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**CAUDILLOS DE LA MISMA TELA: UNVEILING NEOLIBERALISM IN THE 2020
PRESIDENTIAL ADVERTISEMENTS**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR NEIMAN
PROFESSOR PÉREZ DE MENDIOLA**

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Introduction

The Latinx electorate consists of approximately 13% of eligible voters in the United States. For years, the Democratic and Republican parties struggled to figure out how to win the ambiguous “Latinx vote.” In this process, political campaigns aimed to unite and group all Latinx people together as if they all held a singular political agenda. However, both parties failed to acknowledge and apply in their political campaigns the heterogeneity of the Latinx community. In the 2020 Presidential Election, however, Joe Biden and Donald Trump acknowledged the importance of the plurality of the Latinx community and effectively captured the significance of language, for example, in the targeting of Latinx voters through the use of Spanish advertisements. This shift in political strategy as seen in the microtargeting of the Latinx community in the 2020 election was the first time that the Latinx electorate was treated as a political entity with diversity.

The advertisements in Spanish targeted specific subgroups within the Latinx community, appealing to ethnicity/nationality. The 2020 presidential advertisements presented a sort of diverse representation of the Latinx community – or at least how it is understood by these political parties – portrayed by actors with different accents and particular music by popular Latinx singers. The advertisements are also filled with political propaganda, like anti-communist and anti-socialist rhetoric, that plays into the fears of Latinx immigrants from countries like Cuba and Venezuela. In microtargeting subgroups of the Latinx population, both Biden and Trump won crucial battleground states, with Biden winning Arizona and Trump winning Florida. This can, in a way, be attributed to the increase of spending towards advertisements in Spanish and types of Spanish with which certain communities identify with.

The increased use of Spanish in political advertisements is not a surprise considering that Spanish is the second most spoken language in the United States, second to English. Politicians dramatically increased their spending on Spanish advertisements in swing states with large Spanish speaking populations, like Arizona and Florida. By September 2020, the Biden campaign had spent a total of \$2.4 million in Miami and \$1.2 million in Phoenix, compared to that of the Trump campaign which spent \$2.2 million in Miami and \$920,901 in Phoenix. The majority of Spanish television advertisements aired in Florida and Arizona, highlighting the potential influence of the Latinx voter turnout in those states. Based on the 2020 election results, it is clear that each campaign's microtargeting strategies were effective in appealing to the Latinx electorate. Unpacking the semiotics of the Spanish advertisements used to directly influence voter behavior can help us understand the perception and construction of the Latinx political identity on the part of the Democratic and Republican parties. At the same time, this analysis can help reveal what these two parties stand for.

In my semiotic analysis of the Biden and Trump 2020 Spanish advertisements, I seek to answer two questions. First of all: How was the Latinx electorate perceived by the Democratic and Republican campaigns in the Spanish television advertisements during the 2020 Presidential Election? In order to answer this question, I will examine the language and signs used (including the types of Spanish), the actors, the tone of narrators, the music, and the overall visuals in the advertisements to show how they function to serve a similar commitment to American values, particularly those defined as neoliberalism. Second of all: How can these advertisements help us understand not only the role of the Latinx community in politics, but also how the nature of the two party system is understood in terms of their separate yet similar political agendas. For this question, I will focus mostly on the language used in the advertisements, especially taking into

consideration the concepts/issues that each campaign views as important to the Latinx community and how they advertise their party to Latinx voters through the two candidates. In doing so, I hope to reach a conclusion about what this reveals about the core values that each party stands for. Lastly, I will reflect on what these findings reveal about American politics and what this could potentially mean in the future for the Latinx electorate.

My hypothesis is that this shift in the advertising strategies of both the Democratic and the Republican party reveals the core neoliberal values of both parties, more notably through their condemnation of big government. At the same time, however, I emphasize that while both parties condemn big government, both the Biden and Trump campaigns utilize rhetoric that calls upon government intervention, like the promise to step up and fix the economy.

Defining neoliberalism

It is necessary to first identify the main characteristics and functions of neoliberalism in the United States before delving into how semiotics in presidential advertisements reveal it in the first place. Nancy Neiman explains that neoliberalism is often defined in a historical context, particularly its beginning and that there is a lack of consensus on. It can be thought to have developed at the end of the Bretton Woods system in 1971, the elections of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and Ronald Reagan in 1980, the start of the Latin American Debt Crisis in 1982, or even the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (Neiman 31).¹ It can be defined as a developmental model, an ideology, and most commonly today as a public policy model. Neoliberalism is defined as an “ideology and political model that emphasizes the value of free market competition”² and it is

¹ The Meanings of Neoliberalism,” in Ravi Roy, Art Denzau, and Thomas Willett eds., *Neoliberalism: National and Regional Experiments with Global Ideas*, Routledge, 2007.

² Smith, Nicola. “Neoliberalism.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/topic/neoliberalism.

often used to describe policies promoting laissez-faire economics as “the means to achieve human progress” (Smith). Neoliberal policies often include “fiscal austerity, deregulation, free trade, privatization, and a reduction in government spending” (Kenton).³ There is an emphasis on deregulation and privatization, as it promotes the transfer of government ownership and economic control to the private sector.⁴ It is important to note, however, that proponents of neoliberalism, despite rejecting government intervention in the economy, have historically accepted it when it comes to bailouts, corporate welfare, and government subsidies to big corporations. Karl Polanyi would attribute this to there not ever being a free market in the first place. Polanyi argues that “there was nothing natural about *laissez-faire*...*laissez-faire* itself was enforced by the state” (Polanyi 139).⁵ Polanyi further adds that the free market was only made possible by “an enormous increase in continuous, centrally organized and controlled interventionism” (Polanyi 140). This idea was clearly reflected and promoted in the 2020 Presidential advertisements as both Trump and Biden promise to step up and fix the economic crisis that the pandemic highlighted. This paradox of making an exception for government intervention under certain cases of market failure, which is actually almost never referred to as such, has also brought up the question of whether or not neoliberalism is over. Some critics, however, argue that it is still as rampant as ever and that it has even morphed.

Joe Biden running on a seemingly progressive platform in the 2020 Election demonstrates that neoliberalism has evolved, and its rhetoric may not be as direct as it once was. Nancy Fraser argues that Trump winning in 2016 signaled the end of what Fraser refers to as

³ Kenton, Will. “Neoliberalism.” *Investopedia*, Investopedia, 26 Oct. 2020, www.investopedia.com/terms/n/neoliberalism.asp.

⁴ Longley, Robert. “What Is Neoliberalism? Definition and Examples.” *ThoughtCo*, 28 July 2020, www.thoughtco.com/what-is-neoliberalism-definition-and-examples-5072548.

⁵ Polanyi, Karl, and Robert Morrison MacIver. *The great transformation*. Vol. 2. Boston: Beacon press, 1944.

progressive neoliberalism, a concept that is key to understanding election results in the U.S.⁶

Fraser defines *progressive neoliberalism* as “an alliance of mainstream currents of new social movements (feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism, and LGBTQ rights), on the one side, and high-end ‘symbolic’ and service-based business sectors (Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood) on the other (Fraser). I would argue that Biden winning the election proves that this *progressive neoliberalism* is more alive than ever. The advertisements can point us to the ways that the Democratic Party perpetuates its attachment to neoliberal ideologies under the guise of progressivism.

Ganesh Sitaraman argues that one of the problems of both sides, the left and the right, of the political spectrum is how they appeal to identity. Sitaraman writes that “some neoliberals hold high the banner of inclusiveness on gender and race and thus claim to be progressive reformers, but they then turn a blind eye to systemic changes in politics and the economy” (Sitaraman)⁷ Sitaraman further mentions that critics refer to that as “neoliberal identity politics” as it “gives its proponents the space to perpetuate” neoliberal policies, without ever removing the economic structures are clearly harmful to marginalized communities that candidates are claiming to support and promise to protect (Sitaraman). This brings into question how truthful these advertisements to Latinx voters really are.

While I argue that both parties are beginning to understand Latinx diversity, that does not mean that I in any way endorse either candidate/party or that I am applauding their campaign strategies. It is simply an observation of a shift towards the Latinx political identity being taken more seriously as a probable result of more market research based on the increase of the Latinx population. I hope to delve beyond this surface of inclusive advertising to reveal the inner

⁶ Fraser, Nancy. "The end of progressive neoliberalism." *Dissent* 2.1 (2017): 2017.

⁷ Sitaraman, Ganesh. "The collapse of Neoliberalism." *New Republic* (2019).

workings of what can be considered a hyperdeveloped neoliberal agenda. As I will later show in my content analysis of the 2020 presidential advertisements, the appeal to the Latinx identity along with the veiled commitment to neoliberalism is present in both the Democratic and the Republican candidates and deserves a semiotic breakdown and analysis.

Biden advertisements

Bilingualism and unity in the Latinx community

There is no doubt that the Biden campaign wanted to reassure the Latinx community that he understands and accepts their diversity, calling for a unified nation. In the advertisement “Somos Todos,”⁸ a female narrator starts off saying *Tal vez no venimos del mismo lugar, or even call things by the same name, pero ser humano somos todos*. This one of the few Spanish advertisements that also uses English, perhaps in order to appeal to both those who only speak Spanish and those that are bilingual. The narrator emphasizes that despite all of our differences, we are all human while images are shown in a split screen to emphasize two different neighborhoods, one kid playing football and another playing soccer, two Latinx men cooking and Joe Biden grilling, a young woman taking a selfie at a graduation and Joe Biden taking a selfie with a group of Black women, a baby and Joe Biden, Joe Biden putting a mask on and a young woman putting a mask on, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris working in an office and a mechanic, etc. The video shows these images side to side to emphasize that despite them living in different neighborhoods, playing different sports or working different jobs, the point is that they are both human and similar, as the narrator continues to emphasize. At the same time, this

⁸ “Somos Todos | Joe Biden Para Presidente 2020.” *Youtube*, uploaded by Joe Biden, October 14, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XXeKoSV43A&list=PLB92o2PvjgndMHbEdAyvbwfrU5pagNzMK&index=1&ab_channel=JoeBiden.

advertisement appeals to important values in the Latinx community, like hard work and community showing that Biden is a family man that understands hard work and can therefore be trusted.

However, the choice of presenting a diverse, yet united nation using a split screen in the advertisement invites us to question the notion of unity that the Democratic party is offering. The split screen is supposed to parallel the similarities that Joe Biden shares with Latinx and Black voters, including family, religion, and suffering. However, if we really deconstruct it, we see a deeply ingrained American idea of separate but equal that is at work here. Biden simultaneously acknowledges the cultural differences between him, and his voters yet proposes that their hearts beat the same. Despite offering this notion of “we are all human” that supposedly unifies these different communities, it does not reach far enough to desegregate, as the use of the split screen creates a figurative and literal border from the Latinx community. In other words, both groups presented in the video can support Biden and understand these values of hard work and family, but in their own communities, not necessarily as neighbors because that would probably scare some people away or force them to really listen. As bell hooks writes, “the vast majority of white folks have little intimacy with black people and are rarely in situations where they must listen to a black person”⁹ and attributes this to the “nature of imperialist white-supremacist patriarchy” (hooks 31).

In this conversation promoting unity through this together but separate discourse, one should not ignore how neoliberal policies have contributed to an increasing inequality and how they have perpetuated racial and class hierarchies through stratification and voter suppression through redistricting, for example. Vicente Navarro argues that neoliberal theory and neoliberal

⁹ Hooks, Bell. *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. Vol. 36. Psychology Press, 2003.

practice are two entirely different things, noting the increases in state interventionism and state public expenditures in the past few decades, and further declaring the U.S. federal government one of the “most interventionist states in the Western world (Navarro 49). Furthermore, Navarro contends that the increase in inequalities is the direct result of neoliberal policies, like deregulation of labor and financial markets, and the promotion of individualism and consumerism (Navarro 53).¹⁰ The economic inequality as a result of these neoliberal policies, Victoria E. Collins and Dawn L. Rothe write, partly contributes to “extreme poverty, homelessness, immigration and the plight of refugees” (Collins and Rothe 58).¹¹ Therefore, this idea of unity that the Biden campaign promotes fails to address the real issues that would be necessary to achieving true unity.

Another layer that needs to be unpacked in the advertisement is the use of Spanglish in the advertisement, which appears to be well-meaning and inclusive in that it probably intends to appeal to both Spanish and English speakers, but at the same time assumes that all Latinx people speak both English and Spanish. The audience for this specific commercial could be Latinx immigrants or first, second, and third generation Latinx whose family immigrated to the United States considering that Spanglish and bilingualism in general is popular among multigenerational households. Either way, this complicates the notion of this parallel that the Biden campaign tries to go for. It begs the question of who is the Latinx voter that Biden is trying to reach. Perhaps, the use of Spanglish furthers this division between Latinx voters who only speak Spanish and Joe Biden, who presents himself as your typical American guy. One could argue that this discretely reverts to the idea of the “melting pot” that is central to American liberalism, and in doing so

¹⁰ Navarro, Vicente. "Neoliberalism as a class ideology; or, the political causes of the growth of inequalities." *International Journal of Health Services* 37.1 (2007): 47-62.

¹¹ Collins, Victoria, and Dawn L. Rothe. *The Violence of Neoliberalism*. Routledge, 2019.

expands on lack of intimacy between those that are in power and marginalized communities that parties are targeting. It also brings up the notion of multiculturalism, which I will return to later, that opposes the idea of the melting pot and is more in sync with neoliberalism, especially regarding the economic value of immigrants.

Fight against socialism

In “Cacerolazo,”¹² the Biden campaign compares Trump to Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, and Nicolás Maduro. The first thing we hear in the video is the sounds of pots banging, hence the title of the advertisement. The term *cacerolazo* refers to the banging on pots and pans as a form of political protest.¹³ It is used against both communist and right-wing regimes. It is important to note that this type of protest is popular in Latin America, especially to protest against the government. The second element of the video is a voiceover of Trump speaking, starting with “No I don’t take responsibility at all,” before it matches to a clip of him speaking. The video goes back and forth between images of people during the pandemic, in line at a grocery store and in an ambulance, and clips of Donald Trump neglecting the pandemic, saying things like “When somebody is President of the United States, the authority is real” and encouraging his supporters to “dominate the streets.” The sound of pots banging is heard throughout the entire video until the end in which it comes to a dramatic stop for a second before the screen fades to black. Then, a list of names appears one by one: Fidel, Chavez, Maduro, Trump. Afterwards, text that reads: “Caudillos de la misma tela,” which roughly translates to “leaders cut from the same cloth” is

¹² “Cacerolazo | Joe Biden Para Presidente.” *Youtube*, uploaded by Joe Biden, June 27, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCpfVqnZ2W4&list=PLB92o2PvjqndMHbEdAyvbwfrU5pagNzMK&index=26&ab_channel=JoeBiden.

¹³ *English Translation of "Cacerolazo" | Collins Spanish-English Dictionary*, www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/spanish-english/cacerolazo.

shown on a black screen.¹⁴ While the literal translation of *caudillo* is leader, in Latin America the term is used to describe a military dictator or a strongman. The color black here is significant as it has been associated with fascism¹⁵, therefore placing those names over the black screen can be read as the equivalent of calling them fascists.

That is not the only time that the Biden campaign compares Trump to Maduro in an advertisement. “Son Muy Similares,”¹⁶ is narrated by a Venezuelan woman who speaks on how socialism destroyed her country and on the similarity between Trump and Maduro, mentioning *su autoritarismo, su violación a la libertad de expresión y su miedo a que alguien más se les oponga*. This translates to “his authoritarianism, his violation to freedom of expression and his fear of opposition.” The use of a female narrator, particularly a Venezuelan woman, is strategic here in establishing trust and appeal to the emotions of other Venezuelans and their experiences as immigrants in the United States. Experience here is crucial as it serves to validate the speaker, since she experienced socialism before and is using her negative experience to warn others to not vote for someone like the leader of Venezuela. The woman compares Trump to Maduro, mentioning that they are similar in their authoritarianism and their fear of opposition. She reassures voters that Biden is not a socialist, but a future with Trump can easily lead down a similar path as Venezuela. These videos strategically use the Venezuelan immigrant experience fleeing their country in order to manipulate their trauma with socialism into a vote for Biden. However, it is clear that this goes beyond a simple vote. The Biden administration is in a way saying that if not a vote for Biden, then a vote for socialism and a dictatorship. At the same time,

¹⁴ While the literal translation of *caudillo* is leader, it is used to refer to a military dictator in Latin America.

¹⁵ While the color black is primarily associated with anarchism, it has also been used to represent fascism, an example being that it was the official color the National Fascist Party in Italy.

¹⁶ “Son Muy Similares | Joe Biden Para Presidente 2020.” *Youtube*, uploaded by Joe Biden, October 20, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tN806DQU828&list=PLB92o2PvjqndMHbEdAyvbwfrU5pagNzMK&index=5&ab_channel=JoeBiden.

this advertisement is used to retaliate against the Trump administration's allegations of Biden as a socialist because that is the worst possible thing the future president of the United States can be. Biden ultimately gives the Latinx community little to no choice with the only options being voting for Biden or for socialism. This is very telling of the idea of choice that the two party system appears to give.

Popular Latinx artists

The Biden campaign used popular Latinx artists in advertisements, particularly those microtargeting Puerto Rican voters. In “Prohibido Olvidar,”¹⁷ Marc Anthony serves as the narrator and speaks to the Puerto Rican audience to remind them of how the Puerto Rican people united to stand up after the tragic hurricane that struck Puerto Rico. Anthony narrates over images of Puerto Ricans that go from tragedy to hope. While Anthony does not refer to the Biden administration, his participation in a Biden Harris advertisement makes it clear that he is endorsing Biden for president. As a Puerto Rican artist, he establishes the sense of a relationship to the Puerto Rican audience who is familiar with his music. Whether or not they are fans of his music, they can immediately relate to him because he speaks using the pronoun “we.” This contributes to establishing Anthony as a trustworthy authority that serves to let the audience know what is best for the Puerto Rican people as a Puerto Rican himself. However, the Biden administration is using Anthony to reach Puerto Ricans that live in the United States, not Puerto Rico since Puerto Ricans there do not have the right to vote despite them living in a U.S. territory and being affected by the presidential election. Either way, the advertisement serves to appeal to

¹⁷ “Prohibido Olvidar | Joe Biden Para Presidente 2020.” *Youtube*, uploaded by Joe Biden, September 20, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUcLrx8jBjE&list=PLB92o2PvjqndMHbEdAyvbwfrU5pagNzMK&index=15&ab_channel=JoeBiden.

the emotion of any Puerto Ricans that watch it, since they likely have family living in Puerto Rico or relocated to the United States from Puerto Rico. Marc Anthony is there to remind them that they are in this together, they always have been, and Biden will stand by the Puerto Rican people.

In the advertisement titled “Pero Ya No,”¹⁸ Bad Bunny’s song by the same title is playing in the background. The song title translates to “But Not Anymore.” The advertisement highlights the failures of the Trump presidency. The chorus is essentially saying “I wanted/liked you before, but not anymore.” Clips of empty Trump rallies and of Trump are followed by clips of detention centers, police riots, people in ambulances, and of Trump throwing toilet paper to a Puerto Rican crowd. The song serves two purposes, the first showing a certain Puerto Rican representation using the music of an incredibly influential Puerto Rican singer. Bad Bunny has also been known to be vocal of Puerto Rican politics as he once supported the removal of Puerto Rican Governor Ricardo Rosselló.¹⁹ The footage of Trump also allows for a clever and comedic play on words on subjects that should not be made fun or light of, despite it being an attempt to denounce the atrocities under the Trump administration. However, it does show a lighter side of the Biden administration that is in touch with the culture of young people in the U.S, particularly those who listen to Bad Bunny, and Puerto Ricans in the United States. Appealing to a specific subgroup within the Latinx community creates a more personal appeal to that community, while letting people know that Bad Bunny, a popular Puerto Rican singer, endorses Biden for president.

¹⁸ “Pero Ya No | Joe Biden Para Presidente 2020.” *Youtube*, uploaded by Joe Biden, August 28, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRMXO1iIY-M&list=PLB92o2PvjgndMHbEdAvvbwfrU5pagNzMK&index=17&ab_channel=JoeBiden.

¹⁹ Respers France, Lisa. “Bad Bunny, Lin-Manuel Miranda and Ricky Martin Address the Puerto Rico Chat Messages Controversy.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 17 July 2019, www.cnn.com/2019/07/17/entertainment/bad-bunny-lin-manuel-puerto-rico/index.html.

The use of popular Latinx singers, particularly Puerto Rican ones in this case, supports the notion of the Biden administration becoming more inclusive and understanding the diversity within the Latinx community. It is clear that they believe it is an effective campaign strategy to reach out to subgroups within the Latinx community, especially in battleground states with large Latinx populations. This goes beyond reaching out to diverse ethnic groups within the Latinx community, as the Biden campaign goes as far as to use singers that appeal to different generations. Bad Bunny appeals to the younger Latinx population, while Marc Anthony appeals to the older generation of Latinx people. This is an effective strategy considering that young voters, ages 18-29, and specifically young voters of color, significantly contributed to Biden's victory in 2020.²⁰

This shift towards the microtargeting of ethnic subgroups within the Latinx community is relevant to the notion of multiculturalism under neoliberalism and needs to be further questioned. Will Kymlicka writes that some neoliberals opposed multiculturalism on the basis that they viewed it as "embodying the sort of welfare state liberalism they opposed" (Kymlicka 107).²¹ However, Kymlicka traces the shift from social liberalism to neoliberal multiculturalism as he notes how neoliberalism learned to embrace multiculturalism, with a feature of neoliberal multiculturalism being "the belief that ethnic identities and attachments can be assets to market actors and hence that they can legitimately be supported by the neoliberal state" (Kymlicka 109). Thus, I would read the Biden campaign making their advertisements more tailored to specific communities as a form of incorporating and accepting the Latinx population, in this case particularly Puerto Ricans, into American society on the basis of not only their market

²⁰ Beadle, Kelly, et al. "Election Week 2020: Young People Increase Turnout, Lead Biden to Victory." *Circle at Tufts*, 25 Nov. 2020, circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/election-week-2020#young-voters-and-youth-of-color-powered-biden-victory.

²¹ Kymlicka, Will. "Neoliberal multiculturalism." *Social resilience in the neoliberal era* (2013): 99-125.

participation, but in how they serve the neoliberal notion of the immigrant as an asset to globalization through their social/cultural capital.

Trump advertisements

Progresista=Socialist

Donald Trump takes a similar, yet different approach in his presidential advertisements. One of the main tactics that the Trump administration uses is fear mongering of socialism, accusing Biden of being a progressive and therefore a socialist. In “Progresista,”²² the video paints Joe Biden as a progressive, starting off with an out of context clip of Biden stating that he will go down as one of the most progressive presidents in American history. The dramatic music contributes to creating a sense of danger with video clips of Latin American leaders mentioning the term “progresistas” to appear ideologically aligned to Biden’s supposed progressive values. Another clip shows Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden hugging on a stage. Towards the end of the video, text that reads *Progresista=Socialista* appears in bold yellow on a red background over an image of Maduro and Biden smiling at each other. It is clear that the Trump campaign is aware that many Latinx immigrants have a negative association with socialism due to the history of authoritarian leaders associated with socialism in their countries. The audience here is Latinx individuals from countries with socialist/communist leaders, including those who are first or second generation, since they probably hear about the dangers of such regimes from family members. Here, the Trump administration sees the Latinx community as fearful and traumatized and taps into this trauma of socialism to manipulate their vote. Here, it is important to briefly

²² “Progresista.” *Youtube*, uploaded by Donald Trump, August 3, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPLRN6EJgew&list=PLKOAoICmbyV3HOousjVGsnPRcMryiZqM-&index=13&ab_channel=DonaldJTrump.

mention that along with generational divisions among Latinx immigrants, there is also the issue of class that contributes anti-communist sentiments among the Latinx population. For example, some of the first Cubans to seek exile in the United States in the 19060s those wealthy Cubans, supporters of the Batista government, after their properties were confiscated by the Cuban government. The video shows leaders from four different Latin American countries, appealing to a variety of subgroups from the Latinx community. Donald Trump makes it clear to the Latinx community that he is against Biden, a socialist leader that is a threat to this country. Therefore, their only rational vote should be for Trump before the United States is devastated by communism and socialism just like their countries. There is some correlation that this technique of tying Biden to socialist and communist leaders is effective considering that these ads mostly aired in Florida, a state that supported Trump in the 2020 election.²³

“Castrochavismo,”²⁴ refers to Biden as the candidate of *castrochavismo*. *Castrochavismo*, a term commonly used in Colombian politics,²⁵ essentially combines the ideologies of *castrismo*²⁶ and *chavismo*²⁷ and the term is used as a leftist ideology that can allow for the installation of socialism or communism. Once again, he uses clips of Latin American leaders that Latin Americans are familiar with. The use of these Latin American leaders is no coincidence as the Trump administration is aware of the negative effect that seeing them side by side with Biden will have. Like the other videos comparing Biden to socialist leaders, this paints the Latinx

²³ Calvin, Bobby Caina. “President Trump Wins Florida, Collects 29 Electoral Votes.” *AP NEWS*, Associated Press, 4 Nov. 2020, apnews.com/article/election-2020-joe-biden-donald-trump-virus-outbreak-tallahassee-c13067371d409668309fb1f06d8a29d6.

²⁴ “Castrochavismo.” Youtube, uploaded by Donald Trump, October 12, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBnbIttz2fc&list=PLKOAoICmbyV3HOousjVGsnPRcMryiZqM-&index=29&ab_channel=DonaldJTrump.

²⁵ Bermúdez Liévano, Andrés. “Diccionario Político Del 2014.” *La Silla Vacía*, 24 Dec. 2014, lasillavacia.com/historia/diccionario-politico-del-2014-49237.

²⁶ Castrismo refers to the communist ideologies inspired by Fidel Castro, leader of the Cuban Revolution.

²⁷ Chavismo refers to the ideology and political movement of the left socialism that surged in Venezuela around Hugo Chavez.

audience as emotional and easily manipulated when threatened with socialism, since it is well known that there is a large immigrant population in the United States that fled from their countries for that particular reason.

Furthermore, in a couple of the advertisements, immigrant women from Latin America speak about their experience with socialism and warn the audience about Biden and his similarities with Latin American leaders. To them, as well as the audience, these events are similar. It is clear that establishing someone as familiar to the audience creates credibility and trust. It makes sense to assume that one is more likely to believe something from someone that they can relate to. As I will later show, however, this anti-socialist and anti-communist rhetoric is engrained with the neoliberal commitment to a certain type of freedom.

In “Joe Biden is a Trojan for the Disciples of Marx and Castro Who Control His Party and Campaign,”²⁸ the title tells us enough as it ties Biden directly to communist theorists and leaders. Another relevant layer in the video is the fact that an immigrant woman from Cuba is speaking directly to the audience, warning about the “radical socialist left” as she speaks about her experience in Cuba. The woman is Yali Nuñez, Director of Hispanic Media, RNC and she is responding to the Democratic convention. She is speaking English, most likely to appeal to those immigrants who have become Americanized. It is one of the longest advertisements at two minutes and 53 seconds, but the point here is not necessarily to analyze the language, rather the format of the video. It is in the form of an official statement that ironically reproduces the autocratic politics that the Trump campaign claims to undermine when the autocrat is on the left. Thus, for any enlightened viewer, it makes it clear that it is really about ideologies that mirror

²⁸ “Joe Biden Is a Trojan Horse for the Disciples of Marx and Castro Who Control His Party and Campaign.” Youtube, uploaded by Donald Trump, August 19, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LL5subs-w5c4&list=PLKOAoICmbyV3HOousjVGsnPRcMryiZqM-&index=20&ab_channel=DonaldJTrump.

each other with Trump serving as the right wing dictator and Fidel Castro as the leftist one. It comes down to which autocratic regime will serve individual American interests the best.

Multiculturalism

The Trump campaign's advertisements that show how specific the microtargeting of Latinx communities gets is seen in a series of three ads all titled "¿Por qué?" These three ads all have the same Spanish narration saying that "we" all came here because we sacrificed it all to start over, referring to the American Dream that "we," immigrants, come to the United States to achieve. However, each advertisement has different visuals as one was aired in Orlando and Tampa²⁹, one in Arizona and Nevada,³⁰ and one in the South of Florida.³¹ The images that are the same across the three advertisements include one of a man and a woman hugging in an airport, clips of doctors and people in hospitals when the pandemic is mentioned, and Donald Trump waving. However, it is clear that the actors were chosen physically to reflect the ethnic makeup of the respective region. For example, in "Por qué?" for Orlando and Tampa, there is a clip of woman with her daughter, both of whom have wavy/curly hair and were probably chosen to represent how the campaign thinks that Puerto Ricans/people in Orlando and Tampa look like. What confirms that this advertisement is targeting the Puerto Rican population is a clip of a man on top of a car waving the Puerto Rican flag, and a clip of the Puerto Rican and the American flags side by side.

An interesting component that the Orlando/Tampa and the South of Florida ad share is the choice of having the narrator say *Seguir echando pa'lante*, roughly translating to "keep moving

²⁹ "¿Por qué? (Orlando y Tampa)." Youtube, uploaded by Donald Trump, October 28, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1Ze7ltzHrw&list=PLKOAoICmbyV3HOousjVGsnPRcMryiZqM-&index=40&ab_channel=DonaldJTrump.

³⁰ "¿Por qué? (Arizona y Nevada)." Youtube, uploaded by Donald Trump, October 28, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zt9U_UstE-w&list=PLKOAoICmbyV3HOousjVGsnPRcMryiZqM-&index=41&ab_channel=DonaldJTrump.

³¹ "¿Por qué? (Sur de Florida)." Youtube, uploaded by Donald Trump, October 28, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuMQFXudDog&list=PLKOAoICmbyV3HOousjVGsnPRcMryiZqM-&index=38&ab_channel=DonaldJTrump.

forward,” towards the end of the videos. *Pa'lante* is a contraction of “para adelante,” and is a Spanish colloquial term that is popular among Puerto Ricans. However, the narrator in the Arizona/Nevada ends by saying *Seguir luchando por nuestro pueblo*, translating to “keep fighting for our town/people.” This makes it clear that the Trump campaign is informed about the ethnic composure of certain regions, like Puerto Ricans in Florida and Mexican Americans in Arizona and Nevada, but also in terms of how their Spanish differs.

These three advertisements show the Republican Party in a way embracing diversity within the Latinx community. This also brings to light this shared appreciation of multiculturalism, or at least the appearance of it, from both the Democratic and Republican candidates that demands to be questioned. Latinx voters should consider that both parties have supported policies that have been directly detrimental towards Latinx communities, especially towards immigrants. What we see is the notion of neoliberal identity politics that I introduced earlier, and that neoliberals tend to employ, at play here, with both parties supposedly embracing diversity, yet completely neglecting real issues, like the distribution of material resources. Sitaraman maintains that neoliberals, on both sides, use identity “as a shield to protect neoliberal policies” and as a result “leaves in place political and economic structures that harm the very groups that inclusionary neoliberals claim to support” (Sitaraman).

Immigration and the Economy

It is clear that apart from potential voters, one of the only reasons that Republicans often approve the presence of Latinx immigrants in the United States is by referring to their

contribution to the economy. In “Contrastes,”³² the narrator warns that Biden would devastate the economy, one of the reasons given being that Biden wants to raise Taxes. In the ad, clips of Trump appear as the narrator mentions that Trump has fought for “us,” as he raised salaries and the job index increased among Hispanics and poverty was at its lowest. While the economy is one of the top issues that Americans in general are preoccupied about,³³ the way that it is discussed in these Spanish advertisements is in a way that shows how important Latinx workers are to the economy and how it can be fixed by either candidate. Luca Mavelli speaks on the political economy of belonging, which “prompts states to include and exclude migrants according to their endowment of human, financial, economic, and emotional capital” (Mavelli).³⁴ The framing of immigration in the United States is usually in relation to the economy, on both sides of the political spectrum. It is necessary to remember that immigration from Latin America to the United States is the result of implementing American neoliberal policies abroad in the first place. Therefore, it is not surprising to see Trump presenting the economy as an urgent matter for the Latinx community, given that it is through the economy that Latinx immigrants are located and defined within American society, despite them being excluded from society itself.

Law and Order

There is a common element in a lot of the Trump advertisements: warning about cutting police funding and the threat of the radical left. In many of the advertisements, the narrator tells

³² “Contrastes.” Youtube, uploaded by Donald Trump, September 2, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57wHH8B-Nzs&list=PLKOAoICmbyV3HOousjVGsnPRcMryiZqM-&index=22&ab_channel=DonaldJTrump.

³³ Bump, Philip. “Analysis | The Things Americans Are Most Worried about Are Things They Prefer Biden to Deal With.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 5 Sept. 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/09/04/things-americans-are-most-worried-about-are-things-they-prefer-biden-deal-with/.

³⁴ Mavelli, Luca. “Citizenship for sale and the neoliberal political economy of belonging.” *International Studies Quarterly* 62.3 (2018): 482-493.

the audience that Biden will cut police funding, which will result in an anarchist society. This is briefly brought up in “Goya”³⁵ as the narrator tells the audience that Biden and the extreme socialists want to cut police funding. This is more present in “Arrodiado,”³⁶ as the narrator starts off saying that Antifa destroys our communities, while showing a clip of someone breaking a glass door. Afterwards, we see a clip of a people rioting and setting things on fire with the narrator mentioning civil unrest and looting. As he says this, he shows Joe Biden kneeling as if insinuating that Biden will allow for these kinds of things to happen, suggesting a lack of control.

Most of the events in the clips shown occurred during the 2020 Black Lives Matters protests in response to a Minneapolis police officer murdering George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man. In order to interpret the significance of these strategic choice of what footage is included in these videos, it is necessary to mention how rampant anti-blackness is not only in the United States, but particularly within the Latinx community. Latinx allies of the Black Lives Matter movement during the 2020 protests urged the Latinx community to address and interrupt this ingrained anti-blackness in the Latinx community, especially after Latinx people complained that injustices against the Latinx community were being overshadowed by those against Black Americans. These images of chaos are implicitly linked with Black Americans. This anti-black rhetoric is further perpetuated by Spanish-language news as their coverage consisted mostly of villainizing the protesters. Trump contributing to this anti-black rhetoric that is already present

³⁵ “Goya.” Youtube, uploaded by Donald Trump, July 21, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atkkXzXJiy4&list=PLKOAoICmbyV3HOousjVGsnPRcMryiZqM-&index=9&ab_channel=DonaldJTrump.

³⁶ “Arrodiado.” Youtube, uploaded by Donald Trump, June 16, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKkIhx08BkQ&list=PLKOAoICmbyV3HOousjVGsnPRcMryiZqM-&index=4&ab_channel=DonaldJTrump.

within the Latinx community, especially those who are immigrants,³⁷ can be interpreted as contributing to this division among marginalized groups in the United States.

Cedric J. Robinson discusses the historical development of world capitalism in terms of being influenced by the forces of racism and nationalism,³⁸ therefore being inseparable. On the concept of racial capitalism, Robinson explains that “the tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate—to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into ‘racial once’” (Robinson 26). It is important to note that racism or racial hierarchy in a capitalist society is nothing new and has expanded with neoliberalism as seen through the increase of inequality among communities of color and racial divisions in the United States. We see the perpetuation of these racial divisions in subtle ways in these advertisements about how destructive the implications of a decrease in police funding could be not to the Latinx community, but to private property.

At one point in “Arrodillado,” the narrator says that Biden is not facing the radical left that wants to eliminate the police. The conclusion of the advertisement is that with Biden kneeling to the radical left, there will be chaos in the streets with President Trump being shown in the last couple of seconds as the narrator says that he will defend us and protect our communities, our businesses, and our flag. Here, the Trump campaign paints Biden as someone who will be unable to control the country and will allow havoc to wreak with his progressive policies, lack of order and ability to maintain order. Therefore, one should vote for Trump because he will continue funding the police to maintain law and order, which apparently means

³⁷ Anti-Blackness in Latin American is rampant and based on the idea that the closer to white one is, the better. Black Latin Americans are considered to be at the bottom of the racial order in Latin America.

³⁸ Robinson, Cedric J., et al. *Black Marxism, Revised and Updated Third Edition: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. 3rd ed., University of North Carolina Press, 1983. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469663746_robinson.

also allowing the murdering of Black people. For the Trump administration, the threat to the police signifies a leftist revolution or an anarchist uprising of some sort. What Trump really means, however, is that private property needs to be protected.

In “Desfinanciar,”³⁹ once again the audience is told that Joe Biden wants to defund the police as clips of people protesting and people setting things, like an American flag, on fire. The narrator condemns Biden and Kamala Harris as puppets of the radical left, referring to it as a gang that promotes anarchy and chaos, placing an image of them both in front of a burning American flag. The narrator appeals to the Latinx immigrant audience by mentioning that “you,” the Latinx immigrant, came to the United States to live a tranquil and safe life, with Biden placing “your” future and your family in danger. Here, we see a sense of security from chaos being promised to Latinx immigrants. It also speaks more to those that fled from instability in a Latin American country, many of which have socialist or communist leaders that served some and failed others.

The idea of law and order that Trump promises is key to protecting the neoliberal order, especially through the police. Philomena Mariani asserts that the neoliberal state “has an investment in fueling crime – persuading the public of imminent danger by overstating the threat, inflating or distorting crime statistics, and creating the false impression that all citizens are equally at risk victimization,”⁴⁰ but the main objective is convincing people that the solution to all problems is increasing policing and punishment” (Mariani). This is exactly the ideological tactic that is at play in the advertisements of both campaigns, but more explicitly in the Trump advertisements. Trump appeals to fear in order to justify the same police and neoliberal carceral

³⁹ “Desfinanciar.” Youtube, uploaded by Donald Trump, October 19, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7vR19MmTi0&list=PLKOAoICmbyV3HOousjVGsnPRcMryiZqM-&index=34&ab_channel=DonaldJTrump.

⁴⁰ Mariani, Philomena. "Overview: Law, order, and neoliberalism." *Social Justice* (2001): 2-4.

system that oppresses and hyper-criminalizes the Latinx community in the United States, especially immigrants and refugees, who makes up the target audience in a lot of these advertisements. It is also important to consider the Trump administration's negative framing of Mexican immigrants in 2016,⁴¹ essentially calling them criminals. This type of discourse that politicians perpetuate also contribute to the legitimization of harmful immigration policies, like the separation of families, which both parties are complicit in. The point here is to emphasize how the neoliberal commitment to law and order contributes to the mass incarceration and legitimizes carceral policies, like the Trump administration's family separation policy that directly affects the Latinx community.

Deciphering the messages of the Democratic and Republican Parties

The intention of this content analysis is to go beyond what they reveal about campaign strategy and to encourage the Latinx community to accept the performative campaign strategies of both parties as a commitment to serving the Latinx community. If we really look past what appears to a simple propagandist advertisement to reach voters, we realize that Trump and Biden are more alike than they are different. They both clearly understand that the Latinx community is diverse and that by microtargeting and making commercials more personalized, which comes to show how embedded the notion of individualism and consumerism is that political campaigns are treating voters as consumers. For me, it is not as important to determine whether these ads are effective in terms of campaign strategies, but to demonstrate how much is in front of us that appears to be unconscious but can in fact be more strategic than we think. Every image, every word in these videos is carefully crafted and directed by someone that works for these

⁴¹ "Drug Dealers, Criminals, Rapists': What Trump Thinks of Mexicans." *BBC News*, www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-37230916.

administrations. That through a close reading of these advertisements, not only does it show how the parties view the Latinx community, but it reveals how both parties are working from an evolved neoliberal framework and ideology that does not appear to be that different among Democrats and Republicans. However, they are as much a representation of the political parties as they are a perception of the Latinx community. While many may say that the parties have changed to accept diversity and become more inclusive, it is just neoliberalism manifesting in a variety of ways.

An interesting observation in the 2020 presidential advertisements is that in their unity against the fight against socialism, both also promote the necessity of a strong leader. While they do this in different ways, with Trump doing it by mocking Biden's speech impairment and age, and Biden directly calling himself the strongest candidate, this strong man rhetoric ironically falls in the typical description of what an authoritarian leader is supposed to be like. According to neoliberalism, socialism goes against two fundamental neoliberal values: freedom and individualism.

The notion of "freedom" is complicated and often misunderstood within the scope of political liberalism. Robert Heilbroner explains that the central issue in the ideology of political liberalism is that of economic freedom, more specifically "the relation of 'government' to the freedoms of the economic realm" (Heilbroner 122).⁴² However, while this issue is solved through laissez faire policies, Heilbroner elucidates that this never intended for there to be absolutely no government intervention in the economy (Heilbroner 122). On political freedom, however, Heilbroner notes that "capitalism is not in itself a guarantor of freedom...capital itself has no inherent dependence on or affinity to political freedom" (Heilbroner 125,127). Taking

⁴² Heilbroner, Robert L. *The nature and logic of capitalism*. WW Norton & Company, 1986.

into consideration these foundations of capitalist ideology is necessary when illuminating the lack of individual freedom that results from labor exploitation, poverty, incarceration, other symptoms of the American neoliberal state that are neglected by the state for the sake of staying out of the way not only of corporations, but individuals.

These notions of freedom are significant when examining how the Trump and Biden campaigns both place themselves in opposition to socialism and communism yet position themselves as the authorities that will step in and fix the economy. This can in some way be interpreted as promoting big government, therefore getting closer to a socialist idea of increasing the role of the government that both campaigns try so hard to avoid.

Interestingly enough, Biden did run on a seemingly progressive, but not too leftist, campaign. For those on the left who hope that Biden can go even further left than he appears to be for, these advertisements tell us that it is not likely considering how the Biden administration positions itself against socialism, which the Trump campaign attributes to his progressive platform. This is considering that American identity has greatly depended on the notion of capitalism and thus the American Dream, with the United States supporting corporations. This dates back to the Cold War during which the War Advertising Council, renamed the Ad Council in 1943, was created to promote the war effort.⁴³ Their goal included “promoting the virtues of capitalism and free enterprise in America while simultaneously demonizing the alternative—socialism—which was often conflated with communism” (Godeanu-Kenworth). Therefore, it should not be a surprise that both parties are using these strategies, since it shows that at the end of the day both the Democratic and Republican parties have the same commitment to the

⁴³ Clendaniel, Morgan. “These Are the Propaganda Ad Campaigns That Made Socialism Seem Un-American.” *Fast Company*, Fast Company, 28 Feb. 2020, www.fastcompany.com/90469759/these-are-the-propaganda-ad-campaigns-that-made-socialism-seem-un-american.

American identity. Godeanu-Kenworth writes that “the Cold War provided both parties with a shared enemy” (Godeanu-Kenworth). Joe Biden’s progressive economic agenda gained comparisons to the New Deal, with some news outlets calling Biden the second coming of Franklin D. Roosevelt, with his most recent proposal being a trillion dollar infrastructure packet aiming to rebuild the country’s economy.⁴⁴ Ironically, Biden’s policies are being compared to a moment in history that was close to socialist ideology, but of course never defined as such.

Findings

Addressing the Hypothesis

After a close-reading of the 2020 presidential advertisements, it is safe to say that the Latinx population was treated as a political entity with diversity through microtargeting tactics aimed at not only immigrants from different countries in Latin America, but in specific regions in the United States. While it seems that both administrations are understanding Latinx diversity, instead of using this knowledge to promote empowerment and power among Latinx voters, both administrations prefer to resort to neoliberal rhetoric of freedom, multiculturalism, and individualism disguised in anti-communist and anti-socialist propaganda. However, to respond to my initial hypothesis, the content in the Spanish advertisements and the use of microtargeting advertising strategies confirms that both parties view the Latinx community as diverse and as a key group in determining the fate of the United States.

At the same time, the way that these parties understand this notion of diversity has a lot of similarities and is therefore telling of how the two party system is perceived. One likes to

⁴⁴ “Biden's FDR Moment? President in New Deal-like Push That Could Cement His Legacy.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 6 Mar. 2021, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/06/biden-new-deal-economic-infrastructure-plan-politics.

think that as a voter, there are choices. However, these advertisements show us that the ideologies behind the Democratic and Republican parties are more similar than one likes to believe. At the end of the day, both parties stand for American capitalism and neoliberalism. In doing so, Latinx people in the United States are often accounted for their contribution to the economy. This further dehumanizes the Latinx individual through their instrumentalization, as they are reduced simply to commodities and excludes those who do not fit into this mold.

As addressed earlier, the expectation that the government needs to step up aligns with the contradictory nature of freedom according to neoliberalism. In other words, the hegemonic framing of this state versus market debate is an issue considering that the state has always been central to the operation of capitalism. In calling for an activist government, Robert Reich notes that the government's "basic role in setting the rules of the economic game" and the free market versus state debate neglects attention from issues like "how the market has come to be organized differently from the way it was a half century ago, why its current organization is failing to deliver the widely shared prosperity it delivered then, and what the basic rules of the market should be" (Reich xiii). Therefore, the Biden and Trump campaigns' focus on condemning big government while neglecting economic inequality, for example, is beneficial to and sustains the very few that the market does benefit, like corporations. Reich contends that the "threat to capitalism is no longer communism or fascism but a steady undermining of the trust modern societies need for growth and stability" (Reich xii).

This leads one to consider how the state, in this case through the Trump and Biden campaigns, appeal to this lack of trust not only through fear, but by utilizing the populist tactics the neoliberal anti-socialist/communist discourse claims to oppose. While these two candidates supposedly represent their parties, the presidential advertisements appear to be more concerned

about appealing to voters emotionally and as individuals. Donald Trump was considered to be a populist candidate and president that many say led to his success, particularly of the right.⁴⁵ In the case of Trump, it is clear that his individual qualities are what capture people's attention. This is interesting considering that he had the most advertisements condemning socialism and warning about Joe Biden's association with Latin American socialists, while he continued to use a strategy that demonized the other candidate rather than really discussing issues that are important, at least in the campaign's Spanish advertisements. However, Biden is not too far off in his advertisements when he shows that he relates to the Latinx community through his family and his religious values, values that people can relate to.

Conclusion

The 2020 presidential advertisements show us a shift in voter outreach, particularly in terms of whose vote matters. It is clear simply by examining the increase of money spent towards Spanish advertisements that both administrations are conscious that the Latinx vote is significant to electing the president which is no surprise considering that the Latinx population in the U.S. is projected to increase over the next few years. Behind this apparent embracing of diversity, however, the advertisements showed a distance from what is truly appreciation for the diversity in the Latinx community. They embrace a performative neoliberal idea of multiculturalism that never commits to solving the real problems that communities of color disproportionately face, especially those related to economic inequality.

More importantly, however, the Spanish advertisements reveal a similar commitment to neoliberal values projecting a progressive facade for Democrats and on that is more outwardly

⁴⁵ Lind, Michael, et al. "Donald Trump, the Perfect Populist." *POLITICO Magazine*, 9 Mar. 2016, www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/03/donald-trump-the-perfect-populist-213697.

for Republicans. It can be easy to fall for how both parties commit to appeal to the diversity within the Latinx community and believe that its performative embrace means that there will be change. However, I invite the Latinx community to critique and to look past the progressive façade that presidential candidates put on in order to receive votes. The Latinx population in the United States is expected to increase along with the Latinx community's electoral power which means that political campaigns will continue to invest in Spanish advertisements and eventually will become even more tailored to every subgroup of the Latinx community. Therefore, now that the attention will be on the Latinx community, it is crucial that Latinx voters' critique and demand that they do better than getting Bad Bunny on an advertisement or manipulating their trauma. It is time for the Latinx community to make their voices heard and hold presidential campaigns accountable to the oppression and violence that the neoliberal state continues to perpetuate.

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