



WINTER 2019

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OPINION

Spectacle of Decency: Standing Up to Trump's "They Hate America"



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The advice to Donald Trump, from his White House advisors and Republican legislators, was blunt: "Argue that the four congresswomen hated America and were welcome to leave for that reason."

A day earlier, Trump had said, in a tweet-storm about four Democratic Congresswomen, "Why don't they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came?"

All of the legislators in "The Squad" – Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Ayanna Pressley – are people of color. Three were born in the US; the fourth, Omar, came to the US as a 12-year-old refugee from war-torn Somalia. Omar and Tlaib are the first two Muslim Congresswomen in US history.

Trump and his advisors were taken aback by the reaction. Having excused white supremacy after violent marches such as that in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, having insulted and stigmatized immigrants, Muslims, and people of color, Trump now faced his political tipping point of racism.

Emergency meetings were convened to protect the Presidency and, more importantly, the 2020 re-election campaign. The answer came back to the Oval Office: take care not to cross the racism line – but portray "The Squad", Democrats, and critics as the hate-filled enemies of "good" Americans.

On Monday morning Sen. Lindsey Graham, a close friend of Trump, rolled out the tactic on Trump's favorite TV show *Fox and Friends*, "We all know that

AOC and this crowd are a bunch of communists. They hate Israel. They hate our own country... They're anti-Semitic. They're anti-America."

Trump tweeted Graham's diatribe and added, "Need I say more?"

Even with his advisors' caveat, Don't Be Racist, Trump was still close to and possibly over the mark. On the Wednesday, at a rally in North Carolina, he egged on the crowd about "The Squad" and specifically Omar:

"Representative Omar blames the United States, for the terrorist attacks on our country...She looks down with contempt on the hardworking American... And obviously and importantly, Omar has a history of launching vicious anti-semitic screeds"

Back came the loud endorsement, "Send Her Back!" Trump basked for 15 seconds in the chant.

Again furor was stoked. Republican legislators were so concerned that they asked Vice President Mike Pence to damp down the attacks. Ivanka Trump also spoke with her father. So on Thursday, Trump made a grudging retreat, lying to reporters that he had tried to cut off the crowd: "I disagree with it, by the way...I felt a little bit badly about it."

But by Friday, Trump was back on the attack against the "foul mouthed Omar" and the "vile and disgusting statements" by The Squad. The pattern was set. There weren't really any dividers between race, religion, and the performance of They Hate America. There were always crossover points.

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Spectacle of Decency: Standing Up to Trump's "They Hate America"

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On 3 August, a gunman named Patrick Crusius killed 22 people and wounded 24 others at a shopping mall in El Paso, Texas. His "manifesto", posted on the forum 8Chan, echoed Trump's "zero tolerance" anti-immigrant message and policies with its mission to stop a "Hispanic invasion of Texas".

Pressed about the similarity in rhetoric, Trump deflected. He blamed video games and crazy shooters rather than the hostility to immigrants and the availability of guns, including assault weapons: "Mental illness and hatred pull the trigger, not the gun."

By August 7, the Administration was back on the front foot against both undocumented and legal immigrants. Raids on seven food-processing plants in Mississippi swept up almost 700 immigrants, separating them from their children on the first day of the school year. The Administration brought out its plan to deport legal immigrants if they benefited from public programs such as food stamps, housing vouchers, and Medicaid. New guidelines authorized the indefinite detention of undocumented immigrant families, defying a 1997 court settlement.

Meanwhile, Trump and Republican legislators assailed the four Democratic Congresswomen. Trump pressured the Israeli Government into withdrawing permission for Tlaib and Omar to hold meetings in Palestine, also preventing Tlaib from seeing her 90-year-old

grandmother in the West Bank. When Tlaib emotionally spoke of refusing the Israeli conditions of no public statements in exchange for the opportunity to see her "sity" one last time, Trump sneered, "Sorry, I don't buy Rep. Tlaib's tears. I have watched her violence, craziness and, most importantly, WORDS, for far too long."

What Is to Be Done?

An easy response is that the racism, hatred, and division will evaporate if Trump leaves the White House on January 20, 2021, a more salient version of George H.W. Bush's "our long national nightmare is over". (Bush was speaking not about a return to civility and rights but about a supposed victory in the 1991 Gulf War.)

However, easy can be evasive. Even if Trump retreats to Twitter and his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, he has damaged language norms and thus action in US politics. He has shifted the "Overton window", the range of acceptable ideas in public discourse.

More importantly, Republican legislators and activists have not just accompanied but enabled Trump on his Sherman-like march through political culture. Some have paralleled his inflammatory remarks. Others, notably Senate Leader Mitch McConnell, have stonewalled against any measure that might displease Trump. Others have stymied efforts at accountability.

If there is to be repair of the damage, it cannot come only from inside Washington corridors. To counter Trump's spectacle of insult and animosity in the cloak of Make America Great Again, there must be a Spectacle of Decency from the rest of us.

Responding to Trump's racist tweets, Ilhan Omar said, "Together we are fighting for a vision of America where its promise is alive for all who seek it." This was not a language of imposition, but of reflection.

Reflection of the Women's March of January 21, 2017, a day after Trump's inauguration, replacing his Us v. Them with "Whenever you're feeling doubt, whenever you want to give up, you must always remember to choose freedom over fear."

Reflection of those who gathered in airports to say that American should be welcome to all, defying Trump's Muslim Ban on entry by citizens of seven mainly-Muslim countries, and of those who gather today outside migrant detention centers to protest the inhuman conditions.

Reflection of those who walked, chanted, and sang the "March for Our Lives" after the mass killings at Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida in February 2018 and who have held the vigils after Sutherland Springs, Las Vegas, Plano, Pittsburgh, Virginia Beach, El Paso, and Dayton.

Reflection of those who gathered in Charlottesville and beyond, sometimes at risk to their safety, to say no to white supremacist marches.

Donald Trump has used the spectacular to pose the threat to "America". But spectacle does not mean sinking into the position of spectator. To the contrary, it can be part of empowerment.

As Michelle Obama said in July 2016, "When something is cruel or acts like a bully, you don't stoop to their level. When they go low, we go high."

Career Evening



Clinton Institute Alums and some current students with Prof. Liam Kennedy

"The Clinton Institute hosted a wonderful career information night which featured many helpful resources and tips for navigating the post-graduate job market. The event included a speaker from the UCD Career Advising Center who shared the university's tools and outside resources for job searching. Several Clinton Institute Alumni came in to share their experience with finding work after their MA. They shared their passion and zeal for implementing what they learned from their MA programs in their careers. We were able to speak with the presenters and other attendees after the main portion was over and got the chance to make contacts and network for future opportunities. This was a brilliant event that I would recommend any and all Institute students to attend." *Haley Wilson*

The Clinton Institute host US Foreign Policy Conference

Dr. Eugenio Lilli

To consolidate our position as an international center for the teaching and the research on US foreign policy and cyber security, this September the UCD Clinton Institute for American Studies has organized two fascinating events.

To begin with, the Institute hosted the **14th British International Studies Association US Foreign Policy Working Group Annual Conference** on the 4-5th September.

Tellingly, this is the first time since its inception that the British International Studies Association's working group on US foreign policy has held its annual conference outside of the United Kingdom. The working group is one of the largest European networks of academics, scholars, and professionals active in the analysis of US foreign policy. Delegates joined the conference from every corner of the world, with the majority of them coming from Europe and North America.

Speakers discussed issues of US political, economic, and security dynamics in the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and elsewhere; the international records of US presidents and administrations, past and present; US engagement with key global institutions and organizations; and numerous other arenas of historical, contemporary, and future significance.

The keynotes address focussed on the impact of new technologies on US foreign policy.



Christopher Painter delivered a lecture on "Diplomacy, Conflict, Norms and Deterrence in Cyberspace".

Mr. Painter is a globally recognized leader and expert on cybersecurity, cyber diplomacy, and combatting cybercrime. He has been on the vanguard of US

and international cyber issues for over twenty-five years—first as a prosecutor of some of the most high-profile cybercrime cases in the country and then as a senior official at the Department of Justice, FBI, the National Security Council, and finally the State Department. He has initiated, helped drive, or advised on virtually every major US cyber policy for over a decade and has created innovative new organizations and approaches to deal with threats and take advantage of opportunities in cyberspace.

A video of his address will be available on our website – www.ucdclinton.ie.

The second event was organized in collaboration with UCD Discovery and the Boston College Global Leadership Institute. It consisted of another talk by Mr. Painter on September 5th addressing the topic of **"Conducting Diplomacy and Combating Threats in Cyberspace"**.

This event represented an opportunity for the Institute's research community to engage on issues of cyber security with select representatives of hi-tech companies and cyber security firms, diplomats, and members of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Defense Forces, among others.

Through these type of events, the Institute aims at creating a distinctly international environment conducive to improved quality of teaching and researching in US foreign policy and cyber security.





A word from our Alumni

Kyle Gunnels

When I moved from the United States to Dublin in the summer of 2016, like many at the time, I was still processing the Brexit vote that had just occurred in the United Kingdom. And, I naively thought, “well at least the USA is smarter than that” in the lead up to our November election. I was, in hindsight, very, very wrong. In the course of five months, the UK and US presented two situations that became case studies and application scenarios for every one of my classes in the media and international conflict master’s program.

The results of the 2016 election were also ironically and depressingly fortuitous, as I always planned and had already proposed to write my thesis on how traditional journalism practice in the United States is affected by political polarization and partisan media. Almost overnight, I had subject material for a whole chapter seemingly dropped in my lap – and, after completing a survey of journalists at outlets across the US I found that, second to technological disruption, journalists believed the Trump administration was now the greatest threat facing a free press.

Living overseas with so much change happening in the world was eye opening and educating in a way that no classroom could ever be. However, as someone who unabashedly leans left politically and was – and still am – worried about the damage to be inflicted to my country and many of its people, it was also isolating in a way, particularly as the current administration began to implement its discriminatory policies post-inauguration. I watched from afar as things occurred, and as millions of people protested, but I didn’t feel as though I could do anything to help being so far away—and that was tough.

Before deciding to pursue a master’s degree, my work experience primarily centered on education-focused public relations, policy and advocacy – and I originally intended to return to Washington, D.C., post-graduate school to pursue a career in political administration. However, I ultimately decided to put those plans on hold and returned to Denver, Colorado, where I took a job leading communications for an education policy advocacy organization, ultimately leaving to manage communications and strategic initiatives at an education technology company, where I am now.

I’ve continued to be involved in politics, just in different ways than I planned when deciding to attend UCD. The adage in the US that ‘all politics is local’ rings truer today, and that has been a personal focus. Since returning to the US, I’ve worked to ensure that friends who were previously disengaged with the political process are now not only registered to vote, but also actively engaged in supporting causes and candidates. I have and continue to more actively support candidates in city, state and national races, including volunteering with Congressional and Senate candidates in advance of the 2020 election – I’ve learned that to win, candidates need both financial support and human capital.

The world is still watching what will happen with Brexit and its knock-on effects, and the US continues to lose power and prestige every day – but as mentioned earlier, politics is local, and it’s up to all of us to work hard in support of the future we want to see for ourselves and the world. I wish that every single person had the opportunity and open-mindedness to think globally and learn about their own country from a different lens, like the education and perspective provided at the Clinton Institute – if so, I imagine that neither Brexit nor a Trump administration would have come about.

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Upcoming Events

CONFERENCE

Alternative Realities: New challenges for American Literature in the era of Trump
 Friday 13-Saturday 14 December 2019

Speakers include acclaimed writers:

Aleksandar Hemon, Karen E. Bender, Chris Beckett



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