

## *100% Puerto Rican: Jennifer Lopez, Latinidad, and the Marketing of Authenticity*

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### **ABSTRACT**

In 2012, The L’Oreal Group launched a somewhat unorthodox marketing campaign for their “True Match” foundation, which included both print advertisements and tv commercials, and originally featured three specific celebrities: Beyoncé Knowles, Jennifer López, and Aimee Mullins. Going beyond the “different hues” approach usually promoted by these types of commercials and advertisement, L’Oreal presented consumers with the ethnic background of each celebrity: Beyoncé Knowles was described as African American, Native American, and French; Mullins was characterized as Irish, Austrian, and Italian; and Jennifer López was pronounced 100% Puerto Rican. This essay focuses on Jennifer López’s advertisements, as the claim to 100% Puerto Ricanness carries implications for conceptions of both Puerto Rican and Latina identity in the 21st Century U.S. This is especially key when considering the effects of marketed and marketable appeals to racial and ethnic authenticity in the construction of racial and ethnic identity and racial and ethnic labels. [Key words: Jennifer Lopez, ethnicity, representation, advertisement, commercialization, authenticity]

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I am incredibly proud of my culture and I think I am a woman who is totally defined by my culture. My temperament, my body shape, the way I am is all very much Puerto Rican.  
—Jennifer Lopez, April 2007.

Used to have a little, now I have a lot.  
No matter where I go, I know where I came from.  
—Lyrics from “Jenny from the Block” by Jennifer Lopez

There are people who know who I am, and that’s good enough for me.  
—Biography section of Jennifer Lopez Official Website

### **The Marketing of Ethnicities, L’Oréal Edition**

In 2012, the L’Oréal Group (also referred to here as L’Oréal cosmetics or L’Oréal) launched an unorthodox marketing campaign for their “True Match” foundation. The campaign included both print advertisements and television commercials, featuring three specific celebrities: Beyoncé Knowles, Jennifer Lopez, and Aimee Mullins.<sup>1</sup> Going beyond the “different hues” approach that these types of advertisements have historically utilized, and in an unprecedented move, L’Oréal presented to consumers the ethnic background of each celebrity. This was accomplished by placing their corresponding ethnicity or ethnicities of each celebrity on the bottom left corner of the television screen and the bottom right corner of the print advertisement. The commercials and advertisements described Beyoncé Knowles as African American, Native American, and French; they characterized Aimee Mullins as Irish, Austrian, and Italian; and they pronounced Jennifer Lopez 100% Puerto Rican. Exactly like that: 100% Puerto Rican.<sup>2</sup>

The television commercials are all very similar to each other. Each begins with the person sitting on the floor wearing a dress, with nothing else around them but a grayish background. The moment the commercial begins, we hear a short voiceover narration of the celebrity saying: “There is a story behind my skin: It’s a mosaic of all the faces before it. My only makeup: True Match.” The commercials then go on to talk about L’Oréal’s 33 shades of True Match foundation going from light to dark, which they tell the audience they offer in warm, cool, or neutral tones, and they all end with each celebrity looking at the

camera, delivering (a slight modification of) the company's signature phrase: "and I'm worth it." The labeling of "100% Puerto Rican" in Jennifer Lopez's commercial happens approximately four seconds into the thirty-second commercial, in an incredibly close close-up of Lopez's face, branding her right lower cheek (and thus her) with the label for approximately three seconds. The print advertisements showed her picture with the following captioning on the bottom: "The story behind my skin: 100% Puerto Rican. Jennifer Lopez. 100% True Match W6 Sun Beige."

A few things come immediately to mind. First, that these celebrities are able to use the same narrative even though they are from three distinctly racialized backgrounds and, according to the very commercials, from multiple and seemingly mutually exclusive ethnic backgrounds, can appear to be a step in the direction of parity in racial representation in advertisement. However, we must not lose sight of the truism embedded in the narrative, for the story behind everybody's skin has always been a mosaic of previous generations, even in times conducive to the worst instances of racial disparity. In essence, the statement is a biological "truth," not a statement (or evidence of improvement) on race relations. The narrative also becomes true for each one of us today, which is ultimately what L'Oréal intends, as their appeals to ancestry become a strategic marketing tool. Thus, the fact that Knowles, Lopez, and Mullins can use the same script does not mean that they have actually achieved racial parity in advertisement or elsewhere. Second, going by the narrative, the celebrities are talking about their skin being a mosaic of previous generations, but skin is not inherited through ethnicity, only through genetics. The dissonance between the narrative and the labeling of the celebrities seems strategic, for it reflects a common misunderstanding among Americans that race and ethnicity are synonymous, and both based on biology. But as I will discuss shortly, it is obvious that even though they conflate phenotype and ethnicity in the production of these commercials, the marketing team organizing the campaign for The L'Oréal Group did seem to understand the distinction between race/phenotype and ethnicity.

In its Website, L'Oréal claims to be "notably dedicated to celebrating the diversity of beauty" listing their "broad range of spokespeople" as proof of this "diversity" (L'Oréal 2014). But looking at the commercials and print advertisements, we understand that, in the particular marketing campaign discussed here, L'Oréal isn't selling a generic or universal appeal to diversity, or even ancestry, but one that is rooted in multiple and specific marketable

ethnicities embodied by a few of their spokespeople. Also, there is something precarious about the marketability of these ethnicities, as they are passively presented to viewers by way of a label, and not verbally claimed by the celebrities. It is important to note that, as a marketing strategy, the company chose to highlight the ethnic instead of the racial background of these celebrities, for it shows a certain level of understanding in regards to the distinction between the two, and perhaps more important, it signals that the L'Oréal Group felt more comfortable marketing ethnicity rather than race, or both ethnicity and race. Think, for instance, that, the idea of skin as a mosaic notwithstanding, Mullins had as much a claim to 100 percent whiteness as Lopez had to 100 percent Puerto Ricanness. We could also argue that, given the history of racial and ethnic constructions in this country, Knowles also had a claim to being 100 percent African American or Black (American). Instead, the L'Oréal Group is allowing Lopez to claim 100 percent Puerto Ricanness, while the whiteness of Mullins is disguised under several European ethnicities, and the blackness of Knowles is mediated by several ethnicities as well.<sup>3</sup>

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But how would audiences and customers react to a campaign specifically juxtaposing Puerto Ricanness (a decidedly racialized ethnicity) to Whiteness and Blackness? Or, perhaps more important, what would Lopez's claim be if the company decided to do a campaign based exclusively on race instead of ethnicity/nationality? It seems as though the L'Oréal Group sees a 100 percent claim to a specific Latina ethnicity is a marketable (and perhaps fashionable) distinction, in ways that claims to 100 percent Whiteness or 100 percent Blackness, for instance, may not be. And while I am assuming that the ethnicities presented to us in these commercials reflect, in some way or another, the celebrity's self-identification, I also assume that L'Oréal intervened where it suited its marketing vision, perhaps asking them to identify by ancestry. In the end, we must keep in mind that another option for Lopez was to be labeled 100 percent Latina. But perhaps even the L'Oréal Group understands that being Latina is not an ethnicity anchored in a tangible culture and/or

place, as is the case for the other ethnicities featured in the commercials. And of course being 100 percent American, which the three celebrities in question could have easily claimed, also raises questions for two of the three, given that Americanness has historically and still currently remains closely associated with Whiteness (Haney-Lopez 1996; Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo 2010).

We gain some insight on L'Oréal's approach to this campaign by going to the company's website and reading the preamble to the blurbs about their celebrity endorsers (whom they call their "spokespeople"), where the three women discussed above are included, along with fifteen other celebrities. According to the page: "A subtle blend of sensuality, glamour and authenticity is provided by celebrities, who captivate and inspire people of all ages, backgrounds, and ethnicities" (L'Oréal 2014). It is in their appeal to authenticity, along with the invocation of all "backgrounds and ethnicities," that we get a better understanding of the company's aim. Moreover, the page tells us that "[t]he L'Oréal spokespeople have their own passions, style, and personalities but they all have in common a real charisma. Their very own way of sharing a particular vision of beauty as a means of personal accomplishment, a source of freedom and a way of escaping" (L'Oréal 2014). This is important, for at the same time that the company boasts about the uniqueness of these women, it also suggests that they have pretty similar personality traits, level of success, and overall lifestyle.

Although much more can be said about all three sets of advertisements in the marketing campaign emphasizing ethnicities, and even more can be said about the L'Oréal Group's vision and understanding of ethnic backgrounds, I will focus on Jennifer Lopez's advertisements (both television commercials and print) for the campaign in question, as they are the only advertisements with a 100 percent claim to a background, a claim that carries implications for conceptions of both Puerto Rican and Latina identity in the U.S. at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is especially true because these identities are (re)produced in relation to notions of authenticity and through marketing and the media. I also want to discuss Lopez, for as Isabel Molina-Guzmán tells us, "No other contemporary Latina-identified celebrity has captivated and frustrated the [U.S. popular] imagination... more than Lopez" (2010: 51). The uniqueness of Jennifer Lopez's trajectory within the U.S. mainstream culture will serve as an anchor for the discussion of authenticity I develop below.

As I continue with a discussion of Jennifer Lopez's ability to both captivate and frustrate us all, I have two points of clarification: one involving her ethnic

identification in this marketing campaign; and the other involving my focusing on this particular marketing campaign. In relation to the first point, although I will discuss her L'Oréal advertisements, and the implications they may generate, and although I will discuss her racial and ethnic positioning within the context of the U.S., it is not the aim of this essay to dispute Lopez's claim to being 100 percent Puerto Rican. Her ethnic identity itself is not in question, only her commercial(ized) deployment of that ethnicity and its consequences. Regarding the second point, much can be said about the marketing strategies for the many products to which Jennifer Lopez has lent her name,<sup>4</sup> peddling her ethnicity in the process in many of them. However, I think much insight can be gained from focusing on this specific marketing campaign, in that it is different from any and all other marketing ploys. Indeed, this is the only campaign where Lopez's ethnic background is made explicit, and the only campaign where purity and authenticity are invoked, by way of an ethnic label.

With that in mind, this essay seeks to: (1) contribute to conversations about marketed and marketable appeals to racial and ethnic authenticity at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; (2) question the ideas behind an ethnicity that is construed as authentic while being marketed in a bottle of makeup; and (3) show that claims to 100 percent Puerto Ricanness may pose certain complications for how Latinos and Latinas are perceived in mainstream US culture and society.

### **Notions of Authenticity and Racial(ized) Constructions**

#### *A Few Points on Racial Authenticity*

In his influential essay "Identity, Authenticity, Survival," philosopher K. Anthony Appiah contests notions that an authentic identity must fight social forces (of convention) that seem to threaten its development. This is done by proposing that those very forces constitute a person's identity in the first place. He poignantly argues that "it is in the dialogue with other people's understandings of who I am that I develop a conception of my own identity" (1994: 154). More forcefully, he argues that "[w]e make up selves from a tool kit of options made available by our culture and society. We do make choices, but we do not determine the options among which we choose" (Appiah 1994: 155). Appiah's argument provides us with a starting point for our discussion of marketed/marketable identities. Mainly, if it is in the interaction with social forces and social agents that we make sense of ourselves, we must keep in mind that the media constitute a fundamental part of the social forces

with which individuals and social groups interact. Case in point: Jennifer Lopez's advertisements showing her claim to being 100 percent Puerto Rican are mediated by L'Oréal's understanding of 100% Puerto Ricanness. This particular interaction between social agent and social forces is an important one, for it provides a "tool" for the kit Appiah talks about, from which the audience watching/reading those advertisements will choose.

Robin D.G. Kelly (1992) also provides insight into the relationship between constructions of authenticity, individuals, and social forces when he tells us that we must view a term like authentic as "socially constructed and contingent," subject to social dynamics (1992: 1408). This reminds us that the L'Oréal commercials are the result of the time period from which they emerged, that is, at the tail end of a Latino boom, but also at a time period that has been called both post-racial and multicultural (Palermo 2014; Kimmel 2013).

Christopher Bracey argues that in our contemporary society, to seek authenticity is to seek items and experiences that exude a "sense of truth," with the understanding that the experience "that bears the hallmark of authenticity is invariably perceived as superior" (2011: 2). The superiority of the authentic experience translates to contemporary notions of race, for as Bracey also tells us, "The power of race to influence our lives and relationships ultimately turns on our ability to experience ourselves as racial beings. And much like everything else these days, this raced experience is perceived as superior when it [is] shown to be authentic" (2011: 3). Bracey's biggest contribution to discussions about racial authenticity has to do with his discussion of racial salience and racial authentication, concepts that can be easily applied to notions of ethnicity. In his words:

**Today, racial authentication is less about rough policing of categorical boundaries and more focused on *racial salience*—the depth and saturation level of one's professed racial affiliation.... A person who wishes to authenticate his own race seeks to demonstrate racial salience through performance of a racialized identity. (2011: 5)**

He continues his discussion by arguing that "the virtues of race, be they status, benefit, or kinship, are reserved for the most racially salient—those select individuals whose racial credentials and performance of racial identity meet or exceed our expectations" (2011: 5). I will return to a discussion of racial salience in the conclusion, but for now I would like to use Bracey's point about performativity, as "performance of a racialized identity" becomes the means

to claim “truth” about that identity, and in the marketing campaign in question, a way to claim authenticity. In this case, Jennifer Lopez’s performance as a celebrity becomes a performance about her Puerto Ricanness, and her body, the means through which both identities merge, becomes the truth that sells the product.

This brings us to Michael Nieto Garcia, who conveys that notions about racial/ethnic authenticity create a hegemonic discourse. Skeptical of notions around ethnic authenticity, especially as these notions permeate constructions of Latino/ness, Nieto Garcia bluntly states that “[e]thnic authenticity transmutes essentialist logic into ethnic terms, trading biological claims for (mostly) cultural ones” (2012 132). This is key for our discussion of the L’Oréal Group’s True Match Campaign, which in the case of Lopez seems to walk a very fine line between ethnic authenticity and ethnic essentialism (the truth Bracey talks about), by suggesting that her 100 percent Puerto Ricanness can be contained in a bottle of foundation. Isabel Molina Guzmán warns us about the dangers of essentialism involving contemporary notions of Latinos for these “may be more informative of how we inscribe ourselves through the bodies of others” (2007: 122). Guzmán’s point resonates with Appiah’s notion involving the dialectic relationship between the self and social forces, as they both speak of inscribing ourselves through the bodies of others and, I would add, through the marketed/marketable constructions of those bodies. This dialectic becomes key in any discussion of authenticity. But before I delve into constructions of authenticity vis-à-vis Jennifer Lopez and the True Match foundation campaign, I would like to contextualize notions of authenticity in the US and Puerto Rico, as these inform both the way Lopez inscribes herself and the way she is read by others.

#### ***A Few Points about Racial Authenticity in the U.S.***

Americans have learned important lessons on race and racial authenticity from certain historical projects. Some of these projects have been the result of nativist sentiment (Haney Lopez 1996; Chávez 2006), and all have been the result of what Joe Feagin (2006) calls systemic racism, and what Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) call racial formation, which is to say that they have been created as part of the processes determining the content and importance of racial categories, and shaping racial meanings. The most fundamental of these processes, as Ian Haney Lopez has identified, is the law, which has played a central role in the constructions of race in this country by ascribing

“racialized meanings to physical features and ancestry,” and by translating “ideas about race into the material societal conditions that confirm and entrench those ideas” (1996: 14). The processes used to create racial categories and assign racial meaning have been the same processes that have created the illusion of racial and/or ethnic authenticity.

Four specific examples in this respect are: (1) hypodescent laws, a legal hyper-exercise seeking to determine and measure racial contamination, in effect until very recently; (2) Jim Crow laws, a sustained effort to keep whiteness separate from non-whiteness in certain states and regions of the country, instituted after the abolition of slavery, and in effect until the 1960s; (3) laws against miscegenation enacted and enforced in a number of states and in effect until 1967; and (4) multiple legislative efforts throughout the 20th and 21st centuries controlling immigration, seeking to keep non-white immigrants out of the U.S. These prejudicial laws are perhaps some of the country’s most enduring efforts, for they are still in effect or being created today. Regardless of when they were fashioned, such legislative efforts have two things in common: (1) they were all created to contain Whiteness and maintain its authenticity/purity; and (2) the ideological components that created and sustained them have remained in the collective consciousness of Americans long after the laws themselves have been stricken from the books.<sup>5</sup>

Talking about the importance of these legal efforts in creating an enduring notion of Whiteness, Ian Haney Lopez expounds:

**The insistence that Whiteness is common knowledge, even against considerable evidence that it is a complex and ill-defined category, obviates and deflects inquiries about race. Race need not and cannot be interrogated because its essence is immediately and already known, particularly among Whites who possess the repository of common knowledge about whiteness. Through those various forms of naturalization, Whiteness becomes transparent, a protected status that one either has or does not have, but about which one need not think. (1996: 164)**

The entirety of these legal efforts was developed to preserve an authentic and pure whiteness, one that has historically been linked to citizenship and belonging. In that regard, through the law, citizenship has historically become the materiality of whiteness, and whiteness has always needed to be authenticated and protected.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the idea of white authenticity suggests non-white authenticity as well. That is, the historical search for and protection of an authentic white person provides a vision for minoritized racial and ethnic

groups to counter with an authentic black person, or American Indian, or Asian American, or, case in point, an authentic Puerto Rican.

It can be argued that from the start, as a major social force/institution, popular culture has contributed to the country's historical efforts toward a cogent (if flawed) articulation of racial authenticity in the U.S., by playing a critical role in creating and disseminating specific conceptions of race, ethnicity, and nationality. These conceptions have offered Americans a site to validate their ideas about Whiteness and non-Whiteness. For instance, in her book *Slippery Characters*, Laura Browder traces the influence of U.S. popular culture on public discourse around authenticity to the times of P.T. Barnum's American Museum and Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Barnum claimed an authenticity of the exhibits in his museum, which, Browder suggests, helped the middle class to begin performing an American authenticity of sorts by merely attending the exhibits (2000: 54). In Cody's show, the authenticity of the performers as authentic White Cowboys and non-White Indians was stressed above all else (2000: 61). More recently, the development of a black popular culture (including television programming) and a smaller Latino/a popular culture (including shows, movies, performers, etc.) suggests that popular culture continues to provide Americans with specific definitions of racial and/or ethnic authenticity. Of course, these social and historical projects have little if anything to do with racial or ethnic authenticity per se (in any strict biological or genetic or cultural way, as no such thing exists), but they have been closely related to the creation of a dominant and enduring discourse and ideology about racial, ethnic, and national authenticity in the U.S., reifying these notions in the process.

#### ***A Few Points about Racial Authenticity in Puerto Rico***

Although the history of ideological projects invoking racial authenticity in Puerto Rico contrasts markedly with that of the U.S., Puerto Rican mythology has nonetheless also created a dominant discourse around race, one that extends into nation formation for both Puerto Ricans on the island and those on the mainland, who, as Yeidy Rivero (2005) and Marisel Moreno (2012) remind us, are articulated as "la gran familia puertorriqueña" (the great Puerto Rican family). Rivero is clear that, since the 1930s, constant efforts at articulating Puerto Ricanness have "functioned as a symbolic shield against the United States" (2005: 15). Moreno expounds that la gran familia puertorriqueña "continues to inform notions of Puerto Rican identity both in and outside the

island and that the diaspora community has invoked this myth as a strategy to reclaim its kinship ties to the greater Puerto Rican family” (2012: 3). These articulations define Puerto Ricanness as an true existential phenomenon, and are part of the “cultural nationalism efforts” that Christopher Schmidt-Nowara discusses in his work, which, as he argues, became a way for “colonial patriots” to “define a sphere of authentic culture and history protected from what they considered external influences” (2006: 14). Historically, this has meant Spanish (pre-1898) and American (post-1898) influences.

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Paradoxically, Puerto Rican racial mythology offers a narrative about Puerto Rican authenticity by way of cultural and racial mixing and hybridity. And unlike in other Latin American countries, where *mestizaje* is the primary means of racial hybridity, the bulk of racial mixing in Puerto Rico has been the result of *mulataje* (the mix of European and Black), which has offered a longer historical continuity. In the words of theorist José Luis González: “the first Puerto Ricans were in fact black Puerto Ricans” (1993: 10). However, partly because of conquest, partly because of slavery, and mostly because of history, Puerto Ricans have also had a difficult relationship to blackness. This difficult relationship was refined, Rivero suggests, with the advent of Puerto Rican television and other forms of media, by “constructions and discussions of blackness,” which, as she explains, “functioned though historically specific ideological processes that fostered a variety of racial, political, cultural, and social meanings” (2005: 3). As a result, the Puerto Rican dominant racial ideology offers a triad of racial mixing, or as Schmidt-Nawara (2006) calls them, “the three roots,” where European and African ancestries have been tempered by an absent yet omnipresent indigenous figure.

Thus, politicians, academics and social pundits alike have learned to invoke the image of a racial trinity of sorts that includes Spanish, Indian (Taíno), and Black ancestry, in equally distributed proportions, as the building blocks of the authentic Puerto Rican figure. But, according to popular ideology, although the product of these three distinct races, the Puerto Rican subject has been

able to transcend her origins. Thus, the racial trinity creed dictates that the racial origins of the modern-day Puerto Rican is a homogeneous and binding alchemy of races that no longer exist as independent entities on the island, for now we have the *puertorriqueño/a de pura cepa*.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the fetishization of the racial trinity has led to rhetorical strategies about Puerto Rican authenticity, beginning with the notion of “the great Puerto Rican family,” and ending with the notion of “the 100% Puerto Rican.”

### **Latinidad, Marketing, and Commodification**

In her book *Shopping for Identity*, Marilyn Halter tells us that, when it comes to people trying to showcase culture through commercial means, they usually stand at the intersection of two extremes: “authentic cultural purity” and “cultural expression that has been so commercialized that it has been robbed of any distinctive meaning” (2000: 17). She expounds that “[t]he search for authenticity is very much related to nostalgia for an idealized and fixed point in time when folk culture was supposedly untouched by the corruption that is automatically associated with commercial development” (2000: 17). In the case of Latinas/os, the nostalgia is that of a distant land fixed in time through collective memory and practices.

For Latinos/as in the U.S., constructions of ethnic and cultural authenticity are also mediated by way of an amorphous yet stereotypical Latinidad (Aparicio 2003; Davila 2009). Frances Aparicio tells us that “the multiple subjectivities and identities that Latinos embody” lead to complex processes of interlatino transculturations. These interlatino transculturations, she expands, may lead to “competing authenticities,” and in certain spaces to “numerous forms of negotiations...cultural divergences, and power hierarchies” as well (2003: 92). Aparicio (2003) invokes the current moment to position Latina/o subjectivity as a backdrop to the phenomenon that people sometimes lovingly and sometimes cynically call J.Lo. Something to consider, of course, is that J.Lo. “emerged” in a society that sought to glorify and exoticize Latino/a celebrities, while hanging on to a long history of exploiting and denouncing Latinos/as.

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*One illustration of this problem is found in the opening epigraph of this essay, where Lopez claims that her body is “very much Puerto Rican,” suggesting that there is such a thing as an authentic Puerto Rican body.*

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But, as Aparicio also reminds us, Latina/o performers and celebrities have not come out undamaged from this paradoxical moment, for although they may be glorified by the mainstream culture, they have also become “visual embodiments of the colonial conditions and historical experiences of second-generation US Latinas who have been public objects of racial sexualization” (2003: 97). It is in that racial sexualization that we begin to understand the problematic aspect of attempting to find any kind of Latina/o authenticity. One illustration of this problem is found in the opening epigraph of this essay, where Lopez claims that her body is “very much Puerto Rican,” suggesting that there is such a thing as an authentic Puerto Rican body. Isabel Molina Guzmán and Angharad Valdivia take this point further by arguing that “Latina/o identity, as a hybrid form within U.S. culture, remaps dominant hierarchies of identity and challenges popular notions of place and nation” (2004: 214). In fact, they advance their argument by telling us that Latinas/os “occupy a racialized space in between the dominant U.S. binary of Black or White identities” and, perhaps more important, that no Latina celebrity in the U.S. “can lay a claim to an authentically pure ethnic identity, rather they may claim or reject a multiplicity of ethnic identities.” (2004: 214) This is why, although Jennifer Lopez may stake a claim to 100 percent Puerto Ricanness, she has also claimed to be Nuyoricana, American, and Latina, suggesting that her ethnic and national identities may be more complicated than the L’Oréal advertisements lead on.

Molina Guzmán and Valdivia regale us with the biggest insight on authenticity when they insist that “US Latinas/os are never authentic, as the boundaries of identity are policed by both the U.S. and specific Latin American national-ethnic cultures” (2004: 216). And they continue: “It is difficult to find a person of pure ethnic identity, and if it were possible, Latino communities would not be the place for racial or ethnic purity” (2004: 217). They explain that, in the case of Lopez and other Latina celebrities, “as transnational figures...they exist within the representational conflict between the hybrid and the authentic that many diasporic cultures occupy” (2004: 218). However, as Tara Lockhart points out, Lopez participates very “actively in authenticating herself,” arguing that her primary text is one of natural ability and authenticity (2007: 153). In her words: “Lopez is constructed as hard working and focused, characteristics that, when joined to her natural talent and charisma, have aided her in realizing not only her own dreams but also a particular version of the ethnic-American Dream” (2007: 153). This is, perhaps, the vision that she and

L'Oréal tried to convey in the True Match marketing campaign, one in which being 100 percent Puerto Rican was seen as contributing to an authentic US society built by the hard work of multi-ethnic, multicultural “American” others.

### **Jennifer Lopez and Authentic Racial Ambivalence**

As the daughter of two Puerto Rican parents, Jennifer Lopez is assumed to be the result of the Puerto Rican racial alchemy discussed above. But, born and raised in the Bronx, in New York City, Lopez is also the daughter of the Puerto Rican diaspora, at least one generation removed from the complicated understandings of Puerto Rican ideologies about racial authenticity, and at least one generation into the equally complicated map of US (urban) race relations. Moreover, she has spent the entirety of her life experiencing, firsthand, the workings of mainland race relations, including the fact that in the last census, 53 percent of Latinos identified as white.<sup>8</sup> It is, no doubt, through that map that, at least partly, her claim to 100 percent Puerto Ricanness takes form, a claim that simultaneously invokes and muddles racial, ethnic, cultural, and national constructions as it involves a direct comparison and contrast exercise with other racialized groups in the US. That is to say, Jennifer Lopez may see herself as Puerto Rican because she is the daughter of Puerto Rican parents, but she may also see herself as Puerto Rican because she may not see herself as Black, or White, or as a member of any other discreet racialized group in US society. In the end, as a Puerto Rican in the United States, she needs not contemplate anything else about her background; and, given Puerto Rican ideology on the matter and the taken-for-granted racialized tones of any Latina/o identification, that includes her race as articulated by U.S. history and the U.S. imaginary. It is not the case that Puerto Ricanness is necessarily mutually exclusive from Whiteness or Blackness (or Asianness or American Indianness), but rather, Puerto Ricanness may serve as a refuge from (other) racial considerations. This leads her to claim, as she did in one of the opening epigraphs, that her body is “very much Puerto Rican,” without anyone so much as batting an eye, even when we ponder the meaning of such a statement. In this case, a Puerto Rican body is a specifically racialized (though not necessarily racial) body. It is also the means through which (in addition to her parentage) she “authenticates” herself. As Isabel Molina Guzmán tells us, Lopez uses her body “as empirical, irrefutable evidence of her Puerto Rican identity, her authentic self” as “a real Puerto Rican” (2010: 60). Thus, although Latinos may never be authentic as Guzmán and Valdivia claim, they do have ways of trying

to authenticate themselves in a society that, because of its history, expects them to do just that.

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Mary Beltran also talks about the “realness” of Lopez’s body, when she was cast as Fly Girl, which was “fitting a show targeting the ‘urban’ demographic” (2009: 136). This is important, as in addition to using her body to claim Puerto Ricanness, she seems to be using her body to claim other positionalities, and to sell a specific product, which taps into issues of legitimacy (and salience, as discussed by Bracey above), not only for Lopez herself, but for anyone buying the product, and for anyone who also thinks of herself as a (100 percent) Puerto Rican. As Halter tells us, “When individuals purchase something considered representative of a culture, whether buying a piece of their own heritage or branching out to expose themselves to another’s, they expect a certain level of legitimacy” (2000: 19). It boggles the mind that Puerto Rican “heritage” or identity could be packaged and sold in a bottle of foundation, making us wonder whether anyone with Lopez’s background, putting on that exact same foundation, is also made to feel 100% Puerto Rican.

That is to say, Lopez’s body is not only the structure through which her claim to ethnicity is staked, but also the means through which her public persona has been commodified, commercialized, and marketed extensively. As Angharad Valdivia points out, “Parlaying her personal success into a brand, and thus turning her fame into a synergistic set of products that can be marketed across a range of arenas, Jennifer Lopez has managed to turn her Latinidad into a marketable commodity” (2010: 67). Thus, it follows that if Jennifer Lopez is a brand, so is any claim she makes about herself, and that includes claims to ethnicity, a point to which I will return shortly, but for now, I will also add Radner’s point: “As a Latina star, Lopez represented a new world order of femininity in which the ability to ‘look good’ and work hard, and thus, incarnate the ideals of the female ‘striver,’ became available to a broader demographic of women” (2011: 5). This new world order of femininity, I must point out, like the old order, is a racialized one. And as the particular case

of Jennifer Lopez shows us, it is also a marketable order.

Through her commodification and marketing, Lopez has been careful to articulate and reiterate her Puerto Ricanness above any other ethno-racial identity. In fact, the L'Oréal marketing campaign is reminiscent of the 1999 Grammys, in which she co-presented the first award of the evening for best Pop Album of the Year with comedian Jerry Seinfeld. Before announcing the winner, Lopez went into a scripted short diatribe about the "melting pot of music," and Seinfeld concluded that it was "all about diversity." To illustrate his point, he continued: "I mean look at us, I'm Jewish, and Jennifer, you are...." Lopez paused for a moment, and then smiling replied very slowly: "Puerto Rican. One hundred percent Puerto Rican." Thus, the L'Oréal campaign seems to be the most recent incarnation of her categorical pronouncement. However, sometimes it becomes difficult to discern whether Lopez is stating her ethnicity or using her Puerto Ricanness as a marketing tool. One telling example of this ambivalence came to light in an incident that occurred during a 2012 episode of the show *Q'Viva*, where Lopez served as a judge. In this episode, a Puerto Rican hopeful contestant played a waltz composed by his father on his "cuatro," a musical instrument usually associated with Puerto Rican music and culture. After the contestant left, Lopez began to cry, and while wiping her tears, she said to fellow judge Marc Anthony: "It's about race and culture and family.... It reminded me of grandma, tío, titi. It goes to the Puerto Rican core of our family, you know?" Perhaps realizing that her family is the only aspect of her "Puerto Rican core" that has not been commodified, Lopez offers a momentary vulnerability that makes her seem almost human.

But what does that really mean for a person who has turned herself into a brand? Is this merely a sweet, touching moment? Or is the fact that she allowed the moment to air on national television part of a continued effort to market herself and her ethnicity? Perhaps more important, and going back to the L'Oréal commercials, what does it mean for an ethnicity to be sold in a bottle of makeup? (Or a bottle of perfume? Or hair dye? Or a tube of mascara? Or a clothing line? Or a television show?). Especially when we are talking about an ethnicity (namely, Puerto Rican) that at times stands for an umbrella one (namely, Latina/o). And of course, these questions become more relevant when we consider Jennifer Lopez's chameleon-like racial performances over the years. Priscilla Peña Ovalle expands on this idea:

Jennifer Lopez embodies the most commodifiable representation of urban U.S. nonwhiteness...[and has] created a unified fan base of white, black, Latina, and everything in between and outside these parameters. Lopez's career is the full fruition of the Hollywood Latina because she has wielded her in-betweenness with the greatest deftness by turning its inherent visuality into tangible commodities. (2011: 127)

That is, although her ethnicity has remained relatively constant, her racial presentation has approximated Whiteness at times and Blackness at other moments, without fully embodying either. Molina-Guzmán elucidates this issue when she tells us the following: “Depending on the situation... Jennifer Lopez is white, black, [or] brown...” (2010: 14).

There is no vacillation in Molina Guzmán's assessment when later she tells us that “because Lopez can personify multiple ethnic and racial identities, she is often coded as an ambiguously brown ethnic—rarely coded as either white or black” (2010: 58). And she adds: “While the gendering of Latina disciplines the performance of Latina identity in the media, the difficult-to-categorize ethn racial identity of some Latina bodies challenges dominant definitions of nation and citizenship” (2010: 14). And she concludes: “Always on the margins of whiteness, Latinas also exist outside blackness. The racialized dimensions of Latina ambiguity mean they can never be fully incorporated into a nation obsessed with racial fixity” (Molina Guzmán 2010: 15). A nation obsessed with racial fixity and racial authenticity, of course. Beltrán offers us some insight here, for, as she tells us, “An emphasis on Lopez's body and especially her rear end was the overriding feature of her promotion. The inherent contradictions of this start promotion strategy provided ongoing ideological tensions to her publicity and also ultimately assisted in Lopez becoming a mainstream star in this period” (2009: 141). Thus, I would argue that claiming a 100 percent Puerto Ricanness in a society that understands the meaning of racial and/or ethnic permanence (i.e., fixity) may actually be the most profitable move Jennifer Lopez has made yet.

### **J.Lo, Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Look of Authenticity**

In her book *The Trouble with Unity*, Cristina Beltrán reminds us that “identification is as necessary as it is dangerous” (2010: 98). Clear dangers to identification are commodity culture and marketing. In the L'Oréal advertisements, Jennifer Lopez's “100% Puerto Rican” claim serves as an illustration of this danger, for being 100 percent Puerto Rican seems to come in and be reduced to an

authentic “W6 Sun Beige” tone. Also, given that contemporary articulations of Latinoness or *Latinidad* in the US subsume all Latin American nationalities and ancestries into one handy label, her identification as Puerto Rican necessarily implies identification as *Latina*, with the added implication that an authentic Puerto Ricanness necessarily invokes an authentic *Latinidad*. As Molina Guzmán reminds us: “Central to mainstream media representations of *Latinidad* is the production of ethnic authenticity, of an authentic ethnic or panethnic identity often grounded in familiar and marketable characteristics” (2010: 87).

Although Jennifer Lopez has rarely used the label *Latina* to refer to herself, as she usually refers to herself, as Puerto Rican, she has used the label when it has suited her purposes. For instance, as Negrón-Muntaner points out, when defending her casting as Selena for the movie of the same name, Lopez made the following statement in an interview: “Selena and I are both *Latinas* and both had the experience of growing up *Latina* in this country” (2004: 230). Negrón-Muntaner continues: “Given the current political economy of representation for Latinos in mass media, Puerto Ricans, with less institutional clout, general population, and members on Hollywood’s home turf, identifying as ‘*Latina*’ expands Boricua agency and accrues additional value” (2004: 230). Lopez also has posed and/or appeared in the cover of the magazine *Latina* more times than any other public figure, a not-so-symbolic way of claiming the label/identity. But whether she claims the label “*Latina*” or not, given contemporary constructions of Latinos in the U.S., she is perceived, and almost literally bought and sold as *Latina*.

This brings to mind Arlene Dávila’s admonition that “marketing discourse is not without political and economic repercussions” (2001: 235). In fact, Dávila points out that the marketing industry “stands at the forefront of contemporary Latino cultural politics,” and moreover, “the discourses of authenticity [are] engendered by [the marketing] industry to defend the existence and profitability of [Latinos] as an authentic and thus commercially viable market” (2001: 4). Negrón-Muntaner is more poignant in her assessment of the category when she tells us that “*Latino*...refers less to a cultural identity than to a specifically American national currency for economic and political deal making, a technology to demand and deliver emotions, votes, markets, and resources on the same level--and hopefully at an even steeper price--as other racialized minorities” (2004: 172). Although Negrón-Muntaner may seem cynical in her articulation of the category “*Latino*,” looking at Jennifer Lopez’s

trajectory, we can understand her point about it being an all-acquiring currency. Hilary Radner and Natalie Smith take this discussion further when they argue that Lopez draws “on her cross-media reputation and her cross-over audience appeal as a star with a strong ethnic identity who had a mainstream fan base” (2013: 281). And it is the combination of a strong ethnic identity with a mainstream fan base that has produced the hyper-marketable phenomenon we know as Jennifer Lopez.

### **Final Thoughts and The Authentic Latina Threat**

A couple of years after the True Match campaign, Fox News Latino released a statement made by Edward James Olmos, in which he criticized Jennifer Lopez for not “dedicating herself to her culture” (Fox News Latino 2014). Olmos’ statements were released a week before it was announced that Lopez would receive the 2014 Billboard Icon Award, the fourth person, first woman, and first Latina to have ever been recognized with the honor (Press Association 2014). Olmos’ belief that Lopez is not dedicated to her culture, along with the consistent efforts by American popular culture to mainstream her image, seem to be at odds with her simple, yet bold claim in the True Match campaign. However, they are all indicative of the precarious nature of ethnic identity and claims to ethnic authenticity, along with the power of marketing, for in the end, L’Oreal’s branding of Lopez may have more staying power than Olmos’ critique.

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*She mainly means that, when it comes to Jennifer Lopez, the label “Puerto Rican” has not “stuck” in the collective consciousness of Americans, as she is usually described as a New Yorker, being from the Bronx, or at most, as being of Puerto Rican descent.*

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Negrón-Muntaner asserts that “[i]n contrast to most US-born Puerto Rican actresses of the last five decades, Jennifer Lopez has been able to play on the hyphen and come out al otro lado” (2004: 230). She mainly means that, when it comes to Jennifer Lopez, the label “Puerto Rican” has not “stuck” in the collective consciousness of Americans, as she is usually described as a New Yorker, being from the Bronx, or at most, as being of Puerto Rican descent. Perhaps claiming to be 100 percent Puerto Rican is her own way of challenging that collective consciousness, which also sees her as a Latina of

some sort,<sup>9</sup> and Latinas of most sorts are almost unfailingly racialized. We must recall Linda Martín Alcoff's discussion:

**Racialized identities in the North have long connoted homogeneity and easily visible identifying features, but this does not apply to Latinos in the United States, nor even to any one national subset, such as Cuban Americans or Puerto Ricans. We have no homogeneous culture, we come in every conceivable color, and identities such as mestizo signify the very absence of boundaries. (2006: 229)**

Of course, *Latinidad* has been generous to Lopez, even if Olmos thinks the gesture is not reciprocated by the performer. Especially, given the racialized components of *Latinidad*. Peña Ovalle comments:

**The genius of Lopez's branding is her local-global packaging of *Latinidad*. By popularizing an ethnic/Latina-ness defined and contained by the decidedly U.S. urban center of New York, Lopez maximized her representational potential while retaining an "Americanness" in the media's eye. (2011: 135)**

The vacillation in the way Jennifer Lopez is described by the scholars cited above should not be interpreted as equivocation. Rather, the different ways in which Lopez is ethnically and racially described (and even chastised) reflect the very ways in which she has allowed her public and professional persona to be articulated and understood by the public as closer to Whiteness at times, closer to Blackness other times, but always through the prism of Latina-ness. This is the salience that Bracey was talking about in the discussion of authenticity above, for regardless of how she is positioned, her credentials and performance as both a Puerto Rican and a Latina meet and exceed expectations and take precedence over any other marker.

Moreover, the relationship between all economically constituted categories, profit, and identity becomes the heart of the matter in a society that idolizes Latina celebrities, even as, at the same time, it regards everyday Latinos and Latinas as a threat to Americanness.<sup>10</sup> On September 2012, the National Hispanic Media Coalition released a study titled "The Impact of Media Stereotypes on Opinions and Attitudes towards Latinos," showing that news and entertainment media have a strong influence on the perceptions of non-Latinos about Latinos and immigrants. Perhaps more relevant, the study showed that media portrayals of Latinos and immigrants can diminish

or exacerbate stereotypically negative opinions about them, revealing that stereotypical representations in the US have contributed to the labels Latino and Hispanic being associated with alienness and the draining of society's resources. For instance, more than 30 percent of the respondents estimated that at least half of Latinos in the U.S. are undocumented. In addition, 37 percent thought that Latinos take American jobs, and 51 percent thought that the concept "welfare recipient" describes Latinos very or somewhat well.

Similarly, a poll conducted by Pew Research six years earlier showed that, when it comes to perceptions about Latin American immigrants, "majorities [of Americans] express the view that new immigrants do not learn English fast enough and pluralities believe that most immigrants today are here illegally" (Kohut, et.al. 2006). The poll shows that 44 percent of Americans believe that "today's immigrants are less willing to adapt to the American way of life compared with those who came here in the 1900s" (Kohut, et.al. 2006). In fact, only 13 percent of White Americans believe Latin American immigrants are "more willing to adapt to American customs" (Kohut, et. al. 2006). These are just two isolated examples of polling showing specific attitudes and perceptions in relation to Latinas/os. However, they are also representative of the greater, hegemonic narrative that sees Latinas/os as an imposition on American culture and society at best and a threat to that culture and society at worst.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, at the same time that as Molina Guzmán tells us that "the contemporary mediascape...continues to tell a cautionary tale about the political and social consequences of the mediated manufacturing of Latinidad as a homogenized construction that can be sold to global audiences," we must oblige Myra Mendible's point that we can find "the contours of the Latina body in the interstices where lived reality and public fantasies converge." Mainstream fantasies about Puerto Rican and Latina bodies waffle between notions around authentic marketable and commodifiable exotic beauties and authentic threats to the country and the people in it. Within these fantasies, an authentic Puerto Rican is an authentic Latina, and an authentic Latina is simultaneously an authentic marketing object and an authentic threat.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Since the original production of these commercials, L'Oréal has added other celebrities.

<sup>2</sup> Among the other commercials added, Zoe Saldaña's is the most interesting, showing the most labels: Dominican, Haitian, Puerto Rican, and Lebanese.

<sup>3</sup> Even though Knowles' description as African American could be seen as a racial description, we must keep in mind that it is ultimately an ethnic one, for although a *racialized* ethnicity, African American is still an ethnicity, one that is different from "Black," an indisputable racial marker.

<sup>4</sup> Lopez has several perfumes, an entire line of clothing, and even endorsed the Fiat—in fact, in one of the commercials for the Fiat, Lopez plays up her identity as a New Yorker, and as someone who grew up in an urban area. Hilary Radner (2011) calls the woman "a franchise."

<sup>5</sup> For instance, according to Gallup, in 2013, 16 percent of White Americans still believed that people from different races should not be allowed to marry (Newport 2013).

<sup>6</sup> The case of blood quantum laws and American Indians provides an interesting caveat in this discussion. Although originally designed by the American government to determine rights afforded to a particular population, American Indians, American Indian tribes gave these rules a completely different inflection, as they began to use them to articulate an indigenous authenticity of sorts, aimed at rescuing American Indianness from the clutches of genocide. Thus, racial authenticity in this country has been at the center of various and multifaceted historical projects seeking to shore up racial lines and distinctions, although it is clear that constructions of white authenticity through legal and sociopolitical efforts have prevailed throughout American history.

<sup>7</sup> *Puertorriqueño de pura cepa*, a decidedly Puerto Rican expression, refers to a "purebred" Puerto Rican. The phrase can be literally translated as Puerto Rican of pure strain/stump or Puerto Rican to the bone, meaning, of course, 100 percent Puerto Rican.

<sup>8</sup> Of course, as Dávila (2008) reminds us, racial classification as white is one thing, and racial status as White is a different one.

<sup>9</sup> The entertainment news industry is a good measure here, as a great number of headlines usually add the descriptor Latin or Latina when referencing Jennifer Lopez.

<sup>10</sup> For a formidable discussion on Latinos as threat to the U.S. order, read Chavez (2008).

<sup>11</sup> As Chavez (2008) tells us, this threat is expressed through different tropes, including the trope of Latina fertility, criminality, disease, etc.

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