THE TRUMP CARD

POLITICAL LANGUAGE IN THE AGE OF FAKE NEWS AND ALTERNATIVE FACTS
THE TRUMP CARD:
POLITICAL LANGUAGE IN THE AGE OF FAKE NEWS AND ALTERNATIVE FACTS

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Graz, Oktober 2017
"There is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in."

– Leonard Cohen
DECLARATION

I hereby confirm that this master’s thesis entitled

The Trump Card:
Political Language in the Age of Fake News and Alternative Facts

is the result of my own independent academic work. All sources (books, articles, essays, dissertations, the internet, etc.) are cited correctly in this thesis; quotations and paraphrases are acknowledged. No material other than that listed has been used.

I also certify that this thesis or parts thereof have not been used previously as examination material (by myself or anyone else) in another course at this or any other university. I understand that any violation of this declaration will result in legal consequences possibly leading to my expulsion from the University of Graz.

Philipp Rossmann, BA

Graz, October 21, 2017
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to all the people who have ever been on the margins of history and society.

To the black people who have fought and been defeated by white supremacy. We see you and we’re with you. You matter and your lives matter.

To the hard working immigrants who get the job done. You belong. No person is illegal.

To LGBTQIA youth who have been discriminated against. You’re enough. You have a right to be you. Know that you are wanted and that you are loved.

To the women who have fought for equality and who feel that this past year has been a major setback. Thank you for your efforts and your spirit. Keep going, I’m with you. Persist.

To everyone else fighting the good fight so we may one day have equality for one and all. Thank you, thank you, thank you, I’m glad to be in such great company.

To my mother for raising a fighting spirit within me and for always telling me that I’m enough, thank you, I love you. To Manfred for always challenging me to stand my ground and loving me despite our differences. I’m glad you’re my father.

To Paige, my gladiator in boots, my voice of encouragement who always believes in me, especially when I don’t believe in myself. For your help, and love, and friendship. I can never repay you, but I’ll try.

And to Prof. Annemarie Peltzer-Karpf for your incredible support, your words of encouragement and dedication. Thank you so much for guiding me through this, you are a fellow fighter and I’m so grateful I got to call you my teacher. You have my everlasting appreciation!
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INTRODUCTION

Regardless of whether they were a Democrat or a Republican, no American president’s language has ever been as hotly debated and condemned as Donald Trump’s. Ever since he announced his run for office, he has been making headlines—and ever since people have been wondering how it got this far. How could a man with the speech of a toddler and no political experience run for the Oval Office and actually end up winning, turning the entirety of political discourse on its head in the process?

This thesis will arbitrate and contextualize political language in the age of Trump by highlighting the specific linguistic markers of a Trump speech, and by analyzing selected speeches and statements by the current officer in chief. In order to provide a coherent and comprehensive approach, it has been divided into three distinct parts.

Part one investigates the topic of persuasive language and linguistic manipulation, in order to show how language can be used to deceive. The linguistics of lying is relevant, as well, and will be explained to better comprehend some of Trump’s statements.

Part two will provide an overview of traditional political language, especially in the field of American politics. It will discuss frequently used rhetorical devices, as well as the language used for political campaigns by providing relevant and famous examples of the past. Furthermore, it will briefly examine how the notion of American exceptionalism affects the linguistics of American politics.

Finally, part three is devoted to exposing the linguistically manipulative methods of Trump and his administration, discussing his racially divisive campaign rhetoric, his inaptitude of forming coherent thought, on-going cases of propaganda and doublespeak, several of his lies that have been communicated to the public, and his approach at addressing political adversaries, as well as national tragedies.

In times of right-wing political parties gaining more and more traction all over the world, we can no longer turn away from the criminal abuse of language by our elected officials. I intend for this thesis to expose a populist president for his dangerous rhetoric and shine a light into the darkness.
Language has numerous functions, it is a complex system of sounds and signs that we use constantly, whether we are in contact with other people or alone with our thoughts. We use language when we speak, which can be both verbal and non-verbal, but our thoughts underly language as well; it is deeply ingrained into our consciousness as human beings who possess this unique linguistic system. When we think about language and what we do with it, the most obvious connotation that comes to mind is most likely communication. It is the first definition of the word that appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, stating that it is “[t]he method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way” (*OED* online, “Language”, n.d.). It is arguably the most widespread understanding of the term. As humans who coexist on this earth we are bound to communicate with one another. However not all communication is on a small person to person scale, it also happens on a larger scale through public discourse such as the media. Collective channels like newspapers, TV and radio stations, and, of course, the internet have an enormous influence on our everyday lives and constantly communicate information to us. But communication in neither form is always sincere and straightforward. Not only is language used to share vital and truthful information with one another, it can also be used to manipulate, deceive or control another person, a group of people or even an entire society. Therefore, in order to recognize manipulation through linguistic measures, we have to define and understand what it means.

**Aristotle’s *Rhetoric***

That language can be used for persuasive purposes is ancient knowledge. Aristotle already showed an interest in persuasive language in the fourth century BC, providing us with his three “modes of persuasion”, *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. These concepts, represented by Greek words, are also referred to as the three artistic proofs, ethical strategies or rhetorical appeals and classify a speaker’s appeal to an audience.

Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on
putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself. Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. This kind of persuasion, like the others, should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak. It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses. Secondly, persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions. Our judgements when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile. [...] Thirdly, persuasion is effected through the speech itself when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question (Aristotle, trans. 1954: 8-9).

Aristotle argues that in order to effect persuasion, a person must be in command of all three of these means. The first one, ethos, is also called the ethical appeal and is based on the speaker’s character, credibility and reliability. It is the ability to understand human character and goodness in their various forms. The second, pathos, is the emotional appeal to the needs, values and emotional sensibilities of an audience. It is the ability to understand, name and describe emotions, and to know their causes. The third, logos, is the appeal to reason which relies on logic, and on the use of inductive or deductive reasoning. It is the ability to reason logically.

Since an effective speech depends on these three persuasive modes, it begs the simple question: How are they established and how are they detected? As ethos depends on a person’s credibility, a speaker can create ethos in their speech by referring to their expertise or experience on a subject. A doctor of 20 years might refer to their long-stretching career to exert their authority, for example, and a businesswoman may speak of the many challenges she has overcome in a male-dominated system. Pathos is built upon emotional responses, therefore speakers need to relate to their audience in an emotional way by using a more vivid form of language that has connotative meanings, contains figurative examples, is emotionally loaded, etc. Finally, to appeal to the audience’s sense of logic and reason, and to establish logos in a speech, a speaker might include hard data, facts, statistics and evidence, and may provide the audience with a clear trajectory of consequences to a described action.
Remarkably, Aristotle’s strategies have been used for thousands of years and still find application in the 21st century, and scholars continue to believe that a combination of them are essential in order to make a good argument (cf. “Using Rhetorical Strategies”, *OWL Purdue Online Writing Lab*, n.d.).

**Manipulation Through Language**

According to Kasten (1980), manipulation takes place when there is a difference in kind between what a person intends to do (X) and what they actually do (Y) and when the difference between X and Y is traceable to another person. In other words, a person is said to have been manipulated when their actions differ from their intentions based on the interference of someone else. Therefore, linguistic manipulation is a difference in kind between X and Y that is traceable to another person’s use of language, in such a way that the victim may be said to be mislead (cf. Pratte, 1983: 171). While Kasten and Pratte deal with language manipulation in terms of education, their provided explanations also apply to other fields (politics, the media and advertising, to name a few), where scientific research on the matter is still rather scarce. Some of the most prominent methods of manipulative language are lying, statements which overlook, evade and distort facts, fallacies of relevance, ambiguity, and doublespeak.

**Lying**

In *The Linguistics of Lying and Other Essays*, Weinrich (2005: 8) argues that “[l]ying exists in the world. It is in and around us. It cannot be overlooked.” In relation to linguistics he writes that lying is certainly of concern. People use language to lie and “linguistics can […] describe what happens in language when truth is distorted into lie.”

According to Mahon (2008: 211), there is no universally accepted definition of lying, but he explains that it is not a success or achievement verb, such as ‘deceive’ or ‘persuade’, as the speech act of lying is not a perlocutionary act. An act of lying does, according to him, not depend on “whether a particular effect, such as a false belief, has been produced. A lie that is ‘seen through’ by its audience while it is being told to them, and hence, that does not deceive them, is still a lie.” Therefore, lying does not equal deception, although it is instrumental in order to deceive someone. What actually constitutes lying is subject to interpretation. Mahon lists several cases that can be considered a lie, but are not universally agreed upon.
Although most hold that lying requires that one make a statement, some hold that merely acting in an intentionally deceptive way is lying. On this view, for example, faking a limp is lying. Some even hold that simply remaining silent, with a deceptive intention, is a ‘lie of omission.’ Although most hold that lying requires that one make a statement that one believes to be false (an untruthful statement), some hold that it is possible to lie by making a statement that one believes to be true (a truthful statement), as long as this is done with a deceptive intention. Although most hold that in order to lie one must be addressing someone, some hold that it is possible to lie to no one at all, not even oneself— that, for instance, simply making untruthful statements in an empty room can be lying. Although many hold that lying requires an intention to deceive, even if it does not require that deception occur, some hold that lying does not require any intention to deceive, and that making an untruthful statement under certain conditions is lying, irrespective of intention. Although most hold that lying does not require falsity, and instead only requires believed-falsity (untruthfulness), some hold that lying requires falsity, and that making untruthful statements to others with the intention to deceive is not lying if, unbeknowst to one, what one says just happens to be true. Finally, although most hold that lying requires an intention to deceive about the contents of one’s untruthful statement, some hold that lying also requires an intention to deceive about one’s belief in the truth of one’s untruthful statement. According to them, when one lies, one intends not only that others believe that what one says is true, but also that they believe that one believes that what one says is true. Some even go further, and hold that lying requires a third intention to deceive—an intention that others believe that one intends that they believe that one believes that what one says is true (2008: 211-212).

In order to explain what a lie really is, Mahon investigates several different sources which attempt to explain the act of lying (including Joseph Kupfer and the OED definition), and ultimately comes to the following conclusion, providing his readers with two specific definitions:

(i) To lie (to another person) = to make a believed-false statement (to another person) with the intention that that statement be believed to be true (by the other person).

(ii) To lie (to another person) = to make a believed-false statement (to another person), either with the intention that that statement be believed to be true (by the other person), or with the intention that it be believed (by the other person) that that statement is believed to be true (by the person making the statement), or with both intentions (2008: 227-228).

Per these definitions, in order to lie, the sender must be aware of the fact that the utterance is indeed false, and they must intend to deceive the receiver, or at the very least make them
believe that they hold their utterance to be true. For the scope of this paper, I hold these definitions to be most relevant and appropriate and will refer to the term “lie” in the aforementioned sense.

**Euphemism**

A less direct method of manipulating language in one’s favor is the use of a rhetorical device known as *euphemism*, that is the substitution of a potentially offensive term for a more agreeable or less offensive one (cf. *Merriam-Webster* online, “Euphemism”, n.d.).

While the purpose of a euphemism is relatively straightforward, it can have positive as well as negative effects. Granted, in social interactions the device can add a level of politeness or dignity to an utterance that could otherwise be considered to be uncouth or inappropriate. An obvious example for this are the various terms used in place of describing necessary bodily functions, such as the phrases “to go to the bathroom/ladies’ room/men’s room/powder room, etc. Saying that one is feeling “under the weather” is the more evasive and dignified version of announcing that one is incapacitated by an unfortunate stomach flu, sparing the sender of providing the receiver with a visual of their predicament. In the professional sphere, the rise of political correctness has provided several people with better-sounding job descriptions (“flight attendant” instead of “stewardess”, “personal assistant” instead of “secretary”, “housekeeper” instead of “maid”, etc.). Commercially, people use euphemisms to make something seem to be of superior value (e.g. “pre-owned” instead of “used”, “vegan leather” instead of “vinyl”, “polyurethane” or “synthetic materials”).

However, euphemisms hold the potential of great danger in that they can make something horrible seem more palatable to a large group of people. This is especially problematic in politics, which is why they are of tremendous relevance to the scope of this thesis. Politically speaking, euphemisms have enabled disastrous events in the past, perhaps most notably the Nazi’s rebranding of their genocidal atrocities as “ethnic cleansing” or the “final solution”. The sites of their war crimes where they carried out their mass murders were referred to by them as “family camps” or “work camps”. Ultimately, this allowed a large part of the population to turn a blind eye to the unimaginable horror of the Holocaust and potentially left a considerable amount of people in the dark about what was really going on at the time.
This negative and dangerous use of euphemisms is of major relevance to the core subject of this thesis, and it is my assertion that it is of utmost importance to understand and recognize a euphemistic downplaying of a politically dangerous strategy. Current cases of negative euphemisms in American politics will be discussed and analyzed in part three later on.

Dysphemism

A term closely related to euphemism, in fact one of its antonyms, is dysphemism, i.e. the use of a disagreeable or offensive term in place of an agreeable or inoffensive one (cf. Merriam-Webster online, “Dysphemism”, n.d.). Any pejorative term of the English language can arguably considered to be a dysphemism, as its intention is to offend or insult.

Both euphemism and dysphemism are common doublespeak techniques, discussed in detail below.

Doublespeak

Lutz (1988: 40) defines doublespeak as “language which pretends to communicate but really doesn’t. It is language which makes the bad seem good, the negative appear positive, the unpleasant appear attractive, or at least tolerable.” He says that doublespeak “avoids or shifts responsibility” and is “at variance with its real or its purported meaning.” He further defines it as “language which conceals or prevents thought” and “which does not extend thought but limits it.” One of the most effective examples he provides for doublespeak is the renaming of the U.S. Department of War to the Department of Defense in 1947 (1988: 41). “How much easier is it to spend hundreds of billions of dollars for defense instead of war.”

Coe (1998: 192) discusses the truthfulness of doublespeak, which he calls “a deceitful abuse of language, the use of language to mislead. However egregious, out-and-out lies [...] are not doublespeak; [it] involves statements that are formally true.” Therefore, doublespeak differs from a lie insofar that a factual statement is presented in such a way to deceive. He also argues that “[p]ublic doublespeak is an abuse of language, power and people”, and that it sometimes seems to be an attempt to “use lots of words while actually communicating little information unclearly”, as well as “lead astray”. According to Coe, the essential part of doublespeak is its motive. “To unmask doublespeak, we need to ask not so much ‘what do these words say?’ as ‘what does this utterance do?’”
Doublespeak techniques, per Coe (1998: 194) are “the abuse of euphemism, nominalization, abstraction, presupposition, jargon, titles, and metaphor and other tropes as well as inflated language, gobbledygook [language that has been rendered meaningless by the excessive use of abstruse technical terms], symmetrizing, stimulative definition, and ambiguity.” Many of these will be discussed in further detail later in part two dedicated to political language.

**Loaded Language**

Loaded language, loaded terms or emotive language is is a type of rhetoric which attempts to influence an audience by appealing to emotion or stereotypes. This wording has emotional implications aimed at eliciting strong reactions (positive as well as negative) from the addressee. (cf. Weston 2000: 6; Murray & Kujundzic 2005: 90).

The American analytic philosopher Charles Stevenson (1937, 1938, 1944) dedicated a considerable amount of his time to define these loaded terms, which he also calls emotive or ethical words. He claims that they have a “magnetic effect” and have a tendency to influence the interlocutor’s decisions (1937: 18-19). As an example, he has provided the terms ‘terrorist’, ‘torture’, or ‘freedom’ as emotive words which carry more than a simple description of a person, an action, or a concept (1944: 210).

Frijda & Mesquita (2000: 49) explain that words such as these have moral values attached, causing them to lead to value judgments with the possibility of triggering specific emotions. They are therefore said to have an “emotive dimension” and to carry “emotional valence”.

Their appeal to emotion rather than logic or reason has led them to be exploited in the field of politics. Heller (2002: 54) argues that loaded words often occur in pairs, using them as political framing techniques by people with opposing views. He differentiates between what he calls a “Boo! version” and a “Hooray! version”, i.e. versions which elicit negative or positive reactions, respectively. Some examples are the negative term ‘bureaucrat’ versus the positive ‘public servant’, ‘regime’ versus ‘government’, and ‘elitist’ versus ‘expert’.

Loaded language is also imperative to propaganda, a politically manipulative approach to influence an audience or push a specific agenda, which will be discussed in further detail below.
Propaganda

According to Laswell (1927: 627-631) propaganda is the “management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols.” Its strategy can be defined in the language of stimuli-response, and the propagandist is “concerned with the multiplication of those stimuli which are best calculated to evoke the desired responses, and with the nullification of those stimuli which are likely to instigate the undesired responses.” In other words, propaganda is speech which is intended to influence and manipulate other people’s attitudes, beliefs or actions by means of symbols (cf. B.L. Smith, n.d.). In order for speech to be propaganda and to distinguish it from casual conversation or the free exchange of ideas, it has to be deliberate and to have an emphasis on manipulation.

There are several types of propaganda, the most common being of political and religious nature, but as Schwindt (2016: 202-204) points out, the identification of propaganda has always been difficult. One reason for this problem is the possibility that a group may be biased towards their own literature and material, but view that of an opposing group as propaganda. A concise definition, intended to avoid confusions about what is and is not propaganda is given by Jewett and O’Donnell (2006: 7), who explain that propaganda is “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognition, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.”

Laswell (1927: 631) argues that “propaganda rose to transitory importance in the past whenever a social system based upon the sanctions of antiquity was broken up by a tyrant.” As Winter (2014) presents, the first large-scale case of government propaganda was caused by the outbreak of WWI in 1914. A probable reason for the outbreak of propaganda as a public manipulation tool is provided by Laswell (1927: 631), who explains that “[m]ost of that which formerly could be done by violence and intimidation must now be done by argument and persuasion. Democracy has proclaimed the dictatorship of palaver, and the technique of dictating to the dictator is named propaganda.”

The subject of propaganda in relation to U.S. political discourse has gained considerable significance over the last couple of months because of the on-going fake news debate between Donald Trump and his opposition. Fake news is propaganda that is spread via print, broadcast or social media. Further insight into this conundrum will be provided in part three focused on Trump era language.
Part Two:

POLITICAL LANGUAGE

Much like in any other domain, there is a certain type of language found within the world of politics. But unlike medical or legal jargon, which are used for communication within their respective ranks, political language is a tool used for communicating information to the outside—the public, the people of a country. Addressing the people has always been done in a particular type of way and there are several reasons why politicians engage in this form of discourse.

George Orwell, whose novel *1984* about an absolutist regime has once again gained considerable attention over the past year, as people have applied several poignant passages to the strained and tense political climate of our time. But *1984* is not Orwell’s only contribution to politically centered discourse; his 1946 essay “Politics and the English Language” criticizes the debasement of the English language and analyzes its connection to political orthodoxies. “Political language—and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists”, he writes, “is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.” (cf. 1946: 139).

According to Orwell (1946: 136), “political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible”. He argues that “political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness.” This chapter will investigate the markings of political language and lay the basis for this thesis by exploring what political speech typically means, what it entails and what its effects are.

How to Recognize a Political Rhetoric

Political language can take many forms, but Kettemann (2009) argues that it “can basically be defined as persuasive.” We can therefore conclude that the aim of political language is to persuade or influence people to comply with one’s agenda. The previous chapter already established some rules for how language is used to persuade and manipulate, and these following pages will show and explain how language is used to do just that in the field of politics by providing the relevant rhetorical strategies and figures used by politicians.
Rhetorical Strategies

A rhetorical strategy is a method of persuasively communicating an idea using one’s speech. Politicians consciously employ numerous rhetorical strategies in their speeches and their general communication with the public in order to influence them in their favor. The most common methods are listed below.

Identification of the speaker with the audience:

- building up on some local connection; acting extraordinarily “modest”; welcoming the listeners in climaxing order; captatio benevolentiae (seeks to secure goodwill) etc.

Polarization of issues:

- emphasizing the contrast between one’s own opinion and those of others; being enthusiastic about the issue etc.

Repetition of central thesis:

- how the speaker makes sure everyone gets their point

“We are here to keep this promise [...] And I intend to keep this promise”

Parallelism of syntactic structures:

- the repetition of phrases

“Let freedom ring [...] Let freedom ring [...]”

Use of euphemism:

- making expressions with negative associations sound better

e.g.: referring to “bombings” as “attacks by air” (© Lyndon B. Johnson)

Use of connotation:

- used to emphasize meaning

Illusion of proof:

- making assumptions seem like facts
Rhetorical Figures

Del Mar (1842: 113) defines rhetorical figures or figures of speech as “a peculiar expression of sentiment different from the ordinary way.” He explains that it is used in writing, as well as in speaking, and describes it as “ornamental language”, which is frequently used “in order to render discourse more empathetic, striking, or elegant.”

Kettemann (2009) has compiled a comprehensive list of rhetorical figures frequently used in politics. He explains that repetition is very common in political speeches and “enables the listener to think about what has been said”, while it “helps the speaker to emphasize the crucial statements and the listener to remember them.” He distinguishes two kinds: phonetic repetition, which is comprised of consonance (the same or similar consonants occurring in close succession), assonance (the same or similar vowels occurring in close succession), and alliteration (the same word initial consonants occurring in close succession), and lexical repetition, which refers to the same words occurring repeatedly in a speech.

Lists of three (or more) mediate “a feeling of unity and completeness” and often appear in a climaxing order. According to Eidenmueller (2004, see Kettemann 2009), politicians frequently list causes, effects, problems, solutions, and consequences. Per Atkinson (1988: 60, see Kettemann 2009), this strengthens the message.

Among the most common rhetorical devices are metaphors, which refer to the “analogy between two ideas, conveyed by the use of one word instead of another”, and which Kettemann argues can be “more effective than literal wording” and may “emphasize the message”, causing it to be “more likely to be remembered”. Similar to the metaphor is the simile, which compares ideas directly by the use of comparative words.

Kettemann (1997: 9) argues that “research has shown that antithesis”, the method of emphasizing or praising oneself, one’s own party, ideology or opinion, and contrasting it with one’s opponent, “is an effective rhetorical figure to evoke spontaneous applause by the audience.” Furthermore, it is used to simplify different points of view.

In order to raise tension, politicians frequently employ rhetorical questions, a question that is posed without the intention of receiving an answer. According to Eidenmueller (2004, see Kettemann 2009), a rhetorical question does not serve the purpose of further discussion, but of asserting or denying an answer, or has an answer that is either obvious or implied.
A climax “aims to affect people’s emotions and feelings” and is used to “raise tension and underline [the] importance of a statement.” It consists of “words, phrases or sentences arranged in order of increasing importance.” The listeners are supposed to remember the last point – the most striking one.

Emphatic effect is achieved by doubling words which express similar concepts that can be, but are not necessarily, synonymous, a rhetorical device called hendiadys, and by employing hyperbole, i.e. exaggeration. To make themselves stand out, politicians use contrast to highlight their own impact during a speech.

Intertextual references through allusions are very common, especially in US politics (e.g. the founding myth, etc.), as are localisms, intended to connect the speaker to their listeners.

Finally, political speeches often attempt to make complex problems appear much simpler than they are. This process of simplification is especially convenient for when a politician wants to make an unpopular option seem inevitable.

The Language of Political Campaigns

A political campaign is an organized effort which seeks to influence the decision making process within a specific group. In democracies, political campaigns often refer to electoral campaigns, where representatives are chosen or referendums are decided. In modern politics, the most high profile political campaigns are focused on candidates for head of state or head of government, often a President or Prime Minister (boundless.com, “The Modern Political Campaign”, n.d.).

Whether a run for local office or big league government, political campaigns have become almost indispensable in the fight for political positions. The past year has been politically divisive and has arguably revealed a very ugly side of society. The Austrian presidential election, which was repeated twice and which liberal candidate Prof. Alexander van der Bellen could decide in his favor against right-wing conservative candidate Norbert Hofer both times, occupied the Austrian news and public discourse for almost all of 2016. Earlier this year, France was equally divided in a similar situation, with progressive candidate Emmanuel Macron facing off, and winning, against right-wing candidate Marine Le Pen. While Austria and France managed to defeat the populist and nationalist surge that seems to be sweeping the nation, the United States election went into an unfortunate different direction, electing Republican candidate Donald Trump to the highest office in the country, defeating the weathered
and highly politically experienced former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in the process.

While most political campaigns, the aforementioned ones included, are long and relentless, American campaigning appears to be the most extensive, especially when it comes to presidential elections. Public speeches, posters, tour rallies, TV appearances, and numerous ads and commercials are spread out over more than a year, in an attempt to get as many votes as possible and to ultimately decide the election in one’s favor. These following pages will examine the language aspect of a political campaign by examining typically American campaign discourse, and by giving and analyzing some famous examples of campaign material.

The Campaign Slogan

According to presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, campaign slogans “can be crucial if they capture a mood of the country or a quality of the candidate or a promise to the electorate. It doesn't often happen but when it does, the slogan provides a shorthand for the entire campaign.” (cf. Tompkins 2004). Indeed, the slogan is crucial, as we often still remember it years later. While it may only consist of a few words, it can carry significant weight in political discourse and signify the entirety of the campaign. The following pages will list some notable examples and illustrate how language is used in typical slogans.

I Like Ike

A prominent example of a campaign slogan that is still on people’s minds today is Dwight Eisenhower’s 1952 chant “I Like Ike”, a simple rhyme that expresses affinity for the presidential candidate and eventual officer-in-chief. One of the first campaign ads on television, which was produced by Walt Disney Studios with a campaign song by Irving Berlin, the short upbeat spot featured an animated Uncle Sam leading a group of Eisenhower supporters who chanted “Ike for President” (TIME, “Top 10 Campaign Ads”, n.d.; YouTube, “i like ike”, 2006). For his re-election campaign four years later, he chose something simpler and more classic, expressing a longing for “Peace and Prosperity”. This simple alliteration stresses the importance of peace and pairs it with prosperity, likely intending to express that peaceful times are also prosperous for the country.
The Stakes are too High for You to Stay Home

This slogan, accompanying Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1964 campaign also made use of alliterations, in a very clever way no less. Repeating the st in “stakes” and “stay”, and the h in “high” and “home”, the two parts of the slogan are linked together. The message itself is on the more negative side as it appeals to fear, urging people to vote for him in order to prevent a win by his opponent, Barry Goldwater, who was criticized for holding extremist views (PresidentsUSA.net, “1964 Presidential Campaign Slogans”, n.d.).

It’s Morning Again in America

Ronald Reagan’s 1984 re-election campaign ad, stressing Reagan’s economic successes over the preceding four years, began with the line “It’s morning again in America”, and has been called one of the most effective campaign ads of all time (cf. Time, “Top 10 Campaign Ads”, n.d.). It uses the metaphorical meaning of “morning” to indicate American’s improving economy after the recession in the early 80’s. The imagery of a morning implies that there is a new day, intending to signify a renewal of America’s economic power under Reagan.

It’s the Economy, Stupid!

The early 1990’s were defined by an economic crisis and a recession that lasted from July 1990 to March 1991 (cf. NBER, “NBER Business Cycle Dating Committee - March 1991”, n.d.), which was characterized by a sluggish employment recovery and unemployment rates which continued to rise through June 1992 (cf. Lisa Smith, n.d.). Bill Clinton’s bold campaign made waves with the slogan, “It’s the economy, stupid!”, a provocative dysphemism that harshly addressed U.S. citizens as “stupid” and bluntly pointed out the fact that the economy under George H. W. Bush was failing. It was a daring move that starkly deviated from slogans which had come before, but it worked as Clinton’s 370 electoral votes and a popular vote of 43% clearly indicate (cf. The American Presidency Project, “Election of 1992”, n.d.).

Real Plans for Real People/Reformer With Results/Compassionate Conservatism

During his 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush showed the world that he, too, likes a good alliteration. Three of his frequently used slogans followed the same simple con-
cept that year and stressed his political affiliation by naming his conservative stance. I would also argue that it is not a coincidence that a Republican candidate used r-based consonances in not one, but two slogans. Rhetorically speaking it is far more effective than “Government Of, By, and For the People… Not the Monied Interests” used by Green Party candidate Ralph Nader, which is arguably too long and too unconventional for a campaign slogan.

**Change/Hope/Yes We Can**

Barack Obama’s campaign was defined by simple statements that were at once positive affirmations of a historic run (he was, after the all, the first black presidential nominee and president) and descriptive of his heritage. “Change”, which was also used as “Change We Need”, as well as, “Change We Can Believe In”, has strong undercurrents of his African-American roots, with his candidacy being a historical milestone for African-American civil rights. “Hope” itself is a strong, emotionally loaded word that has a lot of positive connotations. Coming from a black presidential candidate it could arguably be said to lead a movement forward for black Americans, and for other minorities as well. “Yes We Can” is perhaps the best known chant of Obama’s presidency; the fact that it accompanied his win as the first black president arguably gives it even stronger connotations (cf. *Wikipedia*, “List of U.S. presidential campaign slogans”, n.d.).

I’m With Her

This affirmation of support accompanied Hillary Clinton’s campaign, who also wrote history as the first female Democratic presidential candidate. It also plays to her minority status as a woman, perhaps even more strongly than Barack Obama’s four years prior, by including the female pronoun “her” in the slogan. While Hillary’s campaign was a major milestone for women in politics and was widely hailed as breaking the glass ceiling, her being a woman arguably contributed to her losing the election in the end, as America is still far from being a post-sexist, post-racial country (cf. Wikipedia, “List of U.S. presidential campaign slogans”, n.d.).

Various Slogans Featuring Plays On Words With the Candidates’ Names

- “Win with Wilson” - Woodrow Wilson (1912)
- “Keep Cool and Keep Coolidge” - Calvin Coolidge (1924)
- “Honest Days With Davis” - John W. Davis (1924)
- “Who but Hoover?” - Herbert Hoover (1928)
- “All for ‘Al’ and ‘Al’ for All.” - Al Smith (1928)
- “Let’s Make It a Landon-Slide” and “Life, Liberty, and Landon” - Alfred M. Landon (1936)
- “We Want Wilkie” and “Win with Wilkie” - Wendell L. Wilkie (1940)
- “Dewey or don’t we” - Thomas E. Dewey (1944)
- “Dew it with Dewey” - Thomas E. Dewey (1948)
- “Work with Wallace” - Henry A. Wallace (1948)
- “All the way with LBJ” - Lyndon B. Johnson (1964)
- “Dick Nixon Before He Dicks You” - Anti-Nixon slogan (1972)
- “They can’t lick our Dick” - Pro-Nixon slogan (1972)
- “Ross for Boss” - Ross Perot (1992)
- “Building a bridge to the twenty-first century” - Bill Clinton (1996)
- “TRUSTED” - Ted Cruz (2016)
- “Can’t Stump the Trump” - Donald Trump (2016)
• “Jeb!” - Jeb Bush (2016)
• “Feel the Bern” - Pro-Bernie Sanders slogan (2016)


These examples highlight the popularity of puns for political campaigns. Most notably, there are numerous cases of alliteration (“Win with Wilson”, “We Want Wilkie”, “Life, Liberty and Landon”, etc.). Rhymes (“Ross for Boss”, “All the way with LBJ”, “Can’t Stump the Trump”, etc.) have also appeared frequently, as they certainly increase a slogan’s memorability.

While some campaigns took a very simple approach (Jeb Bush’s campaign slogan “Jeb!” stands out as an unintentionally funny and strange example), others, like Thomas E. Dewey’s slogans, were more creative and clever, however they appear to have failed to appeal to voters. Alfred M. Landon’s “Let’s Make It a Landon-Slide” is rather ironic in hindsight, considering that he only won two states when he ran against Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1936. Evidently it was a landslide, just not in his favor.

Bill Clinton’s “Building a bridge to the twenty-first century”, which at first glance seems as if it should not belong on this list, is perhaps the most clever one of them all. While his name does not directly appear, the slogan starts with the word ‘build’, making it a phonetic pun that I would argue is hardly unintentional. The message is very strong and powerful, placing Clinton as a proactive candidate who aims to progressively move the country into the new millennium. Furthermore, the slogan may play off of the title of cultural critic Neil Postman’s Building a Bridge to the 18th Century, in which he celebrates the accomplishments of the Enlightenment era and outlines how learning from the past can help build a better future.

The Campaign Ad

Another essential instrument to most political campaigns is the TV commercial, which in the U.S. is utilized for smaller local campaigns, as well as large national ones.

John F. Kennedy’s “Kennedy for Me” (1960)

Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy
Ken-ne-dy for me
Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy

Do you want a man for president who’s seasoned through and through?
But not so dog-toned seasoned that he won’t try something new?
A man who’s old enough to know and young enough to do?
Well, it’s up to you, it’s up to you, it’s strictly up to you.

Do you like a man who answers straight, a man who's always fair?
Well, measure him against the others and when you compare,
You’ll cast your vote for Kennedy and a change that’s overdue.
So, it’s up to you, it’s up to you, it’s strictly up to you.

Yeah, it’s Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy
Ken-ne-dy for me
(cf. YouTube, “Kennedy for Me (Campaign jingle JFK 1960)”, 2011)

The youngest man to ever be elected president in the United States, Kennedy’s ad used his youth as an asset (“old enough to know and young enough to do”) and established ethos by arguing his experience as a politician (“seasoned through and through”). The jingle used in what, according to Walsh (2013), was the first television election made certain to use all three of Aristotle’s rhetorical strategies, adding pathos in the form of appealing to the audience’s agency (“it’s strictly up to you”, “Ken-ne-dy for me”) by reminding them that they have a real stake in the election. By calling upon their good sense and reason (“measure him against the others and when you compare, you’ll cast your vote for Kennedy”), the ad establishes logos and tells the audience that Kennedy is the only logical choice.

**Ronald Reagan 1984 Re-Election Campaign**

Here’s the difference between the two ways of dealing with the nation’s economy.

With Reaganomics, you cut taxes. With Mondalenomics, you raise taxes.


With Reaganomics, you create incentives that move us all forward. With Mondalenomics, you raise taxes.
They both work. The difference is Reaganomics works for you. Mondalenomics works against you.

For his re-election campaign, Reagan also made sure to infuse his ad with a combination of rhetorical strategies. By referring to his economic strategy as “Reaganomics”, a term which is still widely known today, he establishes ethos by highlighting his four years of government experience that allowed him to have an economic plan, unlike Walter Mondale. By referring to Mondale’s economic strategy as “Mondalenomics”, he arguably discredits his aptitude simply because the word lacks the same flow as “Reaganomics”, which people had already gotten used to at that point.

The way in which the ad adds pathos is very subtle and implicit, but there is a notable appeal to people’s emotions by highlighting the various different ways in which Reagan wants to improve people’s lives (“cut deficits through growth and less government”, “create incentives that move us all forward”) and contrasting them with the claim that all Mondale wants to do is raise taxes. This positions him as a candidate who cares and has a diversified strategy, eliciting an emotional response in his audience.

Finally, he infuses the ad with logos in a very straightforward manner by simply stating that “Reaganomics works for you. Mondalenomics works against you.”, a strong claim with a clear logical message.

*Barack Obama, “The Choice” (2012)*

Over the next four months you have a choice to make. Not just between two political parties or even two people. It's a choice between two very different plans for our country.

Governor Romney's plan would cut taxes for the folks at the very top, roll back regulations on big banks, and he says that if we do our economy will grow and everyone will benefit.

But you know what? We tried that top-down approach. It's what caused the mess in the first place.

I believe the only way to create an economy built to last is to strengthen the middle class. Asking the wealthy to pay a little more so we can pay down our debt in a
balanced way. So that we can afford to invest in education, manufacturing, and homegrown American energy for good middle class jobs. Sometimes politics can seem very small. But the choice you face, it couldn't be bigger.  
(cf. YouTube, ""The Choice" - Obama For America TV Ad", 2012)

Unsurprisingly, as a president with a large following of young and enthusiastic people, Obama’s ad relied heavily on pathos. He appealed to the urgency of the election and what was at stake (“two very different plans for our country”, “the choice you face, it couldn’t be bigger”). Furthermore he talks in a very casual, familiar manner, appearing to be on the same level as his voters, to be a part of the people. His ethos is established by stressing how much he cares about middle class Americans and by explaining his plan for the country. Considering the strong emotional tone of his message, he infuses it with logos in a more subtle manner, but stressing that Mitt Romney’s plan has been tried in the past and failed. While many politicians have finished with such a statement by contrasting it with their own approach, he only mentions it briefly in the middle before going back to a more emotionally resonant message.

American Political Rhetoric

While the political rhetorical strategies and figures outlined in the beginning of this chapter certainly apply to political language universally, American political rhetoric is arguably defined by its own unique idea of America and what it means to be an American.

American Exceptionalism

One very common feature in American politics is the emphasis on the notion of American exceptionalism. Political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset (1963, 1996) has discussed this at length and has provided one of three ideas explaining the term. According to him (1996: 18) it is the notion that the history of the United States is quite unique and inherently different from any other nation. He argues that American exceptionalism stems from the American Revolution, which led the country to become what he has called “the first new nation” and to develop the unique ideology of “Americanism” (discussed in more detail later on).

Another idea of American exceptionalism goes back to Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg address (1863), which states that it is America’s duty to ensure that “government of the peo-
ple, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” It has led to the notion that
the U.S. has a unique mission to transform the world (cf. Wood, 2011).

Finally, the term holds the sense that its history and this mission give the U.S. a superiority
over other nations, very evident in the fact that the President of the United States is, among
other terms, often referred to as the ‘leader of the free world’, which either makes it sound
like the United States are the only nation in the world that is free, or that their president leads
all the free nations, giving him much more importance and power than he actually possesses.

The term can be traced back to French political scientist and historian Alexis de Tocqueville
(1840: 36), who first described the U.S. as “exceptional”, writing that “[t]he position
of the Americans is therefore quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no other democratic
people will ever be placed in a similar one.”

This view of America as unique, whether that is good or bad, has held up rather consistently.
Scottish political scientist Richard Rose (1989: 92) also suggests that “America marches
to a different drummer”, and that “[i]ts uniqueness is explained by any or all of a variety of
reasons: history, size, geography, political institutions, and culture.”

Despite the term and the notion persisting, the idea has become more debated and criti-
cized in recent years, especially by postnationalist scholars, such as David W. Noble, who argue
that the United States never broke from European history and have therefore retained
class-based and race-based differences, imperialism, and a willingness to wage wars. Roberts
and DiCuirci (2013: 9) have debated the usefulness of the concept, as well, asking:

Why has the myth of American exceptionalism, characterized by a belief in America's highly distinctive features or unusual trajectory based on the abundance of its natural resources, its revolutionary origins and its Protestant religious culture that anticipated God's blessing of the nation, held such tremendous staying power, from its influence in popular culture to its critical role in foreign policy?

Zinn (1980, 2007) has completely rejected the notion of America as being exceptional,
arguing that its history of slavery, civil rights and social welfare issues render it so morally
flawed that it cannot be an exemplar of virtue, and that it cannot be of divine origin consider-
ing its history with Native Americans.
Americanism

What makes us American is not a question of what we look like, or where our names come from, or the way we pray. What makes us American is our fidelity to a set of ideals – that all of us are created equal; that all of us deserve the chance to make of our lives what we will; that all of us share an obligation to stand up, speak out, and secure our most cherished values for the next generation. That’s how America has traveled this far. That’s how, if we keep at it, we will ultimately reach that more perfect union (Obama, 2017, Facebook).

Americanism as an ideology is a set of patriotic values as a means to create a collective identity and to define what it means to be “American”. The term itself has two different meanings, referring to the defining characteristics of the U.S., and signifying loyalty to the U.S. and a defense of American political ideals (such as self-government, equal opportunity, freedom of speech, a belief in progress, etc.). It can be defined as “an articulation of the nation's rightful place in the world, a set of traditions, a political language, and a cultural style imbued with political meaning” (cf. Kazin and McCartin, 2006). The American Legion (2012) has described it as the following:

Americanism is an unfailing love of country; loyalty to its institutions and ideals; eagerness to defend it against all enemies; individual allegiance to the flag; and a desire to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and posterity.

Theodore Roosevelt (1894) has defined Americanism as a “question of spirit, conviction, and purpose, not of creed or birthplace.”

Like the notion of American exceptionalism, Americanism, I would argue, needs to be taken with a grain of salt and should not just be accepted as a fact. These ideals and virtues, while noble, are certainly not representative of life in the United States, neither of their history, nor of what they are today. Nevertheless, knowing and understanding these narratives is essential to understanding U.S. American political rhetoric, as these ideals are a recurring theme in political speeches and other texts.
The Language of Presidents

Researchers at Carnegie Mellon University’s Language Technologies Institute, as reported by Spice (2016) conducted a readability analysis of presidential candidate speeches and found that most candidates use vocabulary and grammar at a sixth to eighth-grade level.

Historically, Abraham Lincoln ranks the highest linguistically, with an eleventh-grade grammar level, whereas George W. Bush shows the lowest grammatical competence at a fifth-grade level. The study also compared the speech levels of 2016 presidential race candidates Ted Cruz, Hillary Clinton, Marco Rubio, Bernie Sanders, and Donald Trump, with Sanders ranking the highest and Trump receiving the lowest score (view chart below).

Spice mentions another analysis by the Boston Globe earlier, using the Flesch-Kincaid readability test based on average sentence length and number of syllables per word, which found Trump speaking at a fourth-grade level.

According to Trump himself, however, he has “the best words”, as he boasted during a campaign speech in December 2015 (cf. Jones 2015).

They [the State Department] say one of the achievements of the year is bringing peace to Syria, and the whole world is talking about it, it’s—it’s—the level of stupidity is incredible. I’m telling you, I used to use the word incompetent. Now I just call them stupid. I went to an Ivy League school. I’m very highly educated. I
know words, I have the best words, I have the be– but there’s no better word than stupid, right? There is none. There is none.

This statement perfectly encapsulates Trump’s rhetoric, completely devoid of humility or any type of filter, spouting whatever is on his mind. His odd, at times incoherent speeches have garnered him a sizable amount of ridicule from reporters, comedians, and on social media, and prompted him to vow the following in February of 2016.

Now my wife is constantly saying, “Darling, be more presidential.” I just don’t know that I wanna do it quite yet, Jeffrey, because we have a job to do. [...] And we’re doing so good, and we have to be tough for a little while. And I’ll be—at some point—I’m gonna be so presidential that you people will be so bored and I’ll come back as a presidential person, and instead of ten thousand people I’ll have about a hundred-and-fifty people and they’ll say, “But boy, he really looks presidential.” (cf. The Guardian, “Trump: ‘I’m gonna be so presidential that you will be so bored’ - video”, 2016).

The following final part will provide a detailed look at Donald Trump’s language by analyzing select statements from interviews, speeches and other utterances he has made over the past year as a presidential candidate and eventual President of the United States, and argue whether or not he has become so presidential yet.
The inflated style is itself a kind of euphemism. A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all the details. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one’s real and one’s declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink. In our age there is no such thing as ‘keeping out of politics’. All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer (Orwell 1946: 136-137).

While Orwell criticized political language in general, and I would agree that all political language is, to varying degrees, insincere, there has been an undeniable shift in political discourse since that fateful day last November, when Donald J. Trump was elected president of the United States of America.

The candidacy, and subsequent win, of Trump for the highest office in the country marked a severe turning point for the United States’ already fragile political system. The two leading political parties, as well as the country as a whole, seem more divided than ever under Trump, who, less than a year after his surprising election win, is already billed as the least popular president with historically low approval ratings.

While his candidacy was marked by campaign speeches that incited violence at his countless rallies, his presidency has likewise been defined by a myriad of odd events and puzzling speeches. This chapter will delve into the befuddling rhetoric of Trump and his administration and show how the meaning of political language under Trump has changed so severely.

Trump’s Use of Language

Jordan, Vedhara and Pepper (2017) have compared and contrasted the language use of Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn during the UK’s latest election and compared the results they obtained with the language used by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Their findings prove that Trump is far from the norm set by other professional politicians. In the ‘Analytic Thinking’ category Trump scored overwhelmingly low, and they claim that he “has stood out as being an exceptionally intuitive, informal thinker both as a candidate and as a president.” Analytical thinking skills, according to Manning (2014), is critical for tasks such as gathering information, and articulating, visualizing and solving complex problems. Moreover, Hillary Clinton scored considerably higher than Trump in this category. In an analysis of Trump’s inaugural address, Jordan and Pennebaker (2017) argue that Trump is incapable of more logical and hierarchical thinking, evident by the fact that he rarely makes if-then statements.

Another notable one of their findings is that Trump scored rather high in the ‘Authenticity’ category, meaning that he comes across as authentic and personal. This however, does not mean that the things he said were true, but that he made them appear to be true. Many times during his campaign and even now months into his presidency, people have stressed that Trump “tells it like it is”. Despite the fact that his claims have been proven to be false countless times, his supporters still believe that Trump is telling the truth due to his authentic persona. According to Jordan, Vedhara and Pepper, authentic individuals “tend to use more I-words, present-tense verbs and relativity words (e.g. old, far, here) and fewer she-he words and discrepancies (e.g. could, should).”

John McWhorter (2017), professor of linguistics at Columbia University, recently appeared on MSNBC to discuss the speech of Donald Trump, whom he called “linguistically unadorned”, i.e. speaking a basic form of language, the kind he imagines language to have been like when it emerged and there was no writing yet. He also remarks that he does not find him “linguistically challenged” as much as someone who is “oddly adolescent”, especially considering his age.

He speaks like someone who paid no attention to one of the goals of education, which is to refine our natural inborn proclivities of speech, which are great for casual circumstances, but he uses those same ways of speaking in what most of us used to consider formal or important circumstances (cf. McWhorter 2017).
Moreover, he explains that Trump is reinforcing his statements by adding tags such as “believe me” at the end of his sentences, and that he does so even in formal circumstances, “he never leaves the realm of the casual”, which, as McWhorter pointed out, “is unlike even indigenous societies”, where there was always a high and a low way of speaking.

During their interview, MSNBC’s Brian Williams provided some examples of Trump saying “People don’t know...” in place of “I just learned...” during his speeches, which, McWhorter explains, is a strategy of seeming ahead of everyone else. Furthermore, he argues that “there are only so many thoughts” and that he often speaks without having any new insight, which he then covers by saying things like “believe me” and “more than ever before”, or by exaggerating statements adding the word “very”. These, according to McWhorter, are Trump’s ways of using the filler “um” or scratching his head. “Often, the content of what he’s saying is much slimmer than the bulk [...] of the verbiage that he spews out.”

Regarding a possible change in the linguistics of Trump, McWhorter expressed serious doubt. Concluding the interview, he argued the reasoning for Trump’s peculiar use of language, namely that he is definitely a narcissist who has no interest in language as an art form. He states that Trump’s rudimentary grasp of language depends sorely on his lack of interest.

I don’t think he’s gonna change in that way. He simply has no ‘deodorant wearing Sunday best’ way of speaking and that includes that you have to have a more responsible sense of truth than when you’re just BS-ing with your pals. When we speak casually, all the time we say things where maybe if we checked up on it things might be different. He doesn’t understand that if you’re president of the United States you can’t just talk. It looks like you’re just talking because you’re moving your mouth and vibrating your vocal chords, but there’s this other art that you’re supposed to master. He wasn’t interested in that sort of thing, say, in school. This is somebody who was numb to the artful, he has a rather narcotic joy in dismissal and belittlement, rather than building and decorating. And so he’s gonna keep running up against that wall, he doesn’t understand that when you’re president you have to think about things such as what we might call ‘truth conditions’ in linguistics (cf. McWhorter 2017).

The content of the following pages will be dedicated to linguistic analyses of Trump’s speech, as well as investigate the communicative modus operandi of the Trump administration, ranging from his campaign manager Kellyanne Conway’s incessant twists, such as renaming their lies ‘alternative facts’, to Sean Spicer’s short-lived position as Press Secretary.
and their joint effort to declare war on the media, to Trump’s recent troublesome name-calling of Kim Jong Un in an undiplomatic face-off about nuclear power.

**The Incoherent Speeches of Donald Trump**

While listening to Trump speak may leave one with a head-scratching sense of befuddlement, reading transcriptions of his speeches seems even odder and highlights Trumps aforementioned intuitive communicative style. This following section will provide selected transcripts of various public speeches held by the current commander in chief and analyze their peculiar Trumpian features.

**Magnolia Hall, July 2016**

Look, having nuclear—my uncle was a great professor and scientist and engineer, Dr. John Trump at MIT; good genes, very good genes, OK, very smart, the Wharton School of Finance, very good, very smart—you know, if you’re a conservative Republican, if I were a liberal, if like, OK, if I ran as a liberal Democrat, they would say I’m one of the smartest people anywhere in the world—it’s true!—but when you’re a conservative Republican they try—oh, do they do a number—that’s why I always start off: Went to Wharton, was a good student, went there, went there, did this, built a fortune—you know I have to give my credentials all the time, because we’re a little disadvantaged—but you look at the nuclear deal, the thing that really bothers me—it would have been so easy, and it’s not as important as these lives are—nuclear is powerful; my uncle explained that to me many, many years ago, the power and that was 35 years ago; he would explain the power of what’s going to happen and he was right—who would have thought?—but when you look at what’s going on with the four prisoners—now it used to be three, now it’s four—but when it was three and even now, I would have said it’s all in the messenger; fellas, and it is fellas because, you know, they don’t, they haven’t figured that the women are smarter right now than the men, so, you know, it’s gonna take them about another 150 years—but the Persians are great negotiators, the Iranians are great negotiators, so, and they, they just killed, they just killed us (cf. Allegretti, 2016).

Trump held this 90-second-speech in July 2016 to an audience of 500 at Sun City’s Magnolia Hall in South Carolina, and shortly after a transcribed version gained considerable traction on social media. While the exact message of this rambling minute-and-a-half is rather unclear, there is plenty of content to decipher. One highly ironic takeaway from this ill-advise speech, however, is Trump’s assertion that he would be considered one of the most in-
telligent people in the world were it not for his being a republican candidate, and that this exact political affiliation has somehow left him at a disadvantage.

Image 4: Trump Speaking at Magnolia Hall (YouTube, [Online]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeI9p5laE4E. Retrieved October 17, 2017.)

Linguistically, all the typical markers of a Trump speech, as discussed by McWhorter in his MSNBC interview, are there. Speaking in an overwhelmingly intuitive manner, his thought process is almost impossible to follow. While a seasoned politician would approach a speech about nuclear matters (although it is unclear if this is even the case here) in an analytical way, Trump jumps back and forth between various broken sentences, making no clear arguments. He seemingly starts this speech about nuclear power, but before he can even get to that word he interrupts himself midway into his opening sentence by going on a tirade about his family’s history as the supposed intelligentsia, highlighting his opinionated statement with the word ‘very’ four times in one sentence, but before he finishes this train of thought, he steers into yet another direction, claiming that he receives insufficient credit for his self-proclaimed intellect. To add an allure of credibility to his statement, he randomly throws in the term “it’s true!”, before he eventually mentions the world ‘nuclear’ again. His incoherent address continues to mention prisoners, and both the terms ‘Persians’ and ‘Iranians’, which might leave someone to wonder if he is even aware that they are the same people, but it ultimately culminates in nothing. This speech is on par with McWhorter’s assessment of Trump; he talks a lot, but he does not really speak.

It might be noteworthy to point out that this speech was held in July of last year, the same month in which he became the official Republican nominee, and mere three months before he would win the seat for the highest office in the United States.
Interview with The New York Times, July 2017

In a recent interview with The New York Times, Trump made several worrisome statements, among them an admission that he abused his presidential power, and a complaint against Attorney General Jeff Sessions for not obstructing justice on the president’s behalf (cf. Cohen 2017). The interview’s main takeaway, per the Boston Globe’s Michael A. Cohen, is Trump’s “ignorance and incoherence”. He criticizes Trump’s obvious lack of knowledge regarding health insurance, which he believes the average person starts paying at 21 and which costs $12 a year. The fact that the officer-in-chief, who for the last several months has tirelessly tried (and failed) to repeal Obamacare, thinks that health insurance in the United States costs $12 a month should arguably be enough to convince even the most uneducated of his supporters that he does not even possess a basic understanding of the workings of the health care system, yet he goes on by praising himself on his efforts in a familiar manner.

I have great relationships with Congress. I think we’re doing very well and I think we have a great foundation for future things. We’re going to be applying, I shouldn’t tell you this, but we’re going to be announcing, probably on Wednesday, tax reform. And it’s—we’ve worked on it long and hard. And you’ve got to understand, I’ve only been here now 93 days, 92 days. President Obama took 17 months to do Obamacare. I’ve been here 92 days but I’ve only been working on the health care, you know I had to get like a little bit of grounding right? Health care started after 30 day(s), so I’ve been working on health care for 60 days. [...] You know, we’re very close. And it’s a great plan, you know, we have to get it approved (cf. Cohen 2017).

As usual, Trump amplifies his statements with words like ‘great’ and ‘very’, while following a non-linear train of thought. Moreover, he uses frequent repetition and the tag ‘you know’, which McWhorter (2017) explains is a typical attempt to increase credibility. On the content-level, it is a statement full of self-praise without disclosing any actual information at all.

However, this glaring stream of misinformation that he attempts to pass off as true is not the only typical feature of Trump discourse in the interview. The following statement on foreign policy is riddled with his infamous speech markers.

Crimea was gone during the Obama administration, and he gave, he allowed it to get away. You know, he can talk tough all he wants, in the meantime he talked tough to North Korea. And he didn’t actually. He didn’t talk tough to North Korea.
You know, we have a big problem with North Korea. Big. Big, big. You look at all of the things, you look at the line in the sand. The red line in the sand in Syria. He didn’t do the shot. I did the shot. Had he done that shot, he wouldn’t have had — had he done something dramatic, because if you remember, they had a tremendous gas attack after he made that statement. Much bigger than the one they had with me (cf. Cohen 2017).

Once again, it is a mysterious message to decipher. Trump claims that former president Obama “talked tough” to North Korea, only to immediately recant this statement. He starts a sentence with “You know”, once again attempting to make what follows appear more believable, and then repeats the word ‘big’ three times in a row for emphasis. His subsequent take-down of what appears to be Obama and his involvement in Syria is predictably difficult to interpret, made all the more cryptic by yet another break mid-sentence. Cohen argues that “Trump jumps from one idea to another like a leap frog leaping from lily pad to lily pad” and that he “regurgitates snippets of information that he appears to have gleaned from watching television, with no apparent sense of how they are connected to each other.”

Rhetorically, it is difficult to determine what Trump attempted to do. While the ambiguity and evasiveness of his speech is characteristic for doublespeak, his message does not appear well planned or particularly thought out to qualify as that. The several lexical repetitions also do not seem to serve a particular rhetorical function, but appear to be merely fillers in place of factual arguments. Indeed, there appears to be little to no coherence in Trump’s thought process, rendering his points moot if not utterly nonsensical.

Trump’s Inaugural Address

Trump’s address at his inauguration on January 20, 2017 had more of the markings of a classic political speech, but it was undeniably ‘trump’ in delivery and content. He billed his win as a victory for the people, blamed Washington politicians (a group of which he had thus far not been a part of, having had zero political experience as a candidate) for the supposedly bad state of affairs, and stressed a need for border control, as well as mention radical Islamism. The following pages will provide an analysis on select passages from Trump’s Inaugural Address.

Today’s ceremony, however, has very special meaning. Because today we are not merely transferring power from one Administration to another, or from one party
to another – but we are transferring power from Washington, D.C. and giving it back to you, the American People.

For too long, a small group in our nation’s Capital has reaped the rewards of government while the people have borne the cost. Washington flourished – but the people did not share in its wealth. Politicians prospered – but the jobs left, and the factories closed. The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country. Their victories have not been your victories; their triumphs have not been your triumphs; and while they celebrated in our nation’s Capital, there was little to celebrate for struggling families all across our land (cf. whitehouse.gov, “The Inaugural Address, 2017).

Trump starts by immediately building a strong contrast between political powers and the people, claiming to give power back to them as he, a rich businessman with no prior political experience, is supposedly one of the people, as well. This entire passage is built on the contrast between politicians as the oppressors and the American people as the disadvantaged masses (“the established protected itself, but not the citizens of our country”, “their victories have not been your victories”, “while they celebrated [...], there was little to celebrate for struggling families”, etc.). This passage is intended to portray professional politicians in a bad light and for Trump to portray himself as an underdog savior for America.

The forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer. Everyone is listening to you now. You came by the tens of millions to become part of a historic movement the likes of which the world has never seen before. At the center of this movement is a crucial conviction: that a nation exists to serve its citizens. Americans want great schools for their children, safe neighborhoods for their families, and good jobs for themselves. These are the just and reasonable demands of a righteous public.

But for too many of our citizens, a different reality exists: Mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation; an education system, flush with cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of knowledge; and the crime and gangs and drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential. This American carnage stops right here and stops right now (cf. whitehouse.gov, “The Inaugural Address, 2017).

Rhetorically, this is rather standard for a speech of this kind. Both paragraphs prominently feature lists of three (cf. Kettemann 2009), and he draws further contrasts, here by stating how good things should be, then by claiming how bad they supposedly are. Trump focuses on a broken education system, despite the fact that the majority of his voters are uneducated blue-
collar workers (cf. Bump 2015, who argued that Trump had a big advantage among those without college degrees). While attempting to appear earnest, Trump’s statements about education are undoubtedly deceptive, considering that he had previously nominated Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education. According to Milbeth Allen (2017), an intervention specialist at a Madisonville elementary school, DeVos is notorious for trying to dismantle the public education system, and for expanding poor-performing charter schools, as well as increasing vouchers which “suck public dollars out of [...] public schools in order to pay for tuition at private schools.” Furthermore, Allen maintains that DeVos has a total lack of knowledge about the workings of public education. Senators Tim Kaine and Tom Harkin (2017) agree, likewise stating DeVos’s confusion about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as well as her refusal to commit to the collection of data on bullying, harassment and discipline. It is arguably possible that, given DeVos’s lack of qualification for the position, Trump appointed her due to her generous contributions to the Republican Party, which are estimated to be about $200 million (cf. Resmovits 2017).

From this moment on, it’s going to be America First. Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families. We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength. I will fight for you with every breath in my body – and I will never, ever let you down.

America will start winning again, winning like never before. We will bring back our jobs. We will bring back our borders. We will bring back our wealth. And we will bring back our dreams. We will build new roads, and highways, and bridges, and airports, and tunnels, and railways all across our wonderful nation. We will get our people off of welfare and back to work – rebuilding our country with American hands and American labor. We will follow two simple rules: Buy American and Hire American. We will seek friendship and goodwill with the nations of the world – but we do so with the understanding that it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first. We do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example for everyone to follow. We will reinforce old alliances and form new ones – and unite the civilized world against Radical Islamic Terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the Earth (cf. whitehouse.gov, “The Inaugural Address, 2017).

Trump plays heavily on the myth of American exceptionalism, calling heavily on the “City Upon a Hill” metaphor, but is trying to convey that America has become disadvantaged
at the hands of other countries, enforcing his racially charged campaign narrative (“protect [their] borders from the ravages of other countries”) which will be further discussed below. Furthermore, there is more repetition, especially of the sentence-initial word “We”, as he attempts to lay out his plans for his time in office. The content of this passage is very calculated and evasive as Trump lists numerous positive outcomes, yet fails to provide a single strategy.

In hindsight, many of his statements are laced with irony. He says he intends to “reinforce old alliances and form new ones”, yet several state visits with other world leaders went terribly awry (e.g. his visit with German chancellor Angela Merkel, whose hand he refused to shake). His two simple rules, “buy American and hire American”, are highly hypocritical as well, as a significant percentage of Trump’s own businesses are located abroad (cf. Anderson 2015).

We will no longer accept politicians who are all talk and no action – constantly complaining but never doing anything about it. The time for empty talk is over. Now arrives the hour of action. Do not let anyone tell you it cannot be done. No challenge can match the heart and fight and spirit of America.

[...]

A new national pride will stir our souls, lift our sights, and heal our divisions. It is time to remember that old wisdom our soldiers will never forget: that whether we are black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots, we all enjoy the same glorious freedoms, and we all salute the same great American Flag. And whether a child is born in the urban sprawl of Detroit or the windswept plains of Nebraska, they look up at the same night sky, they fill their heart with the same dreams, and they are infused with the breath of life by the same almighty Creator. So to all Americans, in every city near and far, small and large, from mountain to mountain, and from ocean to ocean, hear these words (cf. whitehouse.gov, “The Inaugural Address, 2017).

Toward the end of his address Trump doubles down on Americanism, stressing the supposed spirit and strength of the United States. He invokes strong natural imagery (windswept plains of Nebraska, night sky, mountains, ocean, etc.) and calls upon equality, but instead of stressing a need for equal rights for everyone, he simply claims that they “all bleed the same red blood of patriots” and are “infused with the breath of life by the same almighty Creator”. This is a clear example of doublespeak, a statement that is intended to appear as inclusive and focused on equality, but equal rights are never mentioned, which is unsurprising, as that is something that Trump evidently does not support or believe in.
You will never be ignored again. Your voice, your hopes, and your dreams, will define our American destiny. And your courage and goodness and love will forever guide us along the way.
Together, We Will Make America Strong Again.
We Will Make America Wealthy Again.
We Will Make America Proud Again.
We Will Make America Safe Again.
And, Yes, Together, We Will Make America Great Again.
Thank you, God Bless You, And God Bless America (cf. whitehouse.gov, “The Inaugural Address, 2017).

The final lines of his speech are essentially a repetition of the same pattern that has preceded them. There are more lists (“your courage and goodness and love”, “we will make America strong again, etc.”) and he finishes it with his infamously divisive campaign slogan (discussed further below).


Trump’s Campaign Language

The announcement of Trump’s candidacy was met with more laughter than actual concern, with many comedians deeming it the greatest thing to happen to comedy in a long time. Little did everyone know that the infamous business tycoon and former reality TV personality would soon incite massive amounts of hatred and violence in America’s society.

Trump’s favorite medium of addressing the public, the social media site Twitter, has remained his preferred means of communication, and predictably it played a likewise considerable role in his campaign. Trump is taking to the network, which he uses to send unfiltered short-form messages out into the world, in an incredibly frequent manner (as of September 26, 2017 he has tweeted over 35,000 times). Listed below are some of his tweets from the time of his campaign (courtesy of @realDonaldTrump, twitter.com).
Reading through Trump’s twitter feed, one encounters an endless tirade of self-praise and a constant blaming of others, written in typical Trump fashion: countless expletives, broken sentences, and false information presented as facts. The above listed examples are only mild excerpts taken from a seemingly endless pit of opinionated falsehoods (such as his claim that Mexico will pay for his planned border wall). But of course Twitter was not Trump’s only
form of communication during his campaign; the following pages will delve into Trump’s narrative campaign repertoire.

Making America Hate Again

As laid out in part two, an essential part of a political campaign is the campaign slogan. While Hillary’s “I’m With Her” echoed the support of her hopeful followers, Trump chose “Make America Great Again” (previously used by Reagan in 1980), which was subsequently plastered across red baseball caps all over America and even beyond by enthusiastic supporters of the populist candidate.

What is problematic about the slogan is not the message itself, but the connotations it carries. Trump’s campaign was built on the belief that immigration is to blame for the predicament of white blue-collar Americans and that global warming, among other things, is a hoax (cf. Trump on Twitter: “When will our country stop wasting money on global warming and so many other truly "STUPID" things and begin to focus on lower taxes?”, twitter.com).

In fact, Trump’s announcement speech focused on illegal immigration, offshoring of American jobs, the U.S. national debt, and Islamic terrorism (cf. TIME, “Here’s Donald Trump’s Presidential Announcement Speech”, 2015). The speech has become infamous for his generalizing comment that most Mexican immigrants are criminals and rapists.

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.

Trump immediately received heavy backlash and criticism, even from some notable Republicans, who called him a racist, which, per Kristof (2016), he “vehemently denies”. However, denying such an accusation despite his obviously racist claims is an arguably perfect fit for Trump’s modus operandi.

That Trump’s racially charged speeches would attract protesters was likely foreseeable, and his enthusiastic fans, chanting “Make American Great Again” at his numerous rallies, took Trump’s encouragement to be violent towards protesters very literally. Despite claims that he does not incite violence or even condone violence, he made the following statement during one of his campaign rallies on February 1, 2016 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, which was merely one of many.

So if you see somebody getting ready to throw a tomato, knock the crap out of them, would you? Seriously. Okay? Just knock the hell—I promise you, I will pay for the legal fees, I promise. I promise (cf. Tiefenthäler 2016).

On March 11, 2016 he implied that there should be more violence while speaking to a large crowd in St. Louis.

Isn’t it great to be at a Trump rally, really? Part of the problem and part of the reason it takes so long [to remove protesters] is nobody wants to hurt each any more, right? (cf. Tiefenthäler 2016).

Incidents like these, as well as Trump’s increasingly politically incorrect campaign narrative and racist, misogynistic and homophobic slurs used by his supporters in public and online, have led his opposition to adapt his slogan to “Making America Hate Again”.

Crooked Hillary: Nasty Woman

The final debate of the election cycle has become notorious for two claims made by Trump. First, he made the assertion that “nobody has more respect for women than [he does]”, which is not only a grossly hyperbolical statement, but is also objectively false, given Trump’s many insults to women in the past.

When Clinton laid open her plan to increase taxes on the wealthy, explaining that Trump’s contributions would also go up, “assuming he can’t figure out how to get out of it”, he shook his head, leaned into the mic, raised his finger and said, “such a nasty woman” (cf. Woolf, 2016). This dysphemistic utterance, intended to portray Clinton in a negative light after her slight jab at Trump, who notoriously avoided releasing his tax returns, points to his obvious hypocrisy. His insult to Clinton, unfortunately for him, backfired however, as Hillary supporters and Trump protesters subsequently adopted the phrase “Nasty Woman” as a term of empowerment.

Support Samantha Bee & Planned Parenthood & buy a Nasty Woman t-shirt!
shop.tbs.com/products/full-...
Locker Room Banter


Unknown: "She used to be great, she's still very beautiful."
Trump: "I moved on her actually. You know she was down on Palm Beach. I moved on her, and I failed. I'll admit it. I did try and fuck her, she was married."
Unknown: "That's huge news there."
Trump: "No, no, Nancy. No this was [inaudible] and I moved on her very heavily in fact I took her out furniture shopping. She wanted to get some furniture. I said I'll show you where they have some nice furniture. I moved on her like a bitch. I couldn't get there and she was married. Then all-of-a-sudden I see her, she's now got the big phony tits and everything. She's totally changed her look."
Bush: "Your girl's hot as shit. In the purple."
Multiple voices: "Whoah. Yes. Whoah."
Bush: "Yes. The Donald has scored. Whoah my man."
Trump: "Look at you. You are a pussy."
Bush: "You gotta get the thumbs up."
Trump: "Maybe it's a different one."
Bush: "It better not be the publicist. No, it's, it's her."
Trump: "Yeah that's her with the gold. I better use some Tic Tacs just in case I start kissing her. You know I'm automatically attracted to beautiful... I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star they let you do it. You can do anything."
Bush: "Whatever you want."
Trump: "Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything."

The contents of the tape, which many have deemed an admission to sexual assault, came out two days before the second presidential debate between Trump and Hillary Clinton and was widely believed to be the final nail in Trump’s campaign, but he would go on to win the post regardless one month later. Trump first responded to the scandal in written form, published on his campaign website (cf. Trump, donaldjtrump.com, 2016) saying, “This was locker room banter, a private conversation that took place many years ago. Bill Clinton has said far worse to me on the golf course - not even close. I apologize if anyone was offended.”
This response, which is merely a deflection, is a typical way for Trump to avoid taking any responsibility for his mistakes, once again attempting to blame someone else for doing something “far worse”. It is also a clear example for doublespeak, as it contains evasive and euphemistic language geared towards deception. In this case Trump is trying to use his own scandal to cast a negative light on his opponent Hillary Clinton, by claiming that her husband, former President Bill Clinton, had said far worse things to him in the past. Furthermore, he describes the recording in which he admits to having committed sexual assault, as “locker room banter”, a euphemistic term intended to make it seem harmless and ordinary. And finally, while his statement is written to resemble an apology, he is not, in fact, actually apologetic; he merely apologizes for potentially having offended people, not for the act itself.

The short statement has three distinct markers of doublespeak, beginning by euphemistically casting off his lewd remarks as benign, then deflecting attention away from him, and ultimately culminating in him saying that he “apologize[s] if anyone was offended”. While he includes the phrase “I apologize” in his statement, it is crucial to stress that he did not technically apologize for saying that he, as a “star”, is able to casually molest women, but only that someone may have been offended by it.

**Fake News**

Trump’s war on mainstream media and the spreading of false information by his administration have contributed considerably to comparisons with Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which a totalitarian government alters historic facts daily to line up with their propaganda goals of the day. The debate on fake news is in direct correlation with this analogy, but has become so twisted and cloudy that is difficult to distinguish the influence fake news still holds. The following paragraphs will provide an overview of what fake news means in 2017 and how this definition has changed in the past year, as well as highlight its significance regarding Trump era political speech.

The term itself denotes a type of propaganda in the form of a news story that is fabricated in order to spread false information. Schlesinger (2017) provides a simple and straightforward definition, explaining that it is “actually fabricated stories which are either wholly not grounded in fact or work in enough falsehoods as to be misleading.” The increasing influence of social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, has been beneficial for fake news sites.
Hunt (2016) ascertains that fake news can be difficult to detect because the news format itself is so easy to imitate. According to her, fake news, in its purest form, is entirely fabricated, “manipulated to resemble credible journalism and attract maximum attention and, with it, advertising revenue.” The websites that spread this false information are designed in a manner to resemble legitimate sources, and, according to Hunt, carry names such as “Civic Tribune” and “Life Event Web”. She also says that these alleged news stories are “geared to travel on social media.”

What made fake news a real problem during the 2016 U.S. election cycle was how widespread it had become. Hunt lists two fake news stories that were spread by members of the Republican party: the first is a report that billionaire financier George Soros had paid protesters to disrupt Trump’s campaign rallies, which Trump later publicly repeated himself; the second is the claim the Democratic senators were planning to impose sharia law in Florida, which was later repeated by Michael Flynn, Trump’s choice for national security adviser.

The impact and the immensity of fake news already seems like a considerable threat to democracy and fair elections, but Trump has found a way to make the situation worse and to exacerbate the problem. For several months, Trump has been using the term himself, but instead of using it to reveal propaganda he uses it so spread and multiply it.

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump

Hard to believe that with 24/7 #Fake News on CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, NYTtimes & WAPO, the Trump base is getting stronger!
1:18 PM · Aug 7, 2017

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump

.@CNN is #FakeNews. Just reported COS (John Kelly) was opposed to my stance on NFL players disrespecting FLAG, ANTHEM, COUNTRY. Total lie!
12:26 AM · Sep 26, 2017
When Trump refers to fake news, he uses the term to target mainstream and high reputation media such as The New York Times, CNN, and The Washington Post, often in direct response to a negative article about him. Not only is this a gaslighting strategy (i.e. a form of manipulation intended to make an individual doubt their judgments and perceptions, cf. Dorpat 1994) in its purest form, it is also straightforward propaganda. The president of the United States downright attacks any and all stories he disagrees with as fake news, but spreads fake news stories that fit his narrative and agenda as the truth. Schlesinger (2017) is one of many who are calling out Trump on his propagandist claims, arguing that “[f]ake news is not a story you don’t like, Mr. President; fake news is not a badly reported story; stories about polls you don’t like are not fake news.”

The misuse of the term fake news by Trump and his supporters has led Facebook to abandon the term and to replace it with “false news” instead, in an attempt to combat the sharing of misinformation on its platform. A statement by a spokesperson for the social media site reads that “[t]he term ‘fake news’ has taken on a life of its own. False news communicates more clearly what we’re describing: information that is designed to be confused with legitimate news, and is intentionally false.” (cf. Oremus 2017).

Trump’s attempt to rebrand legitimate and credible sources as ‘fake news’ is incredibly dangerous, especially since his supporters worship him as someone who “tells it like it is”. In populist times, it is mainstream media power sources who uncover a president’s dangerous
propaganda machine, but Trump’s move to discredit these believable sources as unreliable and fake has unfortunately found resonance within his supporter base, who take his own propaganda at face value, but have come to mistrust actual news. This strategy has been proven to work, as many Trump voters continue to rally behind him, defending his callous choices by repeating the propagandist phrases he feeds them all over social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.

**Alternative Facts: Lies Told By the Trump Administration**

After only 200 days in office, Trump has made countless statements which heavily distorted the truth in his favor, going as far as to deny proven facts and lie about incidents for which there is indisputable evidence. When several media outlets addressed his statements and provided proof of their falsehood, the commander-in-chief would usually pin the blame on somebody else, claiming he was provided false information, or simply refer to them as fake news as outlined above.

Kellyanne Conway, Trump’s campaign manager and current Counselor to the President, coined the phrase “alternative facts” during an interview with *Meet the Press* on January 22, 2017 (cf. Bradner 2017), in an attempt to defend Trump’s Press Secretary Sean Spicer who had lied about the size of the crowd in attendance of Trump’s inauguration (discussed in more detail later on). The interviewer Chuck Todd asked her why he would “utter a provable falsehood”, to which Conway replied that he was merely providing “alternative facts”.

The term “alternative facts” alone is a pure example of doublespeak, such a glaringly obvious euphemistic way of avoiding to admit that something was a lie. What is truly astounding in this case, however, is not the fact that Conway would engage in doublespeak on this matter, but that she would do it in such an obvious and transparent manner. The intention behind doublespeak is, as has been established, to deceive and manipulate, but denying that someone lied about provable numbers and then Claiming that their lie was an “alternative fact” is arguably almost an admission to engaging in doublespeak, it is so glaring. Furthermore, Conway later defended her choice of words, according to Nuzzi (2017), defining the term as “additional facts and alternative information”.

Below are some of the most curious lies Trump and his administration have spread to the public within his first 200 days as president of the United States.

Size Matters

If there is one thing POTUS seems to be very insecure about it is numbers. There have been several cases when, in a fit of ostentatious self-praise, Trump has made statements about his accomplishments that were grossly exaggerated.

Strange TIMES

In a speech Trump held in January at the CIA headquarters, he suddenly and unexpectedly mentioned TIME magazine, claiming to hold the record for being featured on their cover.

So a reporter for TIME magazine – and I have been on their cover, like, 14 or 15 times. I think we have the all-time record in the history of TIME magazine. Like, if Tom Brady is on the cover, it's one time, because he won the Super Bowl or something, right? (Laughter.) I've been on it for 15 times this year. I don't think that's a record, Mike, that can ever be broken (cf. Politico, “Full text: Trump, Pence remarks at CIA Headquarters”, 2017).

Assuming this were true, one might still wonder why the newly elected President of the United States would feel compelled to brag about his number of TIME magazine covers, especially keeping in mind that they have often portrayed him in a negative light in the past. His reasoning behind this statement, however, becomes secondary upon learning that it was, in fact, a lie. Shortly after, a spokesperson for TIME magazine came forward, per Fahrentold
(2017), and refuted Trump’s claims: up until that point his likeness had only graced the cover of their magazine 11 times, four short of his supposed 15, and even further from the record for most *TIME* covers, which is held by former president Nixon, who was featured on the magazine’s cover 55 times (Hillary Clinton graced the cover at least 19 times, cf. Begley 2013).

What makes Trump’s exaggerated *TIME* magazine claim even more puzzling is the fact that he decorated several of his golf clubs with a framed cover of himself on the magazine, a cover which, as *TIME* has confirmed, is a fake (cf. Fahrentold 2017). The forged front page features Trump in front of a black background with his arms folded, with two headlines about him: “TRUMP IS HITTING ON ALL FRONTS... EVEN TV!”, written above the *TIME* typeface, and “DONALD TRUMP - The “Apprentice” is a television smash!”, featured as the cover’s main headline in the left corner (see below). The two other headlines are copied word for word from the March 2, 2009 issue, which featured Kate Winslet on the actual cover.

The *Telegraph* has reported that *TIME* magazine reached out to Trump’s staff and asked that the forgery be removed. They have also mentioned that the Trump Organization has made no response regarding the use of the fake cover (cf. Henderson 2017).

Evaluating this seemingly strange incident, it should be mentioned again that it is highly uncharacteristic for *TIME* magazine to use such strong praise for people, especially Trump, on their covers, and that past issues have often portrayed him as a joke or a threat. One might ar-
gue that it speaks to Trump’s fragile ego and distorted sense of reality that he would ask someone to fake a cover of an influential magazine and then proceed to hang it in several places of business. It is seemingly of lesser importance to him to actually achieve this goal by doing meaningful work and consequently garnering TIME magazine’s esteemed acclaim, than it is to be perceived in such a manner by others, regardless of whether or not there is any truth to it.

**Popularity Contest**

Trump’s first day in office is perhaps defined by his incessant claim that his inauguration ceremony attracted up to 1.5 million spectators, and that he drew a larger crowd than President Obama had at his inauguration in 2009. This statement was disproved by photographs taken from above, pictured below.


Describing the amount of people, Trump said the following, “Now, the audience was the biggest ever. But this crowd was massive. Look how far back it goes. This crowd was massive,” (cf. Leonhardt and Thompson 2017). Per *The New York Times*, the images pictured above were taken at comparable times during the ceremony and clearly show that Trump’s crowd was nowhere near as large as Obama’s in 2009, which was approximately attended by 1.8 million people (cf. Wallace, Yourish and Griggs 2017).
When the images began to circulate, the Trump administration went into defense mode, and began attacking the media, which Trump called “among the most dishonest human beings on earth”. His press secretary at the time, Sean Spicer, later accused the press of deliberately misstating the size of the crowd. As *The New York Times* reports,

> Mr. Spicer said that Mr. Trump had drawn “the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration,” a statement that photographs clearly show to be false. Mr. Spicer said photographs of the inaugural ceremonies were deliberately framed “to minimize the enormous support that had gathered on the National Mall,” although he provided no proof of either assertion. [...] Photographs of Barack Obama’s inauguration in 2009 and of Mr. Trump’s plainly showed that the crowd on Friday was significantly smaller, but Mr. Spicer attributed that disparity to new white ground coverings he said had caused empty areas to stand out and to security measures that had blocked people from entering the Mall (cf. Hirschfeld Davis and Rosenberg 2017).

To take matters even further, Spicer continued this narrative with another false statement whose illegitimacy was easily proven, claiming that ridership on the Washington public transit system had been higher than on Inauguration Day in 2013. The Washington-area transit authority, however, provided *The New York Times* with the actual numbers, listing 782,000 riders in 2013 as opposed to 571,000 on Trump’s Inauguration Day. Finally, Spicer said that extended security measures had prevented “hundreds of thousands of people” from viewing the ceremony, but according to the Secret Service the measures had remained largely the same. According to several sources, commentary about the size of the crowd in attendance made Trump increasingly angry, prompting him to threaten the media with retaliation. To make matters worse for Trump (and possibly further fuel his rage) were reports by crowd scientists, who, according to *The New York Times*, have assessed that the number of people who joined the Women’s March in Washington as a form of protest against Trump’s oath of office was three times the size as that of the people who attended to observe the ceremonial event (cf. Wallace and Parlapiano 2017).

**Electoral College Envy**

Despite a surplus of over two million votes, Hillary Rodham Clinton lost the 2016 presidential election to Donald Trump due to the United States’ Electoral College system, which equips the individual states with differing voting power. However, winning the presidency did
not seem like it was enough for Trump, who began circulating claims that “millions of votes” for Hillary Clinton were cast illegally, despite there being no proof for this whatsoever. “In addition to winning the Electoral College in a landslide, I won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally” said a message he posted on Twitter on November 27, 2016, for which there has so far not been a single shred of evidence (cf. Cohn 2016; @realDonaldTrump, twitter.com).

When his voter fraud lies failed to resonate, he took a further attempt at cementing his legitimacy via another falsified, easily disproven claim. “It was the biggest Electoral College win since Ronald Reagan”, Trump said of his 304 Electoral College votes on February 16, 2017 at an impromptu White House news conference. Unfortunately for him, Electoral College records are easily accessible information and were also swiftly provided. Not only did these numbers prove that President Barack Obama won with 332 votes in 2012 and with 365 four years prior, they also showed that President Bill Clinton received 370 in 1992 and 379 in 1996. Even more significantly, President George Bush’s Electoral College votes in 1988 were 426, 124 more than Trump’s self-acclaimed “record number” since Reagan’s win in 1984 with 525 votes. When a reporter confronted the newly elected commander-in-chief about this lie, Trump attempted to avert the blame, saying, “I was given that information.” (cf. Fandos 2017).

**Wiretaps**

On March 4, 2017 Trump tweeted an accusation targeted towards former President Barack Obama, claiming Obama had Trump’s wires tapped in Trump Tower. The fabricated claims have since been denied several times by the Justice Department. James Comey, the former director of the FBI, testified on Capitol Hill earlier this year asserting that there is no evidence to support Trump’s accusations (see below, courtesy of @realDonaldTrump, twitter.com). Furthermore, James Clapper, the former Director of National Intelligence has definitively ruled out that Trump’s phones were ever tapped (cf. Cillizza 2017).
Linguistically, the tweets are typically Trump. Beginning with an expletive “Terrible!”, he vaguely ascertains that he “found out” that Obama supposedly wiretapped Trump Tower, without indicating any credible sources. His second tweet contains a typo, spelling the word “tap” with two p’s instead, and false punctuation, as the phrase is a question and thus has to be punctuated with a question mark. He ends his unsubstantiated accusation with a dysphemistic description of Obama as a “[b]ad (or sick) guy!” Considering that Trump’s claims have been proven to be fabricated, these tweets are another instance of outright propaganda.

Most interestingly, however, is that the first tweet contains another unintentional case of irony. Trump writes that “[t]his is McCarthyism!”, and he is, in fact, right. McCarthyism, a term derived from former U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy, is the practice of making accusations of subversion or treason, “by the use of tactics involving personal attacks on individuals by means of widely publicized indiscriminate allegations especially on the basis of unsubstantiated charges” (cf. Merriam-Webster, “McCarthyism”, n.d.), which is exactly what Trump did with these tweets. Unfortunately, he is unable to comprehend the meaning of McCarthyism, or he would likely realize that he is the true culprit.

Three in One

On July 19, 2017, The New York Times published an interview with Trump and The Times’ Peter Baker, Michael S. Schmidt and Maggie Haberman (2017), in which he told no less than three confirmed public lies. Firstly, he claimed that he was not being investigated by the FBI regarding much speculated Russian collusion with his campaign. “Um, the Russian investigation — it’s not an investigation, it’s not on me — you know, they’re looking at a lot of things.” However, Abramson (2017) recounts a report by The Washington Post from June 14, 2017, confirming that Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who was appointed to oversee the Russia investigation after Trump had abruptly fired former FBI Director James Comey, had widened his probe, investigating whether the President attempted to obstruct justice or intentionally tampered with investigations regarding himself or his associates.

Secondly, when one of the reporters mentions that the markets are doing well, Trump responded in the following way:

They’re going to really go up if we do what we’re doing. I mean, cut regulations tremendously. Sometimes — you know, one thing they hadn’t thought about at
The Times, where they said I didn’t really cut regulations as much. I heard that because I said — it could have been a little slip-up in terms of what I said — I meant, for the time in office, five months and couple of weeks, I think I’ve done more than anyone else. They may have taken it as more than anyone else, period.

[crosstalk]

But I’m talking about for my time. I heard that Harry Truman was first, and then we beat him. These are approved by Congress. These are not just executive orders. On the executive orders, we cut regulations tremendously (cf. Baker, Schmidt and Haberman 2017).

During a fact check two days prior, *The New York Times* found that, as of that week, Trump had signed 42 bills. The average lawmaking pace of the last six presidents is 43 bills during the same period of six months in office. Jimmy Carter had signed 70 bills during his first six months, Bill Clinton had signed 50, George W. Bush had signed 20 and Barack Obama had signed 39 (“including an $800 billion stimulus program to confront an economic disaster, legislation to make it easier for women to sue for equal pay, a bill to give the Food and Drug Administration the authority to regulate tobacco and an expansion of the federal health insurance program for children”). They also ran an analysis of the bills signed by Trump and found that about half of them were “minor or inconsequential, passed by Congress with little debate”, unlike Obama’s high-impact bills (cf. Shear and Yourish, 2017).

Trump’s third case of misinformation during the interview is contained in the following statement about the FBI’s chain of command. “But the F.B.I. person really reports directly to the president of the United States, which is interesting. You know, which is interesting. And I think we’re going to have a great new F.B.I. director.” According to Estepa (2017), this is wholly incorrect. While the president nominates the FBI director, and is able to fire them (as Trump did back in May when he fired Comey after he tried to press him to drop parts of the Russia investigation), the FBI director reports to the Attorney General. Furthermore, the agency’s intelligence activities are overseen by the Director of National Intelligence. The FBI is supposed to be an independent and apolitical organization. According to Benjamin Wittes, editor in chief of Lawfare blog and a senior fellow in governance studies at the Bookings Institution, “[The FBI director] serves the president by leading law enforcement in an independent and apolitical fashion. And it is fundamentally corrupt for any president to be asking to do otherwise... The astonishing implication of Trump’s view is that he believes the president
may shut down an FBI investigation that displeases him.” Estepa adds that “presidents typically do not want to give even the appearance of influencing the nonpolitical law enforcement agency’s investigations”, but Trump spoke to Comey nine times over the course of four months, even demanding a pledge of personal loyalty to him (cf. Kiely and Farley 2017), whereas Comey reports that he only spoke with President Obama twice in three years.

Rhetorically, it is the same old Trump, speaking in broken sentences, stumbling through statements and making sizable leaps between his points that makes it difficult to decipher what it is he is trying to say (e.g. “But even if he did — like I said at the news conference on the, you know, Rose Garden — even if I did, that’s not — other people go a step further. I could have ended that whole thing just by saying — they say it can’t be obstruction because you can say: ‘It’s ended. It’s over. Period.’”). He uses the interview in the usual way to boast about himself, and is even interrupted by his granddaughter who he says is “[g]ood, smart genes.” Throughout the interview, he continues to make exaggerated claims that are easily fact checked and proven false, but it has become common procedure. Trump is a president that says whatever he wants when he wants (proven by his Twitter activity), and like any propagandist, is unconcerned by the truth as that would take away from his narrative that he is the most incredibly accomplished president there has ever been.

**Little Rocket Man**

On September 18, 2017 Trump addressed the United Nations General Assembly for the first time, focusing his speech on nuclear topics, such as the threat posed by North Korea, and on the Iran nuclear deal (cf. Swanson 2017). His most standout remarks, however, were a direct attack against North Korea’s supreme leader, Kim Jong Un.

No nation on Earth has an interest in seeing this band of criminals arm itself with nuclear weapons and missiles. The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea. Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself and for his regime. The United States is ready, willing, and able, but hopefully this will not be necessary. That's what the United Nations is all about. That's what the United Nations is for. Let's see how they do (cf. Swanson 2017).

At no point during his address did Trump refer to him by his actual name, but addressed a powerful leader who poses a great nuclear threat to the United States, as well as the world, as
“Rocket Man”, a child-like insult most probably intended to ridicule Kim Jong Un. Furthermore, Trump audaciously stood in front of the UN and implicitly threatened war against North Korea, saying they would “totally destroy” it. Dreazen (2017) called Trump’s speech “like no UN address I’ve ever heard from an American president of either party”, saying that “[t]he UN was waiting for President Trump [but] candidate Trump showed up instead.” Dreazen stresses the fact that a UN address carries significant weight as other nations listen and set their policies accordingly. “Candidate Trump could get away with lobbing rhetorical grenades and not thinking too much about their real-world impact. President Trump doesn’t have that luxury.” It is indeed wholly undiplomatic to refer to the leader of another country, regardless of who it is, as “Rocket Man”, especially in such a public way. Instead of finding a way to mend a tense situation, Trump’s childish rhetoric is merely adding fuel to the fire.

According to The Post (via Choi 2017B), people who attended a Republican fundraiser dinner on September 26, 2017 were cited saying that Trump had claimed that he thought “Rocket Man” could be taken as a compliment by Kim Jong Un, not an insult. As everyone has come to expect from Trump, when his words create backlash, instead of claiming responsibility, he changes his narrative, arguing that he was wrongfully misunderstood. After Trump’s UN speech, Kim Jong Un responded with a personal message to Trump in which he called him a “dotard”, according to Trump, which prompted him to alter his own rhetoric. “So I said, all right, so now I’ll call him Little Rocket Man,” Trump reportedly said at the dinner per The Post. At a rally in Huntsville, Alabama, a few days prior, Trump addressed the North Korea situation (cf. Choi 2017A), already referring to Kim Jong Un by his altered nickname. “This shouldn't be handled now, but I'm gonna handle it because we have to handle it. 'Little Rocket Man.' We're gonna do it because we really have no choice." The President of the United States is handling conflict like a child, doubling down on laughable insults. It seems as if all reasoning is futile with Trump, who continues to refer to one of his most dangerous adversaries as “Rocket Man” on Twitter, as of October 1, 2017 (courtesy of @realDonaldTrump, twitter.com).

Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

Being nice to Rocket Man hasn't worked in 25 years, why would it work now? Clinton failed, Bush failed, and Obama failed. I won't fail.

9:01 PM · Oct 1, 2017
Fine Nazis

From August 11-12, 2017, a group of white supremacists, white nationalists, neo-Confederates, neo-Nazis, the alt-right and various militias organized a protest, known as the “Unite the Right rally” in Charlottesville, Virginia, under the stated goal to oppose the removal of the Robert E. Lee statue from Emancipation Park (cf. CNBC, “Scenes from Charlottesville’s violent ‘Unite the Right’ rally”, 2017). The vocal protesters carried torches, Nazi flags, Confederate flags, Trump/Pence signs, as well as semi-automatic rifles, chanted racist and antisemitic slogans, and turned violent towards counterprotesters. At the height of the commotion, a car plowed through the crowd, killing Heather Heyer, a young woman who was there to counter-protest the hateful march.

Trump, who did not make a full official statement until three days after the event, began not by condemning these horrifying acts of terrorism, but by defending himself.

I didn't wait long. I wanted to make sure, unlike most politicians, that what I said was correct, not make a quick statement. The statement I made on Saturday, the first statement, was a fine statement. But you don't make statements that direct unless you know the facts. It takes a little while to get the facts. You still don't know the facts. And it's a very, very important process to me. And it's a very important statement. So, I don't want to go quickly and just make a statement for the sake of making a political statement. I want to know the facts. If you go back to my… (cf. Nelson and Swanson 2017).

In his usually repetitive manner of speaking, Trump defended himself against criticism that he did not respond fast enough to an event of such magnitude, led by many of his own supporters. “Here's the thing. When I make a statement, I like to be correct. I want the facts.”, he claimed to the room of reporters, ignoring the many times before in which he made statements that completely evaded all facts. When asked to respond to the comments made by Wal-Mart’s CEO stating that Trump had missed an opportunity to help bring the country together, Trump responded the following:

Not at all. I think the country -- look, you take a look. I've created over a million jobs since I'm president. The country is booming. The stock market is setting records. We have the highest employment numbers we've ever had in the history of our country. We're doing record business. We have the highest levels of enthusiasm (cf. Nelson and Swanson 2017).
Not only is this portion of his statement grammatically flawed (“I’ve created over a million jobs since I’m president”), he used the opportunity to inflate his own alleged accomplishments by making one unsubstantiated claim after another. Not only is it a further instance of instigating propaganda, it is arguably also incredibly bad decorum to use the aftermath of a national tragedy to praise himself.

However, what drew the most criticism were Trump’s following claims about the incident itself. While he commented that he does not condone hate or bigotry in any form, Trump said that there were “groups on both sides”.

You had a group on one side and you had a group on the other, and they came at each other with clubs and it was vicious and it was horrible. And it was a horrible thing to watch. But there is another side. There was a group on this side, you can call them the left. You've just called them the left -- that came violently attacking the other group. So you can say what you want, but that's the way it is.

[...]

Well, I do think there's blame -- yes, I think there's blame on both sides. You look at -- you look at both sides. I think there's blame on both sides (cf. Nelson and Swanson 2017).

Instead of downright condemning these far-right groups for their acts of terrorism, Trump deflects the blame on the counterprotesters, whom he calls the “alt-left”, a term that is derived from “alt-right”, a euphemistic term for people with far-right ideologies and white nationalists. While it is true that the counterprotest was, in part, also violent, the counterprotesters were there to protest racism, hatred, bigotry and anti-semitism led by a group armed with rifles, wearing swastikas and carrying torches. Not only did Trump fail to rightfully condemn this group of nazis and other far-right members, he went a step further, saying that “you have some very bad people in that group. But you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides.”

In August of 2017, the President of the United States, during a press conference about a far-right terrorist attack in which an innocent counterprotester was killed, said that some members of a group of nazis and white supremacists are “very fine people”. He attempted to justify his statement by elaborating, “You had people in that group -- excuse me, excuse me -- I saw the same pictures as you did. You had people in that group that were there
to protest the taking down of, to them, a very, very important statue and the renaming of a park from Robert E. Lee to another name.” Robert E. Lee, who was a Confederate soldier, fought in the American Civil War on the side of the slave-holding South, and is therefore a symbol of the Confederacy and white supremacy, a set of racist ideals based on the belief that white people are superior. This statement is Trump’s attempt to justify the Unite the Right rally by saying the statue was “very, very important” to them. According to Trump, a racist symbol arguably deserves to the displayed if it is “very, very important” to some people sharing the same racist values.

While it may be shocking to read that the President of the United States would essentially say that there are “fine people” among nazis, it is arguably not surprising, given that there were numerous of his supporters among them, and that his rhetoric throughout his campaign and his presidency so far has only fueled them in their beliefs.
CONCLUSION

Eleven months after Trump was elected president it seems as if not a single day goes by without at least one story about him making overwhelmingly negative headlines. The majority of news outlets and people on social media appear to be in constant distress, as repeated reports about his war on the Affordable Care Act threaten to take away insurance coverage from millions of Americans, and his xenophobic efforts against immigrants leave several million people facing deportation. However, Trump being president is not only a threat to the United States, but could possibly negatively impact the entire planet. He already pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement, and his hissy fits geared towards Kim Jong Un have left many people terrified of the possible ramifications of what it means to have two nuclear powers be at odds with each other.

The dire state of United States politics and its effect on the public can best be observed by examining public discourse. While Trump promised that he would become so very presidential were he to be elected, it should be clear to every individual capable of forming independent thought that POTUS has no idea what being presidential even means. This is a man who felt the need to explain that the island of Puerto Rico was “surrounded by water. Big water. Ocean water.” (cf. Fabian 2017), after all. The same man who constantly feels the need to ascertain how tremendously smart he is utters phrases like “big water” publicly, and posted a nonsensical tweet containing the now infamous word “covfefe” late at night, which has since been deleted, but not before it sparked international ridicule. But while some people marvel at the sheer lunacy of Trump’s presidency, his policy holds incredibly dangerous implications, fueled by his hateful rhetoric that has incited a sheer insurmountable amount of hatred in his supporters who spread it far and wide online, and even out in the streets in broad daylight.

While Trump’s speeches and statements all share the same style and similar themes, they vary in effect and impact. Although some are so confusingly cryptic that his message never computes, others, like his stance on immigration and radical right wing extremism come charged with the dangerous subtext that legitimizes right wing white terrorists’ efforts. It seems that Trump’s rhetoric has made racism seem normal again, because his entire campaign and his presidency thus far has been built upon it and has tolerated racist acts and hate crimes. Despite claiming that he is not a racist, he, along with his administration, condemns peaceful
protesters, like NFL players kneeling during the national anthem to protest police brutality towards black people, saying they are disrespecting the flag, while at the same time maintaining that there were fine people among a group of white terrorists carrying nazi flags and tiki torches.

Although it should be noted that his Inaugural Address more or less resembled the make up of a typical political speech, making use of common rhetorical devices, and playing strongly on American exceptionalism, Trump is usually more spontaneous and intuitive with his statements, as highlighted by other examples. He speaks in a very anti-political and unpresidential manner and his rambling rhetoric often goes so far that the gist of his speeches are hard to follow and seem to make little to no sense. Trump’s rhetoric is essentially void of any ethos or logos. He has no political experience to speak of and constantly tries to use his background as a rich businessman as a way of legitimizing his position, never mind the fact that he comes from money and has made, to borrow one of his favorite words, tremendous financial losses. Furthermore, there are no facts to back up his claims either, so the sense of logos with which he attempts to boost his speeches is overwhelmingly fabricated and false. In fact, his rhetoric relies almost entirely on pathos, i.e. the strong emotional reaction he elicits in his audience. He uses loaded language to communicate to his audience that they have become disenfranchised by immigrants and by liberals, and that he will “restore” America to some former imaginary glory. If Aristotle’s theory is to be believed and considering how flawed Trump’s communicative approach is, then how come he was able to still win this race? I would argue that it is because his message fits the narrative of his main base of supporters (Republican blue collar voters from Middle America) and that they thusly do not question his experience or fact-check his claims; it simply does not matter to them as long as there is a candidate who shares their “values”.

But these past several years have shown that Trump does not deal well with criticism of any kind and that he appears to feel a pathological need to ascertain himself. Many have called him a narcissist and he seems to fit the description. As soon as he receives any kind of criticism, he lashes out, deflecting all blame, praising himself even more, spreading one falsehood after another in his desperate need for attention. To Trump, the only thing that matters is his own agenda and his own image, but winning the election has arguably not done him or his ego any favors. His skin seems to be thinner than ever as he struggles to undo every good
thing that President Obama did during his eight years in office (e.g. Obamacare, measures toward gun safety, etc.) and the more his attempts are thwarted the angrier he appears to get.

While at the beginning of his candidacy everyone was laughing, no one is laughing any more. Despite how humorous a phrase like “big water, ocean water” is, the fact that it was uttered by a man in possession of the nuclear codes is downright terrifying. Even more worrisome is that the fact that reason seems to have no place in the Trump era as reputable news sources are rebranded and de-legitimized as fake news, his supporters hang onto his every statement and spread his propaganda even farther, and the education system is being slowly dismantled by people like Betsy DeVos.

Now is exactly the time to be vigilant and to use our voices, especially in the field of academia, and to demand more of our elected officials, in our own countries and all over the world. Populism is largely a result of fear and hate mongering, and education and informed discussion is what we need to shine a light through these dark times and illuminate the masses. I call upon nasty people everywhere to join forces, this too shall pass, and we will persist.
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