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TRUMP: BACK TO THE FUTURE OF MCCARTHYISM

Maj J.R.M. Comeau

JCSP 43

Exercise Solo Flight

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TRUMP: BACK TO THE FUTURE OF MCCARTHYISM

Maj J.R.M. Comeau

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SOLO FLIGHT

TRUMP: BACK TO THE FUTURE OF McARTHURISM

By Major Marc Comeau
Par le major Marc Comeau

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TRUMP BACK TO THE FUTURE OF McCARTHYISM

Post-Truth (adj.) – relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

— 2016 Word of the Year, Oxford English Dictionary

Truthiness (noun) – the belief in what you feel to be true rather than what the facts will support.

— Stephen Colbert, *Digital Economy Forum*, October 17, 2005

INTRODUCTION

The world changed the day that Donald John Trump was elected President of the United States of America. Change the name and the title and of course that phrase could be (and likely has been) used at any momentous occasion in history, however on November 8th, 2016 it was different. That day found that the President-elect of the United States of America, a man who was about to be given the keys and codes to a nuclear arsenal, saw the world through a different lens, a lens of alternative facts. It turns out that some Americans wanted something more, something different, and something not quite like traditional *establishment*.¹ Political scientists and historians watched the elections with peaked interest because, from within their respective fields, they could see alarming analogues and parallels to critical periods of American and European history. On virtually any given day in the months and weeks leading up to the elections, anyone reading or watching popular media sources could see and hear countless comparisons of

¹ According to actual ballots cast in the popular vote Donald Trump lost to Hillary Clinton (62,984,825 to 65,853,516), however he won by Electoral College votes (306 to 232) according to CNN election results reporting. <http://www.cnn.com/election/results/president>

Trump to historic European authoritarian tyrants. Incredibly, despite the frightening lessons of history and the near constant reminders of what Trump represented, if those appraisals were correct, the tyrants had somehow made their way into the office of the President of the United States of America!

The elections are history, the inauguration complete, but the historic associations continue to be made. The terms racist, bigot, misogynist, and fascist all continue to float about in news articles relating to President Trump. Julia Lynch notes in one of her articles that “. . . no political scientist worth her salt wants to hurl ‘fascist’ around as an epithet . . .”² However, it seems that virtually every time President Trump opens his mouth he says, or Tweets, something that harkens back to some diabolical despot we would all prefer to consign to history rather than perceive as tromping about as the proverbial *leader of the free world*.³

Historians often like to seek analogies from the past to help understand what we will see in the future, to help explain the present and perhaps even predict what may come. Over the last year, notable historians and reputable media commentators have compared the rise of Trump and his early days in office to the rise of Hitler and the consolidation of National Socialism in prewar Germany. Moreover, such comparisons have extended to the bombast and swagger of the fascist, Mussolini. More recently, Italy’s experiences with Silvio Berlusconi may provide a glaringly obvious example of the fiasco that can come from electing an “. . . openly racist, anti-immigrant and

² Julia Lynch, *The Washington Post*, “Is Trump a Berlusconi? Or more like Mussolini?” Last modified 4 December 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/04/is-trump-a-berlusconi-or-more-like-mussolini/?utm_term=.b48df47afeb6

³ *Leader of the free world* – is a Cold War propaganda term used to describe the leader of the most powerful of the democratic states, generally associated with the President of the United States.

misogynist . . .” real estate mogul and self-proclaimed political outsider into the highest of national political offices.⁴ Though comparisons have also been made to Joseph Stalin and his regime of lies, authoritarian control, and scientific censorship — Russian Communism imparts such a fundamental political difference that the value in equating the two is somewhat limited when compared with the other analogues, and as such will not be analyzed in this paper, in part due to space limitations. Nonetheless, the comparison could yield some useful insight in a future analysis. These comparisons have hardly been flattering, yet regardless of appropriateness, he is now the President of the United States of America. This paper analytically assesses the arguments – or specious comparisons – with a goal to determining how these comparisons or contrasts work or fail in understanding Trump. Finally, this paper suggests that *American* rather than *European* history provides a better historical analogue to Trump, specifically in the form of the McCarthyism and the second “Red Scare” of the late 1940s and 1950s. Taken together these diverse historical precedents may provide a more fulsome practical sense of the potential risks in the seemingly unpredictable behaviours of Trump and his administration.

THE RISE OF FASCISM: MUSSOLINI AND HITLER

Though no reputable scholar likely believes that Trump is truly the embodiment of American Fascism, many scholars have been able to pull cues from the legacies of Hitler and Mussolini that do unfortunately bare semblance to Trump’s own inconceivable rise. Timothy Snyder notes that Americans are lazy when it comes to finding lessons in history, primarily because it is not an exact reflection of the present. He goes on to say

⁴ Julia Lynch, *The Washington Post* . . .

that in this way, Americans give themselves “. . . an excuse not to think about history.”⁵

While Snyder may be correct on that point, we must still recognize that this doesn't mean that history is not a good tutor. Nevertheless, historic events must be analyzed in the proper context in order to extract the relevant lessons. Though direct correlations may be challenging, inferences can be made and warning signs recognized. In this way, the sudden arrival of Mussolini in Italian politics after World War I, the rise of Hitler in pre-war Germany, and the incredulous victory of Trump in post-Iraq America share some common traits.

Ruth Ben-Ghiat describes how Trump's unconventional policies, manoeuvres, and massive personality parallel closely with how Mussolini confounded the Italian political establishment.⁶ Supporting this, Sebastian Schutte outlines some interesting parallels in how Hitler consolidated power to how Trump campaigned and ascended to the Presidency.⁷ Quoting Robert Paxton, Fedja Buric highlights Mussolini's railing against intruders and enemies, encouragement of violent reckoning, flouting of the rules of political discourse, and promises of the restoration of Italian greatness, as all things we have seen from Trump throughout his presidential campaign.⁸ In his article Schutte identifies four tools that the Nazi's used to accomplish their goals and makes suggestions

⁵ Emmanuel Ocbazghi, *Business Insider*, “Yale history professor: Here's why it's useful to compare Trump's actions to Hitler's.” Last Modified 14 April 2017. <http://www.businessinsider.com/yale-professor-shouldnt-afraid-compare-trump-hitler-on-tyranny-comparison-politics-2017-4>

⁶ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *The Atlantic*, “An American Authoritarian.” Last Modified 10 August 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/08/american-authoritarianism-under-donald-trump/495263/>

⁷ Sebastian Schutte, *The Washington Post*, “Trump/Hitler comparisons are overstated. How did Hitler actually come to power?” Last Modified 22 November 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/11/22/trumphitler-comparisons-are-overstated-but-here-are-4-warning-signs/?utm_term=.234aaa8b76cc

⁸ Fedja Buric, *Salon*, “Trump's not Hitler, he's Mussolini: How GOP anti-intellectualism created a modern fascist movement in America.” Last modified 11 March 2016. http://www.salon.com/2016/03/11/trumps_not_hitler_hes_mussolini_how_gop_anti_intellectualism_create_d_a_modern_fascist_movement_in_america/

that an observer could use to identify similar processes being used by Trump; Scapegoating, media co-optation, paramilitary organizations, and emergency laws. Nicolas O'Shaughnessy distils the similarities, in the rise of Hitler and Trump, down further into three primal emotions: Pride, Fear, and Anger.⁹ Taken together these four narratives do put together a compelling argument that Trump may embody something sinister.

Scapegoats

Mussolini's scapegoat was his political opponents and the “. . . political systems they represented, liberalism and socialism . . .” that he carefully sold to the Italian masses as broken or posing “. . . a grave threat to Italy.”¹⁰ Similarly, Trump's anti-politics set himself against the institutional status quo, where Democrats and Republicans sat near each other on the political spectrum and the population was looking for something different. Further, just like Hitler blamed much of the German failures on minority groups, so too has Trump. Where Hitler blamed primarily Jews, Trump spread his contempt over Mexicans and Muslims as the culprits undermining the American dream. In these ways; Mussolini, Hitler, and Trump began the process of *othering* groups and traditional politicians in an effort to grow his grassroots popular support. Lastly, just like how Hitler and Mussolini were able to rally the German and Italian masses by defining a common patriotic bond in politically weak and economically depressed countries, Trump

⁹ Nicolas O'Shaughnessy, *History News Network*, “Expert on Nazism explains the shocking similarities between Trump and Hitler's propaganda tactics.” Last modified 12 October 2016. <http://www.rawstory.com/2016/10/expert-on-nazism-explains-the-shocking-similarities-between-trump-and-hitlers-propaganda-tactics/>

¹⁰ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *The Atlantic* . . .

was able to take advantage of a staunchly patriotic, but war weary America, where traditional politics had left the population looking for another way.



President Trump and Chancellor Hitler
Source: huffingtonpost.com

Psychologically, it is easier to blame others for our shortcomings than it is to take responsibility for our own circumstances – especially when someone else continually affirms that idea. Additionally, the more often we hear outlandish opinions repeated, particularly those that bare resemblances to our own beliefs, the more normal they become and in so doing become mainstream.¹¹ A shrewd orator, who self-professes to “. . . speak for the white everyman. . .,”¹² Trump fed a constant stream of rhetoric through his political rallies and mass-media outlets that appealed to the common American’s pride, fears, and anger – just like Hitler. Hitler was able to demonize a very small immigrant Jewish minority in Germany by conjuring the idea of a foreign invader, an enemy from

¹¹ Who ever heard about *Furries* or *Bronies* until the Internet and media brought them into our homes.

¹² Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *The Atlantic* . . .

within, exploiting the fact that most Germans did not personally know Jews.¹³ Without hard facts, Trump was able to grow a wave of resentment built on feelings towards several groups of immigrants he carefully chose to call “aliens.”¹⁴ In addition, and despite years of political messaging to the contrary, Trump was able to appeal to fear and ignorance and easily spin over a decade of the ‘War on Terror’ into a general feeling of a threat to America by Islam, and hence against Muslims. Though unfounded, through his constant propaganda Trump was able to “. . . reinforce long-existing negative stereotypes and fear . . .,”¹⁵ and in so doing he established his own enemy from within, his scapegoat.



Prime Minister Mussolini and President Trump
Source: ErikLundegaard.com

Politically, Hitler was able to take advantage of the lack of alternatives in Germany as the existing inter-war fledgling democratic government was reeling from the

¹³ Pat Simons, *Occasional Planet*, “Comparing Trump and Hitler: Uncomfortable but Necessary.” Last modified 14 January 2017. <http://occasionalplanet.org/2017/01/14/comparing-trump-hitler-uncomfortable-necessary/>

¹⁴ Trump is targeting several groups of immigrants, whom he calls “aliens,” a word chosen to underscore his “us” versus “them” mentality. To him “aliens” are all refugees from Syria, most Mexicans (to be walled out at their expense), and all immigrants from “terror countries” (undefined, because “all you have to do is look!”). – Pat Simons, *Occasional Planet* . . .

¹⁵ Pat Simons, *Occasional Planet* . . .

economic challenges of the period. “It was not that a majority of Germans wanted Nazism, but they didn’t want democracy and there was no real political center left in Germany, just communist, socialist and fascist.”¹⁶ Besides, the belief at the time was that the established government institutions and systems of the right-wing parties had sufficiently “normalized” him and they would gain under his leadership.¹⁷ Under very similar conditions, Mussolini created a crisis in Italy and by trafficking in contradiction, paradox, and violence that challenged traditional politics – he garnered the legitimizing Liberal party’s support.¹⁸ Though they believed that Mussolini could be mainstreamed and tempered once he brought them to power, they soon found that they were wrong.¹⁹ Though democracy is well founded in America, a growing populist movement wanted something to change. The anti-politics of Trump allowed him to represent a change from the status quo and gave him the flexibility to be predominantly populist and non-partisan, despite championing the Republican Party whose representatives have been ambivalent on Trump.²⁰ Not that anyone knew what that change actually was or what Trump actually represented, it was sufficient that it was something different.²¹

¹⁶ Nicolas O’Shaughnessy, *History News Network* . . .

¹⁷ Ron Rosenbaum, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, “Against Normalization: The Lesson of the ‘Munich Post’.” Last Modified 5 February 2017. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/normalization-lesson-munich-post/>

¹⁸ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *The Atlantic* . . .

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Ben Sales, *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, “Ambivalent on Trump, GOP Jews gush over Pence.” Last modified 15 July 2016. <http://www.jta.org/2016/07/15/news-opinion/politics/ambivalent-on-trump-gop-jews-gush-over-pence>

²¹ Ron Rosenbaum, *Los Angeles Review of Books* . . .

Media Co-optation

The receptivity of the masses is very limited, their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous. In consequence of these facts, all effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points, and you must harp on these in slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan.

— Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Vol. 1, Ch 6

Formerly a journalist, Mussolini used his knowledge of the media to cultivate his bond with Italians.²² Seemingly an apprentice of Mussolini's success in this realm, one of Hitler's first efforts in establishing totalitarian control over Germany, his *Gleichschaltung*²³, was control of the media.²⁴ As captured in the quote above, Hitler understood that concise and repetitious slogans would gain traction over time. This was a lesson that Trump evidently understood well. Though complete control over the media is virtually impossible in the Western democratic social-media savvy world we live in, Trump's public background divines him a deep understanding of the value and power of the media. His concise use of slogans rather than clearly laid out policies further entrench the idea that he was trying to evoke the feelings of Americans by letting them determine what he meant by "America First" and "Make America Great Again." Trump was allowing the American people to make their own connections via their emotional bonds with whatever their interpretation of the "American Dream" was to solidify their support for him, all the while never actually articulating a position. Similar to Mussolini, he would use the media to push the mainstream envelope.²⁵ Trump channeled Mussolini in his use of the media to gauge just how far he could go with his racism, bigotry, and misogyny. If and when he was called out for crossing a line (as was often the case), his

²² Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *The Atlantic* . . .

²³ Gleichschaltung – the establishment of totalitarian control over all aspects of society.

²⁴ Sebastian Schutte, *The Washington Post* . . .

²⁵ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *The Atlantic* . . .

campaign team or press secretary would declare the offending comments as mistakes, but Trump himself never publicly apologized.²⁶

Whenever Hitler ran into a media source that he could not control, he simply shut them down.²⁷ While Trump could never hope to attain that level of complete control over the media what he has done, since before he was a politician, was attempt to discredit the sources. His attacks on reputable (and perhaps somewhat less than reputable) news agencies have been constant. When challenged by dissenting media, he went on the offensive, both figuratively and literally. Trump, personally and via his press secretary, has belligerently attacked the integrity of reporters and cancelled daily press briefings, then blocked specific media outlets from attending off-camera media gaggles with a carefully selected chosen few. Trump gives obvious advantages to favourable and supporting news agencies, while attacking dissenting voices as *dishonest* and *fake*.²⁸ Not since Ronald Regan has a sitting President missed the White House Correspondent's Dinner.²⁹ By boycotting the dinner Trump underscored his loathing of the media the only way he knows how – by throwing a tantrum. Regardless of Trump's tepid affair with the media, he capably uses the medium to stir the fervour of the American populace. By creating and disseminating controversy he was, and is, able to direct and keep rapt the attention of everyday Americans away from his inconsistencies.³⁰

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Ron Rosenbaum, *Los Angeles Review of Books* . . .

²⁸ Pat Simons, *Occasional Planet* . . .

²⁹ In 1981 Ronald Regan was recovering from an assassination attempt. – Barney Henderson, *The Telegraph*, “Donald Trump skips White House correspondents’ dinner to hold Pennsylvania 100 day rally.” Last modified 28 April 2017. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/04/28/donald-trump-skips-white-house-correspondents-dinner-hold-pennsylvania/>

³⁰ What ever happened in February in Sweden anyway?

Paramilitary Organizations

Unlike Mussolini's violent Blackshirts and Hitler's Sturmabteilung (SA), Trump does not have an avowed paramilitary organization doing his bidding. Or does he? Though Trump rejected an endorsement from a KKK-linked newspaper during his campaign, he has never disavowed the praise bestowed upon him by David Duke, a former Louisiana State Representative and former Imperial Wizard of the KKK.³¹ Through his controversial rhetoric, flagrantly sexist comments, and incitement to verbal and physical violence at his rallies, Trump has essentially mainstreamed and mobilized an army of pre-existing racists and misogynists.³² Just as much as the Trump vitriol has energized his supporters, so too have his opponents been galvanized into action, with Trump protesters clashing with supporters in equally violent ways.³³ Though it is doubtful that a fully-fledged pro-Trump para-military organization could ever emerge in the United States (the Secret-Service notwithstanding of course) it is not difficult to imagine that violence in the United States will continue to blur the lines between Trump related clashes and the long-standing common undercurrents of the American social fabric.³⁴

³¹ Sebastian Schutte, *The Washington Post*... ; Ron Rosenbaum, *Los Angeles Review of Books* . . .

³² Ron Rosenbaum, *Los Angeles Review of Books* . . . ; *The Cut*, "There Have Been at Least 9 Violent Attacks on Women by Trump Supporters." Last modified 14 October 2016. <http://nymag.com/thecut/2016/10/violence-committed-against-women-by-trump-supporters.html>

³³ Jesse Benn, *The Huffington Post*, "Sorry Liberals, A Violent Response To Trump Is As Logical As Any." Last modified 6 June 2016. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jesse-benn/sorry-liberals-a-violent-_b_10316186.html

³⁴ Issac J. Bailey, *Politico*, "How Trump Exposed America's White Identity Crisis." Last modified 22 August 2016. <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/08/trump-race-white-america-identity-crisis-214178>

Emergency Laws³⁵

Though the processes differed – in Mussolini’s Italy, like in Hitler’s Germany, a violent event triggered each of the tyrants to step out of the shadows of politics and into the limelight of full authoritarian control.³⁶ Unlike the floundering German and Italian democratic governments of the day, the American government institutions have been, since their inception, built specifically to prevent the consolidation of power.³⁷ With power subdivided between the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches, the forefathers of Confederation sought precisely to prevent the possibility of authoritarian control of the United States. However, the American government has numerous historical precedents of all three branches being controlled by one party.³⁸ Despite the ability to sign Presidential Executive Orders, akin to Emergency laws, the American democratic institutions still have a say. Regardless, Trump has shown personal disdain for Federal institutions and specifically the legal system where “. . . he has repeatedly perverted the judicial process by using lawsuits to drain people financially. . .” and even claiming a judge was racially biased against him, a claim that was later proven false.³⁹ He has demonstrated that this contempt followed him to Office where he publically belittled the Washington State Judge who legally blocked his first attempted temporary travel ban on

³⁵ Interestingly, Sebastian Schutte notes in his article that “there would be reason for concern that Trump was taking Hitler like emergency measures if he escalated wars abroad without congressional approval . . .” Just like he did when he ordered 59 Tomahawk Missile Strikes on an airbase in Syria in early April. – Sebastian Schutte, *The Washington Post* . . .

³⁶ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *The Atlantic* . . . ; Sebastian Schutte, *The Washington Post* . . .

³⁷ Julia Lynch, *The Washington Post* . . .

³⁸ Sarah Jarvis, *The Arizona Republic*, “Fact Check: How often one party has controlled the federal government.” Last modified 1 December 2016. <http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/fact-check/2016/12/01/fact-check-one-party-three-branches-federal-government/94636286/>

³⁹ Pat Simons, *Occasional Planet* . . .

Muslims.⁴⁰ Ron Rosenbaum eloquently outlines that Trump is defining mendacity down: “While marchers and the courts have put up a fight after the Muslim ban, each new act, each new lie, accepted by default, seems less outrageous.”⁴¹ Trump is slowly setting the bar lower and lower on what the American population, and by extension the world, will accept from him. The Republican Congress, by systematically allowing him to appoint unqualified family members and friends into agency heads and senior advisor positions, are allowing the nepotism of Trump to degrade Federal institutions.⁴² A quick search of the internet will deliver news that Americans are marching in protest of Trump as much as they are in support. It will be up to Republican career politicians to determine politically when America has had enough.

Despite all of the similarities, Trump is not Hitler, nor is he Mussolini.⁴³ Hitler seized power by force and spent decades calling for violence against entire peoples, and was an expansionist calling for global if not only regional domination. Mussolini was influenced by philosophers and seized power by force leading Italy by a dictatorship of fear.⁴⁴ Trump seized power democratically and has never expressed interest in building an American empire outside of American borders.⁴⁵ Trump a, self-declared, successful businessman and real estate mogul who used; business savvy, the ideals of the American dream, and bravado as the foundation for his approach to politics. Nearly 30 years before

⁴⁰ The ban was specifically aimed at Muslims from Syria, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen and gave priority to Christian refugees over those of other religions. – Amy Wang, *The Washington Post*, “Trump lashes out at ‘so-called judge’ who temporarily blocked travel ban.” Last modified 4 February 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/02/04/trump-lashes-out-at-federal-judge-who-temporarily-blocked-travel-ban/?utm_term=.27553624f986

⁴¹ Ron Rosenbaum, *Los Angeles Review of Books* . . .

⁴² Trump “. . . calls climate change ‘a hoax’ and appoints a man who agrees with him to lead the EPA. . .” – Pat Simons, *Occasional Planet* . . .

⁴³ Though I would argue that both Mussolini and Trump were larger than life, at least in their own minds.

⁴⁴ Fedja Buric, *Salon* . . .

⁴⁵ Sebastian Schutte, *The Washington Post* . . .

his political debut, Trump lays bare what can be seen as his campaign strategy in his book “The Art of the Deal”:

The final key to the way I promote is bravado. I play to people’s fantasies. People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That’s why a little hyperbole never hurts. People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It’s an innocent form of exaggeration — and a very effective form of promotion.⁴⁶

As Obama said, “Trump is a “homegrown authoritarian”.”⁴⁷ It is not a far stretch to see that he was born into privilege and raised in a capitalist system that enabled his *truthful hyperbole* to develop unfettered.

ITALIAN NEO-LIBERAL AUTHORITARIANISM: BERLUSCONI

The world of Hitler and Mussolini is far removed from the modern interconnected political domain we know today. Though the comparisons do give us pause for thought, there is a much more current example that we can pull from recent European history – Italy’s former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Long before Trump took the first official steps towards becoming the President of the United States, the comparisons of Trump and Berlusconi were being made.⁴⁸ From a 2005 biography of the then-Italian Prime Minister we begin to see the similarities:

Berlusconi is certainly a consummate salesman, and a very well-prepared one. But he is also, and probably above all, a buyer of commodities and services... his is a patrimonial and acquisitive instinct, fired by the production and the use of wealth, as well as the need for his name and face to be omnipresent... he can be compared to a figure like Donald Trump,

⁴⁶ Donald Trump and Tony Schwartz, *The Art of the Deal* (New York, Random House, 1987), 58.

⁴⁷ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *The Atlantic* . . .

⁴⁸ Adam Taylor, *The Washington Post* . . .

who used to boast that he had the largest living room in New York and the city's most spectacular view.⁴⁹

We can infer from this passage that both men share a penchant for self-importance and how they are both plutocrats who used their considerable wealth and business acumen to build their campaign and frame their political careers. Tellingly, after the recent American election, Berlusconi himself noted in an interview with Italian newspaper that the parallels are “obvious.”⁵⁰



President Trump and Prime Minister Berlusconi

Source: Slate.com

The close similarities do not end with their wealth, political authoritarianism, and egocentrism, they both have a weakness for women. As Stephanie Kirchgaessner points out: “In Berlusconi’s Italy, a woman’s looks were paramount.”⁵¹ With Berlusconi known for his *bunga bunga* sex parties and treating women as sex objects.⁵² Trump, of course,

⁴⁹ Paul Ginsborg, *Silvio Berlusconi: Television, Power and Patrimony* (London, Verso, 2005), 120-121.

⁵⁰ Adam Taylor, *The Washington Post* . . .

⁵¹ Stephanie Kirchgaessner, *The Guardian*, “If Berlusconi is like Trump, what can America learn from Italy?” Last modified 21 November 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/21/if-berlusconi-is-like-trump-what-can-italy-teach-america>

⁵² *Ibid.*

owned the Miss Universe organization and all that encompassed and has been recorded discussing his penchant for sexual assault and rating women's attractiveness.⁵³ Not surprisingly, both men have been on the receiving end of Feminist movement's ire. Kirchgaessner offers that: "Berlusconi's attitude prompted a sort of revolt from women, and women's groups . . . [prompting] opposition to female stereotypes . . ."⁵⁴ The day after Trump's inauguration, estimates claim that more than one million people marched in support of the Women's March on Washington in protest of Trump's presidency.⁵⁵

Aside from sharing a proclivity for spouting racist vitriol, bigotry, misogyny, philandering, spray tans, and narcissism — physically Berlusconi and Trump are very much antithesis. Formerly a crooner⁵⁶, Berlusconi's small stature and arguable "small-man syndrome"⁵⁷ contrasts significantly with Trump's tall stature and his audacity in using his size as a power play in order to dominate his opponents.⁵⁸

Both Trump and Berlusconi grew their respective fortunes from real estate and media; Berlusconi as a media mogul owning and controlling several media companies,

⁵³ Stephanie Kirchgaessner, *The Guardian* . . . ; Ben Jacobs, Sabrina Siddiqui and Scott Bixby, *The Guardian*, "You can do anything": Trump brags on tape about using fame to get women." Last modified 8 October 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/07/donald-trump-leaked-recording-women>

⁵⁴ Stephanie Kirchgaessner, *The Guardian* . . .
⁵⁵ *The Globe and Mail*, "As the Women's March on Washington goes global, here are the highlights." Last modified 22 January 2017. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/womens-march-on-washington-goesglobal/article33696482/>

⁵⁶ "He's a little seducer who crooned his way on the cruise ships early in his career." – Adam Taylor, *The Washington Post* . . .

⁵⁷ Palash Gosh, *International Business Times*, "Sarkozy, Berlusconi and Medvedev: The Long and the Short of it." <http://www.ibtimes.com/sarkozy-berlusconi-medvedev-long-short-it-212673>

⁵⁸ Sarah Kaufman, *The Washington Post*, "Why was Trump lurking behind Clinton? How body language dominated the debate." Last modified 10 October 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2016/10/10/why-was-trump-lurking-behind-clinton-how-body-language-dominated-the-debate/?utm_term=.e4d90b03ffe5

while Trump spent his Hollywood time as little more than a reality TV personality.⁵⁹ Both then used their public media profiles, large bankrolls, and business experiences to help pave their way to political office. Lorenzo Newman notes that “. . . both see democracy as a ratings game . . .” demonstrating that though they lacked political experience, they certainly made up for it by understanding what sells. Both men recognized that “. . . twenty-first-century voters, trained in social media, don’t judge you. They root for you or against you, as they do with a sports team.”⁶⁰ Both Berlusconi and Trump used their recognized name and pseudo-fame to gain political credibility, treating political power and office as a commodity – just like a businessman.⁶¹

It is in the media, however that some differences begin to appear between the two. Where Berlusconi had “. . . extraordinary control over the media . . .” both personally and through the political office he would come to hold, Trump’s interactions have always been more adversarial.⁶² Where Berlusconi was able to leverage his media control to constantly condition his electoral base, Trump had to play the media carefully, often criticizing the media for what he deemed to be “dishonest”⁶³ or “fabricated news.”⁶⁴ Further solidifying his contempt for the media, Trump made campaign promises to “open up” the American libel laws in order to make it easier (arguably for himself) to sue media organizations for damages.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, both Berlusconi and Trump carefully manage

⁵⁹ Lorenzo Newman, *Slate*, “Bunga Bunga, American Style.” Last modified 3 April 2017. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2017/04/the_similarities_between_trump_and_berlusconi_are_much_deeper_than_you_think.html

⁶⁰ Severgnini, Beppe, *The New York Times*, “What a Trump America Can Learn from a Berlusconi Italy.” Last modified 15 November 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/16/opinion/what-a-trump-america-can-learn-from-a-berlusconi-italy.html?_r=1

⁶¹ Taylor, Adam, *The Washington Post* . . .

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Pat Simons, *Occasional Planet* . . .

⁶⁴ Adam Taylor, *The Washington Post* . . .

⁶⁵ Stephanie Kirchgaessner, *The Guardian* . . .

the media and their own public profiles, accepting interviews only with cautiously selected *preferred* journalists, thereby further eroding the credibility of the *other* news agencies they derided.⁶⁶

Politically, Berlusconi and Trump are on opposite ends of the political spectrum – well, at least their political support bases are. While both men sway between traditionally conservative and liberal platforms, Berlusconi’s electoral support base and political bastion was neo-liberal, where Trump is well settled as alt-right (perhaps even far right).⁶⁷ Incredibly, both men garnered fervent religious support – with Berlusconi gaining favour with Italy’s Roman Catholic Bishops, and Trump with America’s Evangelical Christians – by appealing to the churches’ interests on conservative issues ranging from same-sex marriage, anti-abortion issues, and fear of Islam.⁶⁸ Further, Trump also campaigned on a promise to repeal a 1954 law that effectively separated the church and state, a change that could give religion an even more powerful role in American politics than it does today.⁶⁹

Similar to the American government structure, Italy’s government is comprised of three branches: the Executive, Legislative, and the Judicial. Italy also has a President, who is the Head of State, but is separate from the three Branches of government. At one point during his reign as Prime Minister, Berlusconi’s political party (Forza Italia) held a majority in both Houses of Parliament (the Senate and Chamber of Deputies), and it was

⁶⁶ Stephanie Kirchgaessner, *The Guardian* . . . ; Pat Simons, *Occasional Planet* . . .

⁶⁷ Adam Taylor, *The Washington Post* . . .

⁶⁸ Stephanie Kirchgaessner, *The Guardian* . . .

⁶⁹ The 1954 Johnson Amendment that prohibits tax-exempt organizations from participating in political activities - Emma Green, *The Atlantic*, “Trump Wants to Make Churches the New Super PACs.” Last modified 2 August 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/08/how-trump-is-trying-to-put-more-money-in-politics/493823/>

institutional veterans, primarily the judicial that are credited with having held his authoritarian power in check.⁷⁰ Presently in America, the Republican Party has a majority in both Houses of the Legislative Branch, together with a Republican(ish) President the Judicial Branch is left to hold the Government in check. Or so it should be, however the Judicial Branch has often acted in a partisan way,⁷¹ and Trump only recently succeeded in nominating a replacement for the late Associate Justice Antonin Scalia.⁷² Interestingly, it was during the Obama Administration that the Republican majority Senate effectively blocked the President from exercising his Constitutional responsibility of nominating a replacement after Justice Scalia died in February of 2016.⁷³

The Italian Berlusconi experience does leave America with one rather foreboding prediction that –the American democratic institutions may survive the experience, but the social and political scars may last for generations. In Berlusconi’s case, his refusal to resolve conflicts of interest between personal business and affairs of state, his repeated clashes with the judiciary, his tax evasion, his normalization of racism and *bunga bunga* sexism all served to undermine the legitimacy of the establishment and respect for authority.⁷⁴ The Trump experience has all the same hallmarks; the pitiful attempts to demonstrate the separation of his personal business from his state affairs (Mar-a-Lago

⁷⁰ Adam Taylor, *The Washington Post* . . .

⁷¹ Lucas Rodriguez, *Stanford Politics*, “The Troubling Partisanship of the Supreme Court.” Last modified 7 January 2016. <https://stanfordpolitics.com/the-troubling-partisanship-of-the-supreme-court-da9fd5a900ac>

⁷² Lisa Mascaro and David Savage, *Los Angeles Times*, “Senate confirms Neil Gorsuch, Trump’s Supreme Court nominee. Last modified 7 April 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-gorsuch-confirmed-20170407-story.html>

⁷³ Stephen Collinson, Kevin Liptak, Ariane de Vogue and Manu Raju, *CNN Politics*, “Obama nominates Merrick Garland to Supreme Court.” Last updated 26 March 2016. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/16/politics/obama-supreme-court-announcement/>; Fedja Buric, *Salon* . . .

⁷⁴ Beppe Severgnini, *The New York Times* . . . ; Lorenzo Newman, *Slate*, “Bunga Bunga, American Style.” Last modified 3 April 2017. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2017/04/the_similarities_between_trump_and_berlusconi_are_much_deeper_than_you_think.html; Stephanie Kirchgaessner, *The Guardian* . . .

anyone?), his well-publicized personal and professional scuffles with judges, his tax evasion, his normalization of racism and sexism; the result can only be the same as it has been in Italy. When faced with owning up to campaign promises or being caught using untruthful statements, Berlusconi would reply with his now trademark phrase: “*sono stato frainteso*” — *I have been misunderstood*.⁷⁵ This is incredibly evocative of Trump’s far less eloquent *fake news* or *alternative facts*. Though the implications stand the same – a gradual degradation of institutional trust that will outlast the President’s political career and live on in American vernacular.⁷⁶

McCARTHYISM: AN AMERICAN ANALOGUE TO TRUMP

Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it.

— George Santayana, “*The Life of Reason*.” 1905

For all his bravado, all his rhetoric, all his slogans, it is obvious that Trump recognized something in his musings to become the President of the United States. Ever the opportunistic businessman, Trump understood that there was a growing discord within the American populace, a collective grumbling that he could exploit. He also realized that he could foment that grievance into a movement by playing into what Adam Hartung dubbed: “. . . the fears, uncertainties, and doubts of the average American”⁷⁷ – Trump knew that he could talk the grievance into people.⁷⁸ Trump had found his worthy cause-du-jour: racial and ethnic tensions.⁷⁹ Trump took this further by what he saw as the erosion of the American Dream by illegals (primarily Mexicans) and by extremist

⁷⁵ Lorenzo Newman, *Slate* . . .

⁷⁶ Lorenzo Newman, *Slate* . . .

⁷⁷ Adam Hartung, *Forbes* . . .

⁷⁸ Nicolas O’Shaughnessy, *History News Network* . . .

⁷⁹ Peter Beinart, *The Atlantic*, “The New McCarthyism of Donald Trump.” Last modified 21 July 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/07/donald-trump-joseph-mccarthy/399056/>

immigrants from a diametrically opposed religious group – Islam.⁸⁰ Finally, Trump discovered that he had political backers in the Republican Party, eager to put their partisan pull behind someone who could stir-up the masses and gain them the Presidency. Amazingly, Trump was not the first Republican to stir up a miasma of political conspiracies, nor was he the first to use the tactic of hanging his hat on a controversial issue to gain popular political influence.⁸¹ In early Cold-War America the young senator Joe McCarthy had found a similar cause – the perceived insidious Communist infiltration of the Government.



Senator McCarthy, President Trump
Source: LewRockwell.com

Shortly after his inauguration, President Trump made allegations that Obama had wiretapped Trump Tower during the election campaign, even going so far as to say that Obama was guilty of McCarthyism.⁸² Interestingly, in common parlance, the term

⁸⁰ Beinart, Peter, *The Atlantic* . . . ; Adam Hartung, *Forbes* . . .

⁸¹ Jelani Cobb, *The New Yorker*, “The Model for Donald Trump’s Media Relations is Joseph McCarthy.” Last modified 22 September 2016. <http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-model-for-donald-trumps-media-relations-is-joseph-mccarthy>

⁸² Katie Serena, *Salon*, “The White House on ‘McCarthyism’: Bannon praises, Trump dismisses.” Last modified 6 March 2017. <http://www.salon.com/2017/03/06/the-white-house-on-mccarthyism-bannon-praises-trump-dissmisses/> ; Cleve R. Wootson, *The Washington Post*, “The president accused Obama of ‘McCarthyism.’ But Trump’s mentor helped enforce it.” Last modified 4 March 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/03/04/the-president-accused-obama-of-mccarthyism-but-trumps-mentor-helped-enforce-it/?utm_term=.86dcb8892b62

McCarthyism is generally used to: “reference unsubstantiated accusations or unfair investigative techniques, especially as they pertain to politics.”⁸³ Despite calls for evidence in the accusation, Trump never provided any. Instead deferring to an ongoing investigation into the assertion, and eventually claiming vindication when that investigation ultimately found that indeed parts of Trump Tower were wiretapped, despite being localized to the floors leased out to Russian mafia and having occurred between 2011 and 2013.⁸⁴ At the end of Trump’s tweet he noted “This is McCarthyism!”⁸⁵ Unfortunately, he was right, but it was Trump who was guilty of the act, not Obama. Boldly, Trump was simply telling us in plain English what *he* was doing.

Roy Cohn was Senator Joe McCarthy’s crony throughout the Second Red Scare that led to McCarthyism, often “. . . seen whispering into the senator’s ear.”⁸⁶ The very same Roy Cohn later met a debutante Donald Trump and became his attorney and mentor.⁸⁷ Through Cohn’s later legal battles and eventual disbarment for unethical and unprofessional conduct, “Trump was a loyal friend . . . and protege [*sic*].”⁸⁸ The linkage is unquestionable, the results – seemingly obvious. Trump’s campaign assertions that Islam’s hatred of the West is *innate* and calling for a blanket ban on all Muslims in America,⁸⁹ is a play directly out of Cohn and McCarthy’s program. Trump’s allegations are a mirror of McCarthy’s calls that Communists had infiltrated the American political

⁸³ Katie Serena, *Salon* . . .

⁸⁴ Carissa House-Dunphy, *Bipartisan Report*, “Just In: ABC News Releases Evidence Proving Trump Tower Was Wiretapped.” Last modified 21 March 2017. <http://bipartisanreport.com/2017/03/21/just-in-abc-news-releases-evidence-proving-trump-tower-was-wiretapped/>

⁸⁵ Katie Serena, *Salon* . . .

⁸⁶ Cleve R. Wootson, *The Washington Post* . . . ; Jonathan Chait, *New York Magazine*, “Donald Trump Is the Perpetrator of McCarthyism, Not the Victim of It.” Last modified 6 March 2017. <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/03/trump-is-the-perpetrator-of-mccarthyism-not-its-victim.html>

⁸⁷ Cleve R. Wootson, *The Washington Post* . . .

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Simons, Pat, *Occasional Planet* . . .

offices and that all ties to communist thought was an existential threat to America. In a political speech in West Virginia on 9 Feb 1950, McCarthy stated about communism that America was facing “. . . a war between two diametrically opposed ideologies.”⁹⁰ Eerily reminiscent of words spoken by Trump himself when addressing concerns about his policies on the War on Terror.⁹¹ As Barbara Falk notes: “Make no mistake, there *was* an actual threat then – just as there is an actual threat of violent extremism today.” Falk astutely goes on to say that “. . . when securitization is mobilized for political purposes, the result is not security but the dramatic reduction of liberty for the few at the prodding of the cheering sanction of the many.”⁹²

Trump, as was McCarthy, is a master of feeding the media just enough of what he wants them to spin. The relationship is enabled by a symbiotic need for attention, reporting, and ratings.⁹³ In an article in *New York Magazine*, the Jonathan Chait notes: “Trump, like McCarthy, uses reckless accusations to whip his supporters into a frenzy and disorient his foes.” Chait goes on to highlight that Trump, like his doyen McCarthy, is indifferent to facts and truth.⁹⁴ This *revelation* was further confirmed by a White House official, speaking to a journalist on the Obama wiretapping affair that; “Even if it turns out not to be true . . . he will have a very good point to make . . .”⁹⁵ Incredibly, though Trump was able to make the false accusation, he was never held accountable for it. In fact, from long before the election campaign, let alone throughout it, Trump was a

⁹⁰ Joseph R. McCarthy, *History Matters*, “‘Enemies from Within’: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy’s Accusations of Disloyalty.” Last Accessed 17 April 2017. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6456>

⁹¹ Uri Freidman, *The Atlantic*, “The Coming War on ‘Radical Islam’.” Last modified 29 November 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/11/trump-radical-islam/508331/>

⁹² Barbara Falk, *Public Seminar*, “McCarthyism: An American Analog to Trumpism.” Last modified 23 February 2017. <http://www.publicseminar.org/2017/02/mccarthyism/#.WPVxTMszWpq>

⁹³ Jelani Cobb, *The New Yorker* . . .

⁹⁴ Jonathan Chait, *New York Magazine* . . .

⁹⁵ Jonathan Chait, *New York Magazine* . . .

fount of reckless accusations and insinuations, ranging from: the Obama *birther* conspiracy and Clinton *Benghazi* e-mails, to the Mexican *rapists* and *so-called* judges, and finally to the *Cuban-thus-Catholic* Ted Cruz and that since Muslims are of the Islam faith thus they are all Islamist extremist – which are bad.⁹⁶ In this Trump demonstrates that again he was analogous to the demagogue McCarthy; both were in the business of channelling populist conspiracy theories and anti-intellectual paranoia via popular media and political Rallies in an effort to stir the conservative Republican base into action and for their own self-aggrandisement.⁹⁷ Ultimately, it was McCarthy's own success and allusions of fame that would be his undoing when he eventually attacked the US Army in his hunt for Communists. Trump too has pulled at this nerve, in his attack on the hero status of Republican Senator John McCain – Incredibly, though unfortunately tellingly, the results were far different than McCarthy's run at the military. The results of Trump's tirade were little-more than a few high-profile Party supporters jumping off of (but not too far from) the Trump band-wagon.⁹⁸ At some point we can only hope for and expect someone to finally call Trump out on his impudent demagoguery as Joseph Welch did to McCarthy with his fateful line: "Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?"⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Jonathan Chait, *New York Magazine* . . . ; Peter Beinart, *The Atlantic* . . . ; Amy Wang, *The Washington Post* . . . ; Adam Hartung, *Forbes* . . .

⁹⁷ Jonathan Chait, *New York Magazine* . . .

⁹⁸ Ben Schreckinger, *Politico*, "Trump Attacks McCain: 'I like people who weren't captured'." Last modified 19 July 2015. <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/07/trump-attacks-mccain-i-like-people-who-werent-captured-120317>

⁹⁹ Peter Beinart, *The Atlantic* . . .

CONCLUSION

The European experiences of Hitler and Mussolini occurred in a world of emerging democracies, reeling from total war in their literal backyards. American democracy has long since been established and has not seen war on its shores for 150 years. Trump's rise was enabled by the ideals of the American Dream and his own plutocracy, whereas Hitler and Mussolini created the conditions for their own rise through the use of directed violence. Though Trump may be employing some of the less savoury Fascist tools, the similarities more or less end there.

Berlusconi, on the other hand, is a closer analogue to Trump. Apart from their narcissism, love of spray tans, misogynistic tendencies, and flagrant sexism, their similar business and media backgrounds, careful management of the media, and plutocratic foundations for achieving their aims were almost identical. While Berlusconi had the support of violent Italian criminal groups which ensured the Italian population “knew which way to vote,”¹⁰⁰ Trump relied on stirring the communal base fears by normalizing racism, xenophobia, and misogyny to garner the vote. In the end, the differences between the two men tend more to their political inclinations, with Berlusconi being neo-liberal leftist and Trump being conservative alt-right.

History does hold one near-perfect analogue to Trump however, and we do not have to go very far to find him. A Venn-diagram of political and personal influence will find very similar people and conditions surrounding McCarthy and Trump. The lawyer, Roy Cohn was both a close advisor to McCarthy in his heyday and later a mentor to

¹⁰⁰ Adam Taylor, *The Washington Post* . . .

Trump. The democratic Republican Party provided both men with the conservative platforms from which to spout their respective mendacity and vitriol, and a notoriously long-leash for their more outlandish conspiracies and behaviours. Though not comforting, Chait outlines the primary difference between the two men in that: "...McCarthy was a [junior] senator and an insurgent within his party, and Trump is the president who commands his."¹⁰¹

Ironically, it is from Senator Joe McCarthy's own mouth that we get the most appropriate warning of all, "When a great democracy is destroyed, it will not be from enemies from without, but rather because of enemies from within."¹⁰² Though Senator McCarthy was speaking about the Communist infiltrators he was set to rout out, it was his actions that most threatened American Democracy, and it is those same actions that threaten the American institutions again today.

¹⁰¹ Jonathan Chait, *New York Magazine* . . .

¹⁰² Joseph McCarthy, *History Matters* . . .

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