2016

Trump and Hitler: We Get It Already

Tori L. Charnetzki
Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/polsoped
Part of the Political Science Commons

Augustana Digital Commons Citation
http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/polsoped/11

This Opinion is brought to you for free and open access by the Political Science at Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Op-Ed Pieces by an authorized administrator of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.
I am sick of the comparisons between Donald Trump and Adolf Hitler. It is not that I think either deserves a break from public outrage or that they lack any similarity, quite the opposite. But calling Trump Hitler has done little to stopping his leads in the polls or stopping him from winning several primaries. Furthermore, it hurts are ability to discuss the nuances of his hate filled rhetoric that are specific to Islam and Orientalist thinking. Since when is Hitler our only touchstone for dogmatic language? Surely, as a society, we can come up with more interesting metaphors, or at least more creative historical comparisons.

I get it. Trump is a dogmatic speaker who has built a powerful following of people by tapping into fear and anger of the masses. He has done so by focusing much of his bile on “the other”, specifically immigrants and Muslims. Hitler and the Holocaust he created are a horrific example of the actions hate-filled rhetoric can lead to. Comparisons between the two become all the more tempting when Trump suggests that all Muslims be required to have identification (Haberman), one of the first things the Jewish people were asked to do in 1930s Germany.

And sure, there is something to addressing our own vulnerability by imagining ourselves as 1930’s Germany, just a capable of committing horrible atrocities, but the people making these comparisons are not likely thinking they are quite so personally vulnerable.

Comparing Trump to Hitler makes sense, but it is done so often that it is almost rendered ineffective. Being compared to Hitler is so objectively terrible that it is almost as if after pointing out similarities between Donald Trump and Adolf Hitler, we think to ourselves “this is the worst thing we could have said, his political career is over.” And yet, Trump is still up in the polls. Even when Klu Klux Klan leader David Duke praised Trump for revitalizing the ideas and Image of Hitler, Trump continued to win primaries.

I am not trying to say that this comparison is unfounded, or that it should not have been made. I am trying to say that now that we have made it, and seen the limited results that we should really reassess our anti-Trump strategies.

It is also important to note that as terrifying as the anti-Islamic rhetoric in the presidential campaign is, it is also an opportunity for us as a nation to address our own orientalist tendencies. There are many parts of Trumps rhetoric that tap into deeply held notions of Orientalism that we, as a nation need to work on. Donald Trump is far from the first American politician to use anti-Islamic rhetoric for political gains. However with Trump, his rhetoric is so overt, and seemingly indefensible, we may have a real chance of pointing out orientalist tendencies in our larger culture. When we see his rhetoric only as simple, blatant hatred, we miss out on the chance to address some of the larger, more covertly held prejudices in our society.

Scholar Beverley Milton-Edwards discusses the concept of Orientalism, by drawing from noted Scholar Edward Said who saw Western attitudes towards the East as motivated by dominance and exploitation (9). Milton-Edwards identifies Western stereotypes about the Middle East such as violence, amorality, and generally a threat to the West are major components of Trump’s campaign rhetoric and like many components of Trump’s campaign rhetoric they are largely untrue. Trump is not calling for identification of Muslim’s because he wants to be like Hitler, at least I hope not, he is doing it because he knows that large groups of Americans are
suspicious of Muslims and filled with Orientalist conceptions of the other. In order to truly stop
Trump, we must stop these misconceptions.

The power of Trump’s rhetoric rests in stereotypes about the East that the West has spent
decades carefully maintaining. Addressing these stereotypes is a highly necessary component of
addressing and stopping Trump’s popularity.

Perhaps the only way to productively fight Trump’s fiery anti-Islamic is with an equally
passionate, yet more inclusive pro-Islam, anti-Orientalist campaign. We tried comparing Trump
to Hitler, but then again Hitler was elected. And this is a parallel with Trump that I am not
prepared to make.
Works Cited

