
FITNESS FIESTA!
SELLING LATINX CULTURE THROUGH ZUMBA
PETRA R. RIVERA-RIDEAU

BUY

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FOR MY PARENTS, MEG AND GENE

FOR MY PARTNER, RYAN

AND FOR MY CHILDREN, ADRIAN AND RAFAEL

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IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO MAKE AN ACADEMIC BOOK. I could never have written this book without the support of friends, colleagues, and, above all, my family.

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WARM-UP

THERE ARE FEW THINGS I HATE MORE than waking up early or exercising. Imagine my friends' surprise, then, when as a graduate student, I started getting up early to get to the gym by 8 a.m. *three* times a week. The culprit? Zumba Fitness. Zumba Fitness is a dance-fitness program that uses mostly Latin music, along with other genres like Bollywood, soca, dancehall, and Afropop. An instructor leads routines that range in intensity and musical style during the one-hour class. The Zumba Fitness program offers a variety of class formats, including Zumba Basic (what most people think of as a "regular" Zumba class) and variations like Aqua Zumba, Zumba Gold, Zumba Toning, Zumba Sentao, Zumba Step, Zumba Kids, Zumbini (for babies), and the company's HIIT program,[1] STRONG by Zumba.

Zumba Fitness was the best stress relief. I felt rejuvenated after each class. With early morning Zumba, I didn't need five cups of coffee to get over my writers' block. And my experience confirmed what several medical studies have since demonstrated: that frequent participation in Zumba Fitness reduces anxiety and depression.[2] Zumba Fitness classes helped alleviate the anxiety of job applications, academic competition, and dissertation deadlines. What's more, Zumba Fitness featured music I loved. My dissertation examined the racial politics of reggaetón in Puerto Rico, and reggaetón just happened to be one of Zumba Fitness's four core "rhythms" featured in its classes. The class flew by. It did not feel like I was working out—I had embraced Zumba's tagline, "Ditch the workout, join the party!" I was hooked.

But Zumba Fitness also made me uncomfortable. As this book demonstrates, Zumba Fitness's marketing strategy promotes many stereotypical images of the exotic, tropical, foreign Latin other. I loved exercising to my favorite songs, but I wondered how other students who were less familiar with the music interpreted these routines. I was bothered by the idea that Zumba Fitness called salsa, merengue, reggaetón, and cumbia "rhythms" when they are, in fact, vibrant and diverse genres of music that each incorporate a variety of rhythmic structures. I loved singing

along to my favorite songs and doing the body rolls and booty pops. Still, I questioned if, for other people, these moves offered evidence for what they already considered a hypersexual and loose "Latin culture." I heard women in the locker room talk about how they envied their Latina instructor's supposedly "natural" hip-shaking moves. I attended a class taught by the same instructor that attracted Asian and Latin American immigrants who shared their challenges acclimating to life in the United States. I participated in classes where students shouted "¡Olé!" and waved around maracas off beat, and other classes where students proudly sang along to the Spanish lyrics of Daddy Yankee and Victor Manuelle. I heard stories from some white women about how Zumba Fitness gave them an opportunity to express their sexy side, and stories from some Black, Latina, and Afro-Latina women about how they tried to be more reserved with their moves so that they wouldn't be seen as hypersexual vixens.

This book is my attempt to grapple with the contradictions I have experienced in my own Zumba Fitness journey. And I am not alone. I have heard similar conflicting feelings from friends, relatives, and Zumba instructors, including many of the instructors I interviewed for this book. To get at the heart of these contradictions, I've attended Zumba Fitness classes in New England and the South, from California to Maine. I've taken Zumba Fitness classes in schools and community centers, corporate gyms and dance studios, college campuses and children's museums, and even on a cruise ship. I've danced to different Zumba rhythms[3] like reggaetón, tango, soca, salsa, Bollywood, dancehall, belly dance, cumbia, quebradita, flamenco, merengue, hip-hop, bachata, azonto, and more. All of this has taught me that there is no one way to do Zumba Fitness. Zumba Fitness means a lot of different things to different people, and it can get messy sometimes.

Fitness Fiesta! explores these contradictions through close analyses of videos, advertisements, memes, and newspaper coverage along with interviews that I conducted with Zumba instructors and presenters. Taken together, these sources tell a complex story about how Zumba Fitness represents and commodifies "Latin culture." This happens as much in the everyday space of the gym as it does in the marketing materials produced by Zumba's Home Office, the company's corporate headquarters in Florida. I will demonstrate how multiple, and often conflicting, ideas about Latinx identities and cultures circulate simultaneously in the Zumba Fitness world.[4] Some might question why it matters what Zumba Fitness says about Latinx culture. The program has been ridiculed for being a

fad, tacky or cheesy, not real exercise, or on its way out. Regardless of its future (and, to be clear, I don't see Zumba Fitness going anywhere anytime soon), the reality is it is a tremendously popular fitness program that, for many, is their main point of contact—if not their only one—with "Latin" culture. For this reason, it is critical to unpack the lessons, images, and ideas about Latin(x) American cultures that circulate in the Zumba Fitness universe. Doing so unearths deeply entrenched understandings of the relationship between race, belonging, citizenship, and Latinidad in the contemporary United States.

THE THREE ALBERTOS

In Zumba Fitness circles, the company's origin story has taken on almost mythical status. It begins with the "Three Albertos." First is Alberto "Beto" Pérez, the creator and face of Zumba Fitness. The story begins when Beto forgot to bring his music to an aerobics class he taught in his native Cali, Colombia. So, he substituted a tape with his favorite salsa and merengue hits instead. The students loved it, and he continued building a dance-fitness following with this new formula in Colombia.

Eventually, Beto made it to Miami where he began to teach his special brand of aerobics that he called "Rumbacize." One day, a Colombian woman in his class named Raquel Perlman asked him to meet with her son, (the second) Alberto. Alberto Perlman had enjoyed some success promoting Latin American internet start-ups, but once the dot-com bubble burst, he found himself unemployed and living at his mother's house. He met Pérez and saw potential to expand Rumbacize. Together they linked up with the third Alberto, Alberto Aghion, Perlman's childhood friend and former business partner. The three Albertos created a business plan that merged Pérez's dance background with Aghion and Perlman's business savvy. They named their new program "Zumba," what Pérez later described as "an invented word, a fusion of samba, the lively Brazilian dance form, and rumba, meaning 'party.'"[5]

In 2002, they produced their own workout video set of Beto's classes to peddle nationally on television. Perlman obtained funding for the infomercials from investors in Ohio. The infomercials grew popular, and the three Albertos began receiving other opportunities, including the chance to partner with Kellogg's who put Zumba Fitness DVDs in their Special K cereal boxes. Infomercials expanded to the Spanish-language

market in 2004. Eventually people began calling Alberto Aghion to find out how they could become instructors. The Albertos had done a few local trainings that licensed instructors to teach Zumba Fitness, and in 2005, they created the Zumba Educational Division. They began producing music, choreography, and marketing support. In 2006, they created the Zumba Instructor Network (ZIN), which is fundamental to their business operations. Instructors pay monthly dues to join ZIN in exchange for new music and choreography to use in their classes. The fitness craze continued to take off, gyms became more interested, more ZIN members joined, and the brand became a global phenomenon.[6]

Zumba Fitness now boasts a global audience.[7] Potential instructors attend a one-day training taught by a Zumba Education Specialist (ZES), which is the highest level of Zumba Fitness professional. Upon completion, instructors earn a license that permits them to teach Zumba Fitness; however, they also have to pay the Zumba Home Office monthly dues to keep their licenses in good standing and to join the Zumba Instructor Network. In return, instructors receive music recordings to use in their classes on "ZIN volumes" or, increasingly, the ZIN Play app. The company also provides ZIN members with marketing tips, choreography, a website domain, and exclusive access to discounts and the Zumba Convention (among other things). In this way, Zumba Fitness's primary customers are its own instructors who dutifully give the company their monthly dues and, often, purchase Zumba products from vacations to clothing. The Zumba Home Office does not release revenue figures, but in 2012, Perlman suggested that the company was worth "nine figures"[8]—and since then, even if its popularity is said to have peaked, Zumba Fitness has only grown.[9] Zumba Fitness's business model thus revolves around an idea that the company produces entrepreneurs, giving instructors all the tools that they need to be successful. What instructors do with that information is up to them. As we will see later, many Zumba instructors encounter significant challenges with this business model; however, some also see it as a way to achieve individual success and, in some cases, the American dream.

The serendipitous story of Zumba Fitness's creation and ultimate success foregrounds many of the critical values and ideologies embedded within the Zumba Fitness brand. The frequent mentioning of the three Albertos' Colombian roots, and in particular Beto's history teaching dance-fitness classes in Colombia, represents Zumba Fitness as authentically rooted in Latin American culture. This authenticity forms a critical part

of the Zumba Fitness brand and how instructors on the ground view their own relationships to the exercise program. In addition, the story is fully steeped in the ideals of the American dream. Persistence, endurance, innovation, and sacrifice all take center stage in the story of Zumba Fitness's beginnings. This ethos aligns the program with hegemonic ideologies of neoliberalism and postracialism in the United States. In so doing, Zumba Fitness capitalizes on the marketing of ethnic difference—in this case what I term *tropicalized Latinness*—without troubling the racial status quo. Instead, Zumba Fitness couches its narrative within the rhetoric of cultural appreciation, honoring diversity, and meritocracy that ultimately masks the continued salience of racial hierarchies in the United States.

FIT CITIZENS

I often get funny looks from people when I explain that I am researching Zumba Fitness and what it tells us about Latinx identity and citizenship. Many people understand Zumba Fitness to be something that is tied to Latin culture, but the issue of citizenship throws some people off. Perhaps this is because of the common attitude in the United States that one's fitness is a result of their individual choices to consume healthy foods, exercise regularly, and avoid habits like smoking or drinking alcohol. However, it is precisely this assumption that one's health and fitness stem exclusively from their lifestyle choices that obscures how physical ability is central to our conceptions of citizenship. Many scholars of disability studies have made this argument in relation to the ways that judgments of an individual's or group's capacity for rational thought and physical strength have been used to restrict their citizenship rights and exclude them from important civic spaces.[10] Kathleen LeBesco argues that disability and weight gain are often depicted as fundamentally distinct due to assumptions that one does not *choose* to live with a disability, but one *can* modify their lifestyle in order to avoid the unhealthy consequences of being overweight. Nevertheless, she argues that both disability rights activists and fat activists strive to combat similar structural inequalities like the lack of access to services or the negative impact of social stigmas. Despite being construed as a choice, LeBesco shows that the weight and shape of the body are essential to hegemonic definitions of citizenship that determine who belongs in the United States.[11]

Because healthy habits are considered matters of choice, engaging in fitness demonstrates a commitment to neoliberal ideologies that link citizenship to one's self-sufficiency and productivity. Historian Shelly McKenzie argues that, since the 1950s, fitness became tied with patriotism and productivity; to be fit was to be a good citizen, a hard worker, and an impactful contributor to society.[12] At the same time, to have fit citizens in the wakes of several major wars also assured that the military would have ample able-bodied men to fight if the need arose.[13] This intimately linked patriotism to physical fitness.

As time wore on, though, ideas about physical fitness began to stress *individual* fitness outcomes rather than national security, although still in the context of civic duty. Beginning in the 1960s, media and policy discourses shifted to endorsing fitness as a way to achieve ideal health and beauty.[14] Promoters of fitness argued that it could also lead to other emotional and personal enhancements like increased happiness and professional competence.[15] Physical fitness increasingly became a marker of not only health, but also the type of morality and self-discipline consistent with hegemonic expectations of "proper" citizens.[16] "Maintaining a fit body," write sociologists Shari L. Dworkin and Faye Linda Wachs, "is no longer viewed as a personal choice, but as an obligation to the public good and a requirement for good citizenry. The once narcissistic body obsession has not only become a marker of individual health, but a form of social responsibility and civic participation."[17] Jennifer Smith Maguire argues that the notion that individuals either choose to be fit or to be "inactive" rendered fitness "an ethical and moral choice affiliated with connotations of status, virtuousness, and self-responsibility."[18] Even with increased attention to beauty or personality enhancements, the relationship between physical fitness and citizenship never disappeared.

This coupling of physical fitness and citizenship ramped up in the 1980s.[19] The fitness industry mushroomed during this time with the advent of more private fitness clubs and the popularity of fitness celebrities like Jane Fonda, whose aerobics videos made exercise possible whenever and wherever the consumer chose to do it.[20] It is no accident that these ideas about fitness and individual accountability grew in earnest during President Ronald Reagan's administration, which emphasized toughness and self-reliance. Indeed, McKenzie writes that Reagan used exercise to demonstrate his own ruggedness and fitness for office.[21] The widespread availability of fitness options furthered the assumption that fitness was always a personal choice. Physical fitness conjoined health, patriotism,

and morality by making individual self-sufficiency central to being a productive, industrious, and valued citizen.

During this time, the Reagan administration dismantled social welfare programs. To do so, the federal government perpetuated the stereotype of the so-called welfare queen, or the Black single mother who allegedly preferred to live off state assistance rather than work.[22] The pernicious image of the "welfare queen" reproduced racist depictions of Black women as lazy and sneaky people who actively chose to reap the benefits of other people's labor. Around the same time, anxieties about immigrants, especially Latin American ones, arriving in the United States increased. Although Reagan's Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 offered a path to legal status for some undocumented immigrants, it also sought to curb undocumented immigration through punitive policies targeting laborers, employers, and others. This revealed the profound anxiety that immigrants, especially Mexican immigrants, would unfairly take advantage of the benefits of US citizenship (e.g., social welfare benefits, public schools) without contributing to society or the economy (despite the fact that undocumented immigrants *do* pay taxes in the United States). All of these criticisms of social welfare programs targeted Black and Latinx communities assumed to be slothful and cunning "freeloaders" who aimed to take advantage of others' work.

These stereotypes conjure up very specific images of racialized and gendered bodies. For instance, the unruly Black woman's body is a controlling image in the Global North that has long signified racist ideas about Black women's hypersexuality and excess. This excess—being too much, too big, too flashy—is then used to depict Black and Latinx bodies as the opposite of the morals and ideals of modern, rational subjects imagined as white.[23] Weight exemplifies this excess. As Amy Ferrell notes, when increased numbers of immigrants and African Americans arrived in the northern United States in the mid-twentieth century, "fatness became yet another signifier of inferiority, a line demarcating the divide between civilization and primitive cultures, whiteness and blackness, sexual restraint and sexual promiscuity, beauty and ugliness, progress and past."[24] Overweight Black and Latinx bodies seemingly confirmed stereotypes of Black and Latinx people's alleged lack of restraint.

Present-day rhetoric about the obesity epidemic in the United States continues these racialized assumptions that it is the poor, the immigrant, and the person of color who is most at risk. It is true that Black and Latinx communities are disproportionately more likely to be obese than their

white counterparts. And yet, several scholars have pointed out that this anxiety about obesity often pathologizes individual behavior rather than addressing structural inequalities that prevent these communities from accessing healthy food, safe exercise spaces, or adequate healthcare.[25] Instead, the obesity epidemic in Black and Latinx communities is considered the result of cultural deficiency. For example, Natalie Boero analyzes the prevalence of "mother blame" in discussions of the childhood obesity epidemic. Mother blame faults mothers for teaching their children unhealthy habits and feeding them junk food. Boero points out that African American and Latinx mothers are especially targeted by discourses of mother blame.[26] In this way, mother blame can be directly related to the stereotypes of the so-called welfare queen whose selfish attitude prevents her from parenting properly.

Cultural deficiencies are also mobilized in depictions of immigrants' eating habits. Anthropologists Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern and Megan A. Carney find that Latinx farm laborers *do* know what healthy food is, and *do* value healthy eating. However, the prevailing logic for "food assistance programs" targeting these populations "focus[es] on Latino clients' lack of diet-related knowledge, while overlooking im/migrant food-related knowledge and income-related limitations."[27] Such programs depict US approaches to food and behavior as more informed and "civilized" while Latinxs' "habits" are understood to be "primitive" and faulty. This is no surprise given that, historically, public health officials have often painted Latin American and other immigrant populations as culturally suspect, filthy, and carriers of rampant disease—in other words, immigrants allegedly posed serious threats to the health and well-being of the (white) American public due, in part, to their presumably deficient approaches to health.[28]

That obesity—the contemporary marker of the lack of fitness—is associated with the poor, the immigrant, and the person of color is not surprising. These are the same groups already deemed "failed citizens," or those who do not conform to hegemonic values and ideals associated with citizenship.[29] Catherine Ramírez reminds us that people of color, whether immigrant or not, are often depicted as failed citizens given the historical emphasis on whiteness as a marker of Americanness, which persists despite claims that the United States has now become postracial.[30] Although obesity absolutely impacts an individual's health outcomes, the point here is that *who* is fit and what fit *looks like* is intrinsically racialized and, as such, firmly linked to ideas about who can be a productive and

self-sufficient citizen. As Cathy Zanker and Michael Gard put it, "From preventing obesity, cancer, and diabetes to improving school results, giving direction to the lives of disaffected youth, and rebuilding dysfunctional communities, it is hard to think of a problem for which physical activity is not seen as a cure."[31] Foregrounding individuals' physical fitness and lifestyle choices obscures the structural inequality that causes health problems for racially and economically marginalized groups.

In this context, the fact that Zumba Fitness is a *Latin* dance-fitness program might seem like an opportunity to reformulate "Latin culture" as something capable of making the body healthy and fit rather than a culturally deficient approach to food and wellness. For example, Beto Pérez, the face of Zumba Fitness, conforms to the ideal male fit body while also foregrounding his experiences and identity as a Colombian immigrant to the United States. However, Zumba Fitness's popularity has not led to a perception that Latinx people are more physically fit or healthy. Instead, as I show in this book, Zumba Fitness has embraced the neoliberal approach to health and wellness that stresses individual commitments to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Zumba Fitness might be Latin-based, but it still reproduces hegemonic standards of citizenship. Zumba Fitness thus becomes an avenue to produce fit citizens, but not necessarily a space for confirming Latinx citizenship despite being widely recognized for being uniquely "Latin." This contradiction is further amplified in the social and historical context in which Zumba Fitness developed, one steeped in anti-immigrant and anti-Latinx sentiment, but also one where Latinx stars made significant inroads in mainstream US popular culture.

LATINX STARS AND LATINX THREATS

Zumba Fitness emerged at a time of rampant and growing xenophobic and anti-Latinx sentiment in the United States. By the time Zumba Fitness released its infomercials in 2002, the United States had witnessed the passing of myriad laws and propositions meant to restrict an imagined "wave" of Latin American immigrants into the United States. In the 1990s, state policies like California's Prop 187 in 1994 and federal laws such as the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 created increasingly difficult hurdles for immigrants to settle and earn a living in the United States.[32] After the terrorist attacks of September 11,

2001, anti-immigrant sentiment increased as pundits and politicians warned of a potential national security threat posed by undocumented immigrants who arrived to the United States. They depicted the US border with Mexico as an especially dangerous place where terrorists, drug dealers, and other violent criminals could arrive into the United States undetected. Despite the fact that Mexicans had nothing to do with 9/11, and that 9/11 attackers arrived in the United States with visas, undocumented Mexicans embodied the threat posed by this new "flood" of immigrants into the country. Concerns about terrorism dovetailed with long-standing stereotypes of undocumented immigrants as criminals, disease-ridden, and uneducated individuals seeking to take advantage of social welfare programs in the United States.

The unfounded link between terrorism and immigration emerged not only in policies targeting immigrants and the increased militarization of the border, but also in mainstream media when pundits such as Lou Dobbs (CNN) and Bill O'Reilly (Fox News) stoked nativist fears of an immigrant takeover.[33] This discourse escalated throughout the mid-2000s. In 2006, a national wave of protests supporting immigrants' rights and demanding a pathway to citizenship for the undocumented was met with escalating rhetoric about how an influx of Latin American immigrants would not only impact the US economy but fundamentally transform the social order and culture of the United States more generally. In this context, which flags people waved at demonstrations or what languages they spoke in public allegedly symbolized where their loyalties lay—the United States or somewhere else.[34] Even a 2006 Absolut Vodka ad that targeted consumers within Mexico became a flashpoint for nativist rhetoric about the alleged Mexican takeover of the southwestern United States.[35] In this context, several states passed increasingly punitive anti-immigrant legislation, such as the notoriously draconian bills SB1070 of Arizona and HB56 of Alabama. Federal courts struck down many aspects of these bills, but the message was clear: Latin American immigrants (especially Mexicans) threatened life as we knew it in the United States.

Leo Chávez terms such discourses the "Latino Threat Narrative." He writes:

> The Latino Threat Narrative posits that Latinos are not like previous immigrant groups, who ultimately became part of the nation. According to the assumptions and taken-for-granted "truths" inherent in this narrative, Latinos are unwilling or incapable of integrating, of becoming part

> of the national community. Rather, they are part of an invading force from south of the border that is bent on reconquering land that was formerly theirs (the US Southwest) and destroying the American way of life. Although Mexicans are often the focus of the Latino Threat Narrative, public discourse . . . often includes immigration from Latin America in general, as well as US-born Americans of Latin American descent.[36]

Although the Latino Threat Narrative may have surfaced with a vengeance in the mid-2000s, the assumption of Latin American immigrants as potentially dangerous foreigners has long circulated in the United States. As Lee Bebout points out in relation to Mexicans in particular, these discourses have been integral to racializing Mexicans and Latinx people more broadly as distinct from whiteness, and thus Americanness, in the United States.[37] In other words, discourses like the Latino Threat Narrative do more than portray Latinx populations as dangerous and undesirable; they also shore up the associations between whiteness, citizenship, and Americanness in the United States.

Ironically, though, the 1990s and 2000s were also a time of growing Latinx representation in US mainstream media. By the time Zumba Fitness released its infomercials in 2002, the US mainstream had witnessed the so-called Latin boom in popular music, a moment when Latin artists dominated the top of the charts. Many of these artists, such as Ricky Martin, Shakira, Enrique Iglesias, and Marc Anthony, crossed over into the US mainstream market after having incredibly successful careers in the Spanish-language Latin music industry. The result was a frequent portrayal of these artists as foreign despite the reality that most were from, or had strong ties to, the United States. Latin boom artists were continually framed via long-standing tropes of hypersexuality and exoticism that further marked them as racialized others. But these stereotypes became packaged in such a way that rendered these artists as nonthreatening. That is, instead of the hypersexuality of the Latina immigrant mother that threatens the demographic and cultural dynamics of the United States, the hypersexuality performed by crossover stars like Shakira and Ricky Martin became something exotic, titillating, and appropriate for mainstream consumption.[38]

Another characteristic that enabled Latin boom stars' entrance into the mainstream is what María Elena Cepeda calls their "*appearance* of whiteness."[39] In other words, as I have argued elsewhere, these stars embodied a "Latino whiteness" that racially marked them as other vis-à-vis

Anglo whites in the United States but that also distinguished them from nonwhite Latinx people and African Americans.[40] Media representations of Latinxs have historically prioritized those with the so-called Latin look—lightly tan skin, Eurocentric features, and straight or wavy hair. The ubiquity of these images implies that the authentic Latinx person embodies Latino whiteness. Frequent stories and analyses of the systemic exclusion of Afro-Latinx and Indigenous Latinx populations reveal just how common the affiliation between Latino whiteness and Latinidad is in hegemonic depictions of Latinx communities. At the same time, Latino whiteness distanced these Latin pop stars from the "browning of America" associated with the Latino Threat Narrative. Images of the dark-skinned clandestine Latino man dodging authorities on the border accompanied this idea of a "brown wave" or "flood of immigrants" taking over the United States.[41] In contrast, the Latin boom stars' Latino whiteness presented them as assimilable Latin American immigrants whose exoticism and foreignness added a spiciness to US culture that marked them as racialized others. Although they were not fully assimilated as white Americans, these crossover artists' nonthreatening otherness enabled their incorporation into the mainstream. Through performing and embodying this otherness, Latin boom stars could serve as a foil against which normative, mainstream, white Americanness was defined. Their crossover did not necessarily indicate a greater acceptance of these stars as equals to white Americans but, rather, as representatives of a racial and ethnic difference that could be safely and easily consumed by all.

In addition to their Latino whiteness, many of these stars also embodied the so-called American dream. If the Latino Threat Narrative assumed that Latin American immigrants arriving into the United States would eventually drain state resources, the Latin boom artists portrayed a different sort of immigrant who instead would contribute to the US economy. In fact, their embodiment of the American dream conformed to other media depictions of Latinx and Latin American communities as hardworking immigrants. For example, Leah Perry notes, mainstream media routinely depicted 1990s artists Selena Quintanilla and Jennifer Lopez as people marked by immigration despite the fact that Quintanilla was born and raised in Texas and Lopez in New York. This not only reiterated the depiction of Latinx people as always foreign, but it also made achieving the American dream a condition for citizenship.[42] Hector Amaya analyzes the incorporation of immigrant narratives in popular television shows like *Ugly Betty*, which aired from 2006 to 2010 and told

the story of a daughter of Mexican immigrants in Queens, New York, trying to make it in the fashion industry. As one of very few representations of Latinx life on mainstream television, *Ugly Betty* helped reinforce the perception that "good" immigrants become self-reliant and economically successful. Amaya argues that *Ugly Betty*'s success reveals "some of the key conditions Latinas/os have to fulfill to be incorporated in mainstream English-language media, conditions that include fitting into neoliberal definitions of diversity that further devalue the political and cultural capital associated with Latino narratives and Latino labor."[43] This emphasis on the American dream as integral to US citizenship represents those people who do not "make it" as failures due to their own personal faults and supposedly subpar work ethic rather than systemic inequality.

The idea that some Latinx people could achieve the American dream aligned with a representation of Latinx immigrants as hardworking and traditional. This narrative portrayed Latinx communities as people who could potentially embody the values of hard work and moral conservatism of the mainstream United States. Notably, Latinx communities were desired primarily for their purchasing power or voting habits, thus centering neoliberal justifications for their potential inclusion into US society. In this vein, broader policy discussions again stressed the potential economic contributions of Latinx communities while maintaining their ethnic difference. Still, as Arlene Dávila notes, this more "positive" representation of Latinxs did not remove the understanding of them as a cultural and social threat. Instead, these contradictory discourses circulated simultaneously.[44]

Many of the contradictions inherent to Zumba Fitness become less surprising when understood as part of a broader context of contradictory representations of Latinx communities as simultaneously desirable and threatening, assimilable and foreign. The hyperemphasis on Latinxs' foreignness furthered the historically rooted understanding that citizenship and whiteness were intrinsically linked. The success of cultural phenomena like the Latin boom and *Ugly Betty* proved that mainstream audiences had an appetite for "Latin" culture provided it did not threaten the status quo. Similarly, Zumba Fitness manages these contradictions by peddling stereotypes of Latinx people and culture as fun, musical, sexy, prone to partying, and exotic while simultaneously marshaling these stereotypes into consumable products that could become pathways toward upward mobility and multicultural inclusion. Thus, Zumba Fitness can be a symbol of an appealing and consumable

cultural, racial, and ethnic difference that suggests the end of systemic racism even as it promotes racist stereotypes.

ZUMBA IS LIKE STARBUCKS

I met Miriam at Starbucks during her break between teaching fitness classes.[45] At the time, Miriam taught five Zumba Fitness classes a week, including Zumba Basic, Zumba Gold, and Aqua Zumba. Although Miriam enjoyed Zumba Fitness for many of the same reasons that other instructors did—she liked the music, the sense of community—she also thought Zumba Fitness had a brilliant marketing scheme. While sipping on our lattes, Miriam explained, "Zumba has amazing marketing. It's a brand. It's a sense of belonging. It's like, you know, people that drink Starbucks. It puts you in a category of people that do this, and the great thing about this is that you actually connect with people around the world. You find people alike. . . . It's a sense of belonging to a brand. It's catchy. It's colorful. It's energetic. It's really great. But it's the best marketing." Miriam's comments point to a critical aspect of Zumba Fitness's business model cooked up by Alberto Perlman and Alberto Aghion—an enthusiastic dedication to the brand. In fact, CNBC called Zumba the "world's largest branded fitness program" of 2018, indicating just how effective this dedication is.[46]

Zumba Fitness's business model offers a fair amount of autonomy to Zumba instructors. Besides ensuring instructors pay their monthly dues, there is no centralized oversight of instructors' classes. Instructors can include whichever songs they like from a variety of genres, and they can utilize the choreography provided by the company or create their own. Instructors are supposed to follow what they refer to as the "Zumba formula" when organizing their classes. Many instructors described the Zumba formula as "70/30," meaning 70 percent Latin music and 30 percent something else, be it Top 40, hip-hop, or some other "world rhythm" like belly dance or Bollywood. The Zumba formula provides some degree of standardization across Zumba Fitness classes, as do the ZIN volumes and the ZIN Play app. Since many instructors rely on the choreography provided by Zumba Fitness, a student can attend different Zumba classes and encounter the same routine. For example, my mother-in-law brought me to her regular Zumba Fitness class in California. Although I live in Massachusetts, I already knew several routines in

the California class since they all consisted of choreography created and distributed by Zumba's Home Office.

Still, not everyone follows the formula. Some instructors prefer to create their own choreography or to include songs they find outside of ZIN volumes. Even when different instructors might use some of the same choreography, no two classes are the same. Instructors have their own personality and flair, and they organize their playlists in different ways. Some incorporate a lot of US popular music in English. Others rely more heavily on popular "world" rhythms like Bollywood, soca, Afropop, or dancehall than on the four Latin core rhythms. They might modify their playlists based on the tastes and abilities of their students. Regardless of how faithful the instructors I interviewed were to the Zumba formula, they all agreed that Zumba Fitness classes should have diverse music with very limited US American pop, routines that are easy to follow, and a pace that varies in intensity.

Most people in Zumba Fitness classes are not privy to the instructions provided to their instructors about the Zumba formula. Based on my informal conversations with friends, family, and fellow students in my own Zumba classes, the vast majority of the students in Zumba Fitness classes have no idea that a formula exists. With all of the variety in Zumba Fitness classes, and with no one to guarantee that the instructors follow the Zumba formula, what is it that actually makes the brand that Miriam described so identifiable?

The answer is tropicalized Latinness. Many people often point to the Latin music that dominates Zumba Fitness classes as the primary evidence of the fitness program's "Latin" identity. But I would argue that Zumba Fitness's Latinness extends beyond its soundtrack. Instead, *Fitness Fiesta!* shows how Zumba Fitness manufactures a specific brand of "Latinness" that draws from and informs a wider set of values and assumptions about Latinx people and cultures in the United States. I define Latinidad and Latinness as distinct entities. *Latinidad* is a term that scholars use to describe the state of being Latinx in the United States. Latinidad often foregrounds the panethnic nature of the Latinx experience by exploring the similarities and differences between distinct national origin groups (e.g., Salvadorans, Puerto Ricans, Colombians). Many scholars stress that Latinidad emerges from the ground up as different Latinx groups respond to institutionalized forms of ethnoracial discrimination they encounter in the United States that are rooted in the ongoing (neo)colonial relations between the United States and Latin America.[47] Of course, there is no

guarantee that Latinx communities would all align under this umbrella category. G. Cristina Mora shows how a panethnic "Hispanic" category emerged out of a marriage between different institutions—US government agencies, Latinx activists, and Spanish-language media—that convinced people to coalesce behind the category in the 1970s.[48] Corporate entities have also been invested in bringing together groups of Latin American descent in the United States into one consumer market.[49] While such top-down, institutionally driven efforts to create a panethnic category might make some skeptical of its power, Latinidad has still been useful for groups of Latin American descent to organize and push for civil rights. This is never a completely smooth or seamless process. Rather, as Frances Aparicio argues, groups must engage across differences related to race, national origin, language, and other social categories in order to come together. For this reason, she proposes *Latinidad/es* as a term that "allows us to document, analyze, and theorize the processes by which diverse Latina/os interact, subordinate, and transculturate each other while reaffirming the plural and heterogeneous sites that constitute Latinidad."[50] Latinidad is thus not a natural or inherent category, but one that is always in flux and always negotiated. Despite the various institutions and corporations with vested interests in a panethnic category, I see Latinidad as something that is of particular importance to descendants of Latin Americans in the United States who, despite their differences, share some common ground, especially in terms of their ethnoracialization.

On the other hand, I define *Latinness* as a top-down definition of Latinx identities and cultures that emerges from *outside* Latinx communities. Rather than a panethnic identity that recognizes difference, tropicalized Latinness primarily serves as a site of consumption by audiences who may or may not identify as Latinx. Moreover, tropicalized Latinness centers homogeneity. Drawing from the work of scholars like Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, Brian Eugenio Herrera, Isabel Molina-Guzmán, and Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman, I use tropicalized Latinness to refer to the dominant racist assumptions and stereotypes that inform commodified, hegemonic tropes of Latin(x) American cultures and people. Brian Eugenio Herrera writes that Latinness and its corollaries like *Latin* or *Latinization* "describe cultural mechanisms of appropriation and, just as often, misunderstanding." Herrera argues that these terms point out the "very constructedness . . . inaccuracies and inauthenticities" of performances and representations of Latinx cultures and identities that depart from "actual Latina/o peoples, communities,

and audiences."[51] Such representations become normalized by what Isabel Molina-Guzmán calls "symbolic colonization," or the "storytelling mechanism through which ethnic and racial differences are hegemonically tamed and incorporated through the media." In her analysis of mainstream media representations of Latinas, Molina-Guzmán argues that this symbolic colonization reproduces stereotypes of Latinx people as "foreign, exotic, and consumable."[52] Ultimately, then, the process of symbolic colonization reinforces stereotypes of Latinx cultures and communities in the construction of Latinness, but it does so in ways that render them safe for consumption even as they further entrench structural forms of racial inequality.

Tropicalization is at the heart of Zumba Fitness's Latinness. Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman define tropicalization as a process that "imbue[s] a particular space, geography, group or nation with a set of traits, images, and values" that creates a "mythic idea of Latinidad based on Anglo (or dominant) projections of fear."[53] Hegemonic tropicalizations stem from "instances in a long history of Western representations of the exotic, primitive Other."[54] We see these hegemonic tropicalizations in images of hypersexual Latina performers whose foreignness might be amplified by their exotic places of origin, or their spoken accents. Their curvaceous bodies often signal racial difference that depicts them as close to but distinct from Blackness. Tropicalized Latinness is thus marked by an exotic, foreign, racialized otherness that is fundamentally distinct from allegedly more white, respectable, and civilized US Americanness.

Tropicalization also signals an attachment to place. The exotic, sexual figures who embody tropicalization are assumed to arrive in the United States from an undifferentiated tropical zone of sunshine, beaches, and sea breezes, where anything goes and one can live out their most basic and unfettered desires. The residents of the tropics—in this case Latin Americans and their US Latinx diasporas—are depicted as *naturally* prone to primitive behavior as a result of having come from a supposedly unrestrained environment that exists both metaphorically and geographically outside of the boundaries of US modernity. The tropical signals both cultural and geographic—and therefore foreign—difference.

More than inaccurate or problematic representations, the circulation of tropicalized Latinness actually does ideological work that provides fodder for the continued marginalization of Latinx and Latin American communities by the United States. Hegemonic tropicalizations seemingly confirm ethnoracial hierarchies that depict Latin Americans

and US Latinxs as racially suspect and inferior to Anglo whites. Representations of Latin Americans as childlike, unintelligent, and unable to govern themselves have been used to justify US interventions in Latin America, from the literal takeover of Latin American governments (as in the ongoing colonial relationship with Puerto Rico) to creating the conditions for US companies to profit from the labor and natural resources of Latin American nation-states (like the interventions of the United Fruit Company across much of Central America). As Nelson Maldonado-Torres points out, the very same assumption that Latin America requires US aid to become more civilized or modern extends to Latinx communities in the United States who are similarly understood as distinct from the rest of the allegedly more modern and civilized US body politic.[55] In this context, representation is more than a reflection of social conditions; it actively aids in the creation of those conditions in the first place. Disseminating images of Latinxs as the antithesis to the standards associated with the modern respectability of US mainstream (white) culture shapes people's understandings of what and who Latinxs are, and allegedly "justifies" their ongoing exclusion from full civic rights in the United States. Tropicalized Latinness is thus integral to the marking of Latinx people as unfit for citizenship.

Several scholars have analyzed and critiqued the prevalence of these stereotypes in film, television, popular music, literature, and theater.[56] Zumba Fitness differs from many of these other forms of mass-mediated representation in that it is an exercise program in which Latinness is actively experienced rather than passively consumed. Whereas representations of Latinx bodies take center stage in analyses of popular media, Latinx bodies are not necessarily visible or even present within Zumba Fitness classes. Instead, more abstract cues from gestures, sounds, dance moves, or aesthetics make Latinness legible to participants regardless of whether or not they are Latinx themselves. This does not mean that Zumba Fitness enthusiasts who are not Latinx envision themselves as taking on a Latinx identity in Zumba Fitness class. Instead, they *experience* tropicalized Latinness in their one-hour Zumba Fitness class. Ironically, this experience can actually mark non-Latinx Zumba Fitness enthusiasts as distinct from the cultural practices they encounter in their classes. On the other hand, those who identify with Latinx music and dance might view participating in Zumba Fitness as something that allows them to celebrate their cultural pride and traditions. Although individuals may have very different interpretations of

what happens in a Zumba Fitness class based on their own backgrounds and life experiences, the overall Zumba Fitness brand thrives on tropicalized Latinness, often in very problematic ways, to distinguish itself in the fitness world. It is this dominant construction of tropicalized Latinness promoted by the Zumba Home Office, and how this becomes interpreted, mediated, and occasionally contested on the ground, that is the focus of this book.

Despite trafficking in racial stereotypes, the Zumba Fitness brand is depicted as a place that values racial difference and inclusivity. For example, Alberto Perlman told the *Miami Herald* that the "inclusivity is what is special. Everyone is welcome. People in wheelchairs, people from all walks of life, all countries, all ages—that is very unique to Zumba."[57] At her 2019 Zumba Convention Fitness Concert, singer Becky G explained, "That's what I love about Zumba is it brings us all together. Doesn't matter where you from, what color you are, what you stand for, we all come together and we share a beautiful moment."[58] And many instructors I spoke with for this project routinely celebrated Zumba Fitness as a space for understanding and celebrating other cultures. On the surface, such proclamations seem positive. However, as I mentioned earlier, only those who conform to the image of the exotic Latin foreign other can become stand-ins for the integration of Latinx people as a whole. Those Latinx people who do not or cannot become framed within tropes of tropicalized Latinness are depicted as undesirable, problematic populations. It is this contradiction—the incorporation of some ideas about Latin culture and the firm exclusion of others—that enables the coexistence of structural racism and multicultural tolerance.

For this reason, dominant ideologies of neoliberal multiculturalism can easily incorporate tropicalized Latinness without dismantling structural inequality. Neoliberal multiculturalism enables the integration of certain racialized subjects into a multicultural society while continuing to maintain white supremacy and stigmatize others.[59] Despite rhetoric that praises inclusion, access to the Other actually allows for those in power to affirm their own position.[60] Tropicalized Latinness thus offers people the opportunity to engage with and dabble in something "Latin" without disrupting the structural racism and xenophobia that preclude Latinxs' full access to citizenship rights. And so, the overwhelming anti-Latinx and anti-immigrant sentiment that paints Latinxs as fundamentally unfit for citizenship does not actually present a barrier to the growth and popularity of a Latin dance-fitness program like Zumba Fitness.

Throughout the course of this project, I have heard many detractors' reasons for why they hate Zumba Fitness. It is bad exercise, just a fad. It fosters an irrational, almost cult-like dedication. It isn't authentic, but rather another egregious form of cultural appropriation. It is similar to a multilevel marketing scheme, full of false promises of success. It is just annoying. But I would argue that Zumba Fitness *is* in fact worth taking seriously. For many people who I have met, Zumba Fitness is their introduction to "Latin" culture. This means that tropicalized Latinness shapes many people's understanding of what being Latinx is. And it is precisely because of this dedication to the brand that Zumba Fitness has such a big impact on how people understand themselves in relation to Latinness in the United States. Ultimately, Zumba Fitness's circulation of tropicalized Latinness disseminates racist stereotypes of the Latin foreign other while simultaneously dismissing the continued impact of systemic racism.

ZUMBA, NEW ENGLAND STYLE

This book analyzes how Zumba Fitness creates and sells tropicalized Latinness. I use a variety of sources to make my argument: marketing materials from the Zumba Home Office; Zumba Fitness exercise videos and video games; memes and other representations of Zumba Fitness that circulate online; reviews and discussions of Zumba Fitness in popular publications; and my own ethnographic experiences in classes and interviews with Zumba instructors. Since I am not a dues-paying ZIN member, I do not have access to materials that Zumba Fitness exclusively produces for its instructors, like full-length choreography videos or Zumba-produced music.[61] However, I still had a wealth of material to choose from. For instance, for many years, the Zumba Home Office published a monthly online newsletter called *Z-Life* that chronicled Zumba Fitness trends like new clothes, "hot tracks," and individuals' inspirational "Zumba Stories." Snippets of choreography are available on Zumba Fitness's official YouTube channel and on the public social media accounts of popular Zumba Fitness presenters. Zumba Fitness sells many exercise videos and video games available for home use regardless of ZIN status. Online advertisements enticing students to enroll in a Zumba class or to become instructors are regularly available. Zumba's products, like Zumba Wear or the now defunct "Shake Shake Shake" vegan shakes, are advertised and sold on the company's website. These public mate-

rials are crucial to the Zumba Fitness brand, perhaps even more so than exclusive content given to instructors, because they attract students who could potentially become dues-paying ZIN members. These public materials are also critical for my purposes since they shape the view of Zumba Fitness in the popular imagination for both detractors and enthusiasts. I combine these sources with other online sources, such as blog posts or memes, produced about Zumba Fitness by practitioners and detractors. Altogether, these sources uncover how Zumba Fitness sells tropicalized Latinness, and to what effect.

I combine my cultural studies analyses of these products and media with ethnographic research and interviews completed from 2016 to 2019 in New England, especially the Boston metropolitan area. The Zumba Home Office divides different areas into "districts," of which New England is District 45. Many Zumba instructors explained to me that District 45 is especially active—one even called it a "saturated market." There are countless Zumba Fitness classes in the area, as well as a plethora of professional development opportunities for Zumba instructors.[62] Over the course of my project, I attended not only Zumba Basic classes conducted by the instructors whom I interviewed, but also several special events organized by local instructors like charity "Zumbathons" or "Master Classes" taught by Zumba International Presenters from around the world. Therefore, despite my geographic limitations, I had the opportunity to experience a variety of Zumba Fitness styles and programs in diverse settings and taught by different levels of instructors. Focusing on one particular location allows for a more in-depth look at how experiences on the ground at times confirm and at other times counter what is presented by the Zumba Home Office.

On the other hand, collecting ethnographic data in District 45 has some limitations. Although some men teach Zumba Fitness, this area is dominated by women instructors, and all of my interviews are with women. About two-thirds of my interlocutors are also white. The white women I interviewed had very different experiences from the Black and Latina women who spoke with me, a point I have tried to highlight in the book. Since the Zumba Home Office does not release statistics about who their instructors are, it is impossible to know if the women I spoke with are representative of all Zumba instructors worldwide. Moreover, virtually all of the instructors taught predominantly white students. Had I conducted research in a different place with a more diverse clientele, their relationships to tropicalized Latinness might be different.

For instance, one Black instructor related to me her experience visiting a Zumba Fitness class in Atlanta, Georgia. She recalled, "I went there, and it was like one white person in the whole class, and I was like, 'Oh my God!' There are all these other networks . . . it's really different from being up here in New England." I have similarly heard about different types of classes from friends and family members, such as ones taught by Latinx instructors in New York City with a distinctly Spanish Caribbean clientele, or ones that cater to predominantly Black communities by featuring more funk or hip-hop music. Every class is different. *Fitness Fiesta!* analyzes a very small slice of the Zumba Fitness world, one that is primarily populated by white Americans, but with some racial and ethnic diversity.

Regardless of their racial background, many instructors whom I spoke with said they knew little, if anything, about Latin music or dance prior to starting Zumba Fitness. While this might limit some aspects of my research, in other ways, focusing on this population offered important insights into how the Zumba Home Office's selling of tropicalized Latinness was received on the ground by people with relatively little exposure to Latinx culture and life in the first place. At the same time, it is important to note that Zumba instructors did not all agree with the ways that the Zumba Home Office marketed Latin culture. Many instructors, including white ones, criticized the exotifying nature of Zumba Fitness's marketing, and they were skeptical of Zumba Fitness's potential impact on fostering greater cultural understanding. More research on other Zumba Fitness scenes will almost certainly reveal different interpretations of Zumba Fitness and tropicalized Latinness, including ways it might serve a different purpose, one that allows for alternative ideas and expressions of Latinx life to flourish. But, for this book, I focus on the dominant tropes that Zumba Fitness peddles to the wider public. My goal is not to provide a holistic or all-encompassing analysis of the various Zumba Fitness scenes and interpretations that exist in the United States or globally—and, in fact, I believe such a wide-ranging analysis of Zumba Fitness is virtually impossible given the amorphous nature of the company's business model. Instead, I aim to show how Zumba Fitness sells tropicalized Latinness and how instructors who are otherwise unfamiliar with Latin music respond to it. This is the story of one Zumba Fitness scene in one time and place, but it is also a story that reveals much about the relationship between popular culture, citizenship, and belonging in our contemporary "postracial" moment.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

Fitness Fiesta! centers on five key tropes that Zumba Fitness uses to construct and market tropicalized Latinness: authenticity, fun, fiesta, dreams, and love. One of the contradictions of Zumba Fitness's constructions of "Latin" culture is how it centers ideas about cultural authenticity in Latin America while simultaneously homogenizing Latinx culture as a "south of the border" style vacation. The first three chapters focus on how the tropes of authenticity, fiesta, and fun foster this contradiction. The first chapter, "Selling Authenticity," analyzes the trope of authenticity. Authenticity surfaces in Zumba Fitness via discourses that present their "rhythms" (i.e., the musical genres they utilize) as historical traditions unchanged by movement across space and time. I explore items such as the 2009 book *Zumba: Ditch the Workout, Join the Party! The Zumba Weight Loss Program*, written by Zumba Fitness founder Beto Pérez, and Boston-area instructors' recollections of Zumba Fitness "Jam Sessions" (educational programs for instructors) to consider the types of music origin stories that circulate in the Zumba Fitness world. I contrast these with examples of major global pop stars who collaborate with Zumba Fitness to show how the company's narrative of ancient, unchanged, and, therefore, "authentic" musical traditions conflicts with the reality of Zumba Fitness's modern pop soundtrack. The chapter ends with a discussion of how Zumba instructors interpret these origin stories, and their conflicting ideas of what counts as authentic. Overall, I argue that authenticity is a social construction that reproduces long-standing racist and colonial ideologies that present Latin America as more primitive and exotic than the United States.

Despite the trope of authenticity's emphasis on specificity, this embrace of stereotypes of Latin American primitivity lends itself to generalizations about Latinx life and culture. Chapter 2, "Selling Fiesta," explores how the trope of fiesta paints all the aforementioned authentic rhythms as part of a nonstop, exotic, and sexy fiesta. The Spanish word *fiesta* translates to *party*. More than just a word, though, fiesta has become an abstract trope that incorporates a host of stereotypes of Latinx communities as loud, fun-loving, and, especially, hypersexual people. Fiestas exist outside of the normative structures and behaviors associated with modernity and the Global North. As such, the trope of fiesta works together with authenticity to naturalize racial hierarchies that equate whiteness with reason, while simultaneously obscuring the systemic

inequalities inherent to these same racial hierarchies. "Selling Fiesta" explores the role of sexuality and the exotic tropics in constructing the trope of fiesta. I analyze how stereotypes of Latinx sexuality in particular permeate the Zumba Wear clothing line and internet memes about the fitness program. I combine my own reading of these materials with Zumba instructors' explanations of how they manage expressions of sexuality in their classes, with special attention to how race and gender impact their experiences. Ultimately, "Selling Fiesta" shows how the trope of fiesta produces a homogenized and hypersexualized tropicalized Latinness that both conflicts with and conjoins with the trope of authenticity to render Zumba Fitness foreign, exotic, sexy, and racially distinct from US Americanness.

Fiesta operates alongside fun, another trope that reproduces modern racial hierarchies. Zumba Fitness distinguishes itself from other exercise programs by de-emphasizing discipline and prioritizing fun. Fun implies an uninhibited freedom that only exists within the fiesta space, one that affords Zumba participants an opportunity to disregard the behavioral constraints associated with modern, respectable US Americanness. Descriptions of Zumba Fitness stress fun as a natural outcome derived from the program's roots in Latin dance. I analyze the trope of fun through a close reading of Zumba Fitness advertisements and publications such as their online newsletter *Z-Life*. I pair this with ethnographic data that reveals how hard Zumba Fitness instructors work to plan their classes and to curate fun. Still, many participants in Zumba Fitness classes are unaware of the level of preparation that their instructors go through, which is essential in order for fun to be perceived as an effortless, innate aspect of Zumba Fitness. I argue that the trope of fun works with that of fiesta to render tropicalized Latinness nonthreatening to the racial status quo, reframing potentially threatening qualities into desirable ones. Overall, authenticity, fiesta, and fun create a tropicalized Latinness that can be incorporated into the multicultural fabric of the United States, giving an illusion of equality but in actuality reinforcing the mechanisms of Latinx exclusion.

The final two chapters analyze how the tropes of dreams and love transform tropicalized Latinness into an ideal representation of hegemonic ideologies of postracialism and neoliberalism. In so doing, dreams and love further neutralize the potential threat posed by stereotypes like hypersexuality and primitivity embedded in tropicalized Latinness. Instead of presenting these qualities as suspicious or dangerous, love and dreams situate tropicalized Latinness as something

that can be incorporated into the United States even as Latinx people remain excluded from US citizenship rights. Here, I follow Catherine Ramírez's assertion that some subjects are simultaneously included and excluded from the state. She notes that not all groups in the United States are understood to be assimilable into the mainstream. Instead, Ramírez posits that for some groups, "their simultaneous inclusion and exclusion underscore that assimilation is not only the process whereby outsiders are turned into insiders; it is also the process whereby certain social actors and groups are rendered outsiders on the inside."[63] In this case, tropicalized Latinness represents "outsiders on the inside" by continuously signifying Latinxs' perceived otherness in ways that do not threaten, but actually *reinforce* the racial status quo in the United States. The tropes of dreams and love accomplish this by infusing tropicalized Latinness with neoliberal and postracial ideals that maintain hegemonic norms and systemic inequalities.

The trope of dreams centers stories of the ideal Latinx immigrant who capitalizes on the marketability of tropicalized Latinness to achieve the American dream. The American dream serves as the quintessential neoliberal symbol that prioritizes individuals' economic contributions and market viability as a condition of normative citizenship. Zumba Fitness frequently celebrates Beto Pérez for his rags to riches story, moving from an impoverished child in Colombia, to a scrappy immigrant in Miami, to a global fitness star. In "Selling Dreams," I analyze the recounting of Pérez's ascent in his own writings alongside stories of other Zumba International Presenters with similar testimonials about how Zumba Fitness enabled them to live out the American dream.[64] Like the Latin boom before it, these stories portray Zumba Fitness as an effective avenue for financial success while identifying certain Latinx bodies as assimilable into the multicultural United States. But Zumba Fitness is not so lucrative for everyone. I use ethnographic data to show that Zumba instructors of all racial backgrounds often struggle to achieve the financial stability promised by the program. This critique of the American dream exposes the failure of neoliberal multiculturalism to address systemic inequalities that disenfranchise Latinx people.

Similarly, "Selling Love" addresses yet another problem with the neoliberal multicultural thrust behind Zumba Fitness: the circulation of racist stereotypes alongside discourses of love, cultural tolerance, and diversity. Zumba Fitness promotes a "spread love" philosophy that centers positivity and acceptance and avoids any discussion of structural racism.

This makes the program a quintessential example of postracialism in the United States. Zumba Fitness only creates opportunities to address social problems about which there is little controversy, such as health issues like cancer or current events like natural disasters. This furthers the idea of selling love by emphasizing charity and neoliberal approaches to solving social problems without questioning, let alone acknowledging, the structural inequalities that are at the root of these problems. To demonstrate how this works on the ground, I analyze the Zumba Fitness brand's emphasis on individual charitable giving alongside discussions with local Zumba instructors about whether they see Zumba Fitness as an effective space in which to address social problems locally or nationally. I argue that the trope of love either ignores systemic racism or renders it a thing of the past. However, the contradictions embedded within Zumba Fitness enable some instructors to use their Zumba Fitness classes to highlight and educate students about issues impacting Latinx and Black populations.

Overall, *Fitness Fiesta!* considers the complex and often contradictory images of tropicalized Latinness that circulate in the Zumba universe. In general, I am very critical of the Zumba brand, even though I remain a dedicated Zumba Fitness participant who does indeed find Zumba fun. My ambivalence is similar to many of the other Zumba instructors and participants whom I have met over the course of my research. I hope to dwell in this contradiction. My goal is not to catalog the stereotypes embedded in Zumba Fitness but, more importantly, to show how they operate in ways that further enable systemic racial discrimination against Latinxs and other people of color in the United States. I aim to demonstrate how something that appears to wholeheartedly embrace cultural difference can ultimately reproduce the very same stereotypes it claims to refute. These seemingly positive forms of representation can have very insidious consequences. It is for this reason that Zumba Fitness matters. Many of the people I talk to generally think of Zumba Fitness as a positive platform for promoting good lifestyle habits such as health, self-care, happiness, and acceptance of others. But for all of the benefits many individuals (including myself) have experienced, the fitness program provides an important case study for understanding why even the most "positive" representations can actually reproduce unequal structures of power and further racial exclusion. This contradiction reflects one of the primary ways that race operates in the United States. Only by understanding this process can we move forward with imagining more egalitarian and emancipatory futures.

NOTES

WARM-UP

1 HIIT refers to "high-intensity interval training," characterized by intense spurts of exercise followed by short recovery periods.

2 See, e.g., Delextrat et al., "An 8-Week Exercise Intervention"; Lee et al., "Affective Change with Variations"; Viana et al., "Anxiolytic Effects of a Single Session."

3 Throughout this book, I use *rhythms* to refer to these genres in keeping with Zumba's vocabulary. However, as I mentioned previously, I recognize that these are all actual genres of music that incorporate various rhythms.

4 Throughout this book, I use the term *Latinx* to refer to people and cultural practices of Latin American descent within the United States (except when directly quoting other authors who use other terms). Proponents of the term *Latinx* argue that it is more inclusive of gender, sexuality, and race. I also see *Latinx* as a uniquely US-based construction that speaks to the particular experiences of people of Latin American descent within the United States. This makes the term especially useful for this project since I am primarily focused on interrogating the various meanings and representations of Latinness and Latinidad in Zumba Fitness scenes within the United States.

5 Pérez and Greenwood-Robinson, *Zumba*, 46.

6 I pieced together this story from multiple accounts of Zumba Fitness's founding. Of particular relevance are Pérez and Greenwood-Robinson's book *Zumba: Ditch the Workout, Join the Party!*, and an in-depth interview with Beto Pérez and Alberto Perlman on the NPR podcast *How I Built This*. See Guy Raz, "Zumba: Beto Pérez and Alberto Perlman," December 4, 2017, in *How I Built This*, produced by Rund Abdelfatah, podcast, 42:32, https://www.npr.org/2017/12/04/567747778/zumba-beto-perez-alberto-perlman.

7 When I began this research in 2016, the Zumba Fitness official website claimed to have over 200,000 classes in 180 countries. At the time of this writing in 2022, however, those statistics have been removed. This could be for many reasons—declining popularity, a shifting marketing focus, or a host of other issues. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Zumba Fitness is a global fitness phenomenon.

8 Leigh Buchanan, "Zumba Fitness: Company of the Year," *Inc*., December 4, 2012, https://www.inc.com/magazine/201212/leigh-buchanan/zumba-fitness-company-of-the-year-2012.html.

9 Nancy Dahlberg, "How Zumba Still Rocks the Fitness World," *Miami Herald*, August 26, 2018, https://www.miamiherald.com/latest-news/article217263095.html.

10 For an overview of these arguments, see Carey, "Citizenship."

11 LeBesco, "Fat."

12 McKenzie, *Getting Physical*.

13 McKenzie, *Getting Physical*, 38.

14 McKenzie, *Getting Physical*.

15 McKenzie, *Getting Physical*, 123.

16 Dworkin and Wachs, *Body Panic*; McKenzie, *Getting Physical*.

17 Dworkin and Wachs, *Body Panic*, 35.

18 Smith Maguire, *Fit for Consumption*, 20.

19 McKenzie, *Getting Physical*, 164.

20 Woitas, "'Exercise Teaches You the Pleasure of Discipline'"; McKenzie, *Getting Physical*, 164–65.

21 McKenzie, *Getting Physical*, 145.

22 For a critique of the "welfare queen" stereotype, see P. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 78–81.

23 Hernandez, *Aesthetics of Excess*, 9–11.

24 Ferrell, "'White Man's Burden,'" 260.

25 Firth, "Healthy Choices and Heavy Burdens"; Greenhalgh and Carney, "Bad Biocitizens?"; Minkoff-Zern and Carney, "Latino Im/Migrants, 'Dietary Health' and Social Exclusion"; Thompson, "Neoliberalism, Soul Food, and the Weight of Black Women."

26 Boero, "Fat Kids, Working Moms, and the 'Epidemic of Obesity,'" 116.

27 Minkoff-Zern and Carney, "Latino Im/Migrants, 'Dietary Health' and Social Exclusion," 471.

28 For instance, Molina shows how public health programs in Los Angeles at the turn of the twentieth century targeted Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican immigrant groups and promoted good health and hygiene as crucial for citizenship. See Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens*?

29 Ramírez, *Assimilation*, 12.

30 Ramírez, *Assimilation*, 72.

31 Zanker and Gard, "Fatness, Fitness, and the Moral Universe," 49.

32 California's Proposition 187 blocked undocumented immigrants from accessing public services. Although it was ultimately declared unconstitutional, Prop 187 reflected the growing anti-immigrant sentiment of the 1990s. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 was federal legislation that significantly criminalized undocumented immigration, militarized the US-Mexico

border, and limited immigration to those who could prove they would not become a public charge. For more information, see Menjívar, "Illegality"; and Paik, *Bans, Walls, Raids, Sanctuary*.

33 Amaya, *Citizenship Excess*; Bebout, *Whiteness on the Border*.

34 For analysis of the immigrant marches, see Chavez, *Latino Threat*.

35 Bebout, *Whiteness on the Border*; Chavez, *Latino Threat*.

36 Chavez, *Latino Threat*, 3.

37 Bebout, *Whiteness on the Border*.

38 For more on the Latin boom, see Cepeda, *Musical ImagiNation*.

39 Cepeda, *Musical ImagiNation*, 58.

40 Rivera-Rideau, "Reinventing Enrique Iglesias."

41 Santa Ana, *Brown Tide Rising*.

42 Perry, *Cultural Politics of U.S. Immigration*, 185, 189.

43 Amaya, *Citizenship Excess*, 162.

44 Dávila, *Latino Spin*.

45 I use pseudonyms for all of the Zumba instructors whom I interviewed except for public figures (e.g., Zumba International Presenters) who agreed to the use of their names.

46 Zack Guzman, "How Zumba's Founders Turned a Video Made on the Beach with a Handycam into a Global Phenomenon," CNBC, last updated July 24, 2018, https://www.cnbc.com/2018/07/19/how-zumba-exercise-class-went-from-an-idea-to-global-phenomenon.html.

47 For an overview of how scholars approach the concept of Latinidad, see Aparicio, "Latinidad/es."

48 Mora, *Making Hispanics*.

49 Dávila, *Latinos, Inc*.

50 Aparicio, *Negotiating Latinidad*, 31.

51 Herrera, *Latin Numbers*, 13.

52 Molina-Guzmán, *Dangerous Curves*, 9.

53 Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman, *Tropicalizations*, 8.

54 Aparicio and Chávez Silverman, *Tropicalizations*, 8.

55 Maldonado-Torres, "Sovereignty."

56 Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman, *Tropicalizations*; Herrera, *Latin Numbers*; Sandoval-Sánchez, *José, Can You See?*; Dávila, *Latinos, Inc*.; Báez, *In Search of Belonging*.

57 Dahlberg, "How Zumba Still Rocks the Fitness World."

58 "Becky G at the XII Zumba Fitness-Concert," Zumba, August 12, 2019, YouTube video, 0:56, youtube.com/watch?v=q7TqP8LxwpU.

59 Melamed, "Spirit of Neoliberalism."

60 hooks, *Black Looks*.

61 Other scholars who have researched comparable fitness programs have encountered similar restrictions. For example, Devon Powers and DM Greenwell note that the "proprietary, litigious nature" of

the CrossFit and Bikram Yoga brands that they study required that they use a combination of ethnography and outside resources like "journalism, trade books, Internet resources" to analyze these fitness brands. See Powers and Greenwell, "Branded Fitness," 524.

62 I finished my research just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Like everything else, Zumba Fitness classes shut down. However, as I detail later in the book, the Zumba Home Office allowed instructors to teach online. This meant that I could continue taking classes. It also enabled me to take classes with Zumba International Presenters who live in other states and to attend special master classes that Zumba International Presenters opened to the public. Although I maintained my own Zumba Fitness practice throughout this research, I collected all of the ethnographic and interview data for this project prior to the pandemic.

63 Ramírez, *Assimilation*, 15.

64 Zumba International Presenters are instructors, most of whom have climbed the Zumba ranks, who often serve as the face of the brand with features in advertisements, videos, and the like.

CHAPTER 1. SELLING AUTHENTICITY

1 "Zumba Fitness World Party Video Game US Commercial," November 27, 2013, YouTube video, 0:30, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRsoDAK35HI.

2 "Zumba Fitness World Party—Nintendo Wii," Amazon.com listing, accessed March 23, 2023, https://www.amazon.com/Zumba-Fitness-World-Party-Nintendo-Wii/dp/B00DJYK8XS/.

3 It is worth pointing out that this distinction between exotic tropical others and modern whiteness is also evident in the video game itself. The segments about Los Angeles and Europe focus primarily on technique and training, while the segments on Brazil, the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, and Hawai'i all emphasize feeling, inherent rhythm, and tradition. This distinction further reinforces the dichotomy between the modern Global North and the tropicalized Global South. It also mirrors similar discourses in other dance scenes like ballroom wherein European-derived dances are often thought of as more technical and refined than Latin ones.

4 Miller, *Playable Bodies*, 63.

5 Miller, *Playable Bodies*, 64.

6 Miller, *Playable Bodies*, 75, 166.

7 Miller, *Playable Bodies*, 1.

8 Daniel Nye Griffiths, "Marketing Zumba Fitness: Selling Games without Gamers," *Forbes*, February 23, 2012, https://www.forbes.com