

Intersectionality on the Right: The Politics of Latina Conservatism

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Introduction

Conservative politics in the United States is often characterized as a story of white male anxiety and reactionary aversion to an increasingly diverse nation. And certainly, the history of American conservatism lends credence to this characterization — when discussing the history of the modern Right, scholars and pundits alike often point to the GOP’s embrace of the Southern strategy, their opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, LGBTQ equality, and their hostility to bilingual education and affirmative action as central to the movement’s emergence. Indeed, it’s hard not to see the Right’s overheated reaction to Barack Obama’s presidency and Hillary Clinton’s candidacy—not to mention the nomination and election of Donald Trump—as proof that the GOP is driven by hostility to and fear of a growing nonwhite majority, changing gender relations, and increased LGBTQ visibility. Trump’s continual verbal and policy assaults on migrants, his reluctance to condemn neo-Nazis, and his demonization of the Black Lives Matter movement cost him some elite support but won the enduring loyalty of voters pleased to have their prejudices affirmed. Research following the 2016 election has confirmed a strong and growing correlation between voter hostility to racial diversity, immigration, and gender equality and support for the Republican Party and Trump.¹

With GOP losses in 2018 and 2020 widely attributed to voter backlash against Trump’s intolerance and vulgarity, one might have expected the Right to strike a more self-consciously moderate, inclusive tone. Instead, rising extremism among the party’s base has driven a hard right push among GOP officeholders, from the January 6, 2020, attempt to overturn the presidential election result to ongoing state-level efforts to disempower Black and Latinx voters.² With state legislators taking the lead, conservatives have finally achieved their goal of overturning *Roe*, criminalizing health care for women seeking abortions and teens seeking gender-affirming care, staging anti-immigrant border photo ops³ and organizing local activists to attack schools for offering diverse curricula.⁴

Yet despite their increasing shift towards aggressive authoritarianism rule, with its demonization of racial justice movements, assaults on women’s bodily autonomy and LGBTQ rights as ways of wielding state power, the GOP continues to operate under the belief that the presence of women and people of color —as voters, activists, and elected representatives — is both desirable and necessary to their vision of American conservatism. In other words, even as Republican politics have shifted away from the

¹ To cite only two examples: See Pew Research Center, “[Voters’ Attitudes About Race and Gender Are Even More Divided Than in 2016](#),” Sept. 10, 2020, and Magdalena Saldaña, Lourdes M. Cueva Chacón, and Victor García-Perdomo, “[When Gaps Become HUUUUGE: Donald Trump and Beliefs About Immigration](#),” *Mass Communication and Society*, Vol. 21, Issue 6, Sept. 10, 2018.

² Zack Beauchamp, “[The conservative movement is rejecting America](#),” *Vox*, April 1, 2021.

³ David Siders, “[Republicans go all-in on immigration as a political weapon](#),” *Politico*, June 30, 2021.

⁴ Judd Legum, Tesnim Zekeria, and Rebecca Crosby, “[The right-wing operatives orchestrating the attack on America’s school boards](#),” *Popular Information*, Oct. 14, 2021.

multicultural conservatism of Bush to the aggressive nativism of the Trump era, the presence of racial and gender diversity within the GOP has remained a legitimating discourse, even as its affective logics have shifted. Indeed, it's my contention that the GOP's ongoing embrace of aggressive forms of white nationalism, nativism, homophobia/transphobia, and misogyny has obscured a paradoxical and simultaneous reality: the Right's desire for diversity and the GOP's success in electing a growing number of women and people of color to elected office. Despite the Democratic Party attracting the majority of nonwhite and women voters and being a far more multiracial political party in terms of its leadership, representatives, and electorate— voters of color nevertheless remain a growing population in GOP, both as voters and candidates, with the gender gap actually *narrowing* from 2016 to 2020⁵ In both 2020 and 2022, the GOP made gains with Latinos and other voters of color nationwide.⁶

In sum, making sense of this increasingly diverse pool of Republican elected officials and the political possibilities their presence and actions creates requires introducing theoretical resources capable of engaging multiple axes of difference — theoretical frameworks able to analyze both the disadvantages and advantages that shape the speech and action of this increasingly diverse assemblage of conservative and right-wing subjects.⁷

Yet despite the fact that a significant number of political and electoral “firsts” for women of color have occurred on the Republican side of the aisle, most current work looking at conservative women and race has focused on questions of white womanhood and the politics of gender, race, and racism.⁸ As

⁵ Geoffrey Skelley, “Why The Gender Gap Have Shrunk In The 2020 Election,” *FiveThirtyEight*, July 9, 2021 <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-the-gender-gap-may-have-shrunk-in-the-2020-election/>; Steven Shepard, “New poll shows how Trump surged with women and Hispanics — and lost anyway,” *Politico*, June 30, 2021 <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/06/30/new-trump-poll-women-hispanic-voters-497199>. Of course, in absolute terms Trump performed far better with white than nonwhite voters and better with men than with women. Indeed, Latinos were a critical part of the Democratic coalition that took back the White House and the Senate in 2020 and that held the Senate in 2022. Biden won two-thirds of Latino voters across the country, with Latino voters being crucial to Democratic victories in several states. Yet the fact remains: in recent election cycles, the GOP has lost ground with white men and gained ground with Latina women. See “2020 Post-Mortem (Part One): Portrait of a Persuadable Latino,” *Equis Labs*, April 1, 2021.

⁶ <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/11/13/latino-voters-midterm-elections-republicans-00066618>. Indeed, Trump actually *lost* ground with white male voters in 2020 while *growing* his support among Latinos. In 2020, Trump and the Republican Party made significant gains among Latino voters in both Miami-Dade County and Texas's Rio Grande Valley that narrowed the margin for Democrats. Nor were such party shifts unique to Texas and Florida — in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Nevada, densely Latino precincts in all those states shifted toward Trump by between 6 and 20 percentage points since the 2016 election. Even more unexpected, his most significant area of growth was among Latina women, challenging the conventional wisdom that Trump's increasing success with Latinos was due to a culture of “machismo” that mobilized Latinx men. Instead, weighted by subgroup size, Trump's shift among Latinas made the greatest impact. Moreover, according to the preliminary findings of the research firm Equis, Trump's overall “baseline shift” improvement among Latino voters was bigger and broader than shifts among African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.⁶ See Yair Gitz and Jonathan Robinson, “What Happened in 2020: National Analysis,” *Catalist*, October 27, 2021 and “2020 Post-Mortem (Part One): Portrait of a Persuadable Latino,” *Equis Labs*, April 1, 2021.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d30982b599bde00016db472/t/60668f2a28dee76b4ffebc73/1617334072783/Equis+Post-Mortem+Part+One+%28Public+Deck%29+%281%29.pdf>

⁷ For one of the few works in political theory that analyzes the Right through an intersectional analysis of race, gender and sexuality, see “Mama Grizzlies and Guardians of the Republic: The Democratic and Intersectional Politics of Anger in the Tea Party Movement” by Holloway Sparks, *New Political Science*, Volume 37, Issue 1 (2015): 25-47.

⁸ Some examples include: Ileana Ros-Lehtinen; Condoleezza Rice. Nikki Haley; Susan Martinez.

Christina Bejarano notes, “[f]ew studies examine the political influence of the interaction of race/ethnicity and gender in the same analysis” — a point even more true when trying to find work analyzing the interactions between race, gender and conservative ideology.⁹

This chapter seeks to address this under-explored area of scholarship by drawing on intersectional scholarship to consider a particular segment of the GOP growing in both size and importance: conservative Mexican American women. More specifically, this chapter focuses on the successful election (and re-election) of former New Mexico Governor Republican Susana Martinez. Elected in 2011 and serving two terms until leaving office in January 2019, Martinez was the first woman to be elected Governor of New Mexico as well as the first Latina *and* the first woman of color to be elected a state Governor in the United States.

Analyzing how race and gender shaped Martinez’s conservative political identity, this chapter asks, how might invocations of gender and sexuality influence the racial logics available to conservative Latinx candidates? How were efforts to deploy gender impacted by the candidate’s Latinx identity? And what forms of gender and racial difference appealed to white conservatives and are these practices of identity the same or different when it came to attracting Latinx and other nonwhite voters?

Analyzing the governor’s speeches, campaign ads, and interviews, alongside theories of intersectionality, affect, race, gender, conservatism and right-wing politics, scholarship on Latinas and other women of color in U.S. electoral politics, as well as the political history of New Mexico — this chapter explores how Martinez’s race, gender, and ideological orientation appealed to various voting populations — and how the interplay of identity categories and history shaped the style and substance of Martinez’s political appeal. It’s my contention that bringing together this inter- and intra-disciplinary body of work helps us see how Martinez deployed her identity as a Republican Latina in ways both novel and self-consciously intersectional, producing unexpected aesthetic and affective assemblages that appealed to various voting populations. Approaching Martinez as a groundbreaking figure in the history of Latinx politics, the election of this gun-toting daughter of a sheriff’s deputy highlights the importance of attending to the performative, aesthetic, and affective dimensions of voter identification — particularly the unexpected associations and affinities that occur across the lines of race, class, sexuality, and gender.¹⁰ Such cross-cutting forms of identification are capable of creating novel political assemblages and electoral coalitions that will only become more important as conservative Latinas and other women of color become more familiar players in the public sphere. Ultimately, given that Martinez’s electoral

⁹ Christina Bejarano, *The Latina Advantage: Gender, Race, and Political Success* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 37.

¹⁰ In this way, my research builds on my earlier work exploring how Latino identity is forever “amenable to unexpected connections and semiotic chains” (See Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity* (OUP, 2010), 168). In this way, my current research on Latino conservatives seeks to extend and elaborate these earlier claims regarding Latinidad and how its invocation is forever resistant to anchoring a particular politics.

strategy is likely to be studied, emulated, and adapted by others seeking to elect Latinas and other conservative women of color to office, making sense of how the governor's intersectional aesthetics expanded her conservative appeal becomes increasingly important.

Making sense of why candidates displaying a range social, ethnic and gender backgrounds is both desired and deployed by the Republican Party reminds us that racial, gender, and sexual diversity is not simply a site of aversion on the Right; visible difference also functions as a necessary and valued source of legitimacy — as well as an active and heterogeneous source of pleasure for conservative supporters. Moreover, by exploring how intersectional rhetoric can be appropriated for conservative ends, this research seeks to challenge the belief that a more diverse Republican Party (and/or a GOP with its larger Latino presence) will necessarily require the party to become more moderate and less extreme. Instead, more diversity on the Right, including the growing presence of conservative women of color as both candidates and voters, is capable of generating new affective pathways, creating unanticipated opportunities for a conservative politics that is increasingly illiberal, gender diverse, *and* multiracial.¹¹

The Rise and Fall of Susana Martinez

Born in 1959, Susana Martinez grew up in the Rio Grand Valley in El Paso, Texas. The great-granddaughter of Mexican Revolutionary General Toribio Ortega, Martinez grew up in a lower middle-class Mexican American family with two siblings, one of whom was developmentally disabled. Martinez's father, Jacobo "Jake" Martinez served in the U.S. Marines during the Korean War and was a former Golden Gloves champion, winning multiple titles in the 1950s. Martinez's father later served as deputy sheriff for El Paso County while her mother, Paula Aguirre worked in various offices. Martinez's parents eventually started a security guard business and Martinez herself worked as a security guard while attending college at the University of Texas, El Paso.¹²

After graduating with a degree in criminal justice, Martinez attended law school at the University of Oklahoma, moving to New Mexico where she was admitted to the State Bar of New Mexico. An Assistant District Attorney for the 3rd Judicial District of New Mexico, based in Los Cruces, Martinez was appointed Deputy District Attorney in 1992. A Democrat until the 1990s, Martinez and her husband Chuck Franco switched parties to become Republicans in 1995. In 1996, she ran for District Attorney and served three terms for the 3rd Judicial District in Doña Ana County, from 1997 to 2011. Emphasizing her career fighting crimes of domestic and sexual violence against women and children, Martinez's campaign

¹¹ See Jodi Melamed, "The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism," *Social Text* 89 (Winter 2006), 2-3.

¹² See website of Susana Martinez (*Susana Martinez: A Legacy of Improving New Mexico*) <https://www.susanamartinez.com/bio/>; and Susana Martinez Ballotpedia: https://ballotpedia.org/Susana_Martinez

spotlighted her experience prosecuting high profile child abuse and child homicide cases.¹³ Martinez also made cracking down on illegal immigration a centerpiece of her campaign, calling for the repeal of a New Mexico state law allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses.¹⁴

Endorsed by former Alaska Governor and Vice-Presidential nominee Sarah Palin, Martinez won the governorship in 2010, defeating New Mexico Lieutenant Governor Diane Denish with 53% of the vote statewide. Her election made Martinez the 31st governor and the first woman governor elected in New Mexico. Martinez was also the first Latina governor elected and the first woman of color governor to serve in the United States.¹⁵

Following her election in 2010, Martinez was widely seen as a rising star in the GOP — a Latina woman and a conservative governor with strong approval ratings in a state that historically tends to swing towards Democrats. In 2012 Martinez was included in a list of 20 Latino political rising stars under 55 compiled by the *San Francisco Chronicle* and was given a prime time speaking slot at the Republican National Convention.¹⁶ In both 2012 and 2016, Martinez was considered one of the top politicians considered as a vice presidential candidate and in 2013 *Time Magazine* named her one of its 100 most influential people.¹⁷ In 2014, Martinez was re-elected Governor, defeating Democratic Attorney General Gary King by 15-points, the largest margin of victory for a Republican gubernatorial candidate in New Mexico's history. Martinez won 57% of the vote, with a particularly strong showing in Bernalillo County and in the Democratic strongholds of northern New Mexico.¹⁸ In 2015-2016, Martinez also served as chair of the Republican Governors Association (RGA).¹⁹

Martinez was at her most popular when trying to balance conservative policies with the moderate to liberal politics of her state. While opposing the Affordable Care Act, in 2013 Martinez nevertheless

¹³ "Controversial Susana Martinez Ad Campaign Features Slain Baby Brianna Lopez," KVIA ABC-7, September 1, 2010 <https://kvia.com/news/2010/09/01/controversial-susana-martinez-ad-campaign-features-slain-baby-brianna-lopez/>

¹⁴ See Zelig Pollon "New Mexico's Hispanic governor battles over rules of the road," *Reuters*, February 26, 2011

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-immigration-drivers-idUSTRE71PIOP20110226>.

Martinez was ultimately unsuccessful in her efforts to repeal the law, though she continued to try throughout her two terms as governor. See: Zelig Pollon "New Mexico governor loses bid to block licenses for illegals," *Reuters*, March 19, 2011 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-licenses-newmexico-idUKTRE72I4BI20110319>; See also Elizabeth Llorente, "Susana Martinez Vows to Keep Fighting New Mexico Driver's License Law," *Fox News*, January 10, 2017

<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/susana-martinez-vows-to-keep-fighting-new-mexico-drivers-license-law>

¹⁵ Note that a few days later, Nikki Haley became the second woman of color governor. Also a Republican.

¹⁶ "20 Latino political rising stars of 2012," August 25, 2012

<https://blog.chron.com/txpotomac/2012/08/20/latino-political-rising-stars-of-2012-with-photo-gallery/>

¹⁷ "Handicapping the 2016 Vice Presidential Field. Yes, You Read That Right" by Sean Sullivan, *The Washington Post*, March 7, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2014/03/07/handicapping-the-2016-vice-presidential-field-yes-you-read-that-right/>. See also Karl Rove, "The 2013 Time 100: Susana Martinez," *Time Magazine*, April 18, 2013.

<https://time100.time.com/2013/04/18/time-100/slide/all/>

¹⁸ James Monteleone, "Martinez campaign hit on all cylinders," *Albuquerque Journal*, November 6, 2014.

<https://www.abqjournal.com/492100/martinez-zcampaign-hit-on-all-cylinders.html>

¹⁹ Dan Boyd, "Martinez First Hispanic to lead GOP governors," *Albuquerque Journal*, November 18, 2013.

<https://www.abqjournal.com/678929/gov-martinez-elected-rga-chair.hhtml>

expanded access to Medicaid under ACA, expanding the share of New Mexicans with health insurance.²⁰ An opponent of gay marriage, when the New Mexico Supreme Court legalized marriage equality in 2013, making New Mexico the 17th state to legalize same-sex marriage, Martinez didn't fight it.²¹ Nevertheless, during the course of her second term, Martinez's popularity collapsed as voters grew frustrated with her handling of the economy, her ongoing battles with the New Mexico Legislature, public arguments with 2016 presidential candidate Donald Trump, and other scandals and controversies that plagued her administration.²²

Martinez's standing among Republicans was also weakened by her public criticism of Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential election. During the campaign, Martinez endorsed both Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz over Trump and criticizing the candidate publicly.²³ Trump hit back, telling voters at a 2016 rally in Albuquerque that she was "not doing her job."²⁴ Martinez never endorsed Trump and later said she would not support Trump after the leaked 2005 videotape showed Trump bragging about his ability to sexually assault women.²⁵ Following Trump's election however, Martinez grew more conciliatory

²⁰ Heath Haussamen, "Martinez Agrees to Expand Medicaid," *New Mexico in Depth*, January 9, 2013.

<https://nmindepth.com/about/>; and Andrew Oxford, "Susana Martinez Era: The Highs and Lows," *Las Cruces Sun News*, January 9, 2013. <https://eu.lcsun-news.com/story/news/politics/2018/12/26/new-mexico-governor-susana-martinez-era-policies-laws-state-budget-trump/2402884002/>

²¹ Steve Terrell, "Martinez Won't Seek Amendment to Ban Gay Marriage," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, January 6, 2014.

https://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/martinez-won-t-seek-amendment-to-ban-gay-marriage/article_f5b6912c-ae06-5c3f-bd3e-0ae7b9db1989.html;

Dan Boyd, "Gov. Susana Martinez Responds to Same-Sex Marriage Ruling," *Albuquerque Journal*, June 26, 2015.

<https://www.abqjournal.com/604980/gov-susana-martinez-responds-to-same-sex-marriage-ruling.html>

²² During her time as governor, New Mexico's economy continued to stagnate, even as neighboring states like Arizona, Colorado, Utah, and Texas showed stronger recoveries following the Great Recession. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, New Mexico's gross domestic product averaged around 0.6 percent a year between 2010 and 2017, a third of the nationwide job growth rate and the ninth-worst performance among US states at that time.²² Beyond the poor state of the economy, Martinez was also criticized for personalizing feuds and antagonizing many in the legislature, including members in her own party. A former career prosecutor, her style of governance was often combative and adversarial, and she was widely known to target various public officials from both parties. Characterizing herself as an outsider fighting against the "good ol' boys" who filled Santa Fe's backrooms, she did little to combat corruption, vetoing campaign finance reforms and other efforts to shine a light on lobbyists while her allies built a super-PAC machine.²² See *The Bureau of Economic Analysis (U.S. Department of Commerce)*, <https://www.bea.gov/>; Cisco McSorley, "As New Mexico Struggles, Where is Susana Martinez," *The New Mexico Political Report*, August 22, 2016. <https://nmpoliticalreport.com/2016/08/22/as-new-mexico-struggles-where-is-susana-martinez/> See Andy Kroll, "Is New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez the Next Sarah Palin?," *Mother Jones*, April 16, 2014. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/04/governor-susana-martinez-new-mexico-2016/>; See also Robert Moore, "Oh Susana! How New Mexico's Governor's Popularity Eroded," *Carlsbad Current Argus*, November 8, 2015.

<https://eu.currentargus.com/story/news/politics/2018/11/08/how-governor-susana-martinez-popularity-eroded-new-mexico/1891616002/>

²³ Amber Phillips, "Once Hailed as the GOP's Ideal VP Pick, Susana Martinez Finds Herself Clashing with Donald Trump" *The Washington Post*, May 25, 2016 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/05/25/once-hailed-as-the-gops-ideal-vp-pick-new-mexicos-susana-martinez-finds-herself-clashing-with-donald-trump/>); Michael Coleman, "Gov. Martinez Slams Trump's 'Offensive Rhetoric,' Reiterates Stance on Support" *Albuquerque Journal*, October 8, 2016

(<https://www.abqjournal.com/863443/gov-martinez-denounces-trump-says-she-wont-support-him.html>); Matthew Reichbach, "Susana Martinez Slams Trump at Koch-hosted Event" *The New Mexico Political Report*, April 19, 2016.

<https://nmpoliticalreport.com/2016/04/19/susana-martinez-slams-trump-at-koch-hosted-event/>

²⁴ Ashley Parker and Jonathan Martin, "Donald Trump Gives Gov. Susana Martinez a Poor Performance Review" *The New York Times*, May 25, 2016 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/26/us/politics/donald-trump-gov-susana-martinez-new-mexico.html>)

²⁵ Matthew Reichbach, "Susana Martinez Won't Support Donald Trump" *The New Mexico Political Report*, October 8, 2016. <https://nmpoliticalreport.com/2016/10/08/susana-martinez-wont-support-donald-trump/>

towards Trump, dining with him at the White House in 2018 and praising his “compassion” in the treatment of DACA recipients (undocumented immigrants brought to the country as children) and later offering support for Trump’s family separation policy.²⁶

During her tenure, Susana Martinez disappointed moderates and Never-Trumpers by capitulating to Trump, leaving the president’s supporters unconvinced of her right-wing bona fides while also infuriating liberals and progressives with her conservative policy preferences. The combination of failed leadership and evidence of corruption left Martinez with weak and dwindling support.²⁷ Ultimately, Martinez concluded her second term as one of the nation’s least popular governors, ending her time in office with only a third of voters approving of her job performance.²⁸ Ineligible to run again as the result of term limits, Martinez was succeeded in 2018 by the second Latina Governor of New Mexico, Democrat Michelle Lujan Grisham.

Following her departure from elected office in 2019, Martinez continues to be involved in Republican politics, joining the lecture circuit and speaking at various universities and institutions. In 2022 Martinez became the honorary chair of Right Direction Women, a new organization launched to help recruit and support women seeking to run for governor in 2022 and beyond.

Martinez’s track record leaves her unlikely to have the political future pundits imagined following her 2014 re-election. Nevertheless, Martinez’s success in mobilizing her biography and identity holds lessons for making sense of the intersectional dynamics at play when Latina conservatives invoke their cross-cutting identities to win elections.

Before turning to the specifics of Martinez and her specific deployments of identity during her time in office, this essay first turns to theories of intersectionality, followed by research by political scientists

²⁶ Andrew Oxford, “Gov. Susana Martinez Dines with Trump” *AP News*, May 22, 2018.

<https://apnews.com/article/8a286ab22f894cfea78d2cf4b459ffb>; “Martinez Supports Family Separation Policy,” *Associated Press/Las Cruces Sun News*, June 14, 2018. [HTTPS://EU.LCSUN-NEWS.COM/STORY/NEWS/LOCAL/NEW-MEXICO/2018/06/13/NEW-MEXICO-GOVERNOR-SUSANA-MARTINEZ-SUPPORTS-FAMILY-SEPARATION-POLICY/700328002/](https://eu.lcsun-news.com/story/news/local/new-mexico/2018/06/13/new-mexico-governor-susana-martinez-supports-family-separation-policy/700328002/); Michael Coleman, “Martinez, Trump Now See Eye to Eye on Immigration,” *Journal Washington Bureau*, May 23, 2018. <https://www.abqjournal.com/1175540/martine-ztrump-now-see-eye-to-eye-on-immigration.html>; <https://cbs4local.com/news/local/new-mexico-governor-supports-family-separation-policy>

²⁷ Alongside her highly publicized clashes with Donald Trump, the Martinez’s administration was also confronting various scandals, including an FBI investigation of political fundraising tied to one of her high-profile political consultants and a 2015 Christmas Party at a Santa Fe hotel that resulted in noise complaints and recordings captured by hotel security and police referring to the governor as “inebriated.”²⁷ Martinez also weathered rumors regarding a financial settlement had been given to Ruben Maynes, a state police officer formerly in her personal protection detail whom she was rumored to have had an affair. Eventually, additional lawsuits and settlements of over \$5 million filed by former state employees and Martinez allies came to light, leading investigators to characterize the secret settlements as “an abuse of power” by her administration.²⁷ See Daniel Marans, “Totally Not Drunk New Mexico Governor Chastises Cops For Breaking Up Her Hotel Party,” *The Huffington Post*, December 18, 2015 https://web.archive.org/web/20151221023114/http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/drunk-new-mexico-governor-cops_5674aae0e4b014efe0d5aaf0; See also Andy Lyman, “State Auditor: Secret Payouts Were “About Abuse of Power” *The New Mexico Political Report*, November 19, 2019. <https://nmpoliticalreport.com/2019/11/19/state-auditor-secret-payouts-were-about-abuse-of-power/>

²⁸ Matthew Reichbach, “Poll: Low Approval Ratings for Martinez When She Left Office” *The New Mexico Political Report*, January 10, 2019. <https://nmpoliticalreport.com/2019/01/10/poll-low-approval-ratings-for-martinez-when-she-left-office/>

studying the intersectional dynamics of race, gender, and elections alongside scholars analyzing the voting practices of racially resentful voters. Read together, these literatures reveal how the ideological orientation of conservative women legislators of color provides them with unanticipated resources, including the freedom to both assert *and* disavow their race and gender in order to attract a diverse pool of voters who take pleasure in the various synergies their particular assemblage of identities make possible. Turning to the specifics of Susana Martinez, we'll see how Martinez and other conservative women of color are able to leverage tropes and narratives forged through civil rights and social justice struggles, while also drawing on conservative arguments and claims less available to liberal and progressive women of color seeking higher office.

Intersectionality and the Right: A Critical Approach to Power Versus a Positive Form of Evidence

Intersectionality pervades the political imagination and the practical work of organizations mobilizing for social justice, especially those organized by women of color...Intersectionality helps women of color invent and inhabit identities that register the effects of differentiated and uneven power, permitting them to envision and enact new social relations grounded in multiple axes of intersecting, situated knowledge.²⁹

Due to its intellectual and activist origins, intersectionality as a theoretical analytic generally presumes that empowering and unleashing the political imaginaries of women of color will involve approaches to political power that will further progressive enactments of social justice. But what happens when the women of color under discussion “invent and inhabit” their multiple social identities in the service of a conservative political vision — mobilizing and organizing in opposition to the progressive social justice orientation so often ascribed to such subjects? What does it mean when the new social relations based on “multiple axes of intersecting, situated knowledges” involve political imaginaries envisioned and enacted by Latinx and Black women on the Right? In sum, given that intersectionality is often understood as an “antisubordination project” committed to “foregrounding exclusion and its effects,” what happens when we center this theoretical framework in order to analyze conservative women of color?³⁰

While conservative women of color may not share a common political orientation with the feminist theorists dedicated to analyzing “the interconnectedness of structures of domination,”³¹ it's nevertheless my contention that intersectionality remains a particularly productive analytic for making sense of conservative women of color. Here, my analysis is indebted to the work of Jennifer Nash and her

²⁹ Jennifer Jihye Chun, and George Lipstiz, and Young Shin, “Intersectionality as a Social Movement Strategy: Asian Immigrant Women Advocates,” *Signs* 38.4 (2013): 917.

³⁰ Jennifer Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined After Intersectionality* (Duke University Press: 2019), 24.

³¹ Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined After Intersectionality*, 6.

capacious account of black feminism, an approach that welcomes all who share “an investment in theorizing black genders and sexuality in complex and nuanced ways” while also centering black women as “intellectual producers, as creative agents, as political subjects, and as ‘freedom dreamers’ even as the content and contours of those dreams vary.”³²

In recognizing that intersectionality is a product of the intellectual and activist labor of women of color and that it remains a powerful site for theorizing racial and gender domination, my approach builds on the work of scholars who refuse the tendency to treat intersectionality as a theory that *only* applies to women of color. In doing this, I take seriously Devon Carbado’s point that there are “significant costs” to conceptualizing intersectionality “as a theory whose exclusive focus is the intersection of race (read: nonwhite) and gender (read: nonmale): Framing intersectionality as only about women of color gives masculinity, whiteness, and maleness an intersectional pass... further naturalizing white male heterosexuality as the normative baseline against which the rest of us are intersectionally differentiated.”³³ Conceiving certain identities as “outside” intersectionality “legitimizes a broader epistemic universe in which the racial presence, racial difference, and racial particularity of white people travel invisibly and undisturbed as race-neutral phenomena over and against the racial presence, racial difference, and racial particularity of people of color.”³⁴ So while my focus here is on women of color and conservatism, I share Ange-Marie Hancock’s view that intersectionality is best understood as “a normative and empirical research paradigm” that is helpful for making sense of “causal complexity,” useful for engaging “multiple axis of difference—class, sexual orientation, nation, citizenship, immigration status, disability, and

³² In this way, I understand intersectionality as part of the long tradition of black women’s intellectual and activist labor that ranges from Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper to the Combahee River Collective, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Deborah King, Frances Beal, bell hooks, Barbara Smith, Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, and June Jordan. While it’s not possible to provide a fully comprehensive list of the many black women who have made intersectionality such a rich area of scholarship, in addition to the scholars and activists already listed, a partial account would certainly have to include: Gloria Hull; Ange Marie Hancock, Jennifer Nash, Brittney Cooper, and Shatema Threadcraft.

Alongside black feminism, I also recognize intersectionality as emerging out of women of color feminism and queer of color critique and includes Chicana/Latina, Asian American and Native scholars and writers that includes Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Maria Lugones, Chela Sandoval, Nellie Wong, Mitsuye Yamada, Beth Brant, Chrystos, Beatrice Medicine, and others including Janice Mirikitani, Yuri Kochiyama, Gloria Yamato, Leslie Marmon Silko, Gloria Yamato, Lynet Uttal, Paula Gunn Allen, Falguni Sheth, Jasbir Puar, Rita Dhamoon, Anna Sampaio, Christina Bejarano, Celeste Montoya, and Maylei Blackwell. And finally, the archive I draw on here also includes the contributions of numerous thinkers who are neither women nor women of color but whose scholarship also productively extends and expands the terrain of intersectionality. This list would include scholars like Sirma Birge, Leslie McCall, Devon Carbado, and Nina Lykke. In this way, I share Nash’s belief in the importance of both resisting the tendency to construct the black woman as “the paradigmatic *intersectional* subject” while simultaneously centering black women and other women of color as knowledge producers rather than simply victims of discrimination (see Nash, 98). This approach thinks expansively about intersectionality’s genealogies and its overlaps between black women and women of color, exploring such “women of color intimacies” as both sites of collaboration as well as “polyphonic” spaces of “productive frictions” (Nash 109-110). Such an approach historicizes intersectionality, yet resists falling prey to “intersectional originalism” — a reading practice marked by “feelings of ownership and territoriality” that holds that the “proper” interpretive approach will “unleash the analytics true power and effectivity save it from current perceived misuse” (Nash, 60, 62, 32) By recognizing that texts can certainly be misread and misinterpreted, this approach insists that there is no “singular correct and ‘true’ way to narrate the story of intersectionality” and that all reading practices “are interpretive, even if they mask their interpretive work in the name of textual fidelity” (Nash, 64, 69).

³³ Devon W. Carbado, “Colorblind Intersectionality,” *Signs* 38, No. 4 (2013): 841.

³⁴ Carbado, “Colorblind Intersectionality,” *Signs* 38, No. 4 (2013): 823-824.

religion,” and not just race and gender.³⁵ Similar to Hancock, Nina Lykke argues against the impulse to develop “fixed cluster of categories” that would anchor some grand theory of intersectionality, asking us instead to envision intersectionality as a “nodal point, an open-ended framework for comparing different feminist conceptualisations of intersecting power differentials, normativities and identity formations.”³⁶

In their different ways, each of these theorists challenge the tendency to conflate intersectionality with a theory of “double or multiple jeopardy” — the idea that the greater the number of marginal categories to which one inhabits, the greater the number of disadvantages one will experience, that the “dual and systematic discriminations of racism and sexism” alongside other forms of marginalization creates “interactive oppressions” that circumscribe the lives of black women and other women of color.³⁷ While double or multiple jeopardy certainly exists and intersectional analysis can help make sense of these dynamics, intersectionality itself is “not a positive theory of double jeopardy” — it’s an analytic capable of mapping not only the bottom but the top of social hierarchies as well.³⁸ Indeed, while violence, inequality and exclusion still often occurs along racial, gender, and class lines, as Lisa García Bedolla contends, the shift from away from de jure discrimination has also led to a “rights revolution,” expanding opportunities for some and creating “an important heterogeneity of privilege within marginal groups.”³⁹ Moreover, as bell hooks and other scholars of intersectionality have long noted, beyond violence and exclusion, there is also “pleasure to be found in the acknowledgment and enjoyment of racial difference.”⁴⁰ Describing this contradictory dynamic that Rachel Lee names as a kind of “fetishized marginality,” Ann duCille characterizes our current “multicultural moment” as “dramatically charged field” — one in which black women writers have become “politically correct, intellectually popular, and commercially precious sites of literary and historical inquiry.”⁴¹ According to duCille, “racial and gender alterity” has emerged as a “hot commodity,” not only in sites like “the cabaret, the speakeasy, the music

³⁵ See Hancock, “Intersectionality as a Normative and Empirical Paradigm,” *Politics and Gender* 2 (2007): 251.

³⁶ Nina Lykke, “Intersectional Analysis: Black Box or Useful Critical Feminist Thinking Technology?” in *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, edited by Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 207. Also see Nina Lykke, *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2010). Cite how Crenshaw cites Lykke and agrees with this definition.

³⁷ See Valerie Purdie-Vaughns and Richard P. Eibach, “Intersectional Invisibility: The Distinctive Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiple Subordinate-Group Identities,” *Sex Roles* 59 (2008): 377–78; Deborah K. King, “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology,” *Signs* 14:1 (1988): 42–43; Frances Beale, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female” (1969) in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall (1995), 146–156.

³⁸ Devon W. Carbado, “Colorblind Intersectionality,” *Signs* 38, No. 4 (2013): 813; Devon Carbado and Mitu Gulati, “The Intersectional Fifth Black Women,” *Du Bois Review* 10:2 (2013), 814.

³⁹ Lisa García Bedolla, “Intersections of Inequality: Understanding Marginalization and Privilege in the Post-Civil Rights Era,” *Politics & Gender* (2007), 233.

⁴⁰ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 21.

⁴¹ Rachel Lee, “Notes from the (Non)Field: Teaching and Theorizing Women of Color,” *Meridians* 1.1 (2000), 91; Ann duCille, “The Occult of True Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies,” in *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, ed. By Elizabeth Abel, Barbara Christian, and Helen Moglen (Berkeley: UC Press, 1997), 24.

video, the glamour magazine” but also in “the academy, the publishing industry” and other intellectual communities (and here I would add, in the realm of electoral politics as well).⁴²

Indeed, more than an account of double jeopardy or a critique of the limits of single-axis thinking, at its core, what makes intersectionality such powerful analytic for theorizing conservative women of color is that it’s a framework interested in analyzing the epistemic limits of the categories and social identities we use to describe lived experience. Indeed, as Tiffany Lethabo King has argued, if one “tarries with intersectionality,” what careful reading makes increasingly visible is how this analytic is capable of “moving back and forth between identity and non-identitarian formations,” taking us “beyond identity and the subject.”⁴³ Or as Carbado insists, intersectionality reflects a commitment neither to subjects nor to identities per se but, rather, to marking and mapping the production and contingency of both.⁴⁴

This dynamic is visible in her seminal 1991 essay “Demarginalizing the Intersection,” when Kimberlé Crenshaw invokes the metaphor of intersectionality to describe the juridical invisibility of black women’s experiences of discrimination.⁴⁵ Crenshaw’s use of intersectionality was a critique of law’s race-*or*-gender structure, “a way of responding to doctrinal invisibility with an insistence that law both recognize and redress black women’s particular experiences.”⁴⁶ While Crenshaw’s scholarship demonstrates how people within the same social group (e.g., women, African Americans) “are differentially vulnerable to discrimination as a result of other intersecting axes of disadvantage, such as gender, class, or sexual orientation,”⁴⁷ Lethabo King takes her analysis further, noting how introducing Black women into certain areas of labor law “produces a momentary epistemic crisis... the experiences and bodies of Black women are rendered discursively unimaginable.”⁴⁸ In her reading of *DeGraffenried v. General Motors*, Lethabo King draws our attention to Crenshaw analysis of the court’s ruling, especially the judge’s insistence that incorporating black women as “new class of protected minorities” would open up a “Pandora’s box” of protected classes “governed only by the mathematical principles of permutation and combination.” (qtd. in Crenshaw 1991a, 59). Showing how this ruling characterized Black women as a class of petitioners whose very status would “unleash a form of chaos that could undo juridical discourse,”⁴⁹ Lethabo King reveals how Crenshaw’s intersection “announces simultaneity, contemporaneousness, or ‘at the-same-time-ness’; it has the capacity to register space and time at once.”⁵⁰ Thinking about the intersection in this

⁴² Ann duCille, “The Occult of True Black Womanhood,” 21, 22.

⁴³ Tiffany Lethabo King, “Post-Identitarian and Post-Intersectional Anxiety in the Neoliberal Corporate University,” *Feminist Formations*, 27.3 (2015):130, 116.

⁴⁴ Devon W. Carbado, “Colorblind Intersectionality,” *Signs* 38, No. 4 (2013), 815.

⁴⁵ See Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989: Issue 1, Article 8: 139-167.

⁴⁶ Jennifer Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined After Intersectionality* (Duke University Press, 2019), 10.

⁴⁷ Devon W. Carbado and Mitu Gulati, “The Intersectional Fifth Black Woman” in *Du Bois Review* (2013), 527.

⁴⁸ Lethabo King, “Post-Identitarian and Post-Intersectional Anxiety in the Neoliberal Corporate University,” 128.

⁴⁹ King, “Post-Identitarian and Post-Intersectional Anxiety,” 129.

⁵⁰ King, “Post-Identitarian and Post-Intersectional Anxiety,” 132.

register offers an alternative way of thinking about time-space, allowing us to consider intersectionality as “a method/mode/way of conceptualizing movement, time, space, and effects of power.”⁵¹

It's my contention that intersectionality's capacity for theorizing subjects rendered discursively unimaginable — as well as an alternative method/mode/way of conceptualizing movement, time, space, and power — is precisely why the analytic represents a particularly fruitful approach to theorizing conservative women of color. Operating in the aftermath of transformative freedom movements for gender, racial, sexual, and economic justice — as well as in an era of resurgent white settler masculinity, neoliberal multiculturalism, and ever-growing economic inequalities — women of color negotiate a time-space marked by the simultaneity of marginalization, fetishized desire, opportunity, *and* hostility. Attending to such conditions of “at-the-same-timeness” is particularly crucial when looking at conservative women of color, a population who are negotiating and leveraging this paradoxical time-space are ways both expected and strange.

Women of color on the Right also represent a group that regularly occupies “the space of the ‘unthought’” for liberals and progressives — an often unacknowledged population whose existence throws the very categories under discussion into question. Such erasures often result in the liberal refusal to take such subjects seriously, characterizing them as either as less extreme than their white counterparts, or as subjects beyond the pale, a bizarre minority whose views are unrepresentative and therefore not worth engaging. Yet as Lykke has argued, one of the important strengths of intersectional analysis is that it's a mode of inquiry that is willing to be drawn towards “unexpected, disturbing, messy, paradoxical and perhaps conflicting perspectives and questions.” For Lykke, intersectional theorizing involves both “contextualising and opening-up cross-cutting dialogues on disturbing intersections and conflicting theoretical-political perspectives.”⁵² To my mind, conservative women of color are one such unanticipated population — and the issues their perspectives raise are indeed disturbing, messy, conflicted, and paradoxical.⁵³ Yet as Kathy Ferguson reminds us, with its “perpetually open and relentlessly critical approach to power,” intersectional thinking “invites us to push on the vectors of power that most elude us and to be surprised at their collaborations.”⁵⁴ Making sense of the political trajectory of Latina conservatives like Susana Martinez requires analyzing such unexpected collaborations of power and perspective.

⁵¹ King, 132.

⁵² Nina Lykke, “Intersectional Analysis: Black Box or Useful Critical Feminist Thinking Technology?” in *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, edited by Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), Also see Nina Lykke, *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 213.

⁵³ For more on this theme, see Wendy Smooth, “Intersectionality in Electoral Politics: A Mess Worth Making,” *Politics & Gender*, 2 (2006): 400-414.

⁵⁴ Kathy Ferguson, “Feminist Theory Today,” *The Annual Review of Political Science*, 2017, 272-273.

Animated by a concern with processes of co-production and mutability, intersectionality is an analytic that stresses how social and historical dynamics produce categories and identities that are often permeated, obscured, and transformed by other categories. Observing the “overdeterminancy” of race in the United States for example, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham calls on scholars of African American women’s history to attend to how gender identity is “inextricably linked” to racial identity and that “representations of both gender and class are also colored by race.”⁵⁵ Drawing on Omi and Winant’s insight that race is an “unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle,” Higginbotham’s account of the “metalanguage of race” attends to how racial distinctions emanate from and adapt to multiple uses of power in society, and how race itself is always an “unstable, shifting, and strategic reconstruction.”⁵⁶ “Race, Higginbotham writes, “not only tends to subsume other sets of social relations, namely gender and class, but... blurs and disguises, suppresses and negates its own complex interplay with the very social relations it envelops.”⁵⁷

Higginbotham’s insights regarding the ways identities can be subsumed, suppressed and even transformed is echoed and further emphasized by feminist theorists of assemblage. As Kathy Ferguson notes, some feminist theorists have “usefully folded assemblage theory into intersectionality,” building on the work of Deleuze & Guattari and emphasizing “networks within networks of active, mobile, multiple practices and functionalities...horizontal flows, linkages, and disruptions in rhizomatic deterritorializations”⁵⁸ For Ferguson, both assemblage theory and intersectionality share a common sensibility, conceiving of categories as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power.”⁵⁹ Such practices of co-production and mutual transformations are particularly significant when categories and concepts like race, gender, class, ideology, and sexuality interact. Indeed, such interactions are actually “intra-actions.”⁶⁰ Ferguson draws on water and marshland metaphors to characterize the intra-actions generated

⁵⁵ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* 17.2 (1992): 254.

⁵⁶ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 68.

⁵⁷ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* 17.2 (1992), 253, 274, 255.

⁵⁸ Ferguson, 273. See also Jasbir Puar, “‘I’d Rather Be A Cyborg Than a Goddess’: Becoming-Intersectional of Assemblage Theory,” *PhiloSOPHIA: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 2.1 (2012): 49-66; Jasbir Puar, “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages,” *Social Text* 23.3-4 (2005): 121-39; Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); and Nina Lykke, “Intersectional Analysis: Black Box or Useful Critical Feminist Thinking Technology?” in *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, edited by Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

⁵⁹ Ferguson, 272. See also Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis.” *Signs* 38.4 (2013): 795.

⁶⁰ Here, my thinking is indebted to Lykke’s engagement with the work of feminist theorist Karen Barad and her use of the term “intra-act.” For Barad, interactions are often understood as that which takes place between bounded entities, clashing against each other but not generating mutual transformations. Intra-action, by contrast, refers to “the interplay between non-bounded phenomena, which interpenetrate and mutually transform each other while interplaying.” See Karen Barad, 2003. *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter*. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(3), 815. See also Nina Lykke, “Intersectional Analysis,” 208.

by intersectional thinking, noting how water metaphors represent “the many distinct flows of meaning that intermix and interact, though they do not entirely dissolve into one another.” In marshlands, writes Ferguson, “fresh, salt, and brackish waters are simultaneously identifiable and interactive, contiguous and concurrent; land and water shade off into each other.”⁶¹

While I agree with scholars who argue that advocates of assemblage theory like Jasbir Puar often “tie intersectional thinking too tightly to identity,” and that there is no analytic reason to read intersectionality “as more limiting than cosynthesis, interconnectivity, multidimensionality, or assemblages,” what I continue to find valuable about theories of assemblage is the way such theories push us away beyond images of grids and intersections — images that depict identities as separate and discrete from one other.⁶² As Carbado observes, the language of intersection calls to mind a Venn Diagram, an image that that “invites us to imagine social circumstances in which race and gender exist apart from each other as “pure” identities.”⁶³ By contrast, images informed by assemblage theory emphasize porous boundaries and flows, heterogenous and emergent properties — metaphors that more fully capture the dynamics of perception and resonance, the mix of the aesthetic and structural — that better reflect how the most compelling theories of intersectionality operate.⁶⁴ More specifically, such fluid dynamics of perception and resonance help us to better understand the affective and political resources available to conservative women of color.

Deploying their identities in particular and unanticipated ways, conservative women of color reveal how the corporeal and the historical intertwine, creating opportunities for unexpected resonances and electoral assemblages. The Right understands that the term “woman of color” is saturated with historical meanings and assumptions — meanings and assumptions that conservative women of color candidates can deploy as well as unsettle.

Indeed, while conservative Latinas like Martinez don’t themselves embrace the term intersectionality, the concept invites us to consider the paradoxical conditions of representation that professional women of color inhabit — a time-space of simultaneity marked by expanding opportunity, ongoing hostility, tokenistic desire, and asymmetrical power relations. Conservative women of color running for office are cognizant of the fact that their racial and gendered embodiment resonates politically — that as women of color running for and holding higher office, their presence signifies to many as inclusion, justice, and

⁶¹ Ferguson 272; Barstch I, DiPalma C, Sells L. 2001. Witnessing the postmodern jeremiad: (mis)understanding Donna Haraway’s method of inquiry. *Configurations* 9(1):127–164]

⁶² See Ferguson, 273 and Carbado, CI 816. For further discussion of the relationship between theories (and theorists) of assemblage theory, see Jennifer Nash, (chapter 51) and Lethabo King, pp. 119-127.

⁶³ Carbado and Gulati 2013, 532.

⁶⁴ See George E. Marcus and Erkan Saka, “Assemblage,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 23 (2006) no. 2–3, 103-104

progress. Attending to this mix of the aesthetic and the structural — alongside its intra-active capacity to “subsume, blur, disguise, and suppress” its interplay with other identities and social relationships — the metalanguage of race presents conservative women of color with the rhetorical space to put forward policies whose reactionary elements are sometimes blurred and/or subsumed by the “dramatically charged fields” they inhabit.

Shifting registers, I want to turn now from these more abstract accounts of intersectionality, with their references to nodal points, categories of the unthought, the simultaneity of time-space, intra-action, porous boundaries and flows, etc. — and consider these insights in relation to research analyzing the unexpected electoral success of women legislators of color and what has been described as “the Latina advantage.” It’s my contention that some of the electoral advantages available to Latinas and other women of color are of particular value to conservative women of color running for office. Indeed, a deeper engagement with intersectional thought reveals that conservative Latinas are particularly well positioned to capitalize on some of the attitudinal support available to women of color politicians.

Unexpected Advantages: The Complicated Politics of Desire and Resonance

Formative research studying women legislators of color initially drew on the “double” or “multiple jeopardy” approach, noting how black women had been “doubly excluded from the political arena” as well as the “pervasive and persistent underrepresentation of women of color in elective offices.”⁶⁵

Yet in noting these challenges, Mary Hawkesworth and other political scientists who study race and gender have also insisted that women legislators of color are not simply figures of marginalization — in recent decades they’ve also made impressive gains in the electoral arena. Even beyond the historic election in 2020 of Kamala Harris as the first African American and Asian American woman to serve as Vice-President of the United States, a record number of Black women now serve in Congress and hold state legislative office.⁶⁶ Over the course of the 1990s, Latina representation in Congress increased 500 percent⁶⁷ and their representation in state offices increased 280 percent.⁶⁸ Latina office-holding grew more

⁶⁵ Mary Hawkesworth, “Congressional Enactments of Race-Gender: Toward a Theory Race-Gendered Institutions,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97 Nov. 4 (November 2003), 530. See also Marianne Githens and Jewell Prestage, “A Minority within a Minority.” In *Portraits of Marginality: The Political Behavior of the American Woman*, ed. Marianne Githens and Jewell Prestage (New York: David McKay, 1977), 339-45. Discussing how institutional norms and practices are often raced and gendered, for example, Mary Hawkesworth describes how despite seniority and “impressive legislative accomplishments,” many women legislators of color described “marginalization within legislative institutions” characterized as “[s]ilencing, excluding, marginalizing, segregating, discrediting, dismissing, discounting, insulting, stereotyping, and patronizing.” See Hawkesworth, “Congressional Enactments of Race-Gender,” 530-531.

⁶⁶ Jamil Scott, Nadia Brown, Lorrie Frasure, and Dianne Pinderhughes, “Destined to Run?: The Role of Political Participation on Black Women’s Decision to Run for Elected Office,” *National Review of Black Politics*, Vol. 2, Number 1, 26. See also Kelly Dittmar, “Black Women in American Politics. Center for American Women and Politics,” Eagleton Institute of Politics, 2019, New Brunswick, NJ.

⁶⁷ From one to six. See Bejarano, 4.

⁶⁸ From sixteen to sixty-one. See Bejarano, 4.

modestly at the county, municipal, and school-board levels, but at each level of government “Latina increases far outpaced increases in Latina/o representation overall.”⁶⁹ Intriguingly, research conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s on Latina elected officials suggested that Latinas are elected at higher rates than their male counterparts.⁷⁰ Indeed, as of 2005, women of color at the state and national levels made up a larger proportion of their minority delegation, “compared to their respective minority male counterparts” and a larger proportion than that of white women compared with their white male counterparts.⁷¹ In sum, while women of color remain underrepresented compared to their population numbers and continue to face specific and significant challenges, a record number of women of color now serve state legislative office and serve in Congress, a gain in numbers that has surpassed “the expectations and explanations” of political science research.⁷²

Historically, the scholarship analyzing the electoral achievements of women legislators of color has focused on Black women, the largest and most electorally successful portion of this population. Noting that African-American women account for a greater proportion of Black elected officials than white women do of white elected officials, and that African American women have outpaced African-American men in elective office success, Wendy Smooth has characterized this phenomenon as the “paradox of participation.”⁷³ As Smooth notes, “African-American women appear to be overrepresented in elective office while simultaneously holding the characteristics that would make them least likely to be politically engaged.”⁷⁴ Yet Black women have proven “more politically ambitious than their white counterparts,”

⁶⁹ (Fraga and Navarro 2004:4). For more recent statistics on Latinas running for national office, see Anna Sampaio, “Presente!: Latinas Mobilizing for Political Change across Candidates, Races, and Voters in 2020” in *Gender and Elections: Shaping the Future of American Politics* (5th Edition), edited by Susan J. Carroll and Richard L. Fox and Kelly Dittmar (Cambridge University Press, 2022): 169-191.

⁷⁰ Garcia Bedolla, Tate, and Wong 2005:167; Montoya, Hardy-Fanta, and Garcia 2000; Takash 1993; Hardy-Fanta 1993, Bejarano (2013).

⁷¹ Garcia Bedolla et al. 2005:166.” (Bejarano 2-3)

⁷² Bejarano, 131).

⁷³ Smooth 2001, 4th edition, Smooth 2006

⁷⁴ Smooth, 178, 4th ed; “Studies of political participation have consistently concluded that the affluent and the educated are more likely to participate in politics at higher rates.” (4th edition, 179) “The existing literature draws heavily from Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s (1995) resource model to inform the ways in which we think about political participation, including the act of running for elective office. Previous work has acknowledged and modeled the link between, on the one hand, time, money, and civic skills, and, on the other, political candidacy (see Lawless and Fox 2005, 2010)...However, compared with other groups of women, Black women’s engagement and political interest present a challenge to this work.” “Although Black women are less likely to have the resources that are associated with increased political participation (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Verba and Nie 1972), Black women participate in a variety of political activities at a high rate” (Junn 1997; Tate 1991; Gay and Tate 1998; Alex-Assensoh and Stanford 1997; Brown 2014a). (Scott et al, 27) “However, for African American women, the usual determinants of political participation – education and income – are not strong predictors of participation. African American women’s high level of officeholding contrasts with their material conditions, which suggest that they would be far less politically active. As of the 2000 U.S. Census, 43 percent of Black families were headed by a single mother, and the poverty rate among African American women was more than twice that of non- Hispanic white women. Regardless of their socioeconomic status, African American women are far more likely than African American men to engage in both traditional forms of political participation (including voting and holding office) and nontraditional forms of participation (such as belonging to organizations and clubs, attending church, and talking to people about politics).” (4th edition, 179)

enjoying greater proportional success in being elected to mayoral, state legislative, and congressional office in comparison to white women throughout the 1970s and 1980s.”⁷⁵

Scholars have also noted that when Black women and other women of color candidates are strategic about embracing the “fullness” of their identities, they’re often able to grow their pool of voters, increasing their crossover appeal by drawing on both race and gender-based resources. Discussing such intersectional possibilities, political scientist Christina Bejarano offers a theory of “Latina advantage” that demonstrates how minority women candidates — Latinas in particular — can gain electoral advantages from the interactive dynamics of race and gender, allowing them to perform better electorally than either white women or minority men among certain key voters.⁷⁶ In the first study to look at the political experiences of Latina candidates across multiple states, Bejarano’s research powerfully demonstrates how the experience of Latinas “differs from that of white women” and that Latina political candidates are positively affected by a variety of factors, including advantages in terms of attitudinal support and increased candidate-quality, as well as a softening of racial bias related to gender.⁷⁷

In demonstrating how “minority female candidates are viewed differently from minority male candidates, and female candidates are viewed differently from male candidates,” Bejarano shows how Latinas “benefit from the availability of a wide variety of voting coalitions.”⁷⁸ Moreover, while Latinas and other women of color can still be disadvantaged by gender and racial stereotypes and expectations, Bejarano’s research across thirty-six states makes a powerful case that for both the representative and the respondent, the interaction of race/ethnicity and gender “can mitigate the effects of both racial bias and gender bias, resulting in fewer electoral disadvantages for females.”⁷⁹ By characterizing themselves as “women, mothers, and community advocates,” Latina candidates can create a “gender-inclusive advantage,” that appeals to a multiracial electorate of women in ways that limit race-based white backlash⁸⁰ The data showing white women as more willing to support minority candidates and that Democratic women are more supportive of female candidates — even when these candidates are Republicans and don’t share a common party identification — underscores Bejarano’s insight that “descriptive divergence between the representative and the voter does not have to produce voter bias.”⁸¹ It also speaks to the insights of scholars of intersectionality like bell hooks and Ana duCille who have

⁷⁵ (Smooth, 179, Frasure Scot piece; and Robert Darcy and Charles Hadley. 1988. “Black Women in Politics: The Puzzle of Success.” *Social Science Quarterly* 77: 888–898].

⁷⁶ Bejarano, *The Latina Advantage*, 2

⁷⁷ Bejarano, *The Latina Advantage*, 6, 11. footnote: Candidate-quality characteristics include: “the candidate’s previous membership or leadership roles in community organizations, previous political experience in lower-level political offices, and other preparatory background characteristics.” (133)

⁷⁸ Bejarano, 133.

⁷⁹ Bejarano, 39.

⁸⁰ Bejarano, 38.

⁸¹ Bejarano, 49.

identified the ways in which “racial and gender alterity” has become a “hot commodity,” offering (in this instance) the pleasure of racial difference that comes with supporting female candidates of color, regardless of political party.

One of the most compelling aspects of *The Latina Advantage* is Bejarano’s finding that white respondents “demonstrate less racial bias in voting for racial/ethnic minority incumbents if they are female,” supporting that argument that “gender can ‘soften’ the threat posed by racial/ethnic differences.”⁸² She continues:

The positive interaction of race/ethnicity and gender provides increased electoral support for white female and minority female incumbents from their constituents. Gender brings a “softening” influence on racially biased levels of political support for both white female and minority female incumbents. This set of findings provides additional empirical support to the argument that Latinas are able to benefit electorally from their multiple identities... (49)

This study brings a new twist to the theory of racial threat having shown that, through the intersectionality of their race and gender, Latinas and other minority women encounter less hostility among white voters due to the “softening” of their race. (132)

Bejarano’s findings regarding the gendered nature of racial threat narratives also expose how fear and hostility targeting Latino male candidates can rebound in favor of Latina candidates. Gendered Latino threat narratives of Latino men as “macho” become sites of opportunity for Latina women who are seen less threatening than male Latino candidates who are more likely to be characterized as arrogant, aggressive, or even criminal.⁸³ Such electoral advantages with their blend of both admirable and noxious views calls to mind Ferguson’s marshland metaphors and the ways in which “fresh, salt, and brackish waters are simultaneously identifiable and interactive, contiguous and concurrent.”⁸⁴

“As a Latina” — Susana Martinez and the Pathbreaking Politics of Resonance and Disavowal

As the only female Hispanic governor in the United States, Martinez’s political ascendance was often framed as a series of “firsts.” In a 2010 profile immediately following her election (with the title “Susana Martinez: ‘I’m very proud of what I’ve accomplished as a Latina’”) *Latina Magazine* opens by emphasizing Martinez’s unique status as “the first Latina to be elected governor in U.S. history.” Asking Martinez about the political underrepresentation of Latinos in public office and about the experience of being a political trailblazer for Latina women, journalist Damarys Ocaña Perez asks:

⁸² Bejarano, 133.

⁸³ Bejarano’s research also has intriguing parallels with the scholarship on support for candidates of color by white conservative and/or racially resentful voters. See “TRUE COLORS: WHITE CONSERVATIVE SUPPORT FOR MINORITY REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES by M. V. HOOD III and SETH C. McKEE, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 1, Spring 2015, 28 and Christopher F. Karpowitz, Tyson King-Meadows, J. Quin Monson, and Jeremy C. Pope, “What Leads Racially Resentful Voters to Choose Black Candidates?” *The Journal of Politics*, volume 83, number 1 (2020).

⁸⁴ Ferguson 272; Bartsch et al. 2001 Barstch I, DiPalma C, Sells L. 2001. Witnessing the postmodern jeremiad: (mis)understanding Donna Haraway’s method of inquiry. *Configurations* 9(1):127–164]

With so many states with huge Latino populations, what took us so long to get our first Latina governor?

I don't know [laughs]. I wish I had the answer to that. It's true of many positions. We haven't had a good representation, but we're taking big steps toward having greater Latina representation throughout the country.

How do you feel about going where no Latina has gone before?

I'm very proud of what I have accomplished as a female and as a Latina, but it has come with a lot of hard work and education, and I know that I have to prove myself beyond the fact that I'm a female and Latina.⁸⁵

Martinez's statements about her gender and racial identity in *Latina Magazine* echo Ronnee Schreiber's claim that conservative women are generally critical of "politics based on a group's identity," considering "appeals to group based claims antithetical to individual self-sufficiency and progress" and that they therefore invoke gender identity "critically and self-consciously to legitimate conservative values."⁸⁶ In contrast to progressive and liberal candidates whose voter base expect their elected officials to speak out against racism and sexism as powerful forms of structural inequality with roots in the nation's history, Martinez claims her race and gender within identity-based spaces like *Latina Magazine* while also emphasizing individual achievement and claiming a color-blind ethos that appeals to GOP voters by avoiding discussions of institutional racism. Here, Martinez conjures an intersectional time-space marked by forms of simultaneity that allows her the freedom to reference, ignore, and/or dispute issues of racism and sexism. We see this dynamic at play in *Latina Magazine*, with Martinez both claiming pride in her identity and acknowledging her status as a political trailblazer while also refusing an explicitly feminist and/or race-conscious analysis that would acknowledge how various forms of historical and structural inequality has impacted the political underrepresentation of Latinas. Instead, Martinez characterizes the problem of Latina underrepresentation as widespread ("it's true of many positions"), unfathomable ("I wish I had an answer"), and ultimately improving ("we're taking big steps toward having greater Latina representation throughout the country"). At the same time, Martinez continually claims and references her racial and gender identity ("I'm very proud of what I have accomplished as a female and as a Latina") while also shifting the focus *away* from her race and gender to her status as an individual whose accomplishments are primarily the result of "hard work and education" and who is obligated to "prove myself beyond the fact that I'm a female and Latina." Such enactments of identity are capable of attracting a pool of voters who are either attracted to and/or inattentive to such decontextualized, ahistorical and individualized accounts of racial and gender difference.

⁸⁵ EXCLUSIVE: Susana Martinez: "I'm very proud of what I've accomplished as a Latina" *Latina Magazine*, Nov. 10, 2010 by Damarys Ocaña Perez [<http://www.latina.com/lifestyle/news-politics/exclusive-susana-martinez-im-very-proud-what-ive-accomplished-latin>]

⁸⁶ Schreiber, *Righting Feminism*, 42.

Drawing on affective and aesthetic resources that are particularly available to conservative women of color, Martinez asserts the political importance of her racial and gendered identity in her 2012 speech at the Republican National Convention. Marking political her debut on the national political stage, Martinez spoke after former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, sharing her life story, and advocating for Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney. Towards the conclusion of her speech, Martinez stated:

As the first Hispanic female governor in history, little girls often come up to me in the grocery store or the mall. They look and point, and when they get the courage, they ask, "Are you Susana?", and they run up and give me a hug. I wonder. How do you know who I am? But they do. And these are little girls. It's in moments like these when I'm reminded that we each pave a path. And for me, it's about paving a path for those little girls to follow. No more barriers.

In many ways, Mitt Romney and I are very different. Different starts in life, different paths to leadership, different cultures, but we've each shared in the promise of America. And we share a core belief that the promise of America must be kept for the next generation. *El sueño Americano es tener éxito*. It is success and success is the American dream, and that success is not something to be ashamed of or to demonize. There is one candidate in this election who will protect that dream. One leader who will fight hard to keep the promise of America for the next generation. And that's why we must stand up and make Mitt Romney the next president of the United States.⁸⁷

In both her *Latina Magazine* interview and her speech to the RNC, Martinez is self-conscious and strategic regarding how she invokes her racial and gendered identities. Indeed, rather than eschewing "identity politics" with its invocations of gender and race, Martinez repeatedly names her identity as "the first Hispanic female" to serve as governor in the United States. Moreover, in her description of "little girls" running up to hug her, Martinez's story both affirms and celebrates the affective power of racial and gender identification, particularly for the little (presumably) Latina girls who recognize her and seek out her embrace. Indeed, Martinez continually depicts herself as a pathbreaking Latina whose very presence in public life is proof of a world of expanded opportunity and possibility for future generations. In this way, Martinez's narrative embodies Higginbotham's intersectional claims regarding the always "unstable, shifting, and strategic reconstruction" of race in relation to gender, alongside the capacity of race to "negate its own complex interplay with the very social relations it envelops."⁸⁸ Indeed, by asserting her identity as a woman of color, Martinez invites these little girls and other viewers to experience her as the embodiment of social justice struggles that led to her presence on the public stage, regardless of whether she herself is a supporter of many of the policies and movements that made her presence possible. Equally significant, Martinez self-identifies as a woman of color tearing down barriers for young girls and paving a path for them to follow in a speech to endorse Republican Mitt Romney for President — a candidate who famously called for the "self-deportation" of immigrants and who promised to veto the DREAM Act,

⁸⁷ <https://www.politico.com/story/2012/08/susana-martinez-rnc-speech-text-080421>

⁸⁸ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 68; and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17.2 (1992), 253, 274, 255.

a piece of legislation explicitly focused on removing barriers for undocumented youth and creating a pathway for their citizenship. Yet rather than address policy questions head-on, Martinez's speech at the RNC "negates its own complexity" with these very social relations, evading policy and working instead to create resonances between herself and Romney in order to produce a mutually transformative intra-action that obscures questions of Republican policy, orienting our gaze instead towards an emotionally charged depiction of little girls moved and inspired by Latina success.

Martinez's also uses her RNC speech to repeat her well-publicized origin story about leaving the Democratic Party and becoming a Republican — a conversion narrative designed to appeal to GOP voters. Describing her and her husband's decision to switch political parties, Martinez first described how she and her husband became audience to a request:

I was a Democrat for many years, so were my parents. Before I ran for district attorney, two Republicans invited my husband and me to lunch, and I knew a party switch was exactly what they wanted. So I told Chuck, "We'll be polite, enjoy a free lunch, and then say goodbye." But we talked about issues — they never used the words Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal. We talked about many issues, like welfare — is it the way of life or hand up? Talked about size of government — how much should it tax families and small businesses? And when we left that lunch, we got in the car, and I looked over at Chuck and said, "I'll be damned. We're Republicans."⁸⁹

Personifying Ronald Reagan's claim that "Hispanics are Republicans, they just don't know it yet," Martinez characterizes her party switch less as a decision and more as a realization. Initially characterizing herself and her husband as "takers" (Democrats looking for "a free lunch") Martinez's transformation begins by turning to welfare policy, with its potent yet unspoken allusions to the Black and Latina women often seen as treating such handouts as "a way of life."⁹⁰ Yet by describing her transformation from Democrat to Republican, Martinez depicts she and her husband moving from Mexican American "takers" to small government Republicans — a narrative designed to appeal to Republican voters on both an affective and aesthetic level.

Together, an intersectional analysis of these findings by various scholars of race, gender, and elections demonstrates Bejarano's claim that "the resources that come with the intersecting identities" can at times "uniquely lessen the effect of each additional element."⁹¹

Turning from how voters view candidates, I want to turn now to what I believe are some of the most significant intersectional tropes that Martinez herself deployed as both candidate and governor of New Mexico. More specifically, in an effort to garner support for her candidacy and policies, Martinez deployed a gendered language of maternal protection steeped in melodramatic and spectacular depictions

⁸⁹ "Susana Martinez 2012 RNC Speech (text, video), *Politico*, August 29, 2012. <https://www.politico.com/story/2012/08/susana-martinez-rnc-speech-text-080421>

⁹⁰ Lionel Sosa, "Politics and the Latino Future: A Republican Dream" in *Latinos and the Nation's Future*, edited by Henry G. Cisneros and John Rosales (Houston: *Arte Publico Press*, 2009), 119.

⁹¹ Bejarano, 38.

of sexual violence that echoed familiar xenophobic characterizations of migrant men as savage and barbarous. Moreover, in making intersectional appeals a central element of her political identity as governor, Martinez offered an aestheticized vision of criminalizing migrants that linked her family's aspirational history to the long history of Mexican Americans participation in the military, law enforcement, and other aspects of the U.S. homeland security state.

Prosecutor, Pioneer, and Protector: Savagery, Racialized Sexuality and Melodramatic Heroism

When narrating her years with the federal Public Defender's Office in Las Cruces, Martinez continually emphasized her experience as a state prosecutor and children's court lawyer, specializing in child abuse, domestic violence, sexual offenses, and child homicide cases. Indeed, in portraying herself as a protector of women and children, Martinez produced aesthetically resonant images that combined a racialized maternalism with a masculinist vision of law and order. To achieve this compound dynamic, Martinez deployed a melodramatic form of racialized sexuality involving sensationalist accounts of women and girls being victimized by sexual and domestic violence. Similarly, in her years-long effort to repeal the state law allowing undocumented New Mexicans access to driver's licenses, Martinez consistently employed a gendered language of danger and vulnerability that relied on affectively charged associations between illegality, masculinity, and criminality. Yet by invoking her identity as both a Latina woman and a state prosecutor, Martinez's statements against "illegal immigrants" merged discourses of public safety with maternal caregiving, complicating and obscuring the racial and gendered stereotypes her rhetoric exploits. Again, here we see another iteration of how gender works to "soften" the threat posed by racial/ethnic differences.⁹²

Throughout the 2010 race, the Martinez campaign ran a variety of ads emphasizing her experience as district attorney in the state's 3rd Judicial District in Las Cruces, and referring to the fact that she was named "Prosecutor of the Year" by the State Bar of New Mexico. A 2010 profile of Martinez in the *Albuquerque Journal* noted that "[s]he was the only Hispanic female lawyer in the Las Cruces-based District Attorney when she was hired in 1986."⁹³ Yet the author of the profile portrays Martinez as "avoiding the issue" when asked if she felt she was blazing a trail for Hispanic women," stating instead: "[t]he trail I was blazing was working with sexually abused children...and making great strides."⁹⁴

As with her profile in *Latina Magazine*, in her exchange with the *Albuquerque Journal*, we see Martinez first naming her racial and gender distinctiveness, only to show herself uninterested in the politics of identity. By both focusing on and then pivoting from what she *is* (the only Hispanic female in

⁹² Bejarano, 133.

⁹³ "Tough As Nails," *Albuquerque Journal*, Sunday, September 12, 2010 by Colleen Heid. See <http://www.abqjournal.com/news/state/1223012state09-12-10.htm>

⁹⁴ "Tough As Nails," *Albuquerque Journal*.

the DA's office) to what she *does* (working with sexually abused children), Martinez offers voters a image of pioneering diversity she then supplants with a focus on agentic and aspirational individualism. Moreover, by characterizing herself as someone who has “devoted 21 years to prosecuting criminals,” Martinez continually references her long professional career fighting crimes of domestic violence and sexual offenses aimed at women and children.⁹⁵ Describing this decision in her address at the 2012 Republican National Convention, Martinez states:

I became a prosecutor. I took on a -- a specialty that very few choose to pursue. I prosecuted child abuse and child homicide cases. Cases that were truly gut-wrenching. But standing up for those kids, being their voice for justice was the honor of a lifetime.⁹⁶

In depicting herself as a prosecutorial “voice for justice” — as someone committed to “standing up” for abused and murdered children, Martinez situates her identity within the gendered logic of masculine protection. As characterized by Iris Marion Young, the logic of masculinist protection casts US leaders as “chivalrous masculinist protectors who guard citizens from ‘evil others.’”⁹⁷ As Holloway Sparks notes in her analysis of intersectional anger and the women of the Tea Party movement, the politics of masculine protection “is regularly bound up with militarism” and typically involves “an explicit commitment to the use of physical violence.”⁹⁸ Moreover, in noting that the logic of protection “relies heavily on gender formations to become intelligible,” Sparks simultaneously reminds us that the position of masculinist protector is certainly “not limited to men.”⁹⁹ Martinez’s account of 2002 prosecution of the case of “Baby Brianna” highlights this tendency to both claim the mantle of maternal protector while also unsettling traditional gender roles by situating herself in the role of the melodramatic hero — a protector of women and children typically envisioned as a masculine subject.

⁹⁵ “Tough As Nails,” *Albuquerque Journal*.

⁹⁶ Gov. Susana Martinez’s speech at the Republican National Convention on Aug. 29, 2012

⁹⁷ Iris Marion Young, “The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State,” *Signs* 29:1 (2003), p. 10. For an earlier discussion of the gendered logics of protection, see: Judith Hicks Stiehm, “The Protected, The Protector, The Defender,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 5:3–4 (1982), pp. 367–376.)

⁹⁸ Holloway Sparks, “Mama Grizzlies and Guardians of the Republic: The Democratic and Intersectional Politics of Anger in the Tea Party Movement,” *New Political Science*, 40.

⁹⁹ Holloway Sparks, “Mama Grizzlies and Guardians of the Republic,” 40, 42.

Described as “one of the worst child abuse cases in the state history,” five month old Brianna Lopez of Las Cruces, New Mexico had been raped, bitten, dropped, and abused to death by members of her family.¹⁰⁰ The horrific story of “Baby Brianna” dominated New Mexico’s headlines for months, with Martinez becoming well-known for her prosecution of the case. In her campaign ad entitled “Baby Brianna,” Martinez reminds New Mexico voters of this shocking story through a melodramatic narrative that opens with a picture of Brianna Lopez.

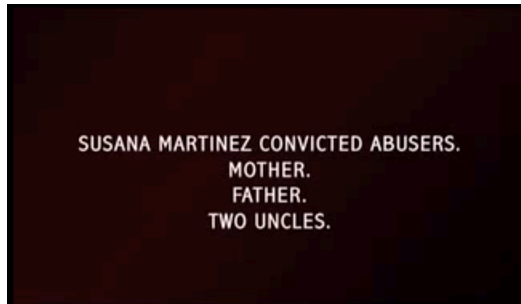


The ad states:

“Baby Brianna was five months old when she died. She had many broken bones, over thirty bite marks, and she was beat to death. We had to fight for those kids that were killed this way. So we went to the legislature and fought for three years to make it a life sentence, and we succeeded.

Baby Brianna’s photo still hangs in my office.
I want to fight for New Mexicans, and I want to turn New Mexico around.”¹⁰¹

As Martinez speaks, a screenshot comes up that reads:



In *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom*, Libby Anker defines melodrama as “a genre form that portrays dramatic events through moral polarities of good and evil, overwhelmed victims, heightened affects of pain and suffering, grand gestures, astonishing feats of heroism, and the redemption of virtue.” For Anker, melodrama is more than a film, literary, or cultural genre — it is a political genre, more precisely “a genre of national political discourse.”¹⁰² According to Anker, melodramatic political discourse:

[C]asts politics, policies, and practices of citizenship within a moral economy that identifies the nation-state as a virtuous and innocent victim on villainous action. It locates goodness in the suffering of the nation, evil in its antagonists, and heroism in sovereign acts of war and global control

¹⁰⁰ “Is New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez the Next Sarah Palin?” by Andy Kroll, *Mother Jones*, April 16, 2014.

¹⁰¹ “Baby Brianna” Martinez Campaign Ad (August 05, 2010): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lknVCxXGGc>

¹⁰² Elisabeth Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 2.

coded as expressions of virtue. By evoking intense visceral responses to wrenching injustices imposed upon the nation-state, melodramatic discourse solicits affective states of astonishment, sorrow, and pathos through the scenes it shows of persecuted citizens. It suggests that the redemption of virtue obligates state power to exercise heroic retribution on the forces responsible for national injury.¹⁰³

By depicting herself as successfully convicting the violently abusive Lopez family, Martinez's ads featuring Brianna Lopez depict a melodramatic account of "overwhelming vulnerability" that simultaneously displays "virtuous Americans under siege."¹⁰⁴ Moreover, as Anker notes, melodrama, "often links virtue to childhood"¹⁰⁵ with the melodramatic hero often understood to be "a self-determining man with an innate sense of goodness, who can free himself (and his helpless yet grateful female and child dependents) from the chains of social domination."¹⁰⁶ By emphasizing her successful effort to lobby the Legislature for life-in-prison sentences for offenders who intentionally kill children, the ad depicts Martinez as a female hero whose individualism "leads to the state," not to a distrust of all forms of state power but to the support of particular forms of state-sanctioned violence.¹⁰⁷

Martinez's use of melodramatic political discourse draws on a gendered language of danger and vulnerability while simultaneously characterizing Martinez as a trailblazing female "protector" and hero. At the same time, as a conservative woman of color, Martinez often links questions of female vulnerability and public safety to a criminalized account of the dangers posed by "illegal" immigrants. This conservative deployment of intersectionality can be seen in Martinez's years-long effort to repeal the state law allowing undocumented New Mexicans access to driver's licenses.

Below are three examples of how Martinez invokes a language of racialized sexuality to voice her concerns regarding border security and illegal immigration.

Martinez's 2010 ad "Border" opens with Martinez facing the camera:

Martinez: "I'm standing in New Mexico. And on the other side of that fence [Juarez], it's the murder capital of the world. When crime spills over, I prosecute."

Announcer: "Susana Martinez for governor."

Sheriff Todd Garrison: "All candidates talk tough about border security. But Susana, she's done something about it. She prosecutes members of the most violent Mexican cartels."

Martinez: "Criminals take advantage of weak laws, like giving driver's licenses to illegal immigrants. As governor, that will change."

Announcer: "Susana Martinez for governor. She'll fight for border security. She always has."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Elisabeth Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Duke University Press, 2014), 91.

¹⁰⁶ Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 82.

¹⁰⁷ Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 95.

¹⁰⁸ "Border" campaign ad (04/19/10): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7VG3TG9XVM>



In another ad entitled “Bold Change,” the ad opens with an image of a tearful white woman whose face is superimposed next to Martinez and the statement “Fights for Victims.” A few seconds later, the ad shows an image of the U.S.-Mexico border wall and the statement that Martinez “Prosecutes Drug Cartel Members.”¹⁰⁹



¹⁰⁹ “Bold Change” campaign ad (2010): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7VG3TG9XVM>

In her post-election interview with *Latina Magazine*, Martinez elaborated on the reasoning behind her opposition to undocumented immigrants having driver's licenses and her concerns regarding border security:

***Latina Magazine:* You want to repeal the law that allows illegal immigrants to get a license in NM and want to make sure that illegal immigrants don't have access to the state's lottery scholarship. Some people think of it as selling out. What do you have to say to them?**

SUSANA MARTINEZ: I think the way you combat that is with information. I have a different perspective. I have been the prosecutor and the district attorney in a border county. We live next to the most violent city in the world. It's not just that I am Latina and happen to live in the state of New Mexico. But I deal with the criminal element every day and people who have come here to New Mexico illegally with the sole purpose of committing crimes. When I talk to Latinos here in the state of New Mexico and I tell them that that is my focus, they are very much in agreement. If those individuals are arrested for committing crimes—whether it's trafficking in narcotics or domestic violence, breaking into businesses or rape, need to be placed in a jail—there needs to be a hold on them and they need to be removed from this country because they have proven to be dangerous. That has always been my focus, not only as district attorney, but also as a candidate for governor.

To repeal the law that provides drivers licenses is to make New Mexico less attractive to that kind of element, to keep them from coming here. So how do we distinguish the folks who are coming here to work and to better themselves from those who are coming here to get documentation in order to further their criminal activities?

***Latina Magazine:* How do you tell them apart? What about the people who do come here to work and better their families?**

SUSANA MARTINEZ: That has never been my focus as district attorney or as a candidate for governor. My focus has always been those people who are placed in jail because now they've proven to be dangerous. I've had lengthy conversations with Hispanic people to distinguish that. For example, you'll have a Hispanic woman who is here illegally from Mexico who has been raped by her husband, we never want to create the fear that would keep her from calling law enforcement. There has to be a good response, so she can stay in this country and participate in the prosecution of that individual who raped them. We do that and we file the proper documentation for that person to remain in this country to fight for justice. We treat even illegal immigrants who are here and are victims of crime in a way that is positive. They're not just being deported because they're here illegally.

***Latina Magazine:* As a governor of a border state, what would the ideal comprehensive reform look like to you?**

SUSANA MARTINEZ: I don't know what the comprehensive reform act would be, but the first thing we have to do is we have to secure the border. And

it's not just Mexicans. I think that's what's so important—people think it's only about people from Mexico. They are coming from all over the world. And we know this because of the work I do as a prosecutor. They are coming from all over the world and finding the weakest part of the country from which to enter the country illegally, and that just happens to be the Mexican border.¹¹⁰

Finally, in her 2012 State of State Speech, Martinez again argued for repealing the law that allows the undocumented to get a drivers license:

Finally, keeping New Mexico children and families safe should be a top priority every time our legislature meets.

Like you, I was horrified over the holidays to read about the tragic and inexcusable cases of child abuse. A child just a few weeks old was badly beaten, sexually abused, and eventually left to die. Small, helpless little girls were bruised and broken, left in a bathtub.

I have spent my life and career helping those who had no voice, particularly children who had been the victim of senseless cruelty, violence, and abuse.

I am asking you to join me in standing up for those who are unable to stand for themselves.

I'm asking you to increase penalties for child abuse.

Those who abuse children should face severe penalties and mandatory prison time.

We must always put justice for victims first...

I am confident we can work together to solve other pressing public safety needs - strengthening Megan's Law to ensure sex offenders cannot live in secret in our neighborhoods, allowing Amber Alerts to be issued when relatives abduct a child and put them in harm's way, and ending the practice of providing driver's licenses to illegal immigrants.

Just last week, a man pled guilty in Alamogordo to trafficking humans from Pakistan and elsewhere through New York, and into our state – a 'touch and go' to grab our license, to grab our government-issued ID card, and leave.

To where? Who knows? For what purpose? Who knows?

Over and over, we hear the same story – the fraud, the trafficking, the security threats...

I want to thank Independent Representative Andy Nunez for sponsoring the bill to repeal this law and I want to And it's time to vote to repeal this law.

I'm also asking the Legislature to work with me to crack down on repeat drunk drivers...¹¹¹

In her arguments regarding immigration and border security, Martinez continually references New Mexico's proximity to the border, stating that “[w]e live next to the most violent city in the world,”

¹¹⁰ EXCLUSIVE: Susana Martinez: "I'm very proud of what I've accomplished as a Latina" *Latina Magazine*, Nov. 10, 2010 by Damarys Ocaña Perez

¹¹¹ *New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez's 2012 State of the State Address*, Feb. 22, 2012. <http://www.governing.com/news/state/new-mexico-2012-state-of-the-state-address.html>

continually noting the danger and violence occurring “on the other side of that fence.” Describing Mexico as “the murder capital of the world,” Martinez situates herself as a Mexican American woman making affectively charged claims depicting Mexico as a terrifying space of global vulnerability, violent uncertainty, and inescapable deceit.

Similarly, in her arguments for repealing the law allowing the undocumented to receive driver’s licenses, Martinez employs a gendered and racialized melodramatic language of danger that continually links vulnerable women and children with threatening images of illegal, masculine criminality. Such linkages are present when Martinez conflates the undocumented with those “trafficking in narcotics or domestic violence, breaking into businesses or rape.” Yet when asked about undocumented families who “come here to work and better their families,” Martinez immediately goes to the example of a “Hispanic woman who is here illegally from Mexico who has been raped by her husband.” Here, female undocumented subjectivity is characterized by sexual victimization while masculine illegality remains connected to a discourse of savagery and violence.

Moreover, as Anker notes, anti-immigrant rhetoric often draws on a melodramatic discourse similar to the discourse of anti-terrorism. In both cases, “it positions immigrants... as evil villains out to disempower America. As the war on terror has been unable to make good on the promise of sovereign freedom...one of its effects is to relocate the villainy that overwhelms America from terrorists onto immigrants, especially poor and brown ones.”¹¹² Martinez clearly draws on this legacy — her demand (and belief) that the first response to immigration must involve “securing the border” speaks to a dream of clearly marked territorial boundaries that distinguish between the U.S. and its Others. Here, melodramatic political discourses approaches the “cause of the events” as “external to America: the nation suffers as virtuous innocent entity without responsibility to the actions” that led up to its moment of injury.¹¹³ Rather than thinking in terms of “large-scale social injustices,” villainy “becomes personified in the body of the singular evildoer. Once the villain is punished or redeemed, social injustice is eradicated.”¹¹⁴

This emphasis on villainy and the “singular evildoer” is on display in Martinez’s 2012 State of the State Address. Here, Martinez rhetorically locates her demand for revoking driver’s license for the undocumented in the section of her speech focused on “keeping New Mexico children and families safe.” Yet Martinez situates her discussion of public safety alongside a horrific account of “badly beaten, sexually abused” children “left to die.” Here Martinez also uses overwrought language to convey a “scene of victimization” – a vision of “small helpless little girls...bruised and broken, left in a bathtub.” Martinez then calls on the legislature to “strengthen Megan’s Law to ensure sex offenders cannot live in secret in

¹¹² Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 17.

¹¹³ Anker, 51.

¹¹⁴ Anker, 73.

our neighborhoods, allowing Amber Alerts to be issued when relatives abduct a child and put them in harm's way, and ending the practice of providing driver's licenses to illegal immigrants.”

Creating an affective chain linking sexual predators, endangered children, and illegal immigrants, Martinez draws on her identity as a Latina prosecutor, maternal caregiver, and feminine protector in ways that complicates and confuses the racial stereotypes her rhetoric exploits. Equally significant, Martinez's melodramatic depictions of migrant criminality advanced some of the most brutal and dehumanizing accounts of migrants put forward by xenophobic voices on the Right, including then-candidate Donald Trump and radical white nationalists like Ann Coulter. Yet the affective and ideological resonances that exist between Trump, Coulter, and Martinez are muted (or to use Bejarano's term, “softened”) by the intersectional context Martinez both inhabits and deploys, allowing her to be classified as part of the more moderate and multicultural wing of the Republican Party. Yet Martinez's ability to be “seen as a centrist” was not about working across the aisle or pursuing moderate, bipartisan public policies. Instead, it marked her ability to produce an intersectional and melodramatic account of herself as a strong and unwavering Latina protector of women of children engaged in a heroic struggle against sexually violent, predatory migrant men. In other words, centrism here does not denote a politics of moderation so much as an affect-laden politics of simultaneity — a compound account of racial pride and maternal protection nested within an anti-migrant politics. As embodied and enacted by conservative women of color, such both/and politics prepares voters to reconcile the value of racial and gender diversity alongside an aggressive and racialized politics of nativism. Indeed, in the case of Martinez, her melodramatic political discourse of violated women and girls offers a multicultural bridge to the hyperbolic red-meat nativism of Ann Coulter and Donald Trump.

¡Adios America! —Melodrama and the Politics of Simultaneity

As discussed earlier, melodramatic political discourse “solicits affective states of astonishment, sorrow, and pathos” by highlighting injustices done to the nation-state and its persecuted citizens. Ann Coulter's *¡Adios America!* (June 2015) is a text rife with such melodramatic and hyperbolic language, depicting immigrants as pathologically dysfunctional and monstrously violent:

The problems stemming from unchecked immigration are all over the news. You'll just never be told they are problems of immigration — children living in poverty, childhood obesity, teen pregnancy, out-of-wedlock births, abysmal high school dropout rates, income inequality, “homegrown” terrorists, massive Medicare frauds, internet crime, identity theft, prison overcrowding, the vast number of uninsured used to justify Obamacare, sex trafficking, the epidemic of child rape, the destruction of our national parks, drunk driving casualties, drug-resistant tuberculosis, measles and other viral outbreaks, bankrupt government pensions, lower reading and math scores, and shorter “Americans.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Ann Coulter, *¡Adios America!* 13-14.

The main difference between decapitations in Syria and Mexico is that Mexicans also behead women, children, and innocent bystanders.... Mexicans specialize in corpse desecration, burning people alive, rolling human heads onto packed nightclub dance floors, dissolving bodies in acid, and hanging mutilated bodies from bridges.¹¹⁶

In addition to such over-the-top characterizations of migrants as the group most responsible for nearly every economic, social, and political problem present in the United States, an obsessive focus on violent sexuality also suffuses Coulter's work. In *¡Adios America!*, for example, Peter Beinart notes that Coulter devotes "a whopping six chapters" to immigrants and rape. Moreover, Coulter appeared particularly determined to connect Latino migrants with pedophilia and the rape of children, stating that America's main immigrant groups have a "gusto for gang rape, incest and child rape"¹¹⁷ and that "[t]he rape of little girls isn't even considered a crime in Latino culture — and that culture is becoming our culture."¹¹⁸ Not surprisingly, Donald Trump was a fan of Coulter, calling *¡Adios America!* "a great read" before announcing his presidential run.¹¹⁹

While slightly less graphic than Trump and Coulter's gruesome accounts of marauding migrants, Martinez's ad campaign focusing on the horrific child abuse murder of baby Brianna Lopez is yet another iteration of this practice — deploying racialized and melodramatic accounts of the rape and murder of women and children for political ends. Beaten to death by the Lopez family, Martinez's ad campaign featuring stories of Brianna's bite marks and broken bones creates a simultaneous time-space whereby voters are encouraged towards feelings of horror, lurid fascination, distress over the murder of an innocent little (latina) girl, and revulsion against the monstrous Mexican Lopez family. Together, the overtly racist anti-migrant rhetoric of pundits like Coulter and politicians like Trump combine and comingle with a Latina governor's repeated references to Mexico as "the murder capital of the world" alongside stories of girls "beaten, sexually abused, and eventually left to die" — creating a melodramatic and multiracial resonance machine, fueled by visions of innocent babies, monstrous Mexicans, and dangerous "illegals."

Brown Girl With A Gun: Pleasure, Pride, and the Gendered Politics of Armed Citizenship

In addition to conflating noncitizen status with savage violence and criminality, Martinez's conservative intersectionality goes beyond the melodramatic accounts of gendered and sexualized violence discussed above. Martinez's representational strategy also engages with more pleasurable affects surrounding race and gender. In this final section, I explore the many ways Martinez draws on her own

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 184.

¹¹⁷ Coulter, *¡Adios America!*, 216.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 283.

¹¹⁹ Peter Beinart, "The Republican Party's White Strategy," *The Atlantic*, July/August 2016, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/07/the-white-strategy/485612. Coulter repaid Trump's blurb by quickly writing *In Trump We Trust: E Pluribus Awesome!*, published Aug. 23, 2016.

embodiment as a Latina female to create pleasurable feelings of pride alongside forms of gender and racial novelty — depicting affectively potent intersectional accounts of Martinez alongside Latino servicemen and police officers. By linking her personal and professional background in law enforcement with her family’s history of military service and law enforcement, Martinez’s speeches and campaign ads sought to win over New Mexico voters by referencing the multigenerational presence of Latinos in the southwest, connecting this to a potent history of racial pride regarding Latino service in the U.S. military, evoking the long history of Mexican Americans winning elections and holding political office in the state. And finally, Martinez successfully drew on her own embodiment as Latina, creating pleasurable forms of aesthetic dissonance that gratified supporters. Such racial and gender novelty disturbs (but ultimately reinforces) traditional masculinist accounts of law and order.

Getting Specific: New Mexican History and the Politics of Visibility and Silence

As Christina Bejarano and other scholars of Latina politics have observed, the states with the highest numbers of Latina elected officials are New Mexico, California, and Texas.¹²⁰ Given this, we should not be surprised that the first Latina elected governor in the United States was born in Texas and that the state she was elected Governor was the state of New Mexico. Indeed, Martinez is part of a distinct political history in the southwest. As scholars of Latino history and politics have long demonstrated, the Mexican political experience in New Mexico was unique in comparison to other states. As Laura Gomez writes, because of the slow influx of Anglos into the state, New Mexico maintained a relatively large percentage of Mexican Americans in comparison to states like Texas and California that both experienced an early and massive Anglo influx. In the aftermath of 1848, Mexican elites “accommodated, contested, and negotiated their position” in this new American racial order.¹²¹ At the same time, as Gomez notes, New Mexico was also a region characterized by large tribal populations, diverse indigenous communities that Mexicans were in conflict, kinship, and alliance with. Both the Spanish and American racial orders sought to enlist Mexicans in the management of the territories, leading Mexicans to become “agents in the reproduction of racial subordination” even as they were also victims of it.¹²² Rather than relying solely or primarily on practices of removal, displacement and subjugation, the racial, economic, and historical dynamics of post-1848 New Mexico led Anglos in the territory to pursue political strategies of power-sharing and co-optation. According to Juan Gomez-Quñones, this distinct history of power-sharing meant that that Mexicans not only continued to hold elective office, but that Mexican American

¹²⁰ Bejarano, 133.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹²² Gomez, 115. As Gomez notes, this post-1848 dynamic — of categorizing indigenous tribal populations as a nonwhite while classifying Mexicans as “legally white” alongside being socially constructed as a non-white, racially inferior population — resulted in a history of Mexican Americans becoming both victims *and* participants in settler colonial projects of racial management. See Gomez, *Manifest Destinies*, 5

politicians could also “wield significant political power as the state and federal levels of government.”¹²³ Since becoming the 47th state in 1912, New Mexicans have had more success than other states in electing Latinos to public office.¹²⁴

Incorporated through war and conquest into a nation that denies rights and dignity to those deemed nonwhite, this dynamic of being both victims *and* participants in projects of racial management can be seen in Susana Martínez’s own family story of upward mobility through military service and the policing of populations.¹²⁵ An example of Martínez unexpected harnessing of carceral aesthetics occurs in her speech at the 2012 RNC. Describing her youthful efforts to support her family’s business, stating:

We grew up on the border and truly lived paycheck to paycheck. My dad was a golden gloves boxer in the Marine Corps, then a deputy sheriff. My mom worked as an office assistant. One day they decided to start a security guard business. I thought they were absolutely crazy. We literally had no savings. But they always believed in the American dream. So, my dad worked to grow the business. My mom did the books at night. And at 18, I guarded the parking lot at the Catholic church bingos.

Now my dad made sure I could take care of myself. I carried a Smith and Wesson 357 magnum. Yes, that gun weighed more than I did. [RNC audience cheering].¹²⁶

Portraying herself as a brown girl with gun “that weighed more than I did,” Martínez provides her GOP audience with a pleasurable image of a law-and-order Latina — “a pro-life, pro-gun *mujer* who advocates for stronger border security.”¹²⁷ In a similar vein, Martínez’s ran campaign ads that also emphasized the

¹²³ Juan Gómez Quiñones, *Chicano Politics: Realty & Promise, 1940-1990* (University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 45.

¹²⁴ Based on the most recent census data, about 49.3 percent of New Mexico’s population is Hispanic and Martínez took around 38 percent of the Hispanic vote in 2010 and an estimated 40 percent in 2014. As of 2022, New Mexico has elected seven Hispanic Governors and for many years, New Mexico was the only state with a Mexican American U.S. Senator, Dennis Chavez, who served in the Senate from 1935 to 1962. See US Census (New Mexico), accessed May 30, 2022 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NM/RHI725220#RHI725220>. See also: <https://www.abqjournal.com/2419172/at-nearly-half-of-population-nm-still-most-latino-state.html>

¹²⁵ Gomez, *Manifest Destinies*, 5. For more on the complex story regarding Latinos and their relationship to whiteness, see Benjamin Marquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican American Political Organization* (University of Texas Press, 2014), Patrick Lukens, *A Quiet Victory for Latino Rights: FDR and the Controversy Over Whiteness* (University of Arizona, 2012), and Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York University Press, 2006 [1996]). A growing number of Latino Studies scholars are exploring how Latinos have sometimes claimed whiteness, negotiating not only the black/white binary but how they also inhabit categories such as not-black, off-white, etc. Of course, Latinos may recognize themselves as white while also arguing for anti-racist, pro-immigrant policies. But other white-identified Latinos might display their own anti-migrant narratives. Latino police officers, ICE agents—all may (though not necessarily) have a close relationship to whiteness. Some may even fall prey to white supremacy. In sum, whiteness is a vexed category, even for the Latinos who both claim and repudiate it. See Gabriela Resto-Montero, “With the rise of the alt-right, Latino white supremacy may not be a contradiction in terms,” *Mic*, December 27, 2017.

¹²⁶ Gov. Susana Martínez’s speech at the Republican National Convention on Aug. 29, 2012.

¹²⁷ EXCLUSIVE: Susana Martínez: “I’m very proud of what I’ve accomplished as a Latina” *Latina Magazine*, Nov. 10, 2010 by Damarys Ocaña Perez

pleasurable novelty of having a Latina embody the homeland security state. In her ad entitled “Police Stand with Susana,” a group of male police officers testify to their support of Susana:

Policeman: “Diane Denish helped abolish the death penalty”
 Policeman: “Even for cop killers.”
 Policeman: “That’s why we stand with Susana.”
 Policeman: “Susana backs down to no one.”
 Policeman: “We’re with Susana.”
 Policeman: “The F.O.P. supports Susana.”
 Policeman: “New Mexico’s Prosecutor of the Year.”
 Martinez: “Don’t be fooled by the negative attack. The old way won’t work anymore. This election is a clear choice between more of the same or positive agenda: to end corruption, eliminate waste, and put people back to work. It’s our state. Together, we’ll take it back.”¹²⁸



Surrounded by policeman who stand both behind and side-by-side with the candidate, Martinez is portrayed here as a tough leader who “backs down to no one.” A woman law enforcement respects and will follow, the policeman in the ad all appear to be Anglo men. Presenting herself as a woman of color commanding and leading a group of white male police officers, this image of respect and deference aimed at a singular Latina highlights the campaign’s ability to create images of gender politics whose compound aesthetics are simultaneously creative and novel. Such cross-cutting images operate on multiple registers, appealing to voters in ways that are “messy, conflicted, and paradoxical.”¹²⁹ In speeches and in the imagery of her campaign ads, Martinez offers a vision of a strong Latina that satisfies a variety of viewers including: Latinos who take pride in seeing one of their own wield power and authority; law-and-order feminists; as well as white GOP voters who take pleasure in conservative multiculturalism.

Patriotism, Service, and Sacrifice: From Migrant Savagery to Mexican American Law and Order

¹²⁸ “Police Stand with Susana” campaign ad (7/9/10)

¹²⁹ See Lykke, p. ??

In her RNC speech, Martinez describes her father as “golden gloves boxer in the Marine Corps, then a deputy sheriff.” In her 2014 campaign ad entitled “Helping People.” Martinez underscores this autobiographical claim by displaying a vintage photograph of her family with her father in his sheriff’s uniform and carrying his gun.¹³⁰



Here, the mid-century photograph of Martinez’s Mexican American father in his Sheriff’s uniform allowed her campaign to connect the specific story of her Latino family to a familiar source of pride for many Mexican American families — namely the multi-generational history of Mexican Americans serving in the military and law enforcement. Indeed, as Michael John Sullivan has noted, Mexican Americans have a long history of drawing on their wartime service to demand equal treatment as citizens.¹³¹ Latino veteran organizations like the American GI Forum were part of the larger Latino civil rights community that included organizations like the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Emphasizing patriotism, service, and sacrifice, these organizations drew on a civic republican discourse to claim membership in the U.S. polity. Later, during 1960s and 70s, Chicano anti-war activists organized events like the Chicano Moratorium to protest the large number of Mexican Americans serving and dying in the Vietnam War. In other words, alongside critiques of US militarism and intervention, across the political spectrum, Latinx political actors have made rights claims by drawing on the long history of U.S. military service in these communities.¹³² Martinez’s ability to invoke and recombine contrasting conceptions of racialized masculinity highlights how a conservative deployment of intersectionality “invites us to push on the vectors of power that most elude us and to be surprised at their collaborations.”¹³³ Alongside melodramatic accounts of savage undocumented men preying upon women

¹³⁰ “Helping People” campaign ad (2014): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5QXK3foXF0>

¹³¹ Michael John Sullivan, “By Right of Service: The Military as a Pathway to Earned Citizenship,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2014): 245-259.

¹³² More recently, undocumented activists known as DREAMers called for a pathway for citizenship by sometimes emphasizing their willingness and desire to engage in military service. See <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/daca-recipients-who-dream-of-military-service-are-stuck-in-limbo>

¹³³ Kathy Ferguson, “Feminist Theory Today,” *The Annual Review of Political Science*, 2017, 272-273.

and children, Martinez simultaneously identifies herself as a law-and-order Latina while also identifying herself within a long and gendered history of Mexican American men in law enforcement and the U.S. military. Evoking the sense of pride many Latinx subjects feel regarding their sacrifice to the American nation state, allusions to this history of service is gratifying to a particular type of Latinx and Anglo voter.

At the same time, the history Martinez emphasizes — of Mexican American participation in the military and law enforcement — is silent regarding the long history of anti-Mexican racial violence, Latinx indigenities, and Native dispossession also prevalent throughout the region.¹³⁴ Historically charged yet simultaneously ahistorical, Martinez’s intersectional play of specific Mexican American images and assertions offers voters an array of subjects to both claim and oppose, enjoy and revile. By emphasizing the multigenerational presence of Latinos living and serving in the military and law enforcement, Martinez creates a conservative and carceral language of Latinx linked fate that (despite its visual novelty) resonated with New Mexican voters while also aligning comfortably with settler colonial and traditional masculinist accounts of law and order. Such linked fate narratives can exist comfortably with anti-migrant politics that exceptionalizes some migrants while viewing the population on the whole as dangerously Other. Here, we can see how Martinez’s intersectional conservatism engages in processes of “co-production and mutability,” producing categories and identities “permeated, obscured, and transformed by other categories.”¹³⁵

Conclusion

Martinez began her career as governor of New Mexico being hailed as the future of the Republican Party. Yet by 2019, the governor’s star had faded, brought down by scandals, the failure of her administration to deliver on her promises, as well as from her well-publicized battles with Donald Trump. Ultimately, Martinez’s intersectional electoral strategies were better suited to winning elections than to successfully governing in a Democratic-leaning state like New Mexico.

Nevertheless, analyzing how the first Latina elected governor in the United States Martinez told her story and drew on her various identities offers powerful insights regarding what Anna Sampaio refers to as “intersectional challenges” — the various ways that identities can be “invoked and even weaponized” by Latina conservatives seeking to unseat challengers and win statewide office. (179) Indeed, rather than being a victim of “double or multiple jeopardy” due to their race and gender, for conservative women of color, visible difference functions as a necessary and valued source of legitimacy as well as an active and

¹³⁴ William Carrigan and Clive Webb, “When Americans Lynched Mexicans” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2015: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/20/opinion/when-americans-lynched-mexicans.html?_r=0. See Monica Munoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*. For more on the specific history of racial violence in New Mexico, see Laura Gomez and Simon Trujillo.

¹³⁵ Ferguson, 272.

heterogeneous source of pleasure for conservative supporters. Invoking difference as a way of upholding the status quo, conservative women of color function for conservative voters as evidence of the GOP's nonracism, and as proof that the values of individual merit and equal opportunity work and are not subject to legitimate challenge. Negotiating a both/and time-space marked by marginalization, fetishized desire, racial hostility, enhanced opportunity, *and* backlash, the Martinez campaign is a valuable example of how conservative women of color have access to a dizzying array of historical, affective, and aesthetic strategies to pull from.

Of course, the intersectional political assemblage created by Martinez is not the only route to electoral success. We are already seeing other enactments of Latina conservatism, other deployments of creative new compound formations that appeal to particular subsets of voters. Yet in the end, what conservative Latinas and women of color elected officials demonstrate is the ideological instability of intersectional claims.

In the case of Martinez, by invoking her race and gender in the service of her melodramatic and maternalist claims to law-and-order, her campaign was able to cultivate feelings of racial pride and linked fate by emphasizing the history of Mexicans in the military and in law enforcement while simultaneously encouraging both Latinx and non-Latinx voters to view migrants through a simplistic and criminalizing lens. In sum, rather than diminishing the GOP's negative racial affects, Latinas and other conservatives of color reveal how right-wing deployments of intersectionality often lead to unexpected innovations and rhetorically expansive possibilities. Indeed, what the experience of more gender and racial diversity in the GOP shows is how the presence of nonwhite, queer, and female subjects within the Republican party can actually *expand* the terrain of the sayable — creating new affective pathways and unanticipated opportunities for demonizing noncitizens, sexual minorities, and other marginalized and racialized populations.