

# The Resurgence of Hate: Introductory Notes on the 2016 US Presidential Campaign

C. Richard King  
Columbia College Chicago  
David J. Leonard  
Washington State University

On June 16, 2015, Donald J. Trump launched his presidential campaign in a rambling speech that lamented that state of the American republic, damned the status quo, celebrated his achievements, and struck the populist tone that would prove central to his run for the republican nomination and ultimately the White House. Throughout his remarks, he would set aside conventional conservative talking points, including tax cuts, state's rights, and family values, opting instead to cast the US, and especially his target audience, the white voter, as the victim of the establishment, globalization, particularly trade imbalances with Asia, immigration, the media, political correctness, and a failure of leadership by then President Barak Obama. These forces, and the communities they empower he asserted, had diminished the nation and degraded the possibilities of the average American. "We need somebody," he declared, "that literally will take this country and make it great again" (DelReal, 2015, para. 2). Not surprisingly, he asserted, "We can do that" (DelReal, 2015, para. 2). In this initial address, he anchored his appeal in the language of hate, a language and spirit that would define his campaign and many of its supporters. Speaking of immigration from Mexico, for instance, Trump invoked familiar nativist trope of deviance, violation, and impropriety:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.

Formulaic to be sure, but the rhetoric of hate effectively distinguishes between self and other, good and evil, order and chaos, recycling falsehoods and fears in condensed stereotypes to mobilize (identity) politics (Full text: Donald Trump announces, 2015).

Over the next 18 months of his campaign, Trump would make the case for "making America great again," not through a hopeful vision, coalition building, or respectful discourse, but through dehumanizing rhetoric that would play on longstanding histories of white supremacy, xenophobia, anti-

Semitism, and countless more hate. He would continue to marshal anti-immigrant sentiment to advance his campaign and his oft repeated call for a border wall., portraying migrants and refugees from Latin America as bad hombres, criminals, largely through references to M13, and unassimilable, even hostile, outsiders (Mendoza-Denton, 2017). Over time, he would add an almost unending range of others to his hate list. While he regularly belittled his opponents, resorting to name calling and disparagement to undermine them and their standing, he took to twitter seemingly at all hours to bully critics and journalists.

More than antipathy for individuals, Trump used dehumanizing rhetorics and tactics to channel collective resentment and anxiety against entire groups of people, restating longstanding negative association and restabilizing persistent social hierarchies. In addition to immigrants from Mexico, he also weaponized xenophobia, drawing on the pronounced Islamophobia in American life to question the patriotism of Muslims in the US and to call for a Muslim ban (Amaney, 2017; Gomez, 2018; Grose, 2018). Less overtly, his campaign recycled a variety of established racial rhetorics (O'Connor & Marens, 2017). It used anti-Semitic tropes to speak to elements of its base, even as it offered strong support for the state of Israel (Moshin, 2017). Trump himself took pleasure in anti-Indianism, mocking Elizabeth Warren's claim to Native American heritage through the dismissive moniker Pocahontas, while supporting the propriety of the racial slur used by the NFL franchise in Washington, DC. He leveraged ideologies of anti-black racism, from his questioning of Barack Obama's citizenship to his incessant disparagement of Chicago, from his peddling of false and racist narratives about crime within the black community to his reluctance to repudiate white supremacism movements and organizations, from his willingness to attack black politicians and celebrities to his policy decisions, to mobilize white voters (Desjardins, 2017). Beyond race, he targeted other marginalized and disempowered groups as well. Infamous for his philandering, Trump displayed pronounced misogyny on the campaign trail, particularly when targeting Hillary Clinton. And, in word and deed, he invoked ableism to diminish opponents, describe the state of America, and advance himself (Harnish, 2017). Trump demonstrated an unrivaled capacity to dehumanize, belittle, and bully in the 2016 US presidential campaign. His use of hate is not especially surprising, nor particularly exceptional.

All of these themes and the broader implications inspired this special issue. In fact, more than the election, the centrality of hate in the 2016 election, one that not only pitted Donald Trump against Hillary Clinton, a Republican versus a Democrat, but one that brought the fissures and divisions in the nation to the forefront, anchor this special issue. Each of the authors seeks to look at the hate that was the 2016 election, offering a his-

toric, rhetorical, and sociological autopsy of not only the election but the rise in hate crimes, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, white supremacy, and a resurgent white nationalist movement.

While the hate, antipathy, racist appeals, misogyny, nostalgia, and divisiveness feels unprecedented, the 2016 election was a window into a larger history. On the one hand, antipathy, anxiety, and xenophobia have deep roots in American politics. Nativism, racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and sexism have played a role in campaigning and elections since the founding of the republic. The shock caused by the vitriol at the heart of the Trump campaign in 2016 reflects a consensus of sorts that emerged in the wake of the civil rights movement that had effectively policed overt expressions of hate, while arguably encouraging the proliferation of a coded discourse of dehumanization and marginalization.

On the other hand, Trump was not alone in his use of hate. His chief opponent in the election, Hillary Clinton, famously described black youth as “super predators,” and did little to embrace or empower Black Lives Matter and Dakota Access pipeline activists. Likewise, her policy positions are neither colorblind in their historic foundation and significance (Savali, 2016) nor anti-racist in their prescriptions. And, so called Bernie Bros, young men noteworthy for their support of Bernie Sanders presidential run, like Trump, employed misogynistic framing to discredit Hillary Clinton during the primaries (Wilz, 2016). Of course, each of their, their campaigns, and their supporters embrace, use, and deployment of the ideologies of hate have different contexts, meanings, and consequences, given their different connections to history and power.

Moreover, as evident in the essays within this special issue, Trump hated on almost everyone in the 2016 presidential campaign, he did so in unique ways. First, his rhetoric was noteworthy for its openness and intensity, its refusal of the post-civil rights consensus, and the manner in which it exploited a notion of political correctness to surface and mobilize prejudice and antipathy. Second, his use of social media allowed his campaign to easily speak to a range of audiences across platforms and to leverage media outrage to amplify its message (A short history of how. . . , 2017). Third, Trump brought marginal positions to the center (Barkun, 2017). This is especially true of his embrace of white nationalism and the so-called alt right and with them an emergent movement and ideology rooted in white identity politics (Daniels, 2016). Finally, it is important to note that the politics of fear and loathing that propelled Trump into office must be seen as a backlash against the presidency of Barack Obama and oddly endow hate today with an uneasy utopian, even redemptive, quality. This backlash has its roots in a sense of imperiled whiteness, which Trump exploited throughout his campaign. Indeed, making America great again, meant for

many of Trump's supporters a nostalgic longing for a return to something that never really existed, that is the hope for something better through the recentering of American life around the supremacy of whiteness, Christianity, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. Trump breathe oxygen into movements, ideologies, and communities, resulting in not only embrace of policy that further injures marginalized communities but a level of openness in the everyday and systemic politics of hate and violence

Hate has become the new normal in the US. Its ascendance was almost immediate after the election: on the day after Trump's election, the Southern Poverty Law Center identified 202 incidents of hate across the country, part of a ten period in which over 850 acts of harassment, intimidation and violence were perpetrated (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). Far from a momentary spike, name calling, bullying, assault, and terrorism have a longer lasting presence, trending upward. Hate crimes reached a new high in 2017, continuing a recent trend. Muslim Americans experienced a second straight year of increased incidents of hate in 2017 (U.S. anti-Muslim hate crimes rose 15 percent in 2017, 2018). Only by the post-9/11 rivals the Trump era for the prevalence and intensity of hate (Modi & SAALT, 2018). And, according to the Anti-Defamation League, anti-Semitic incidents rose by nearly 60% in 2017 (*Anti-Semitic incidents surged nearly 60% in 2017*, 2018). Equally disturbing, Trump has legitimated formerly marginalized white power movements ideology, setting the stage for the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville (Perry, 2018). In a very real way, Trump has not only spewed hate and encouraged others to do the same, he has become the embodiment of hate: his name itself is now a racial jeer that attackers use to belittle and threaten their victims in schools and on streets (Barry & Eligon, 2017). In fact, South Asian Americans Leading Together (Modi & SAALT, 2018), a civil rights organization, found not only a spike in hate directed at Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus, but also that nearly one in five attacks referenced the president or his policies during their commission (Modi & SAALT, 2018). Finally, since taking office, Trump has continued to lean on language that divides, demeans, and demonizes, while implementing policies that exacerbate inequalities.

It is within this context that this special issue came about. We sought pieces that not only examine the centrality of hate – racism, misogyny, homophobia, anti-Semitism, ableism, xenophobia – to the 2016 election not only as an effort to restate what we already know but, in an effort, to move this conversation forward. We hope these pieces highlight the different places that “hate” materialized during the 2016 election; we hope each reveal that consequences beyond “victories” and “losses” but in the form of increased violence and policies that leave the marginalized even more vulnerable. Collectively, these pieces reveal the extent to which the 2016 elec-

tion was one where hate was at its core; it is no wonder that 1.5 years since the 45th president was decided, the vitriol, the demonization of communities of color, and the advancement of racist and xenophobic policies remain a prominent reality. For those who saw hate as something unique to 2016 or part of campaigning, the daily headlines and hidden realities tell a different story. Given its resurgence, nay, its normalization, since the last election cycle, one has to imagine that hate will play a prominent role in the 2020 US presidential campaign as well. Making it all the crucial that we understand the 2016 election, a task the essays that follow initiate in powerful ways.

#### REFERENCES

- A short history of how Donald Trump amplifies extremism & hate on Twitter. [Blog]. (2017, November 29). Retrieved from <https://www.adl.org/blog/a-short-history-of-how-donald-trump-amplifies-extremism-hate-on-twitter>
- Anti-Semitic incidents surged nearly 60% in 2017, according to new ADL report.* [Press Release]. (2018, February 27). Retrieved from <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/anti-semitic-incidents-surged-nearly-60-in-2017-according-to-new-adl-report>
- Barkun, M. (2017, 04). President Trump and the “Fringe”. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 29(3), 437-443. doi:10.1080/09546553.2017.1313649
- Barry, D., & Eligon, J. (2017, December 16). ‘Trump, Trump, Trump!’ How a President’s name became a racial jeer. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/us/trump-racial-jeers.html>
- Daniels, J. (2016). Understanding the Trump moment: Reality TV, birtherism, the alt right and the white women’s vote. *Racism Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.racismreview.com/blog/2016/11/09/understanding-trump-moment/>
- DelReal, J. A. (2015, June 16). Donald Trump announces presidential bid. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/donald-trump-to-announce-his-presidential-plans-today/?utm\\_term=.17f04811479d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/donald-trump-to-announce-his-presidential-plans-today/?utm_term=.17f04811479d)
- Desjardins, L. (2017, August 22). Every moment in Trump’s charged relationship with race. Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/every-moment-donald-trumps-long-complicated-history-race>
- Full text: Donald Trump announces a presidential bid. (2015, June 16). Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/?utm\\_term=.3ccc107c6dd9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/?utm_term=.3ccc107c6dd9)
- Gomez, S.L. (2018). “Not White/not quite:” Racial/ethnic hybridity and the rhetoric of the “Muslim Ban.” *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric*, 8(1/2), 72-83.
- Harnish, A. (2017). Ableism and the Trump phenomenon. *Disability & Society*, 32(3), 423- 428. doi:10.1080/09687599.2017.1288684

- Jamal, A. A. (2017). Trump(ing) on Muslim women. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 13(3), 472-475. doi:10.1215/15525864-4179144
- Modi, R., & SAALT, (2018). Communities on fire: Confronting hate violence and xenophobic political rhetoric. Retrieved from <http://saalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Communities-on-Fire.pdf>
- Moshin, J. (2018). Hello darkness: Antisemitism and rhetorical silence in the "Trump era." *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric*, 8(1/2), 26-43.
- O'Connor, L., & Marans, D. (2017, February 17). Here are 16 examples of Donald Trump being racist. Retrieved from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/president-donald-trump-racist-examples\\_us\\_584f2ccae4b0bd9c3dfe5566](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/president-donald-trump-racist-examples_us_584f2ccae4b0bd9c3dfe5566)
- Perry, S. (2018). President Trump and Charlottesville: Uncivil mourning and White supremacy. *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric*, 8(1/2), 57-71.
- Reilly, K. (2016, September 10). Hillary Clinton transcript: 'Basket of deplorables' comment. Retrieved from <http://time.com/4486502/hillary-clinton-basket-of-deplorables-transcript>
- Savali, K. W. (2017, November 13). For the record: 'Superpredators' is absolutely a racist term. Retrieved from <https://www.theroot.com/for-the-record-super-predators-is-absolutely-a-racist-t-1790857020>
- Southern Poverty Law Center. (2016, November 29). New SPLC reports reveal alarming pattern of hate incidents and bullying across country since election. Retrieved from <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2016/11/29/new-splc-reports-reveal-alarming-pattern-hate-incidents-and-bullying-across-country>
- U.S. anti-Muslim hate crimes rose 15 percent in 2017. (2018, April 23). Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-islam-hatecrime/u-s-anti-muslim-hate-crimes-rose-15-percent-in-2017-advocacy-group-idUSKBN1HU240>
- Wilz, K. (2016). Bernie bros and woman cards: Rhetorics of sexism, misogyny, and constructed masculinity in the 2016 election. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 39(4), 357-360. doi:10.1080/07491409.2016.1227178