/os might pose to the nation-state.

This focus on the financial impacts of Latina/o “obesity,” I argue, is linked to understandings of Latinas/os and the “overweight” and “obese” as “undeserving members of

society” (Chavez 125). In his discussion of the death of organ transplant recipient Jesica Santillan, Chavez notes that conservatives constructed Santillan’s medical care in the United States as “an example of the undeserving ‘illegal’ immigrants coming to America to take from the deserving citizens” (Chavez 2013, 125). Similarly, much of the modern discourse surrounding body weight and healthcare relies on a construction of “legitimate” versus “illegitimate” recipients of care and medical expenditure. “Overweight” and “obese” patients are understood as drains on the healthcare system, as it is their “fault” for being fat and any health concerns that they have are immediately imagined as “weight-related.” Latinas/os, too, are understood as illegitimate subjects not only for their food and exercise “choices,” but also for the fact that they should not be in the United States to begin with and therefore should not lay claim to the rights and services to remain healthy and alive.

In his discussion of organ transplants, Chavez argues that “[p]ublic discourse that accuses immigrants of draining medical resources and positing a threat to the very life of citizens [...] serves as a practice that disciplines immigrants” (Chavez 2013, 130). While this example is very narrow and the practices of organ donation and anti-obesity campaigning seem to have little in common, I suggest that the two are linked by the rhetoric of expenditures made on the “wrong” bodies. The discourse of non-citizens costing the nation-state too much is often utilized in discussion of Latina/o obesity and in addition to functioning as a disciplinary measure, this discourse also sets the scene for conditional citizenship. In this configuration, Latinas/os are “less valued than others (citizens)” and therefore demonized for their use of healthcare and accused of being excess consumers of goods and services (Chavez 2013, 131). I argue that rhetorical construction of Latinas/os as “more likely to be” or “disproportionately” overweight and obese creates the conditions by which this population is multiply situated outside the bounds

of the “deserving” citizen. They are first defined as outsiders through what Chavez defines as the “simplistic” binary of citizen/immigrant and second, they are marked by the various stigma attached to fatness and deemed lazy, gluttonous, stupid, and so incapable of proper bodily comportment that they make themselves sick and act as a drain on the economy and the healthcare industry (Chavez 2013, 144).

In addition to the notion that “overweight” and “obese” Latinas/os will consume an unequal share of healthcare resources, discourse about “overweight” and “obese” Latinas/os also betrays a simultaneous concern that this group will not be able to contribute adequate amounts of labor and money to the nation-state. As Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas argue in their work on biological citizenship, modern medicine’s ability (or perceived ability) to make the body legible and eminently fixable and usable allows the body and its parts to be understood as economically useful (Rose and Novas 2004, 30). Leo Chavez links their work directly to Latina/o immigration and access to healthcare, taking what they term “biovalue” as “the value of the body as a commodity” (Chavez 2013, 130). While Rose, Novas, and Chavez are discussing the literal tissues, organs, and even genes of the body, I move to understand biovalue in terms of labor. In other words, as bodies are used in “the creation of wealth” by creating marketable medical treatments often stemming from the healthy status of the individual (for example, organ donation), bodies are also used as labor or potential labor once again based on the presumed or desired healthy status of the worker in question (Rose and Novas 2004, 30).

The understanding of Latinas/os as important potential laborers is clear in the “Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Obesity” report. The report’s central thesis argues that “addressing these disparities is essential for the well-being of individuals and families and to help contain skyrocketing U.S. healthcare spending and *increase the nation's productivity*” (“Special Report:

Racial and Ethnic Disparities” 2014, emphasis added). The concern regarding “the fastest growing population in the United States” is a concern about the future utility of a labor force, especially as the “nearly one in three children [who] will be Latino by 2030” are understood as future workers who must contribute to the nation-state (“Special Report: Racial and Ethnic Disparities” 2014). Citing LaVeist, et al.’s 2011 article entitled “Estimating the Economic Burden of Racial Health Inequalities in the United States,” the report notes that “eliminating health inequalities could [...] recover \$13 billion annually due to work lost by illness and about \$250 billion per year due to premature deaths” (“Special Report: Racial and Ethnic Disparities” 2014).

Importantly, while LaVeist, et al. argue that “it is not our intent that the utilitarian argument should replace moral deliberation or the application of social justice,” the application of their work within a racialized anti-obesity framework produces precisely that effect (LaVeist et al 2011, 235). In particular, their argument that “[t]he large number of premature deaths represents a substantial loss of human potential, a loss of talent and productivity that might otherwise have contributed to the betterment of society” combines with racially-inflected inequalities in labor that situate bodies of color—and Latinas/os especially—not as citizens, but as a “disposable workforce” (LaVeist et al 2011, 235; Molina 2010, 166) As Natalia Molina explains, “Mexican immigration was (and continues to be) primarily labor migration,” a history that shapes the understanding of Latinas/os’ presence in the United States (Molina 2010, 158). In her discussion of the American cultural narratives of Mexicans, Molina argues that the primary association of Mexicans with their potential ability to labor during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries served to divest them of citizenship “even though they were eligible for citizenship and some, of course, were citizens and had families who had been in the United States for

generations” (Molina 2010, 165). I argue that this characterization of Mexicans and Latinas/os has shifted very little, and anti-obesity rhetoric directed at Latina/o communities demonstrates that it is still “their labor, not their civic participation, that [is] desired” (Molina 2010, 165).

The concern for the impacts that Latinas/os will have on the future success and “productivity” of the United States’ echoes conservative politicians’ insistence that Latinas/os do and will continue to threaten the nation-state. In particular, the couching of Latinas/os as potentially productive or destructive as a question of health versus illness lends extra import to controlling the bodies of Latinas/os through health discourse. Thus, the “obesity epidemic” functions as a disciplinary measure that is used to castigate the choices, habits, cultures, and bodies of this population. Furthermore, the reliance on anti-obesity discourse from *within* Latina/o interest groups such as LULAC and National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators, (authors of “Latinos Living Health Initiative” and “Hispanic Obesity: An American Crisis,” respectively), suggests an awareness of what Molina calls the “racial scripts” of Latina/o desirability as laborers intended to serve the nation-state rather than be counted as true citizens. In other words, the deployment of anti-obesity rhetoric within these documents puts a positive spin on American reliance on Latina/o labor and not unlike the racist depictions of Mexicans as docile Indians in the 1930s, “reveal[s] how one could also use racial scripts to portray a racialized group *positively*” (Molina 2010, 167; emphasis added).

The embracing of weight loss as a solution to the United States’ supposedly endangered economic productivity by Latina/o organizations and leaders functions primarily to call attention to the very real and dangerous healthcare inequities faced by Latina/o communities. However, the use of anti-obesity discourse as the means to this end underscores the linkages between ideals of body size and productivity via labor, thus providing Latina/o organizations and leaders the

opportunity to reiterate the necessity of Latinas/os in the United States. I argue that during a contemporary moment marked by calls for stricter immigration and naturalization barriers as well as deportations, aligning the Latina/o community with weight loss serves to suggest that Latinas/os are actively invested in preserving their ability to labor in and for the United States. The reiteration of the “Latinas/os as laborers” racial script as deployed in pro-weight loss materials functions as a reminder or “proof” that Latinas/os deserve to be here, as their labor and productivity will serve the nation-state’s financial bottom line. However, while this strategic deployment of anti-obesity rhetoric and weight loss as a community goal does serve to paint Latinas/os in a positive or “desirable” light, it does little to challenge the racial scripts that characterize Latinas/os as laborers whose presence in the United States is contingent upon their ability to adequately serve the nation-state.

VII. Health Discourse and the Racialization of Precarity

Latinas/os, therefore, continue to exist in a state of precarity that is only exacerbated by the racialization of “obesity” as primarily an issue faced by Latinas/os and African Americans. Attempts to align Latinas/os as working *against* “obesity” as exemplified by organizations such as LULAC and the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators operate, however ironically, under similar principles as conservative mouthpieces that center Latina/o excess as a threat to the nation-state. Rather than refusing or refuting arguments that Latinas/os present a danger to the United States, these organizations appear to concede this point by suggesting that Latinas/os *could* continue or be made to be useful laborers if only Latinas/os are given the tools to lose weight. At its core, the characterization of Latinas/os as currently fat but potentially thin exacerbates the association of Latinas/os with their future contributions to the United States. The precarious nature of Latina/o presence in the United States is highlighted by the continued

association of these communities with discourses of “obesity”, as these discourses centralize the future of the fat body, insisting that fat bodies must strive to be thin at some later point in time. The racialization of “obesity” as more prevalent in Latina/o communities due to supposed biological or cultural differences further posits Latinas/os as relevant only due to their potential or future bodies and the ability of those bodies to do work. While the medicalization of fatness often appears to offer a means for understanding fatness as morally neutral, this is not the case. Rather, the “cure” offered by weight loss simultaneously reifies notions of blame and responsibility while—in the case of Latinas/os in particular—suggesting that Latinas/os’ “health” can and should be defined by their ability to do work.

In other words, the racial scripts tied to “obesity” health discourses allow for different metrics of health for Latinas/os versus white Americans. Although perfunctory gestures are made toward unmeasurable categories such as “quality of life,” it is not with the same panic and urgency as is given to concerns about Latinas/os’ future productivity, the likelihood that they will die without fulfilling this potential, or the monetary amount they will cost the nation-state. Thus, the precarious nature of Latina/o presence in the United States is further magnified by the very healthcare discourses that purport to offer assistance and a better life for all. The “health risks” of obesity are not only the often overblown or oversimplified references to diabetes and heart disease, but also the danger of being understood as a poor laborer or a social and financial burden, both of which increase the stigma against Latinas/os and often function as barriers to citizenship and other forms of social belonging. Rather than offering care, these discourses offer an ultimatum to Latinas/os in which their future in this country directly depends on their weight and the ability to labor that “successful” weight loss supposedly means.

The following chapter further examines the contingent nature of Latina/o presence and belonging in the United States, arguing that the association of Latinas/os with labor and the assumption that fatness or “obesity” preclude successful labor creates an ever-narrowing template for the acceptable immigrant-to-citizen body. The stigmatization of Latina/o bodies as “sick” due to their actual or impending “obesity” serves not to garner sympathy or assistance, but rather to engender stigmatization which functions to justify their positioning as “outsiders” and racial others. When utilized as part of the militaristic rhetoric of the “War on Obesity,” thinly veiled language about Latina/o “health disparities” places Latina/o bodies on the front lines of a dangerous cultural battleground. Chapter 5 links the two most prominent discourses shared by anti-Latina/o and anti-fat rhetoric—war and disease—and connects them to the contemporary associations of Latinas/os with the “American Dream” narrative, suggesting that the future of Latinas/os in the United States is contingent not only upon immigration reform, English-language proficiency, or “hard work,” but also on having and maintaining the “proper” citizen-body.

Chapter 5: The American Nightmare: Contingent Futurity and the Real Danger of Obesity
Rhetoric

I. Introduction

I close this project by examining the role of anti-obesity rhetoric in the construction and deployment of the “American Dream,” specifically as it is applied to Latina/o communities in the United States. The American Dream is an ideology that often influences immigrants’ choices and experiences in the United States by insisting “that one can achieve success and prosperity through determination, hard work, and courage” and that there exists “an open system for mobility” (Hill and Torres 2010, 95). In particular, the American Dream is a rhetorical strategy linked to discourse of the United States as the “land of opportunity for all those who want to improve their own and their family’s lot” (Ono and Sloop 2002, 3). The American Dream, therefore, suggests possibility and potential for a better future in direct opposition to a substandard past. For Latina/o communities in particular, American Dream discourse has been an important ideological resource for those arguing for immigration reform, access to education and social services, and anti-racism. At the same time, I argue, the fantasy rhetoric of the American Dream and the construction of the United States as a land of opportunity has also presented a unique set of problems for Latinas/os. In particular, the American Dream allows for the consistent deployment of respectability politics, or the iteration of good/deserving immigrants versus bad/undeserving “illegals.” This binary construction of good and bad Latinas/os is easily coopted by both the political Right *and* Left to further goals that may not necessarily benefit Latina/o communities. Furthermore, American Dream rhetoric and its association with discourses of immigrants seizing and making proper usage of “opportunity” is often linked with

“obesity epidemic” rhetoric in order to recast the “proper” immigrant body in terms of weight, size, and assimilation.

This chapter, therefore, begins by examining sizeist rhetoric as it is deployed by Latina/o centered organizations through the lens of Chela Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed*, arguing that this rhetoric is a tool utilized within Latina/o communities to effect change despite its problematic roots. Focusing on the contradictory nature of the espousal of anti-fat discourse in Latina/o-centered organizations, I link sizeism to American Dream ideology and examine the potent combination of fear and hope that arises from understanding fatness as a volitional, controllable, and changeable barrier to belonging. I then move on to discuss the co-optation of American Dream rhetoric specifically in terms of contingent futurity, which I define as the terms by which the presence and future belonging of Latinas/os in the United States is contingent upon their performance of proper Americanness, especially in terms of their weight. This section is tied to First Lady Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move!* campaign and examines her use of American Dream, citizenship, and futurity rhetoric in crafting Latina/o-specific weight-loss discourse. Finally, this chapter ends with an analysis of anti-obesity language as it is specifically applied to American military service and national security, arguing that for Latina/o communities in particular, anti-obesity rhetoric is intrinsically connected to the ability to sacrifice oneself for the nation-state, thus—ironically—removing the threat of excess through war.

II. Anti-Fat Rhetoric as a Methodology of the Oppressed

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval identifies a “five-location topography of consciousness [which] demonstrates hegemonic feminist political strategies” (Sandoval 2000, 54). I argue that in both the equal-rights and separatist strategies for resistance Chela Sandoval describes, anti-fat attitudes are used as tactics in the methodological toolboxes of Latina/o

organizations centered on fighting against or ameliorating the effects of structural oppression. Increasingly, for those espousing an equal rights viewpoint, Latina/o fatness is seen as a difference that must be eradicated, while for those operating under separatist tactics, Latina/o fatness is seen as a sign of sameness or solidarity with the oppressor. This leaves little room for fat Latinas/os to exist within these communities, as fatness is rendered a shameful symbol of otherness or surrender.

In Sandoval's "equal-rights form," opposition, "oppositional actors argue for civil rights based on the philosophy that all humans are created equally" based upon the experiences of unequal treatment based in socially constructed notions of difference, (Sandoval 2000, 56). While this "ideological tactic" appears beneficial on its surface, Sandoval notes that it does little to question issues of power and identity, as "[a]esthetically, the equal-rights mode of consciousness seeks duplication; politically, it seeks integration; psychically, it seeks assimilation" (Sandoval 2000, 56). In particular, she argues, it does not resist or demand the reconsideration of the "most favored form of the human-in-power," instead opting to demand sameness and transformation and welcoming of the oppressed into this category. Thus, the social and ideological legitimacy of this category is not called into question, and difference is theorized to "lay in appearance only, not in 'reality'" (Sandoval 2000, 56).

Her characterization of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) as an organization whose political engagements and strategies fall under the rubric of equal rights is borne out in works by Carlos K. Blanton and David Kaplowitz, both of whom note LULAC's comparatively conservative stance from the 1930s up until the 1970s. While Kaplowitz in particular seeks to salvage LULAC's reputation as "'Tio Tacos—the Mexican American equivalent of Uncle Toms, who sold out their ethnic identity,'" his work does so by highlighting

the efficacy of LULAC's equal rights strategies, not denying them (Kaplowitz 2003, 194). For example, Kaplowitz notes that LULAC "had a reputation for negotiation and working within the system to bring change" and were considered by President Lyndon B. Johnson to be the most reasonable and moderate members of the Mexican American community" (Kaplowitz 2003, 193). Furthermore, "more conservative groups such as LULAC gave establishment Democrats and Republicans an opportunity to appeal to Mexican Americans who identified themselves as white, ethnic Mexicans" (Kaplowitz 2003, 194). LULAC's "equal rights" framework, therefore, was predicated on an insistence upon sameness with American citizens, but not just any American citizen. Rather, LULAC and the conservative Mexican American constituency it served focused on a devising a racial script that posited Mexican Americans as also white but definitely *not* African American. This political group also "resented the radicalism of the Chicanos" who drew attention to their racial difference and insisted not upon acceptance via assimilation, but on working "to protect and nurture the differences that define [their] practitioners through their complete separation from the dominant social order" via what Sandoval identifies as the separatist mode of resistance (Kaplowitz 2003, 194; Sandoval 2000, 57).

I pay special attention to LULAC in this section due to their collaboration with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's "effort to reduce childhood obesity among vulnerable populations" ("Latinos Living Healthy Initiative" 2011). This collaboration, started in 2011, originally maintained a focus on nutrition, dieting, exercise, and health screenings, all of which were geared toward helping Latinas/os lose weight or maintain an "acceptable" weight. As the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) lists "Childhood Obesity" as one of their main topics of study and advocacy, LULAC followed suit with the Latinos Living Healthy Initiative ("Our

Topics” 2016). The RWJF is responsible for developing some of the most widely read literature and “reports” on the “obesity epidemic,” including the yearly *F as in Fat* report series, which ran from 2004 to 2009 under the title *F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies Are Failing in America* and from 2010-2013 as *F as in Fat: How Obesity Threatens America’s Future*. The current incarnation of this report is now known as *The State of Obesity: Better Policies for a Healthier America* (“Resources: The State of Obesity” 2016). All versions of this report were produced in collaboration with the Trust for American’s Health (TFAH).

LULAC’s collaboration with the RWJF produced a subsection of the broader Latinos Living Healthy Initiative, entitled “Latinos Living Healthy Initiative: Addressing Childhood Obesity.” Interestingly, the current webpage for Latinos Living Healthy does not include any references to the Addressing Childhood Obesity goals, as both page content and outside links referring to childhood obesity appear to have been scrubbed. However, a Google search yields both the “General Info” flyer analyzed extensively in Chapter 3 as well as a flyer highlighting a co-sponsorship with the Walmart Foundation focusing on nutrition and repeating some of the same information that can be found in the “General Info” about childhood obesity (“LULAC: Welcome to Latinos Living Healthy!” 2011; “Latinos Living Healthy: Obesity and Nutrition” 2011). While the focus on childhood obesity seems to have been dropped from LULAC’s priorities and programs (indeed, it does not exist on either the “Priorities” or “Programs” sections of the Latinos Living Healthy webpage), I argue that these documents suggest LULAC’s willingness to concede the point of Latina/o obesity and use it as a lever for requesting visibility, collaboration, and funding. This, in conjunction with LULAC’s National *Feria de Salud* reflect LULAC’s admission that higher numbers of “overweight” or “obese” Latinas/os shows a problem with Latina/o communities rather than a questioning of these statistics or the efficacy of

being compared (unfavorably) to white Americans. The promotional materials for the 2014 event explain that in addition to “reducing health disparities” and “increasing access to quality [and] affordable health care,” they continue to maintain “an emphasis on reducing childhood obesity” (“Latinos Living Healthy Feria de Salud” 2014).

In conjunction with the contributors to the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators’ *Hispanic Obesity: An American Crisis*, LULAC’s “emphasis” on reducing “obesity” in the Latina/o community follows Sandoval’s equal-rights strategy to the letter. In particular, I wish to return to Sandoval’s characterization of the very aesthetics of an equal-rights approach. She explains that “[a]esthetically, the equal-rights mode of consciousness seeks duplication,” a duplication that renders the “oppositional actor” a copy of those in power, and by an understanding of power as holding to some sort of transitive property of equality (Sandoval 2000, 56). In the case of Latina/o organizations who promote weight loss as a strategy for inclusion and equal treatment, this duplication is understood to be achieved by the literal thinning of the Latina/o body to more closely approximate ideals supposedly represented by white bodies. As this equal rights logic goes, if Latina/o bodies look more like white bodies (or what we idealize as white bodies), there is no basis for discrimination.

While it would stand to reason that what Sandoval terms the “separatist” tactic of resistance would allow for fatness to stand as an exemplar of difference around which to organize as well as “to protect and nurture,” Marcia Chamberlain’s work on Mexican-American lawyer, activist, and author Oscar Zeta Acosta’s autobiographical writings suggest otherwise (Sandoval 2000, 57). Initially well-known for his activism during the Chicano Movement, Acosta’s fatness and eating habits took center stage in both his own autobiographical works as well as Hunter S. Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* in which he is portrayed as a fat

Samoan, rather than Mexican-American, lawyer (Thompson 1996). She argues that 1970s Chicano activists “wanted to represent themselves, symbolically and literally, as underconsumers, as people who had not yet gotten a piece of the American pie” (Chamberlain 2001, 103). In particular, she argues, this has its roots in Chicano activism’s beginnings in the struggles of farm workers whose starvation was starkly juxtaposed by the abundance of the crops they planted, harvested, and transported but could not afford to purchase and eat (Chamberlain 2001, 104). The difference that Chicano activists wanted to highlight, therefore, was that they were not gluttonous overconsumers, but rather marked by “their complete separation from the dominant social order” (Sandoval 2000, 57). The means by which they differentiated themselves from “the Anglo oppressor” centered on projecting an image of asceticism, perhaps most profoundly demonstrated by Cesar Chavez’s highly effective use of hunger strikes, especially his famous 25-day strike in 1968 (Chamberlain 2000, 104; “Delano Grape Strike and Boycott” 2015).

As Chamberlain notes, “[i]t is not a complete coincidence that the major Chicano leaders of the 1970s were thin: Cesar Chavez, Luis Valdez, Gilbert Padilla, Corky Gonzalez, David Sanchez” (2000, 104). This association of Chicano activists with a sort of righteous thinness stood in stark contrast not only to images of larger Anglo-Americans, fattened quite literally by the labor and sacrifice of Chicana/o farmworkers, but also with another rendition of the Tio Taco. In this case, the villainy of “those who sold out to the Anglos” was visible on the body as ill-gotten gains of money, power, and fat (Chamberlain 2000, 104).

The 1970s “liberal left,” whose ideological interest in destroying the “large, greedy food conglomerates that were threatening to wipe out smaller operations” contributed to this general anti-fat sentiment among liberals and revolutionaries alike (Chamberlain 2000, 104).

Chamberlain argues that this vilification of fatness led to a situation in which “Acosta’s body, regardless of his politics, seemed to align him with the Anglo oppressor” (2000, 104). Simply put, “[t]he fat, often grinning, figure of Acosta messed up this picture of oppression,” or one that relied upon thinness to symbolically differentiate Chicanas/os from white Americans (Chamberlain 2000, 104). Despite his legal work on behalf of Chicano activists, the large, boisterous, self-described brown buffalo “shocked Mexicans and Anglos alike because he refused to clean up, tone down, or change his act for either audience,” an act that centralized his large body and large appetite for food (Chamberlain 2000, 106). Acosta’s brash nature and his open racially-inflected sexism combined with his often overwhelming embodiment and drug use to reinforce linkages among his various political, social, and physical failings (Acuña 1996). The elision of Acosta’s fat body from Chicano activist history and the demonization of fat Mexican-Americans (indeed, could there be such a thing as a fat, political Chicana/o?) suggests that fatness was not understood as a point of difference around which activists could rally. The following sections explore the tensions between fatness and identity politics further, focusing on the ways in which fatness and “obesity” are leveraged by those both inside and outside Latina/o communities to shape the conditions of Latina/o belonging.

III. Fear, Hope, and Fat: American Dream Discourse and Volitional Weight Loss

In February 2014, Northwestern University assistant professor of medicine Namratha Kandula published an opinion piece in the U.S. News & World Report, entitled “The ‘American Dream’ May Be Bad for Your Health.” This article, written on the heels of Super Bowl 2014, and Coca-Cola’s wildly successful, seemingly pro-immigrant ad spot, argues that “[t]he real message behind the ad was not about embracing diversity, but rather, ‘Drinking Coca-Cola is American. Coke is part of the American Dream’” (Kandula 2014). This salient point about the

marketing of diversity soon gave way to a discussion of the vulnerability of immigrant communities, ending with a clarion call “to protect the health of an increasingly diverse America by countering the aggressive marketing of junk food, soda and other unhealthy behaviors as part of the American Dream” (Kandula 2014). However, in her call to “protect” immigrant communities, Kandula conflates ill health and weight, arguing that “[i]t is well known that the over-consumption of sodas and other sugary drinks is an important driver of the high rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease in the U.S.” with no discussion of the differences among these three “diseases.” Furthermore, she particularly focuses on immigrant youth, arguing that “being a second generation immigrant is associated with more obesity” (Kandula 2014).

While the remainder of Kandula’s piece offers a useful critique of the advertising and distribution patterns of “junk food and soda,” her invocation of the American Dream gestures toward the complex and often contradictory use of American Dream rhetoric as it applies to discussions of immigrant foodways and bodies. For physicians such as Kandula, “obesity” and conditions thought to be related to obesity are important reasons for questioning American Dream rhetoric, especially as it is deployed as marketing tool by unscrupulous corporations “targeting immigrants as a distinct market segment” (Kandula 2014). Anna Bellisari also links the American Dream to “obesity” arguing that the cultural values of “capitalism and individualism shape both the personal choices and political and economic forces that promote excessive energy consumption and inadequate energy expenditure” that she understands as causing “obesity” (Bellisari 2012, 70). For these scholars, the American Dream is something to be feared not necessarily because it suggests immigrants can become Americans, but because it leads to an incorrect rendition of Americanness. In other words, the danger of the American

Dream is that, when misused or misinterpreted, the ideals of abundance, comfort, and safety promised by this rhetoric will lead immigrants to become fat.

However, for many immigrant communities, especially Latina/o communities, the discourse of the American Dream is not tinged with fear, but with hope. Characterized as “an open system for mobility,” the American Dream offers “hopes of a better life, greater opportunities, employment, and education for their children” (Hill and Torres 2010, 95). While the American Dream is based on hope for a better future, it is also predicated on narratives of “great sacrifices” and “a strong work ethic” that essentially function to mark Latina/o immigrants as deserving of the opportunities promised by the American Dream (Hill and Torres 2010, 95). Part of this “strong work ethic” also often requires a commitment to weight loss or weight maintenance. In this construction, being “overweight” or “obese” signifies laziness or a refusal or inability to work, conditions that do not allow for successful pursuit of the American Dream. Furthermore, the hopeful nature of weight loss narratives, or the idea that the individual will achieve the perfect body at some point in the future reflects a similar emotionally-tinged narrative of the American Dream. In both cases, the idea of “hard work” is centralized, with exercise and careful eating or dieting comprising the core of weight loss, and labor—often highly physical—at the core of the American Dream’s promise of uplift.

I argue that both weight loss and the American Dream are understood as volitional in nature. In both cases, the impetus is on the individual to make something happen and in doing so, make a transition in identity. Importantly, as April Herndon argues, “excessive weight is almost always read as volitional and a sign of a person being irresponsible” (Herndon 2014, 70). This understanding of body weight as something someone can change or control allows for an expectation or even a demand that the fat subject will do something to lose the “extra” weight.

Despite the myth that Latinas/os are somehow immune to these expectations due to a cultural preference for larger bodies, the insistence upon weight loss is clearly a goal of number of Latina/o-serving organizations, as chapters 3 and 4 attest.

Therefore, Latinas/os living in the United States are targeted by two interconnected messages about weight. First, they are also linked to “overweight” and “obesity” in popular media as well as the biomedical community, both of which deem Latinas/os as more likely to be “overweight” or “obese” and therefore more vulnerable populations. Second, they are told that weight loss is something they should be working toward and if they work hard enough, they will lose weight. “Excessive” weight and weight loss come to define Latina/o as a racial, ethnic, and cultural identity, and the American understanding of weight loss as volitional places additional expectations on Latinas/os to work toward shedding weight as a sign of their willingness to “work” toward the American Dream. In a cultural moment in which being fat is symbolic of laziness and a racialized laziness in particular, losing weight functions as a strategy to disassociate oneself or one’s community from these stereotypes by working off the pounds.

The public conversation conflating fatness and racial, ethnic, and national difference does more than simply call attention to the supposed “health” needs of Latina/o communities. Rather, the morally loaded connotations of the “obesity epidemic,” the “war against obesity,” and “too fat to fight” discourses sidestep the generic good of “future citizens” and “American Dream” rhetorical strategies. Tellingly, in late May 2015, conservative news outlet Breitbart News Network posed the question, “[s]houldn’t the United States be picking the most desirable immigrants to bring into the United States[?]” in support of an e-mail from political commentator Ann Coulter (Boyle 2015). In the e-mail, she referred to immigration rights activist Gaby Pacheco, stating “[w]hen I’m in charge of immigration (after our 10 year moratorium), I will not

admit overweight girls [like Pacheco]” (Boyle 2015). Social desirability, citizenship, and body size are linked, as Latinas/os’ weight becomes a key criteria for determining their right to belong to the nation-state. Importantly, the characterization of Latinas/os as only potential citizens does create opportunities for citizenship, but these opportunities rest on the crafting of a “fit” body whose utility is determined in the eyes of the state, rather than the individual. Latina/o belonging is not guaranteed by any means, despite the hopeful message of the “American Dream.” Rather, it is dependent on proving oneself worthy by fulfilling the ever changing requirements of the American Dream, including those that revolve around reshaping the “unfit” immigrant body into a “fit” citizen body.

IV. Contingent Futurity and American Dream Co-optation

I borrow the notion of “contingent citizenship” from Deborah A. Boehm, who defines it as “national membership that is partial, conditional, or relational” (Boehm 2012, 162). While citizenship and non-citizenship centered around rhetoric of legality and illegality tend to dominate popular news and media representations of Latina/o presence in the United States, the notion of contingent citizenship allows for the re-theorization of citizenship even for legal or formal citizens “who are culturally, socially, politically, or physically excluded from the nation” (Boehm 2012, 162). Boehm’s work highlights the ways in which American immigration laws and practices such as state surveillance and deportation, as well as economic and social factors impact the citizenship experiences of youth in particular. I link contingent citizenship to discourse in order to underscore not only what Boehm calls “the contradictory ways state regimes construct ‘legal/illegal’ subjects,” but also the role of discourse in determining social belonging. In particular, I focus on how discourses of futurity shape the conditions by which a contingent citizen *might* become an actual citizen, in both the legal and social sense. Discourses

that focus on the future of immigrants—their future earning power, their future cultural practices, and their bodies' future utility allows for a “wait-and-see” approach for communities of color marked by immigration narratives. Historically, Natalia Molina argues, Latina/o communities of Mexican descent have been imagined as “disposable” labor, which “deprive[d] Mexicans of social citizenship since they were always imagined as individuals who would soon be going home, not as potentially rightful members of US society” (Molina 2010, 166). Thus, the desirability of Latinas/os as laborers shaped and continues to shape the reality of their acceptance into the nation-state. They are “maybe” citizens whose presence is largely considered in terms of their potential ability to serve the nation-state as well as their potential “fit” into larger constructions of a citizenry.

Despite the historical presence of Latinas/os in the United States since the country's inception, Latina/o communities are still often conceptualized not in terms of their past presence in the United States, but in terms of their potential future impact and impending presence in the United States. In particular, Latina/o children and youth are warily positioned in terms of their potentiality, most often as subjects of anti-immigrant rhetoric of “invaders” and “anchor babies.” Even when discourse surrounding Latina/o youth is positive, there remain conditions of their futurity, as rhetorical loopholes which serve to highlight the contingent nature of their presence and acceptance. For example, I turn to Michelle Obama's July 2013, speech to the National Council of La Raza on the subject of childhood “obesity.” In this speech, she argued that it was time for Latina/o parents and la raza as a whole to “step up” to tackle what she understood as a major health crisis in the Latina/o community (Obama 2013). As part of furthering the goals of her then three-year-old Let's Move! campaign, the First Lady argued to a room of Latina/o leaders and community members that health-care reform and immigration reform are “about one

simple thing: They're about achieving the American Dream. They're about building a country where no matter who you are, or where you're from, or what you look like, or who you love, you can build a decent life for yourself and an even better life for your kids" (Obama 2013).

This "even better life" for Latina/o children, therefore, is a life predicated on the increasingly paired notions of citizenship and "health" discourses that understand fatness as antithetical to a "healthy" body politic. In her speech to the NCLR, she argued that "while food might be love, the truth is that we are loving ourselves and our kids to death" (Obama 2013). By invoking the familiar and popular narrative of obesity-induced illness and morbidity, Obama calls the fitness of Latina/o children into question, suggesting that the future of Latina/o communities is at stake, threatened not by racialized specters of deportation, incarceration, and socioeconomic inequality, but rather by the body weight of future generations.

Furthermore, Obama's invocation of American Dream rhetoric divests Latina/o children of the very claims to American-ness she cites by making the American Dream contingent upon weight loss. As Obama explains, "keeping that dream alive isn't just about changing our laws out in Washington. It's also about changing people's lives on the ground," which she intends to do by specifically addressing "the epidemic of childhood obesity in America" (Obama 2013). Obama closes off the possibility of fat Latina/o children achieving the American Dream by highlighting the conditional nature of this narrative—the American Dream of upward mobility is only accessible to those whose bodies either already conform to the strict standards of correctly embodied Americanness or those who take steps to attain this ideal. To exist outside the bounds of a particular body size and type is to forfeit social and cultural inclusion, as anti-obesity and racialized xenophobic discourses collude to produce a type of double or layered exclusion. The "overweight" and "obese" Latino child, therefore, becomes a problem for those seeking an

American narrative of both belonging and uplift, as these children's bodies cannot fit into the narrowly defined space in which citizenship, health, and the imagined body politic overlap.

V. Maternal Blame, “Bad Food,” and Childhood “Obesity”

Michelle Obama's alarmist rhetoric of loving children “to death” reflects a discourse of fear and urgency that has been mapped onto the bodies of “overweight” and “obese” Americans for decades (Solovay and Rothblum 2009). Furthermore, her clear placement of blame on “us”—or the parents of Black and Latina/o children—reifies the argument that it is the parents and communities of color that are responsible for the supposedly impending deaths of legions of young Black and Brown bodies. While she goes on to gesture toward food deserts, poverty, crime and other structural forces as important factors in the apparently meteoric rise in “obesity,” she weaves the language of personal responsibility and blame into her remarks in order to galvanize a community to her cause.

Despite her argument that immigration and health care reform matter because “they're about building a country where no matter who you are, or where you're from, or what you look like, or who you love, you can build a decent life for yourself and an even better life for your kids,” her rhetoric on the causes and consequences of fatness echoes discourses that espouse decidedly anti-immigrant sentiments—and do so specifically via the demonization of the Latina matriarch, her body, and the bodies of her children. This section contextualizes Michelle Obama's Latina/o-focused *Let's Move!*-related appearances as part of a larger discourse in which anti-immigrant and anti-fat rhetoric are linked to notions of maternal blame, a child-centered “American Dream” narrative characterized by conditional or contingent future citizenship and, finally, a threat to the U.S. nation-state.

In her speech to the National Council of La Raza, Obama presents herself as a universal First Mother, whose unique identity as both an African American woman and the First Lady somehow makes it possible for her to identify herself as part of the “we” who are responsible for “loving ourselves and our kids to death” (Obama 2013). She goes to explain that “we need to step up. We need to own this as a serious problem in our communities. We need to admit that what we’re doing simply isn’t working anymore. And we need to start questioning the behaviors and beliefs that are making our kids sick” (Obama 2013). This use of the collective “we” is not accidental nor is it without impact. Through conflating her racial and cultural identity with that of her Latina/o audience, Obama is seeking to produce a rhetoric of sameness and belonging that allows her access to the bodies, foodways, health, and futures of Latina/o children. By positioning herself as part of this community through the production of shared experiences and even language—tellingly, she begins her speech with an awkwardly accented “¡Buenos dias!”—the First Lady lays claim to the bodies of the fat Latina/o children she is entreating her audience to save from obesity-related deaths.

Via *Let’s Move!* and related public appearances, Michelle Obama further constructs herself as the substitute “good” mother who can provide guidance to Latina/o parents and children as well as the nation as a whole. Clearly cognizant of the media focus on her “fit” body, Obama uses her own body as leverage to convince NCLR leaders to follow her instruction, noting that “I eat a balanced diet and I work out every single day of the week with very few exceptions” to signal not only her physical fitness, but also her role as “fit” mother who is performing motherhood correctly (Obama 2013). This is closely tied to Obama’s carefully curated public persona as a “fun” or “hip” mom who regularly dances with children in public appearances at D.C. area schools, “talks” with Sesame Street characters, and manages to get

popular singer Beyonce on board with the campaign. By publicly promoting and engaging in “fun” healthy eating as well as aligning herself with Beyonce—who changes the title of her popular song “Get Me Bodied” to “Let’s Move Your Body” and similarly dances with young school children of color in the video—Michelle Obama becomes the ultimate “cool” mom (Ulaby 2011).

Specifically, Obama becomes the type of mother who can do what she chastises Latina/o parents for *not* being able to do since they “are working longer hours, working harder than ever before just to make ends meet. So instead of making home-cooked meals, it’s often easier to head to the drive-thru or pop something in the microwave” (Obama 2013). Thus, these parents—through a combination of choice and circumstance which Obama characterizes as complacency—are *unfit* parents whose inability to protect their children from the dangers of childhood obesity justifies and indeed necessitates Michelle Obama’s presence as the substitute mother. However, through “dynamic visuals with simple tips for parents” Obama’s *Let’s Move!* Spanish-language public service announcement (PSA) allows the First Mother to pass her wisdom and knowledge of proper parenting to those responsible for fat Latina/o children’s obesity (*Let’s Move! PSA: T-Shirts* 2011).

Let’s Move!’s 2011 PSA, entitled “T-Shirts,” features a young Latino boy wearing a number of oversized shirts, which he then removes one by one. Some of the shirts are numbered, indicating the child’s Body Mass Index (BMI), while others include imperative statements (or “simple tips,” as they are characterized in the YouTube video’s “About” section) directed at parents. Parents are told to ensure that their children “juega 1 hora al dia” (play one hour per day), “opta por agua” (opt for water), “merienda vegetales” (snack on vegetables), eat “porciones pequenas” (small portions), and enact number of other small changes “para prevenir la obesidad

infantil” (to prevent childhood obesity) (*Let’s Move! PSA: T-Shirts* 2011). While these “tips” are ostensibly intended to help parents curb childhood obesity, they do so by first indicting Latina/o parents whose children’s fat bodies demonstrate parental failure. The “fat” child in this PSA only loses weight (an image achieved by having a thin child wear multiple shirts) as each tip is revealed, signaling the efficacy of the tips as well as the efficacy of this state-sponsored parenting guide.

Interestingly, parents or caregivers are absent from this video which, when coupled with Obama’s characterization of Latina/o parents as “working longer hours,” suggests that Latina/o childhood obesity is also caused by parental neglect. As April Herndon argues, a lack of adequate or appropriate supervision is often cited in decisions to remove fat children from the so-called “obesigenic environments” of their homes (Herndon 2014, 57). Parents are imagined as unaware or uncaring about their children’s eating and exercise habits, and are therefore understood to be endangering their children via a type of benign neglect. For mothers in particular, their own fat bodies are often cited “as evidence of their inability to appropriately parent” (Herndon 2014, 68-69). As Latina women are considered “more likely” to be fat, their parenting skills are also called into question. This PSA functions as a state intervention into the lives of fat Latina/o children by demonstrating Latina/o parents’ inadequacy and replacing it with the clearly effective imperatives of the state. Thus, Michelle Obama’s spearheading of this campaign neatly positions her as a representative of the state, one whose superior mothering tactics can save the Latina/o child from obesity.

Despite her initial insistence on shared identity and experiences, Obama’s proactive behavior further positions her as a “good” mother, as she has done or is doing all that she asks of her Latina/o audience. She explains that she “was diligent about taking [her daughters] to every

single one of their well-child visits right on time” and that when her doctor suggested lifestyle changes so her daughters would “grow up healthy,” she and her husband “listened to our pediatrician and we made those changes” (Obama 2013). While she is ostensibly using this anecdote to promote the passing of President Obama’s Affordable Care Act, she is also re-articulating a narrative of proper mothering, in which good mothers are those who not only can and do take their children to the doctor but also give priority to medical expertise over their own knowledge.

In constructing herself as the First Mother of the nation’s youth, Michelle Obama engages in a conversation that portrays the Latina mother or matriarch as an improper, failed maternal subject. As Natalie Boero argues, “[m]others of color are particular targets in explaining high rates of ‘childhood obesity’ among Hispanic and African Americans,” with food believed to be prepared and served by women functioning as the main symbol of “ethnic culture” (Boero 2009, 116). For Latina women in particular, “mother blame” and attributions of “bad” mothering are specifically expressed in terms that highlight cultural otherness, such as “ethnic” food classifications. I use Mae Ngai’s notion of “racialized foreignness” as she applies it to the crafting of immigration law in the early twentieth century to argue that the cultural difference implied by terms such as “ethnic” or “ethnic food” marks the preparer as unassimilable and ultimately an outsider (Ngai 2014, 73). These foreign foods re-inscribe Latina women as foreign mothers whose inability to properly care for their children is rooted in racialized difference and perceived inferiority.

This application of “foreignness” to Latina mothers in particular certainly colored social workers’ interactions with Mexican-American mother Adela Martinez-Regino, whose daughter Anamarie was the subject of investigation and removal from her home in New Mexico. As

Herndon notes, case workers “consistently asked [Adela] to speak Spanish,” despite the fact that Adela Martinez-Regino is a fluent English speaker and only partially fluent in Spanish (Herndon 2014, 137). Their insistence on speaking to her in Spanish suggests that social workers understood the family as foreigners incapable of understanding both English and proper child-rearing. For example, the affidavit filed by the social worker, Liza Perez, explained that “the family does not fully understand the threat to their daughter’s safety and welfare due to language or cultural barriers,” a claim that Adela Martinez-Regino understood as part of Perez’s desire to paint the family as “ignorant foreigners” (Herndon 2014, 138; Belkin 2001). Troy Prichard, the Martinez-Regino family’s lawyer, argued that those responsible for removing Anamarie from her home made “veiled comments which added up to ‘You know those Mexican people, all they eat is fried junk, of course they’re slipping her food’” (Belkin 2001). Anamarie’s fatness, therefore, was linked to her family’s—and more importantly, her mother’s—supposed cultural difference. As “Mexicans,” they were understood as both unwilling and unable to maintain prescribed American foodways that were believed to change their child’s weight. “Mexican” food becomes the imaginary enemy of thinness, “fried junk” that is supposedly a marker of Mexican culinary—and cultural—difference and inferiority.

Similarly, in her speech to the NCLR, Obama frames her assignment of responsibility and blame for the weights and sizes of Latina/o children in terms of food, eating, and feeding, concluding that in order for Latina mothers to correctly feed their children, they must abandon their culturally-marked cuisine. Despite the fact that she takes great pains to connect her own experiences as an African-American woman to those of her audience, her speech is predicated on the attribution of foreignness to the foodways of Latinas/os and their families—in the process conflating the broad the variety of Latina/o foodways and experiences to foods that function as

culinary shorthand for “ethnic” Latina/o food. In particular, she calls extra attention to what are often interpreted as “traditional” Latino foods such as “tres leches” cake, “tortillas,” and “arroz con pollo,” suggesting that it is the presence of these foods in the households and diets of Latina/o children that lead to Latina/o childhood obesity (Obama 2013). Not unlike the redlining of pan dulce in Stanford University’s “experimental weight loss program for Mexican American families,” these foods and the marked foreignness as cited as the cause of “obesity” which must ultimately be eliminated (Boero 2009, 146).

While she compares these Latina/o “staple” foods to the “mac and cheese” and “ribs” of her own childhood, Obama notes their role as comfort foods that are unique to the Latina/o community and therefore part of the culturally-specific foodways that lead Latina/os down the path toward fatness (Obama 2013). Thus, the “abuela” and “Tia” who feed and overfeed children, “insist[ing] that a chubby baby is a healthy baby” and “giv[ing] your nieces and nephews the foods they want instead of the nutrition they need” produce a kind of culturally-induced fatness (Obama 2013). In other words, through these particularly maternal figures Obama reproduces the notion that Latina mothers and matriarchs are responsible for the fat or potentially fat Latina/o children for whom she is so concerned.

Obama’s speech characterizes the Latina/o family as in need of intervention, as Latina mothers fail to adequately feed their children, resulting in fat and unhealthy bodies. Importantly, this improper form of mothering is understood to have an impact on the futures of Latina/o children, particularly as future or potential citizens. I agree with Amy Erdman Farrell that “[t]he connections between body size and citizenship are particularly salient today” not only because the “obesity epidemic” is front-page news, but because the definitions of citizenship in the United States are becoming increasingly narrow (Farrell 2011, 3). This constriction places bodies

characterized by their excess such as fat bodies, brown bodies, and fat brown bodies in a particularly dangerous position.

As April Herndon notes, “the US government has taken an interest in the food choices of immigrant populations and the working class—and although the war on obesity might be relatively new, government concern about obesity and immigrants is long standing” (Herndon 2014, 138). The conflation of culturally-induced fatness and foreignness in Latina/o communities in particular is also not a recent phenomenon. Marcia Chamberlain also draws attention to the linkages between food and assimilation in her reading of Oscar Zeta Acosta’s *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. She argues that “the message that the social and scientific reformers of the 1950s were pushing onto Mexican American mothers” was that “[n]ot only is obesity a sickness, it reflects on one’s citizenship” (Chamberlain 2001, 101). Thus, the attempts of reformers to teach Mexican American mothers to serve more “mainstream foods” are rooted in an understanding of Mexican foods as simultaneously “threatening” and “fattening,” rendering the foodways of immigrants as not only different, but “pathologically” so (Chamberlain 2001, 101). Relying on the notion that Mexican women were the stewards of the home, reformers also understood mothers as the family members primarily responsible for meals and the root cause of ill-health, often coded in terms of fatness or fattening, yet under-nourishing.

Part of Americanization, therefore, necessitated teaching immigrant women to eat and feed their children correctly, ridding their diets of ethnic staples and encouraging them to—as George J. Sánchez points out—“replace tortillas with bread, serve lettuce instead of beans, and broil instead of fry” (Sánchez 1995, 102). Furthermore, he argues, initiatives adjusting and Americanizing the foodways of Mexican immigrants in the early 1900s were “intended to construct a well-behaved, constructive citizenry” (Sánchez 1995, 102, emphasis mine). Thus,

Latina/o youth were and continue to be imagined largely in terms of their potential as future citizens. They are, as Americanization efforts ranging from those undertaken by reformers in the first decades of the twentieth century to Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* project demonstrate, understood as malleable subjects who can only be granted citizenship should they conform to certain corporeal standards. The fat body, in this case coded as racially different or foreign is therefore "incompatible" with the body politic of the citizenry. As April Herndon writes, "[i]n order to be a proper American one must meet a certain corporeal standard," a standard that fat bodies will always fail to embody (Herndon 2005, 128). Thus, two separate yet interrelated phenomena come to bear on the bodies of Latina/o children and youth: first, the state project of crafting a body politic comprised of physically "fit" or thin subjects and second, a forward-looking focus that imagines Latinas/os and Latina/o youth in particular as shaping the future of the nation-state.

As Lauren Berlant argues, the focus of anxieties and concerns about the American nation-state's future centers on babies, children, and youth, for their "bodies and identifications" are understood to eventually "direct America's future" (Berlant 1997, 6). Furthermore, this focus opens the opportunity for "crisis," as "what gets consolidated now as the future modal citizen provides an alibi or an inspiration for the moralized political rhetorics of the present and for reactionary legislative and juridical practice" (Berlant 1997, 6). I suggest that the heightened focus on Latina/o children and their present and future corporeality is reflected precisely in the "moralized political rhetorics" of childhood obesity prevention mechanisms on the state level. The discursive construction of Latinas/os in the United States as "immigrants," "recent arrivals," "invaders," and "threats" revolve around notions and fears of and for the future of the U.S. nation-state. Thus, the stakes for Latina/o youth at the center of discussions around childhood

“obesity” are not only in terms of “achieving” thinness, but also achieving future existence in the nation-state. Ironically, only by being physically smaller can Latina/o youth countermand calls for their removal, thus rendering their presence in the nation-state contingent not on birth or blood, but on weight loss.

VI. Latina/o Utility and Too Fat to Fight

Latina/o youth’s future state of belonging is by no means guaranteed by immigration reform or even birthright citizenship. Discourse that renders Latina/o children’s claims to citizenship contingent on their weight becomes even more pertinent when considered in a post-September 11th context. The War on Terror has—as Charlotte Biltekoff points out—been morphed into a “condition and a worldview” that allows militarism and the idea of “battle” to extend beyond the battlefield and into many aspects of everyday life otherwise seemingly unconnected to the war (Biltekoff 2007, 34). This rhetoric of terror and danger within the nation’s borders is often invoked in anti-immigration and nativist discourses that characterize Latina/o immigration as threatening to destroy the nation-state from the inside. As Biltekoff explains, undefined and unclear boundaries of the ongoing War on Terror placed Latino and other “useful” minority bodies under a microscope. The constant characterizations of Latina/o and Black communities as more likely to be fat and therefore less useful to the nation-state “provided a reason for regulating minority bodies in the national interest” (Biltekoff 2007, 41). This anxious dependence and fear about the stability of the current nation-state and the assurance of its future success falls heavily on Latina/o children and youth who must correctly embody utility to the nation-state. Thus, anxieties surrounding Latina/o youths’ bodies, I argue, places fat (or potentially fat) Latina/o children at the center of a discursive firestorm.

For Latina/o communities, military service has historically maintained a dual function characterized by the exchange of the Latino body as soldier for a claim to citizenship and belonging (Ramos-Zayas 2012, 351-353). This is especially true of the U.S.'s ongoing military operations as part of the War on Terror in which, as Hector Amaya notes, “[t]hree of the first coalition soldiers to die in Iraq in 2003 were non-citizen Latinos who were given posthumous citizenship” (Amaya 2007, 3). The percentage of active military personnel identified as Hispanic jumped from 3% in 1985 to 13% in 2014, due in large part to the economic and educational promises of military service (“Hispanics in the United States Army” 2016). The filmmakers behind the 2010 documentary “Yo Soy El Army” argue that Latina/o youth are “targeted by the US military as a new and steady source of recruits” (Yo Soy El Army, 2010). Other critics cite the military’s recruitment practices which have included “intentionally us[ing] Latino recruiters in Latino areas” as well as promising assistance with immigration processes (Sánchez 2013). Similarly, during his 2012 bid for the presidency, Republican nominee Mitt Romney crafted a “strategy” in which “young illegal immigrants who were brought to the United States as children should have the chance to become permanent residents, and eventually citizens, by serving honorably in the United States military” (Klein 2012). The relationship between Latina/o youth and military service is marked by coercive tactics which prey on the legal vulnerability of Latina/o youth and their families in order to secure more soldiers to serve the nation-state.

As Amaya argues, the Armed Forces Naturalization Act of 2003 which “grant[ed] posthumous citizenship to the non-citizen Latino war casualties” as well as “expedited naturalization of non-citizens serving in the military” should also be understood “as part of the overall strategy post-9/11 to secure military enlistment” (Amaya 2007, 15). This legislation was a direct response to the attacks of September 11, 2001 as then-President George W. Bush

officially designated the period beginning on September 11, 2001, as a period of military hostilities” (*H.R. 1954: Armed Forces Naturalization Act of 2003* 2003). Under the Armed Forces Naturalization Act, this designation means that “individuals who have served in the armed forces on active duty are immediately eligible for naturalization” (*H.R. 1954: Armed Forces Naturalization Act of 2003* 2003). For undocumented Latina/o youth and mixed immigration status families, this legislation incentivizes military service as a means to secure one’s safety in the United States.

Michelle Obama’s assertion that childhood obesity prevents fat Latina/o children from “fulfilling their boundless promise” must be contextualized in terms of a war that requires the bodies of Latina/o youth to continue and holds the possibility of eventual belonging to the nation-state (Obama 2013). The “boundless promise” of Latina/o youth during wartime is their potential to fight for the nation-state, again highlighting the ways in which Latina/o citizenship is contingent upon the desirability of certain bodies over others. In this case, the physically “fit,” combat-ready body presents an opportunity for future citizenship, as it can be converted to capital that is potentially exchanged for the rights and privileges of belonging.

This rhetorical strategy has been put to use in discussions surrounding the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minor or DREAM Act, perhaps most obviously in the 2013 documentary, *The Dream is Now* (Guggenheim 2013). The 31 minute film features the narratives of young men and women for whom the passing of DREAM legislation would offer the possibility of secure citizenship. In particular, the documentary produces a narrative in which ideas of “hope” and “worth” are closely intertwined, with the desire and the ability to do work presented as evidence of the immigrant subject’s worth. Each young person’s narrative revolves

around hard work, educational or military achievement, or the desperate desire to work despite legal barriers.

The story of one young Latino man in particular, Alejandro Morales, uses rhetoric of fitness and bodies fit enough to serve in the American military to further bolster this young man's right to belong to the nation-state (Guggenheim 2013). As a rhetorical strategy, this works well in light of recent panics about national security in which the oft-quoted "3 out of 4" young Americans are not physically "fit" to serve in the military (Guggenheim 2013). At the same time, the film makers and participants' gestures toward obesity epidemic and anti-fat discourse also reifies the notion of Latina/o youth utility. Interspersing images of a helicopters, guns and gun fire, and the now familiar bootcamp/workout montage, the documentary links physical fitness and military service as Latino immigrant youths' potential "vehicle to give back to that country that has given to them" (Guggenheim 2013). In other words, for Latino youth and young men in particular, the right to remain in the country and be afforded the rights of citizenship is literally rooted on their ability serve the nation-state.

Fatness, understood as a barrier to military service, therefore becomes "absolutely a security issue for our country," as Obama argued in a 2012 episode of "The Dr. Oz Show" ("First Lady Michelle Obama!" 2012). This conflation of fatness with fear has become a common refrain in the First Lady's public appearances on behalf of Let's Move! and related campaigns. In 2010, speaking in support of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act, she began her speech by stating "[M]ilitary leaders ... tell us that when more than one in four young people are unqualified for military service because of their weight. They tell us that childhood obesity isn't just a public health issue, it's not just an economic threat, it is a national security threat as well" (Obama 2010). Thus, Obama combines the rhetoric of "too fat to fight," most recently used by the

“nonpartisan national security organization of senior retired military leaders” behind Mission: Readiness, with discourses characterizing Latina/o youth as disproportionately overweight and obese (“About Us | Mission: Readiness” 2016; “Too Fat to Fight” 2010). In doing so, a new discourse emerges, constructing these bodies as dangerous due to their physical inadequacy—if they are “too fat to fight,” they threaten the safety of the nation-state.

Conclusion: The Real Dangers of Anti-Obesity Rhetoric

Despite the professed good intentions of anti-obesity rhetoric, the taking up of arms “against obesity” is bound to have some collateral damage. In the case of populations whose presence in the United States is constantly under debate in the press as well as in the courts, the weapons used to “battle” obesity are all too easily converted into weapons against these already vulnerable communities. In a cultural moment of both real and imagined “dangers” to the U.S. nation-state and its citizens, the focus on obesity is not entirely about restoring health and well-being. Rather, anti-fat and obesity rhetoric function to define the enemy as gluttonous, lazy, overconsuming, dangerous, and *different* from those bodies which must be protected. After seeking out the enemy body, this rhetoric also works to destroy those whose bodies are marked as outsiders, either by enforcing weight loss, or building literal, legal, and social barriers to belonging.

The danger of obesity, therefore, is not necessarily wrought by the “extra” pounds and diseases supposedly linked to weight, but the powerful stigma surrounding obesity that depicts fat people as subhuman, enemy others who can be subjected to both internal and external policing, punishment, and coercion. For Latinas/os, whose Americanness is always subject to extra scrutiny, the stigma of obesity is compounded with narratives of racial inferiority and

difference, as well as nativist attitudes that posit Latinas/os as interlopers and foreigners whose fatness (real or imagined) is proof that they should not be in the United States.

The highly virulent nature of anti-obesity and anti-fat rhetoric and the very few social constraints on verbal and textual attacks on fatness and fat people will likely continue to shape at least some aspects of the so-called immigration debate. The derision faced by fat activists and Fat Studies scholarship also has the potential to defuse the potential utility of a Fat Studies or Fat Acceptance approach within Latina/o Studies or Latina/o-serving institutions. Yet, the insidious linkages between fat hatred and racist attitudes toward Latina/o immigrants (and non-immigrants) are exemplified by calls for both the barring of “overweight girls” and the chiding of Latina mothers for overfeeding children, by Ann Coulter and Michelle Obama, respectively. This focus on the weight of Latinas/os, I argue, must be understood as a tactic of policing, disciplining, and ultimately categorizing Latina/o bodies as too big to belong.

Notes

Chapter 1

¹ Throughout this project, I will be placing the terms “overweight,” “obese,” and “obesity” in quotation marks to note that—as Marilyn Wann argues—these terms are “neither neutral nor benign” (14). Within the field of Fat Studies, these terms are understood as demonstrative of the social construction of attractive and acceptable bodies, especially as this occurs with the assistance of medicalized terms such as “overweight” and “obese.” The word “fat” will generally not appear in quotation marks in order to differentiate this term as the “preferred neutral adjective” as well as “a preferred term of political identity” (Wann 2009, 15).

Chapter 3

¹ See the introduction to J. Eric Oliver’s *Fat Politics: The Real Story Behind America’s Obesity Epidemic* for an in-depth investigation into the controversy surrounding this figure.

Chapter 4

¹ For more on the controversy surrounding the relationship between BMI and health outcomes, see Paul Campos et al.’s work discussing the development of BMI as well as public understandings surrounding this metric (Campos et al. 2006). Also see Charlotte Cooper’s extensive discussion BMI within the field of Fat Studies (Cooper 2010).

Chapter 5

¹ For a particularly interesting and timely example of the virulent hatred of Fat Studies work in conservative media, see the controversy regarding my offering of a Fat Studies course at the University of Maryland in early 2016 (Hasson, 2015).

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