

The Trump Presidency, Journalism, and Democracy

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Chapter 11

Scapegoater-in-Chief

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11 Scapegoater-in-Chief

Racist Undertones of Donald Trump's Rhetorical Repertoire

Stephen J. Heidt

One of the keys to Donald Trump's unlikely rise to the presidency was his reliance on tropes of scapegoating to distinguish himself and his policies. Scapegoating, a trope that externalizes blame for one's own failures on another, has long held a central place in Trump's rhetorical repertoire. But during the 2016 campaign, Trump took the tactic to new levels, scapegoating immigrants, Muslims, foreign nations, and the political elite as a means to identify national failures and justify his candidacy. These rhetorical choices raised the profile of his campaign, garnered significant media attention, and distinguished Trump from the other Republican contenders. While initially slow to call out scapegoating, naming Donald Trump a scapegoater has now become ubiquitous in the political press. *The American Conservative* called him the "scapegoat supreme of our time" (Gornoski, 2016).

Roll Call noted how Trump's scapegoating rhetoric "cloaked" the absence of real policy proposals (Allen, 2016). *The Washington Post* argued his inaugural address established potential "scapegoats for his presidency" (Downie, 2017). *The Atlantic* identified how the president "scapegoats unauthorized immigrants for crime" (Beinart, 2017). Noam Chomsky (2017) pointed to the "obvious technique" of scapegoating as a mechanism for Trump to "maintain control." Yet others have pointed to the commonalities between Trump's rhetoric and Philippine President Duterte, who has scapegoated drug users to incite the police to seek out and arrest or kill them (Sanchez-Moreno, 2017), and the "rise of the politics of scapegoating" around the world, mostly by far-right candidates obsessed with immigration, refugees, and the shifting demographics of ostensibly "white" states (Blakely, 2017).

While scapegoating is common in political rhetoric, Trump's enactment of this form, particularly as targeted at immigrants and Muslims, entails an underlying racist narrative as the basis of his campaign for the presidency. This scapegoating rhetoric challenged American political culture generally and the political press specifically for three reasons. First, the rhetoric implied racist themes that resonated with a sizable portion of the electorate. Second, it led to absurd policy proposals that were either infeasible or outright unconstitutional. Third, as Trump's

fortunes grew and mainstream critiques of his discourse populated internet-networked media, the candidate lashed out by scapegoating the press. While it would be unfair to criticize the political press for failing to stop Trump's rise, the aggregate impact of Trump's scapegoating rhetoric reveals a fundamental incapacity of the media to contest overtly racist tropes.

This chapter argues that Trump's scapegoating rhetoric has produced a pernicious political culture that enabled his rise to the presidency. Toward that end, I first discuss the nature of scapegoating in American public culture. Then, by analyzing Trump's rhetoric scapegoating of immigrants and Muslims, I demonstrate the depth and consistency of Trump's scapegoating rhetoric. I argue this rhetoric enabled Trump to gain recognition, to cobble together an electoral coalition, to stand in for policy, and to rationalize policy failure. I then conduct a limited analysis of reporting on Trump's scapegoating rhetoric, marking how the political press transitioned from treating Trump as novelty to dangerous. Finally, I conclude with some thoughts on the press's role in reporting on and contesting xenophobic rhetoric.

Scapegoating in American Political Life

For Carl Schmitt (2007), politics itself is defined by the "distinction" that lies "between friend and enemy" (p. 26). This ontology of the political isolated the enemy as discursively constituted in relation to the construction of the people. Constitutive acts to distinguish between friends and enemies emphasize the oppositional qualities in each and, as such, clarify both the character of the enemy and the people. As Shapiro (1999) has said, nationalist discourse defines the self through acts of "negation" (p. 42). The stronger the act of negation – in this situation via acts of scapegoating – the stronger the sense of identity becomes. This Hegelian thesis inscribes the state in an irrevocable process in which individuals are compelled to "engender an opposite and create an enemy" (Shapiro, 1999, p. 43). The downside of this conception of the political, of course, is that as Bruce Lawrence and Aisha Karim (2007) have observed, "violence [may be] constitutive of human nature" (p. 4). In other words, constituting national identity via negation brings into sharp relief the distinctions between us and them, but also inscribes politics into a cycle of violence from which there is no escape.

As a rhetorical device, scapegoating is perhaps one of the most powerful and integral to the construction of national identity. Most obviously deployed in the build up to war, scapegoating involves identifying an enemy, separating "us" from "them," and, in the process, commits the nation to war. As Bradley Klein (1988) has argued, the entire question of "threat" is ultimately a function of dramatic action where those external to a political community are coded in terms of

an us/them dichotomy or within an orientalist framework (p. 296). This process, what Kenneth Burke (1964) has called the scapegoating ritual, generates animosity toward an enemy while cleansing the nation of responsibility or guilt for political violence. While the scapegoated Other can absorb diverse characterizations, the transference of guilt and sin is a one-way movement in which a stable community deposits collective sin, guilt, and blame on a “sacrificial vessel” capable of embodying the evil faulted for the community’s collective struggle (Foy, 2012, p. 95).

Part of the rhetorical power conferred by scapegoating is found in the ritual’s ability to generate cathartic sentiments. These sentiments are rhetorically derived from the realization that another is responsible for the failings of their communities. In contemporary American political life, immigrants are popularly scapegoated for the dearth of low-skilled jobs, among other community “maladies” (Cisneros, 2008). Burke (1969) termed the purifying component of the process “catharsis by scapegoat” and explained it could be achieved via the identification and punishment of the scapegoat (p. 406).

The teleological character of the ritual, with its identification of purification as the ultimate destination, manifests first with a defense of the “inborn dignity” of the righteous, the location of a “projection device” for depositing “one’s ills ... thereby getting purification by dissociation” and “symbolic rebirth” for the community in which members are offered “a ‘positive’ view of life” which they can achieve by “moving forward” in the direction implied by the scapegoating ritual (Burke, 2005, pp. 193–194).

Moreover, the purifying feature of the scapegoat ritual is found in what Foy (2012) called “a transformation process” experienced by the scapegoated entity (p. 95). This transformation accrues not merely by the casting out or exclusion of the scapegoated entity, or by dissociation, but by the ritual of sacrifice. As Burke (1969) put it, the “new principle of merger” emerges via the “dialectical opposition to the sacrificial offering,” in which, via sacrifice, the community cleanses itself of the sins attributed to the scapegoated entity (p. 406). The completion of the scapegoat ritual depends on contextual and rhetorical factors in relation to the construction of the scapegoat and the remedy proposed.

Domestically, purification may be achievable via the casting out of particular populations or via the mere fact of division that distinguishes between one population and another, because, as Tom Douglas (1995) pointed out, “death is not the reason for scapegoating – it’s an outcome” (pp. 8–9). While not all instances of scapegoating demand violence, Burke argued the ritual can only produce the “feeling of relief” that accompanies catharsis if the sins of the enemy are cleansed in some capacity (Burke, 1964, p. 16). For Burke, this pressure for relief compels political actors to take the ritual to its logical conclusion.

The Banality of Scapegoating

A “ubiquitous discursive strategy,” as James Jasinski (2001, p. 507) put it, scapegoating is constantly repeated in all aspects of human relations. Rene Girard (1979) found the ritual so dominant that he claimed scapegoating is inextricably linked to and the “source of all rituals and religions” (p. 302). Burke (1968) took things even further – describing scapegoating as ontologically written into language itself and manifest in all aspects of human social relations (pp. 19–24). Countless studies demonstrate this transformational process, identifying as scapegoated communities: Muslims, Immigrants, baseball players, foreign enemies, drug dealers, philandering presidents, political parties, and a diverse set of public actors across differentially located communities.

While all scapegoated communities or individuals are capable of absorbing multiple and sometimes conflicting depictions, they remain organized under a master term that restricts significant variation in how those communities are classified. The term “drug dealers,” for example, is flexible enough to include people of every race, domestic and foreign, but designates a particular character premised on the actions of the individuals fitting the term. But, by scapegoating “drugs” and “dealers,” public discourse produces “common enemies” by “(mis)placing blame” from societal or economic factors to the individual users and those who supply illicit intoxicants (Mackey-Kallis & Hahn, 1994, pp. 2–3). In the first instance, the user is mortified, a process that demands admission of guilt. In the second, what Burke called victimage, the dealer is singled out as a unique cause of drug abuse. This differential aspect of scapegoating – between mortification and victimage – means that even while public advocates blames users for drug abuse, the dealer and producer receive unique rhetorical and material attention. Most notably, the discourse of the “War on Drugs” targets dealer and producer with police and military tactics organized by the discursive strategy.

Moreover, the scapegoating process implicates public deliberation by propagating mythic elements about a particular group and circulating that myth in the press. Press circulation of scapegoats often preserves the status quo, either by externalizing responsibility for a public problem or by undermining those seeking to address it. Jack Lule (2001), for example, has shown how the news scapegoated the Black Panthers as a means for “delegitimizing dissent” and sabotaged Huey Newton’s activism in particular (pp. 62, 64–80). Jeremy Engels (2010) has contended scapegoating “manufactures consent by manipulating the vitriolic emotions” generated by figuring the public as victim of a “name[d] the enemy” (pp. 304, 308). Emily Weiser (2008), too, has noted the emphasis on division and naming with her modern readings of Burke’s landmark essay “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle” (pp. 61–64).

These critics have contended “unification by scapegoat” extends the dialectical relationship between the division of “us” and “them,” a division that Burke (1968) has argued carries a “terministic compulsion” that drives individuals to “carry out the implications of one’s terminology” (p. 19). Thus, just as the Romans needed to crucify Jesus to achieve the catharsis invoked by sacrifice and the Nazis had to commit genocide to complete the scapegoating of the Jews, so too do nations act out the scapegoating ritual in foreign and domestic policymaking (Burke, 1973, pp. 45–48). In this way, scapegoating drives a pseudo-deliberation in which scapegoating a political enemy serves as the basis for political consent.

Trump’s Scapegoating Rhetoric

Cobbling together a narrow coalition that barely eked out an Electoral College victory, Trump’s scapegoating rhetoric propelled his candidacy while revealing deeply rooted racism in American political culture, if not the Fourth Estate (Grusin, 2017, pp. S87–S88). This rhetoric is distinctive in that Trump wove it into arguments for impossible policy plans – the southern border wall Mexico would pay for and his pledge to ban Muslims from entering the country, shut down mosques, and otherwise suppress Islam in the United States. These proposals – one practically unfeasible, the other likely unconstitutional – comprised the policy core of his campaign and reflected Trump’s ignorance and braggadocio.

Atypically, however, Trump’s scapegoating rhetoric produced division and opposition rather than unity. The rise of “resistance” groups, his declining popularity, and his inability to manufacture consent for virulently racist policies speak to the divisive components of his rhetoric. By analyzing Trump’s scapegoating of immigrants and Muslims – his most consistent targets – this section highlights the overtly racist components of his rhetoric and provides insight into his failure to generate unity.

Scapegoating (Mexican) Immigrants as Criminals

Scapegoating immigrants for American failures retains a central position in Trump’s rhetorical arsenal. From his speech announcing his candidacy to the present, he has consistently spoken about the dangers posed by immigrants, identified immigrants as the source of national problems, and blamed Democrats for failing to stop immigrants from illegally entering the country. In his presidential announcement address on June 16, 2015, Trump laid the foundation for this discourse by focusing on Mexicans by stating:

When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best... 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. But I speak to

border guards and they tell us what we're getting... They're sending us not the right people. It's coming from all over South and Latin America, and it's coming probably – probably – from the Middle East.
(Trump, 2016a)

This rhetoric figures immigration as something sent by foreign governments, implying those governments select their worst citizens and deliver them to the U.S. border. In doing so, Trump expands archetypal forms of scapegoating from the actual immigrants to include national governments. While Trump's scapegoating of immigrants blossomed into a full-throated charge that Muslims are responsible for international terrorism as his campaign progressed, this speech focused attention on "the border." Implying immigrants only transit from south to north – thus there is only one border that matters – he pledged to build a wall between the United States and Mexico that they will "pay for" (Trump, 2016a).

Trump's scapegoat, distinctly brown and foreign, appeared as the source of drug abuse, crime, rape, and terrorism. The rhetoric turned a blind eye to America's collective appetite for illegal drugs and to how national policies contribute to the rise of terrorism in the world and instead outsourced responsibility to those most vulnerable. The rambling remarks moved from blaming individuals, however, to also scapegoat nations like Mexico and China as simultaneously weak and vindictive and marvels of technological advancement. Appearing contradictory, Trump's argument implied that America was "losing" because other nations had figured out how to take advantage of us to their own benefit (Trump, 2015a).

This rhetoric blamed American economic and social weakness on the strategies enacted by foreign presidents. It implied that Mexican leaders, in particular, had sought to undermine America's greatness by flooding the country with poorly skilled, criminal elements. Simultaneously, the rhetoric called for a strong, capable leader up to the task of returning America to its former glory, someone who could out-strategize the opposition. In short, it heralded the need for a master negotiator, a deal maker.

Perhaps responding to media pushback, Trump doubled down on his claims about Mexico, tweeting on June 30, 2015, "I love the Mexican people, but Mexico is not our friend. They're killing us at the border and they're killing us on jobs and trade. FIGHT!" (Trump, 2015b). While this rhetoric mimics how presidents refer to foreign enemies (Flanagan, 2009), Trump's identification of Mexico as an enemy was shocking in and of itself. The United States and Mexico have long enjoyed close relations. During the Cold War, Mexico supported American anti-Communism policies in the region. After the Cold War, in addition to Canada, the nations negotiated and acceded to a free trade agreement. President George W. Bush's first international trip was to Mexico. And the nations have an ongoing partnership to combat drug trafficking.

In short, since 1945, Mexico has been one of the United States' strongest and most reliable allies. Trump's narrowing of scapegoating to specifically identify Mexico as an enemy of the nation disrupted this longstanding relationship. In Trump's world, Mexico appeared as dangerous and hostile to American interests. As he put it at a campaign rally in New Hampshire on June 30, 2016, "that could be a Mexican plane up there. They're getting ready to attack" (Gass, 2016). Picked up by the press as a jest, Trump's audience appeared to enjoy the remark and, in the broader context of a rhetoric blaming Mexico for stealing American jobs, the claim extended Trump's scapegoating thesis. Mexico, in cooperation with the Clintons and NAFTA, orchestrated American malaise.

In one of the strangest twists of the campaign, Trump's scapegoating rhetoric entangled the Pope after the religious leader made comments opposing the candidate, his anti-Mexican rhetoric, and his proposed border wall. Trump's statement warned that "when the Vatican is attacked by ISIS ... the Pope would have only wished and prayed that Donald Trump would have been president" (Trump, 2016e). Raising the other primary target of Trump's scapegoating rhetoric – Muslims – the statement also extended his claims about Mexico. This time, Trump figured Mexico as a rude bully having "made many disparaging remarks about me." They also were suspicious and secretive, but Trump was "wise to them" and knew they "want[ed] to rip off the United States."

Indicting all Mexicans, not just the president or the country's leadership, Trump's scapegoat appeared as an entire nation, collectively responsible for America's decline. Their policies cause, Trump stated, "crime, the drug trafficking and the negative economic impact" (Trump, 2016e). All of these remarks figured Mexico as the responsible party for American economic and cultural suffering, depicting the southern neighbor as having both the intent and means to ruin the nation. At the same time, they figured Trump as the only candidate to truly know the shape of Mexican character and as being up to the task of defeating their nefarious designs.

Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric reached an apex in his address accepting the nomination for president. In this speech he claimed "nearly 180,000 illegal immigrants with criminal records ... are tonight roaming free to threaten peaceful citizens" (Trump, 2016d). He punctuated the claim with an anecdote about an innocent (white) child killed by an undocumented immigrant (non-white) before shifting to claims about immigrants stealing American jobs. Once again, the rhetoric piled the blame for national ills on a foreign body. Crime, poverty, crumbling infrastructure, and budget deficits all resulted from massive waves of illegal immigration. Identifying the immigrant body – coded as a contaminant to the national body politic – as the cause of the nation's problems also pointed to the solution. Only by empowering Trump to run the nation could the immigrant body be banished from the country and prevented from returning.

While Trump's scapegoating of Mexicans remained consistent across his campaign, his vainglorious trip to meet with the president of Mexico – Enrique Peña Nieto – in August 2016, temporarily moderated the explicitness of his rhetoric. He followed up the visit with what he called a “detailed policy address” on “illegal immigration” in Phoenix, Arizona, on August 31, 2016. After praising Peña Nieto as someone “who truly loves his country,” Trump claimed he would rework the relationship between the two nations on the basis of “fairness” (Trump, 2016f). The comment implied, of course, that the current relationship was unfair, balanced in favor of Mexico. The rest of the address mimicked the basic pattern by pointing out the harm caused by immigrants and by blaming President Barack Obama and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

In each instance, the scapegoated Other appeared as “illegal immigrants,” rather than Mexico. Trump characterized immigrants as unable to “assimilate,” as dangerous and violent, and as job stealers who are “hurting a lot of our people that cannot get jobs under any circumstances” (Trump, 2016f). This rhetoric justified Trump's policy proposals, most notably his claim that he would build a “beautiful southern border wall” that “Mexico will pay for” (Trump, 2016f). By singling out the southern border, the rhetoric again inferred the danger posed by darker, non-white bodies moving from South to North.

Conferring responsibility on Mexico for not controlling those bodies – thus their responsibility to pay for the wall – Trump escalated the depiction by pointing to the technological sophistication necessary to keep immigrants out of the national body politic. “We will use the best technology,” he claimed, listing off measures to detect and detain migrants from going under or above the wall (Trump, 2016f). The rest of his policy proposals related to amplifying the means to capture and banish immigrants from the country, which he summed up by saying, “otherwise we don't have a country” (Trump, 2016f). Again, the rhetoric implied the contamination of the national body by foreign, non-white Others. Immigrants didn't just represent danger or loss of jobs; they reflected a loss of identity.

Scapegoating Mexicans from the Campaign to the Presidency

In the first presidential debate on September 26, 2016, Trump continued to identify “illegal immigrants” as the source of rising crime rates. Claiming the residents of “our inner cities ... are living in hell because it's so dangerous,” Trump blamed “gangs roaming the street. And in many cases, they're illegally here, illegal immigrants. And they have guns. And they shoot people” (Trump, 2016a). At the second debate on October 9, 2016, he continued the theme, insisting that:

children have been killed, brutally killed by people that came into our country illegally. You have thousands of mothers and fathers

and relatives all over the country. They're coming illegally. Drugs are pouring in through the border. We have no country if we have no border.

(Trump, 2016b)

And in the final debate on October 19, 2016, Trump reiterated all of the previous themes about drugs, criminality, loss of jobs, and a loss of national identity. Emphasizing his differences with Clinton, he finished his remarks by declaring that “we have some bad hombres here, and we're going to get them out” (Trump, 2016g). The picture evoked by this rhetoric entails a nation with the best intentions, hamstrung by a wave of brown, criminal bodies engaged in trafficking drugs, resorting to violence to pursue their goals, and unchecked by national authorities. Prototypical for racialized depictions of Latino immigrants (Santa Ana, 2002), Trump's rhetoric blamed both the immigrant and the Democrats for allowing the undocumented to corrupt the national fabric. As a rationale for his candidacy, this discourse distinguished his outlook from Clinton's while pushing his plan to “build a wall.”

Atypical for presidents, Trump has held several campaign style rallies since his inauguration. In those rallies, he has again resorted to scapegoating immigrants for perceived national problems. In one such rally, he repeated his campaign tale of meeting “American families whose loved ones – sons and daughters, husbands and wives – were viciously killed by illegal immigrants” (Trump, 2017a). Simultaneously emphasizing American victimhood while blaming the previous administration and “the media” for enabling immigrant violence, Trump's scapegoating rhetoric expanded the number of parties responsible beyond just the immigrant. It also wielded presidential ethos to fill out a more complete picture of the scapegoated other.

Implying his vantage point provided a clearer picture of the problem, Trump stated that “we are finding that drug dealers, robbers, thieves, gang members, predators, killers and criminals of all types preying on our citizens ... one by one, they are being tracked down and thrown the hell out of our country, and we will not let them back in” (Trump, 2017a). This rhetoric placed criminality in a binary relation – criminals were foreign and illegal, the victim citizens, innocent and law abiding. The rhetoric implied immigrants had an animalistic character. They “preyed” on the innocent and had to be “tracked down” and evicted from the nation. He continued these themes a subsequent rally (Trump, 2017b), a White House event in which he brought in family members of persons killed by undocumented immigrants (Trump, 2017c), a statement on legislation to further criminalize undocumented border crossings (Trump, 2017d), and in a weekly address (Trump, 2017e).

But it wasn't until a rally held in Ohio on July 25, 2017, that the president explicitly called immigrants “animals,” conferring subhuman

status upon them (Roberts, 2017). Claiming immigrants were “predator and criminal aliens who poison our communities with drugs and prey on innocent young people,” he then described how they kidnapped “a young, beautiful girl” and tortured her to death “because they want them to go through excruciating pain before they die” (Roberts, 2017). Embodying the most racist form of scapegoating, Trump’s rhetoric dehumanized the foreign body, marking it as the source of domestic problems and signaling the likelihood that his policies would increasingly target the scapegoated population. It also collapsed distinctions between the undocumented and the documented, the criminal and the lawful.

Scapegoating Muslims as Terrorists

The scapegoating of Muslims by Trump appeared as a secondary target during the campaign. Having endorsed some of the worst conspiracy theories about Barack Obama’s nationality and religious affiliation, Trump had a well-documented public record of expressing concern about Muslims. In his pre-campaign discourse, Muslims were suspicious by their very nature. His campaign rhetoric gradually embraced and expanded on the thesis that Muslims are inherently dangerous. At a rally in New Hampshire on September 30, 2015, he warned attendees that Syrian refugees “could be ISIS... This could be one of the greatest tactical ploys of all time. A 200,000-man army, maybe.” Filling out the portrait, he asserted, “they’re all men, and they’re all strong-looking guys” (Johnson, 2015a).

Simultaneously casting Europe and the United States as potential victims of terrorist attack, the rhetoric depicted refugees as purposefully secretive, masculine, and potentially dangerous. Implicitly figuring the United States and Europe as white states – victims of Middle Easterners – Trump’s supposition extended his prior concerns about non-white bodies posing a danger to national identity and justified the *a priori* exclusion of refugees.

A month later, Trump implied that the problem was Islam itself, not merely Syrian refugees. In an interview with Fox Business, he expressed interest in shutting down mosques in the United States as something to “look at” (Bailey, 2015). He continued the theme in an interview on MSNBC on November 15. This time he was even more explicit, stating how closing mosques is “something that you’re going to have to strongly consider because some of the ideas and some of the hatred – the absolute hatred – is coming from these areas.” He elaborated: “The hatred is incredible; it’s embedded. It’s embedded. The hatred is beyond belief.” Even while noting he knows some “Muslims, who are such unbelievably great people,” the valence of his remarks left little doubt about the source of American insecurity and how to counteract it (Johnson, 2015b).

The Episodic Scapegoating of Muslims

Throughout the rest of 2015, Trump continued to insist that Muslims of all stripes were anti-American, different from the rest of “us” and in need of monitoring, if not exclusion. In Alabama, he claimed “thousands and thousands of people were cheering” the fall of the World Trade Center, and on ABC News he clarified that those cheering were “a heavy Arab population” (Delawala, 2015). On MSNBC, Trump stated, “we are not loved by many Muslims” (Morning Joe, 2015). Each of these iterations distinguished between us – non-Muslim Americans – and them – Muslims of many nationalities – implying that Muslims could never truly be part of the nation. The call reached its apex with Trump’s response to the San Bernardino massacre on December 13, 2015. “You have to take out their families,” Trump declared on Fox News. Later, he claimed “we have people out there that want to do great destruction to our country.” He ended the year claiming that Islam is a “sickness” and Muslims are “sick people” (Friedman, 2015).

By March 2016, the scapegoating of Muslims resurged in Trump’s speeches. He contended on CNN that “Islam hates us ... there’s unbelievable hatred of us” (Schleifer, 2016). After three suicide bombings in Brussels, he expanded on the theme telling Fox Business that “we’re having a problem with the Muslims ... these attacks aren’t coming out of – they’re not done by Swedish people” (Saul, 2016). The phrasing of “the Muslims” again distinguished between us and them by separating Muslims as a separate class. On NBC’s TODAY, he added “there’s no assimilation ... they want Sharia Law. They don’t want the laws that we have” (Stump, 2016). The rhetoric replicated tropes of the national body contaminated by a foreign Other, warning that no Muslim immigrant could ever truly become American (or Western) because the very nature of their religion precluded it.

After the Pulse Nightclub massacre in Orlando, Florida, in June 2016, Trump extended his scapegoating of Muslims to renew his call for an immigration ban. Claiming the massacre was an “attack on the right of every single American to live in peace and safety,” Trump’s speech sought to produce unity via the identification of a common enemy (Trump, 2016c). Dodging the nature of the victims – LGBTQ people – Trump identified the enemy as Muslim and foreign, never truly “homegrown” and instead “imports from overseas.” The rhetoric distinguished between us and them while urging unity across “the whole civilized world in the fight against Islamic terrorism, just like we did against Communism in the Cold War.” Replicating orientalist tropes about Muslims and implying suspicion toward all Muslims, the narrative built a justification for his Muslim ban by scapegoating Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and the “dysfunctional immigration system” that left the nation vulnerable to attack (Trump, 2016c). This discourse distinguished Trump from Obama and Bush.

While both of his predecessors embraced orientalist policies, Obama attempted to justify those policies without articulating stereotypical tropes about Islam (Goldberg, 2017). And Bush, even in calling for a Global War on Terror – a crusade of West versus East – attempted to articulate respect for Islam and dissociate the “terrorists” from the wider Muslim diaspora (Lee, 2017, 6). For Trump, nuanced distinctions were part of the problem.

Trump’s speech accepting the Republican nomination for president leaned heavily on the scapegoating of Muslims to justify his candidacy. Framing his candidacy as the remedy to “a moment of crisis for our nation,” Trump claimed:

...to make life in America safe, we must also address the growing threats we face from outside the country: we are going to defeat the barbarians of ISIS, and we’re going to defeat them fast....The damage and devastation that can be inflicted by Islamic radicals has been proven over and over.

(Trump, 2016d)

Here, Trump’s rhetoric simultaneously represented the nation as at risk and identified the cause of the danger as an external, non-white, non-Christian population.

The principle of division manifest in scapegoating discourse – separating Americans from Muslims – marked the boundary that constituted a specific type of American identity. Rather than signify the sovereign border between the United States and the world, Trump’s discourse marked that boundary as the division between (predominantly) white Christians and Muslims. Making “Islam” the dividing line introduced doubt in the Americanness of any American Muslim, a possibility he pointed to by naming the events of 9/11, the San Bernardino attack, the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, the recruiting center attack in Tennessee in 2015, and the Orlando massacre. With the exception of 9/11, each of the named attacks involved American citizens who also claimed to worship Islam.

As the campaign wound down, Trump continued to blame the immigration system for permitting terrorists to infiltrate the national body. In a rally on September 19, 2016, Trump claimed that “Islamic terrorist attacks ... were made possible because our extremely open immigration system” (Nuzzi, 2016). Again, Trump’s rhetoric highlights the “Islamic” component of the attacks. The move scapegoated Muslims for American vulnerability to terrorism while turning a blind eye to other forms of domestic terrorism like abortion clinic bombings or mass shootings that did not involve “Muslims.”

Doing so facilitated the identification of a problem – immigration – that Trump could solve. Redemption, in Trump’s oration, appeared as

first endorsing his mandate for the presidency and then as empowering him to fix the problems created by Obama and Clinton. For his base, identifying Muslims, immigrants, and Democrats as the source of American ills proved cathartic. A week after his inauguration, Trump signed the first executive order barring Syrian refugees and citizens of seven other nations from entering the country for 90 days. After a series of court challenges, Trump reissued the ban in a way designed to withstand legal scrutiny (Liptak, 2017).

Analysis of Media Response to Trump’s Scapegoating Rhetoric

The scope of this chapter does not permit a full analysis of the bulk of media coverage over the course of the campaign. Instead, the following focuses on three significant moments in the campaign: Trump’s announcement address, his response to the Orlando massacre, and his address accepting the nomination for president. Analyzing press accounts of these four events provides insight into the shape and tone of coverage over the first year of his campaign and points to the ways the political press failed to take his campaign seriously. It also highlights enduring questions about the role of political journalism in political campaigns in challenging candidates.

Announcement Address

In an already crowded field of Republican challengers, the political press did not appear to take Trump’s announcement of his candidacy entirely seriously. An analysis of press coverage revealed Trump’s announcement address generated three primary responses from the political press: comments about the oddness of his speech, comments about his celebrity status, and observations about his chances. Commentary about the oddness of Trump’s speech typically described the setting (Trump Tower in New York City), the length of the speech, and the rambling form of delivery. When discussing the content of the speech, typical accounts referred to it as odd, as “dramatic and eccentric,” and filled with “the strangest quotes” (Clark, 2015). *Politico* referred to the speech and to Trump’s campaign as “quixotic” and “pugnacious,” but went on to list the “ten best lines” from the speech, with the “best” being a quip about Mexicans (Lerner, 2015).

The Guardian (2015) also called the speech “eccentric,” noted the ways Trump scapegoated Mexicans, and then shifted to discuss the horserace component of a crowded field of Republican challengers. *The Financial Times* called his address a “bizarre tirade” and noted the “string of xenophobic comments – particularly about Mexican immigrants whom he said included ‘rapists’” (Sevastopulo, 2015). National Public Radio

(NPR) classified the speech “unconventional” but produced a list of its “best moments” (Kelly, 2015). Notably, the list did not mention the “rapists” comment. Matt Tiabbi (2015) wrote a column in *Rolling Stone* listing “the 47 funniest things about Donald Trump” and referred to his comments about Mexicans as a “crude swipe.” These examples point to the ways the political press covered Trump’s entry into the race as a form of comic relief. Very few mainstream news sources directly challenged Trump’s scapegoating rhetoric, instead noting its atypical form for presidential aspirants.

A secondary strain of commentary highlighted Trump’s celebrity status. ABC News recounted the candidate’s descent on the escalator prior to his actual address, referring to him as “The Donald” (Santucci & Stracqualursi, 2015). CNN emphasized Trump’s celebrity status, noting he “flaunted his wealth and success in business” to prove his qualifications for the job (Diamond, 2015). Entertainment press coverage raised Trump and his candidacy as a spectacle and as a source of comedy (Scheck, 2015). Most accounts discussed Trump’s candidacy as a “gift from the comedy gods” (Bauder, 2015). One account mentioned Trump had referred to Mexicans as “rapists,” as well as attacking “U.S. politicians as ‘stupid,’ ‘morally corrupt’ losers” (Mccaffé, 2015). In none of these accounts did the press report on or challenge Trump’s scapegoating of Mexicans. Instead, each of these accounts highlighted some capacity of Trump’s celebrity status and the potential comic relief made possible by his candidacy.

The final major strand of commentary focused on Trump’s chances to win the nomination. Most discounted the possibility of Trump winning the nomination. *The Financial Times*, again, claimed that “practically no one thinks the billionaire has a chance of becoming president,” quoting academics and political analysts to demonstrate the consensus (Sevastopulo, 2015). One conservative commenter wrote a column titled “Anticipating Donald Trump’s exit speech” and called the announcement speech “crazy,” “incoherent,” and a “joke” (Domke, 2015). In short, a significant strand of coverage did not take Trump’s candidacy seriously.

Responses to Trump’s comments on Orlando Massacre, June 2016

The analysis of press coverage of Trump’s speech after the Orlando massacre demonstrates the significant shift in coverage from June 2015 to June 2016. Multiple reports specifically named and challenged his scapegoating of Muslims, noting that his rhetoric did not align with core American values. *The New York Times*, for example, emphasized Trump’s claim that “all Muslim immigrants posed potential threats to America’s security and called for a ban on migrants from any part of

the world with ‘a proven history of terrorism’ against the United States or its allies” (Martin & Burns, 2016). The reporting went on to explain how Trump had implicitly connected terrorism to all Muslims, coding Muslim bodies as inherently dangerous and incapable of becoming truly American.

Another account noted that Trump blamed “Muslim immigrants” for terrorism, even though the Orlando shooter had been born in the United States, rather than directly call out the candidate, this article reported that Clinton had stressed the need to work with Muslim communities rather than “scapegoating” them writ large (Cadei, 2016). Another commenter lamented the scapegoating of Muslims after the massacre, noting that for “Donald Trump ... basically all Muslims” are to blame (Gobry, 2016). And *U.S. News* called Trump’s speech “one of the most demagogic anti-immigration speeches by a candidate in modern times” (Hemmer, 2016).

An additional line of media commentary emphasized the politicized nature of the event and pointed to differences between Clinton and Trump, as revealed in their speeches about the Orlando massacre. In what would become increasingly common after the conventions, these accounts depicted Clinton as a “thoughtful, cautious leader” and Trump as someone who “shoots from the hip and trusts his gut” (Elliot, 2016). These accounts identified scapegoating rhetoric in both candidates discourse – guns vs. immigration – but withheld judgment about the candidates themselves. Instead, they presented the candidates’ remarks as indicative of leadership style, leaving it up to the voter to determine which style they preferred. A secondary component of this media coverage emphasized that the candidate’s speeches “defied, as usual, political convention” (Biermann & Halper, 2016). Much of this reporting appeared in a he said-she said format, in which both candidates’ views were presented without much guidance offered to delineate or judge the two.

Responses to Republican National Convention Address, July 2016

Previous scholarship indicates that news media coverage of convention addresses tends to highlight the positive components of the speakers and the vision they offer the world (Benoit et. al., 2007, p. 147). Because of the potential “bump” in support media coverage of conventions can produce, candidates typically coordinate the speeches at the convention to ensure the nominee receives favorable coverage (Vigil, 2015, p. 130). In the current, digitized media ecosystem, convention addresses are now live blogged, immediately dissected, memed and otherwise cut into sound bites that political commentators employed by the major television and cable networks can easily circulate (Foley, 2012, pp. 613–614).

While the TV news has, to some extent, participated in these practices for decades, the increasingly fragmented media landscape has undermined candidates' attempts to frame news coverage of convention addresses (Scacco & Coe, 2016, p. 2017). That said, several strands of media coverage emerged in the aftermath of Trump's acceptance address. One strand emphasized the length of the speech and its significance to the Republican Party (Date, 2016). These accounts, while noting Trump was never a Republican and only became one to win the nomination, highlighted the policy components of Trump's address and his claim to leadership. In doing so, these reports detailed ideological and policy differences between Trump and the Republican Party.

The major media frame of Trump's address, however, emphasized the "darkness" of his speech. CNN, for example, noted that "Trump conjured a dire picture ... of an America sliding deeper into poverty, violence and corruption" (Collinson, 2016). Without using the words, the report identified Trump's reliance on scapegoating, particularly immigrants. Reuters, too, adopted a similar frame, claiming "Trump presented a bleak view of America under siege from illegal immigrants, threatened by Islamic State militants, hindered by crumbling infrastructure and weakened by unfair trade deals and race-related violence" (Holland, 2016).

Trump's scapegoating of immigrants for insecurity and economic malaise appeared as the dominant frame in these reports, although some outlets opted to fact-check the candidate and point to the lack of "policy agendas" designed to address the challenges he identified (Flores, 2016). And, in perhaps its most explicit move against Trump, *The New York Times* editorial page referred to the speech as a "campaign of fear," and warned that the candidate "intends to terrify voters into supporting him" (Editorial Board, 2016).

Conclusion

While it is tempting to write Trump off as an exception to the rule, as David Campbell (1998) has said, "the ability to represent things as alien, subversive, dirty, and sick has been pivotal to the articulation of danger in the American experience" (p. 3). Historically constant, those representations have driven the nation to war, underwritten racist policies at home and abroad, and bonded American culture around notions of exceptional ideals. Trump rise to power, then, reflects synchronicity with a particular kind of identity politics that typifies American political culture.

Principally orchestrated via the discourse of scapegoating, this form of politics identifies others as the source of American malaise, offering up an image of America as held back by the nefarious designs of others. Trump's embodiment of the most racist scapegoating form, while

disconcerting, suggests that politicians can continue to exploit American commitments to the belief in their own exceptional qualities.

Trump's candidacy raises important questions for how the news media should report on populist leaders who directly challenge American democracy. As a profession organized to objectively report both sides, Trump's rise suggests limitations in the role the press can play in countering dangerous populist impulses. Rather than directly calling out Trump, his rhetoric, and his candidacy for underlying xenophobic and racist elements, initial accounts treated the Trump campaign as another act of political theater.

Moving from frames of novelty to frames of danger, the coverage indexed in this chapter demonstrates that Trump's rise corresponded with press concerns about his rhetoric, his policies, and his anti-democratic impulses. Rarely engaging explicit condemnation, the press's emphasis on identifying and condemning Trump's scapegoating of immigrants and Muslims suggests a shift in the coverage of the insurgent presidential candidate.

Still, Trump's rise generated significant and sustained opposition. A Black Lives Matter founder, for example, responded to Trump's nomination address by calling out the candidate's racist undertones. As she put it, "the terrorist on our televisions tonight was Donald Trump," he is "a charlatan who will embolden racists and destroy communities of color," and "White people of conscious must forcefully reject this hatred" (Edwards, 2016).

Defining Trump as a terrorist shifted the focus away from the elements of political theater and spectacle to emphasize the core essence of Trump and his campaign. This reframing shows how oppositional voices can wield a new rhetoric of the enemy to political gain, not as a technique of persuasion, but rather as an embodied position of opposition. Ultimately, these forms of embodied oppositions are likely to become increasingly important as Trump shows no sign of abandoning virulently racist forms of scapegoating.

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