

Hello Darkness: Antisemitism and Rhetorical Silence in the “Trump Era”

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This essay investigates the simultaneously loud and silent rhetorics of antisemitism that have proliferated leading up to, and since the inception of, the Donald Trump presidency. How is it possible that discourse that seems so obvious, and so antithetical to US ideals, has managed to go either unnoticed or unremarked upon, or has been met with passionate support? The answers to this lie in the difficulty in ascribing authorial intent to silence, in the nebulous space of liminal Whiteness occupied by American Jews, and in Trump’s usage of five strategic rhetorical silences that signify antisemitism: literal; symbolic; dialogic; paralipic; and dog-whistled. The essay concludes by discussing how the Trump campaign/Cabinet’s attempts to capitalize on White dispossession and utilization of “the radical flank” is helping both to normalize his antisemitic followers and to add to his appeal.

Keywords: Jewishness, Antisemitism, Donald Trump, Rhetorical Silence, Dog-whistle

While the marchers marched in Charlottesville in August, 2017, I mentioned on Facebook that when I began my PhD over a decade previously, a (likely well-meaning) professor had told me that I shouldn’t pursue a dissertation investigating and retheorizing the place of Jews in the US vis-à-vis race, Whiteness and marginalization. This work was unnecessary, I was told, because we were “past-antisemitism in the United States.” And now here we were, with marchers chanting, “Jews will not replace us.” When I posted this, one (likely well-meaning) acquaintance posted that White Supremacy, and the marches, were not *really* about the Jews or antisemitism; my personal anecdote was a distraction.

I began thinking about how responses to White Supremacy and bigotry seem to revolve around a decision-making calculus which focuses on “race” (read: non-Whiteness) versus Whiteness. So, some de-prioritize antisemitism because, since Jews have made it as “White” (in the U.S. narrative), this hatred is somehow less hateful. This in turn led me to think about the current political climate (which brings with it the faulty notion that the current, highly-visible wave of antisemitism is a sort of easily operable and idiopathic tumor, rather than an indicator of an underlying, malignant and genetic ailment), the mechanisms facilitating both the proliferation of antisemitic rhetorics in the U.S., and the silences around them.

In this paper, I examine Donald Trump’s antisemitic rhetorics. It’s quite possible that Trump is *not* antisemitic in the way that he is clearly sexist, Islamophobic, etc.—but he *uses* all the tropes of antisemitism fluently. Part of the problem in this kind of work is the *exactitude* that one invariably wants, but can rarely achieve. I cannot say, with certainty, that Trump *is an antisemite*. Regardless of how forthright and unvarnished he may seem, it is impossible to know what he truly thinks or feels; that is how language works.¹ Thus, some of the more pointed criticisms of Trump

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¹ See Stuart Hall, “Encoding, Decoding,” in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Ed.), *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, (London: Hutchinson, 1980): 128-138.

follow the type of trope uttered by the head of a foundation combating antisemitism: “I take Donald Trump at his word that he is not an antisemite. But he is a serial enabler of antisemitism.”² And, while one can point to the rise of antisemitic acts since the inception of Trump’s presidency—an increase of 86 percent³—one cannot prove that Trump’s rhetorics have *caused* this rise. Rather, I believe that President Trump is tapping into, and bringing forth, a deep wellspring of systemic antisemitism that many (incorrectly) assumed to be either extinct or nothing more than the expression of a radical individualism. Making difficult what would otherwise seem to be easy—declaring Trump an antisemite—is his employment of various types of silence—things that are literally unsaid, things that are stand-ins for things that *cannot* (because they are taboo) be said. This leads to a thorny question—how do scholars analyze that which is, or cannot, be said?⁴

My aims in this paper are multifold. I intend to: investigate silence as a rhetorical strategy; point to the rhetorical tools that Trump and his supporters use in order to invoke and provoke antisemitism; demonstrate how competing views of Whiteness and marginalization have fueled this current instantiation of antisemitism; and detail why this particular groundswell of White nationalism is effective.

Before moving on to Trump’s meaningful silences around antisemitism—silences which stand in stark contrast to how vociferously he harangues other marginalized identity groups—it is important to say a quick word about antisemitism in the United States. Much as we find ourselves in an era in which it is often mistakenly believed that racism is an individual flaw, not a systemic or institutional one,⁵ we are also in an era in which antisemitism is largely believed to be something spouted by the occasional disgruntled young White man with a tiki torch, not something culturally endemic. And, indeed, just as Jews have been (partially) Whitened as part and parcel of fitting into a White Supremacist nation,⁶ the very long and historic narratives of Jewish *Whitening* and of antisemitism in the United States have been whitewashed.⁷ But those discourses of antisemitism have always lingered. The march in Charlottesville is a metonym for this; what started as a White nationalist protest against removing Confederate iconography soon featured antisemitic chants. This is because “Anti-Semitism often functions as a readily available language for all manner of bigotry—a Rosetta Stone that can translate animus toward one group into a universal hate for many groups.”⁸ The idea that Jews are the string-pullers behind the scenes—running “the media,” the US political system, the Federal Reserve—is a canard that has never disappeared, and that keeps antisemitism current.

While some may believe that antisemitism is a recent phenomenon, not part of the genome of this nation, Jews have been disparaged or rejected since its inception.⁹ Antisemitism is something

² Kenneth Stern. “What will it take for Donald Trump to condemn Antisemitism?” *The Forward*. February 16, 2017.

³ Clark Mindock. “Antisemitic incidents almost double under Donald Trump administration, new figures reveal.” *Independent*. April 25, 2017.

⁴ See Crispin Thurlow and Jamie Moshin, “What the f#@\$: Policing and performing the unmentionable in news.” In Melani Schroter and Charlotte Taylor (Eds.), *Exploring Silence and Absence in Discourse: Empirical Approaches*. (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

⁵ Eduardo Bonillo-Silva, “Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation,” *American Sociological Review*, 62, no. 3 (1997): 465-480.

⁶ See, for instance, Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and what that Says about Race in America*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

⁷ Jonathan Sarna, “Anti-Semitism and American History,” *Commentary*, 71, no. 3 (1981).

⁸ Emma Green, “Why the Charlottesville Marchers were Obsessed with Jews,” *Atlantic*, August 15, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/nazis-racism-charlottesville/536928/>.

⁹ Sarna, “Anti-Semitism.”

that has long found its voice in the US, from the lynching of the falsely-accused Leo Frank in 1915, to the 1920s, when there were more KKK members in the United States than there were Jews,¹⁰ the Johnson-Reed Act halted the immigration of Eastern European Jews¹¹ and many universities instituted a quota system to restrict Jewish admission (with some lasting through the 1970s),¹² to the scientific racism of Madison Grant (who proclaimed that Jews were the lowest of the races).¹³ Even in 2014, the FBI reported that 57% of religiously-targeted hate crimes were antisemitic in nature, and that antisemitism is particularly prevalent on college campuses.¹⁴ In other words, Trump's flirtations with antisemitism described throughout this piece should not be read just as the (oftentimes silent) discourses of one man, but as his tapping into a longstanding American narrative.

Trumping Up Silence

In 2005, the UN designated January 27th as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The date was chosen because it marks the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Auschwitz, the most infamous of all Nazi concentration camps—and the primary metonym for the Holocaust as a whole¹⁵—was the site of an estimated 1.1 million murders, 960,000 of whom (87%) were Jews.¹⁶ Since its inception, every standing U.S. president has delivered a statement in memoriam on that day. In 2007, George W. Bush said: “On the second International Day of Commemoration, we remember and mourn the victims of the Holocaust... We must continue to condemn the resurgence of antisemitism, that same virulent intolerance that led to the Holocaust, and we must combat bigotry and hatred in all their forms, in America and abroad.”¹⁷ In 2012, Barack Obama said: “This International Holocaust Remembrance Day... we remember the six million Jews and millions of others who were murdered at the hands of the Nazis.”¹⁸

While many Holocaust victims were not Jews—including political dissidents, the disabled, homosexuals, and the Roma and Sinti—the Holocaust was primarily a Jewish genocide. Other groups were targeted, but they were not “slated for utter annihilation” in the same way as were the Jews.¹⁹ Thus, Donald Trump's statement on January 27, 2017 is particularly noteworthy. It reads, in its entirety:

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Michael Dobrowski, “In Search of Refuge,” *Shofar*, 22, no. 4 (2004): 143-44.

¹² Brodtkin, *Jews Became White Folks*.

¹³ Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, (Burlington: Ostara, 1916/2011)/

¹⁴ FBI, “2014 Hate Crime Statistics,” accessed November 11, 2017, https://ucr.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/hate-crime/2014/topic-pages/victims_final.

¹⁵ See Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁶ “Auschwitz,” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, accessed September 23, 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005189>.

¹⁷ George W. Bush, “Statement on the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust,” *The American Presidency Project*, January 26, 2007, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=24462>.

¹⁸ Barack Obama, “Statement by the President on International Holocaust Remembrance Day,” *The White House*, January 27, 2012, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/27/statement-president-international-holocaust-remembrance-day>.

¹⁹ “The Holocaust Resource Center,” *Yad Vashem*, accessed on September 23, 2017, http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/resource_center/faq.asp.

It is with a heavy heart and somber mind that we remember and honor the victims, survivors, heroes of the Holocaust. It is impossible to fully fathom the depravity and horror inflicted on innocent people by Nazi terror.

Yet, we know that in the darkest hours of humanity, light shines the brightest. As we remember those who died, we are deeply grateful to those who risked their lives to save the innocent.

In the name of the perished, I pledge to do everything in my power throughout my Presidency, and my life, to ensure that the forces of evil never again defeat the powers of good. Together, we will make love and tolerance prevalent throughout the world.²⁰

What makes this statement particularly important is not what it says, but what it does not say—and, by extension, what it says *via* what it does not say. Conspicuously absent from this statement commemorating the Holocaust—an event in which two-thirds of the world’s Jewry were murdered, and which lives on as one of the major pillars through which American Jews identify *as Jews*²¹—are Jews. Trump’s spokesperson, Hope Hicks, argued that this was an intentional omission that should be read as anything *but* antisemitic: “Despite what the media reports, we are an incredibly inclusive group and we took into account all of those who suffered.”²² In other words, many people were victimized and murdered during the Holocaust, so mentioning the Jews in particular would serve to minimize the suffering of other target groups. On one hand, this argument may seem nonsensical—certainly, one could mention Jews *and* other victims of the Holocaust (explicitly or otherwise), as demonstrated by Presidents Bush and Obama. On the other hand, this signals two analytical problems that will serve as a foil and touchstone throughout this paper: how, exactly, do we analyze and interpret that which is not said; and, how do we assign intent/blame for that which is either unsaid or denied?

Following scholars like Hall,²³ Jaworski,²⁴ Huckin,²⁵ Olson,²⁶ Glenn²⁷ and Cloud,²⁸ I view silences as *rhetorical/discursive*—as communicative, not as the absence of sound or text.²⁹ As Olson puts it, “Deeds can be done in eloquent silence, and ideas conveyed through a wide range of symbolic means beyond the spoken or written word.”³⁰ *In context*, silences can have symbolic power, and speak just as loudly as do words;³¹ Cloud supplies an apt metaphor, noting that silence is “an

²⁰ Donald J. Trump, “Statement by the President on International Holocaust Remembrance Day,” *The White House*, January 27, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/27/statement-president-international-holocaust-remembrance-day>.

²¹ Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

²² In Jake Tapper, “WH: No Mention of Jews on Holocaust Remembrance Day because Others were Killed too,” *CNN*, February 2, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/28/politics/white-house-holocaust-memorial-day/index.html>.

²³ Stuart Hall, *The Origins of Cultural Studies*, (Northampton: Media Education Foundation, 1989/2006).

²⁴ Adam Jaworski, “Introduction: an Overview,” in Adam Jaworski (Ed.), *Silence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997): 3-14.

²⁵ Thomas Huckin, “Textual Silence and the Discourse of Homelessness,” *Discourse & Society*, 13, no. 3, (2002): 347-372.

²⁶ Lester Olson, “On the Margins of Rhetoric: Audre Lorde Transforming Silence into Language and Action,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 83, no. 1 (1997): 49-70.

²⁷ Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004).

²⁸ Dana Cloud, “The Null Persona: Race and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Uprising of ’34,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 2, no. 2 (1999): 177-209.

²⁹ Jaworski, “Introduction.”

³⁰ *Ibid*, 66.

³¹ Glenn, *Unspoken*.

integral component of meaning-making, to be understood in the same way in which silence is the complement of sound in music.”³² Part of the inherent difficulty in analyzing silence is that one “cannot essay all the motivations for silence.”³³ Silence is inherently contextual and polysemic³⁴—how do we know that which is unsaid? Many theorists associate silence with imbalances of power, either forced on marginalized groups,³⁵ or taken on and employed in response to a wide variety of oppressions—that is, “less silent than *silenced*.”³⁶ Olson, for one, warns that silence can be a dangerous rhetorical tool, as it can function as an enabling and quiescent behavior: “Silence may be more decorous than a scream, but silence is unlikely to secure necessary support, assistance, and care from concerned communities, or to bring about social or political change.”³⁷

In Trump’s case, we see something else entirely; a silence employed not from oppression, but from power. He is *using* silence to achieve (strategically unstated) goals. A useful way to think of this is through Cloud’s notion of the “null persona,” a created rhetor who is using silence to overcome hidden (to the audience) constraints.³⁸ While Cloud offers this in the context of marginalized rhetors, it works for Trump, too; he faces the constraint that antisemitism is generally considered unacceptable, and that members of the alt-right³⁹ *do* tend to see themselves as marginalized. In fact, Trump often, strategically, paints *himself* as marginalized—the victim of attacks from the media, other politicians, voters and so on.⁴⁰

The silences of Donald Trump are not truly silent or absent—their very silence speaks volumes. The contextual narrative that will become unearthed here points to what Huckin terms as “manipulative silence,” in which the rhetor intentionally/strategically conceals relevant information for their own advantage.⁴¹ As Sobkowiak points out, silences work *because* they are ambiguous.⁴² Thus, the job of a critic is to point to and find these silences against the backdrop of a larger context, to discern what they may mean, and to figure out if *not* saying something is beneficial to the rhetor. I now turn to the variety of “rhetorics of silence” employed by Trump, followed by plausible goals of these silences.

³² Cloud, “Null Persona,” 181.

³³ In Olson, “Margins,” 51.

³⁴ See Glenn, *Unspoken*, and Huckin, “Textual Silence.”

³⁵ Robin Patric Clair, *Organizing Silence: A World of Possibilities*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998).

³⁶ Cloud, “Null Persona,” 197.

³⁷ Olson, “Margins,” 65.

³⁸ Cloud, “Null Persona,” 200.

³⁹ In using “alt-right,” I largely agree with the definition supplied by the Southern Poverty Law Center (<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/alt-right>), who argue that the term refers to those who propagate and believe in far-right ideologies that orbit around the *protection* and furtherance of Whiteness and White Supremacy. The alt-right eschew both mainstream conservatism (because their politics is too political, non-vituperative and inclusive) and “knee-jerk” liberalism. As I explore contextually throughout the piece, what sets the alt-right apart in my mind is its indebtedness to (White) identity politics.

⁴⁰ Paul E. Johnson, “The Art of Masculine Victimhood: Donald Trump’s Demagoguery,” *Women’s Studies in Communication*, 40, no. 3 (2017): 229-250

⁴¹ “Textual Silence,” 351.

⁴² Włodzimierz Sobkowiak, “Silence and Markedness Theory,” in Adam Jaworski (Ed.), *Silence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997): 39-62.

Rhetorics of Silence

There are five different types of silences that Donald Trump uses in conjunction with antisemitism: literal; symbolic; dialogic; paralipic; and dog-whistled.⁴³ Before turning to these, however, I would like to point out that Trump has also been guilty of *explicit* antisemitism, such as these statements to Jewish Republican donors in December 2015: “I’m a negotiator, like you folks... Is there anybody who doesn’t renegotiate deals in this room? Perhaps more than any room I’ve ever spoken to,”⁴⁴ and “I know why you’re not going to support me. You’re not going to support me because I don’t want your money. Isn’t it crazy?... You want to control your own politician.”⁴⁵ These antisemitic canards are explicit instantiations of Trump’s attitude towards Jews (though they are also the type of rhetoric that he treats as examples of his honest, unvarnished and *humorous* style), providing *observable* context for his silences.

Literal Silences

While in Poland, Trump did not visit the Warsaw Ghetto (the largest Jewish ghetto in Nazi-occupied Europe)—the first President to do so since 1989, prompting this statement from Jewish leaders in Poland: “We deeply regret that President Donald Trump, though speaking in public barely a mile away from the Monument, chose to break with that laudable tradition. We trust that this slight does not reflect the attitudes and feelings of the American people.”⁴⁶ While visiting Israel, he scheduled only fifteen minutes at Yad Vashem (the Holocaust museum), upsetting Israeli journalists and prompting comments about his minimization of the Holocaust. While he did give a somber address, he left the following message (in its entirety) in the guestbook: “It is a great honor to be here with all of my friends—so amazing and will never forget!”⁴⁷ And, when asked by *CNN* about whether he would reject the support of noted antisemitic Holocaust denier David Duke, Trump’s response was, “I don’t know anything about white supremacists, so I don’t know.”⁴⁸

One of the key, and often ignored, aspects of discourse is that *which is not said*. As Judith Irvine notes,

The moral life of language does not reside in the linguistic properties of utterances alone, nor only in the moment of interaction. The words not spoken, the discourse contexts, the interactional and societal histories, the responses by interlocutors, the conventions of genre, the regimes of language, truth, and knowledge that prevail in the interlocutors’ social worlds—all these are relevant as well.⁴⁹

⁴³ These categories are not entirely discrete; there are times of leakage, when examples work in multiple rhetorical ways.

⁴⁴ Frank Bruni, “Why Does Donald Trump keep Dissing Jews?” *New York Times*, July 8, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/08/opinion/sunday/why-does-donald-trump-keep-dissing-jews.html?mcubz=1>.

⁴⁵ Rebecca Shimani Stoil, “Trump Courts Republican Jews with Offensive Canards,” *Times of Israel*, December 3, 2015, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-courts-jewish-republicans-with-offensive-stereotypes/>.

⁴⁶ Adam Taylor, “Trump was First U.S. President to Visit Warsaw Without Visiting the Warsaw Ghetto since 1989,” *Washington Post*, July 6, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/07/06/trump-was-first-u-s-president-to-visit-warsaw-without-visiting-the-warsaw-ghetto-since-1989/?utm_term=.0146353c42f3.

⁴⁷ Sarah Wildman, “Donald Trump at Yad Vashem Leaves a Bizarrely Chipper Note for Posterity,” *Vox*, May 23, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/5/23/15680314/trump-holocaust-memorial-guest-book-notes-so-amazing>.

⁴⁸ “There’s a Reason why White Supremacists like Donald Trump,” <https://www.hillaryclinton.com/feed/theres-a-reason-why-white-supremacists-like-donald-trump/>.

⁴⁹ Judith Irvine, “Leaky Registers and Eight-Hundred-Pound Gorillas,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 84, (2011): 15–40, 35.

Absence can be filled with meaning, and *loud*.⁵⁰ It is also, often, a signal of taboo—that which *cannot be said*, yet, somehow, still finds an outlet. The linguistic context that *is* present—in the entry in the guestbook, in the ambivalent statement about Duke—may be read as “traces and essences” of the taboo that is left *unsaid*.⁵¹

Symbolic Silences

By “symbolic silence,” I mean those times when the President (or those aligned with him) does not “say” something, but finds other discursive outlets. Symbolic silences can perhaps be thought of as a type of dog-whistle (explained in detail later in in this manuscript), but I differentiate them by defining “symbolic silences” as those that are entirely visual, and thus literally *impossible* to speak. In developing this category, I draw on the field of social semiotics and visual communication—the work of Kress and van Leeuwen in particular⁵²—which argues that images and visual symbols are steeped in meaning and imbued with ideology.

The first example of this are ((())), or “echoes.” Echoes are triple parentheses placed around people’s (often journalists’) names, denoting that they are (or might be) Jewish. When “Jewish” journalists condemn or criticize Trump, alt-righters have responded with echoes, and with antisemitic taunts and tropes ranging from gross Jewish caricatures to Holocaust iconography. Not only do those parentheses “mark out Jews, but they visually contain them, sequestered as if in a camp or prison.”⁵³ These parentheses are intended as a “visual pun,” signifying that “the supposed damage caused by Jewish people reverberates from decade to decade.”⁵⁴ Once a writer is identified—via echo—as Jewish, other users “dogpile” the writer with abuse and threats.⁵⁵ The ((())) is powerful because it is not easily searchable, and thus abusers can hide in plain sight and claim plausible deniability. While Trump himself has not been cited as using the echo, it is important here because those who use it articulate themselves with Trump—often using Trump’s name in their Twitter handles—and primarily use it to speak in his defense. As Oren Segal, the director of the ADL’s Center on Extremism, notes, “the jingoism of Trump’s presidential campaign has fueled this sort of harassment.”⁵⁶ The echo is also another example of literal silence; the President has not condemned the bigots who echo and harass journalists in his name: “And still, we have heard nothing from Mr. Trump,” says Jonathan Weisman, a victim of echoing attacks, “no denunciation, no broad renouncing of racist, antisemitic support, no sympathy for its victims.”⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Thurlow and Moshin, “What the f#@\$!”

⁵¹ See Ibid.

⁵² See Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁵³ Katy Waldman, “(((The Jewish Cowbell)))”: Unpacking a Gross New Meme from the Alt-right,” *Slate*, June 2, 2016, http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon_valley/2016/06/02/the_jewish_cowbell_the_meaning_of_those_double_parentheses_beloved_by_trump.html.

⁵⁴ Cooper Fleishman and Anthony Smith, “(((Echoes))) Exposed: The Secret Symbol Neo-Nazis Use to Target Jews Online,” *Mic*, June 1, 2016, <https://mic.com/articles/144228/echoes-exposed-the-secret-symbol-neo-nazis-use-to-target-jews-online#.YkolsulE7>

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ In Ibid.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Weisman, “The Nazi Tweets of ‘Trump God Emperor,’” *The New York Times*, May 6, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/opinion/sunday/the-nazi-tweets-of-trump-god-emperor.html?smid=tw-share&_r=0

Pepe the Frog is another powerful example of symbolic silence. Pepe first appeared in 2005 in the online cartoon *Boy's Club*. While the image was not originally associated with antisemitism, it was appropriated as a meme by frequenters of 4chan and Reddit.⁵⁸ Its use exploded; Pepe was the most re-blogged meme of 2015.⁵⁹ Since then, White Nationalists wrested Pepe from the mainstream: “We basically mixed Pepe in with Nazi propaganda, etc. We built that association.”⁶⁰ Pepe is seen as being imbued with meaning: “Most memes are ephemeral by nature, but Pepe is not. He’s a reflection of our souls, to most of us.”⁶¹ Many Pepe memes have grotesque connections to Holocaust imagery.

Trump—or his campaign—has re-tweeted images of Pepe from noted alt-right/antisemitic users. One was a caricature of Trump *as* Pepe, with the caption “You can’t Stump the Trump.” Another came after Hillary Clinton referred to Trump supporters as “a basket of deplorables,” featuring an altered movie poster of “The Expendables” showing Pepe, Trump and other conservatives.⁶² Trump’s silence here is important and multifaceted: it is, at the very least, problematic that a symbol *currently* conflated with antisemitism was retweeted by a presidential candidate; the fact that it was a *symbol*, rather than *linguistic*, gives plausible deniability—one could “not know” that a cartoon was conflated with antisemitism. Coupled with his literal silence, non-condemnation, and lack of apology about Pepe, this reads as manipulative silence—not speaking against antisemitism while tweeting an antisemitic symbol is additive; his usage of Pepe was actually effective marketing—of antisemitism, *to* antisemites: “I didn’t support him at first but the memes were too dank to ignore. So yes I support him now. I thought that his perspicacious usage of contemporary cultural memetics is both humorous and effective at garnering support.”⁶³

Finally, in July, 2016, Trump tweeted the statement “Crooked Hillary—Makes History,” with a graphic of Clinton’s head superimposed over a pile of money, flanked by a six-sided-star containing the text “Most Corrupt Candidate Ever!”⁶⁴ The ad used money—the stereotype most infamously and damagingly associated with Jews, linked it to corruption—another stereotype, and a six-sided-star—the most persistent signifier of the Jewish genocide. It was a retweet from a White Supremacist message board.⁶⁵ While the campaign amended the image in response to criticism, replacing the star with a circle, Trump insisted that the ad was not antisemitic, that the star was actually a “sheriff’s star,” (which actually makes far less sense contextually than a Star of David), and that his staff should not have omitted the star. The context of the loaded language, the star, the White Supremacist website, and the absence of apology certainly seems meaningful.

Trump’s silence, coupled with these symbolic, textual winks, are read by his supporters as being meaning-full: “He is a bulldozer who is destroying our traditional enemy.’ Mr. Trump may

⁵⁸ “Pepe the Frog,” *ADL*, accessed on September 27, 2017, <https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/pepe-the-frog>.

⁵⁹ Jay Hathaway, “Tumblr’s Biggest Meme of 2015 was Pepe the Frog,” *NY Mag*, December 9, 2015, <http://nymag.com/selectall/2015/12/tumblr-was-here-for-pepe-the-frog-in-2015.html>.

⁶⁰ Olivia Nuzzi, “How Pepe the Frog became a Nazi Trump Supporter and Alt-right Symbol,” *The Daily Beast*, May 26, 2016, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/how-pepe-the-frog-became-a-nazi-trump-supporter-and-alt-right-symbol>.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² “Pepe the Frog Meme Branded a ‘Hate Symbol,’” *BBC News*, September 28, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-37493165>.

⁶³ In Gideon Resnick, “4chan 4 Trump,” *Daily Beast*, October 20, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/4chan-4-trump>.

⁶⁴ Jeremy Diamond, “Donald Trump’s ‘Star of David’ Tweet Controversy, Explained,” *CNN*, July 5, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/04/politics/donald-trump-star-of-david-tweet-explained/index.html>.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

not be alt-right himself, but ‘he doesn’t have to be to advance our cause.’”⁶⁶ As Leah Ceccarelli notes in her work on polysemy, texts can be imbued with a multitude of meanings; “strategic ambiguity” occurs when a rhetor purposefully layers meanings intended for multiple audiences for their own gain.⁶⁷ Strategic ambiguity can be a tool of the dominant regime, used to cater to the powerful while placating the marginalized, and can also increase a message’s palatability by appealing to conflicting groups. Silence is particularly interesting as a polysemic “text”—it is so open that it can be *filled* with meaning. Witness, for instance, David Duke’s comments in Charlottesville: “This is a first step toward making a realization of something that Trump alluded to early in the campaign—this is the first step toward taking America back.”⁶⁸ And, when a journalist asked the chairperson of “The American Freedom Party,” “What is Donald Trump saying that is speaking to white nationalists? Is he saying things in language that may not be explicit, but he may be giving you a signal,” the response was, “No, he’s explicit.”⁶⁹ Trump’s silences are so powerful because, for those (particularly in the alt-right) who support him, they are not silent at all.

Dialogic Silences

Mikhail Bakhtin postulated that we “live in a world of others’ words.”⁷⁰ In forming the notion of *dialogism*, he notes that “Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others.”⁷¹ Dialogism is, “*another’s speech in another’s language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way.”⁷² Bakhtin helps elucidate another of Trump’s types of silence, what I call “dialogic silence,” instantiated by his usage of other’s words to speak *for* and instead of him, particularly in the form of social media. Trump, dubbed by CNN’s Van Jones as “The Social Media President,” has used social media in an innovative way that changed the political playing field.⁷³ According to Twitter, the magnitude of Trump’s presence on the platform is staggering (and has grown massively since his inauguration)—he is the 21st most followed tweeter (with over 42 million followers), with an audience attentiveness rating of 70%.⁷⁴ These numbers demonstrate just how powerful and wide-reaching his tweets and re-tweets can be. Not only does social media—Twitter in particular—serve as a place where vituperation is permissible, if not encouraged, it also allows a multitude of silences. Its fleeting and a-contextual nature allow plausible deniability—someone else can be blamed (a sort of “phantom dialogism”), and it can be easily “misinterpreted.”

⁶⁶ “Pepe and the Stormtroopers,” *The Economist*, September 17, 2016, <https://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21707201-how-donald-trump-ushered-hateful-fringe-movement-mainstream-pepe-and>.

⁶⁷ Leah Ceccarelli, “Polysemy: Multiple Meanings in Rhetorical Criticism,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 84, no. 4 (1998): 395-415.

⁶⁸ Nathan Guttman, “What a Jewish Journalist saw in Charlottesville,” *Forward*, August 12, 2017, <http://forward.com/news/379780/what-a-jewish-journalist-saw-in-charlottesville/>.

⁶⁹ “There’s a Reason.”

⁷⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984): 143.

⁷¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, “On Dialogism and Heteroglossia,” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992): 294.

⁷² Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992): 324.

⁷³ Van Jones, “Trump: The Social Media President,” *CNN*, October 26, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/26/opinions/jones-trump-social-media/index.html>.

⁷⁴ Twitter Counter, <https://twittercounter.com/realDonaldTrump>, accessed on November 10, 2017.

Trump is a frequent retweeter, refracting his own voice with the “speech” of others. Some of Trump’s most notorious posts—Pepe the Frog, the Star of David, etc.—came from antisemitic Twitter users. In August, 2017, three days after the solar eclipse, Trump retweeted a meme of his face “eclipsing” Barack Obama’s, with the title, “The Best Eclipse Ever.” This was a retweet of Jerry Travone, who four days earlier had tweeted, “We have enough of these Jews where I live lol someone else take them. They just can’t drive.”⁷⁵ Similarly, Trump tweeted a video that showed him pummeling a man with a CNN logo head, retweeting HanAsshole Solo.⁷⁶ Three months before, Solo responded to a tweet from Donald Trump, Jr. saying, “To find out who rules over you, simply find out who you are not allowed to criticize,” with, “Spin the dreidel and find out”—a thinly-veiled reference to Jews being a secret global power.⁷⁷ Additionally, Trump “retweeted a message from @WhiteGenocideTM, phony crime statistics that originated with neo-Nazis and a quote from Benito Mussolini. His campaign blamed an intern for tweeting an image of Nazi soldiers superimposed on the American flag next to Trump’s likeness.”⁷⁸ Twitter is a particularly useful venue because it facilitates dialogic silence—Trump can ventriloquize the voice of another while remaining effectively silent.

Recent content analyses of Trump’s tweets have unearthed damning evidence of the effectiveness of these dialogic silences. The most similar subreddit to the Trump subreddit (“The Donald”) content-wise is a thread called “Kiketown.”⁷⁹ The subreddits that share the most commenters include “Fatpeoplehate,” “TheRedPill,” “Coontown,” and “4chan,” dedicated to themes like bullying, misogyny and racism.⁸⁰ Trump’s campaign staff monitored the subreddit to see what resonated with potential voters, and Trump hosted a Q&A on the site.⁸¹ These retweets are extremely effective; of Trump’s 42 million Twitter followers, approximately 10% are “extremely” right wing—users who also follow accounts like “Prison Planet” (“the most prolific conspiracy theorist in contemporary America”⁸²). This 10% accounts for 55% of the retweeting of Trump.⁸³ Trump’s social media usage not only allows him to say a lot while being ostensibly silent, it is also *effective*, as his words are spread by primarily by those who “get” the message.

⁷⁵ Deena Zaru, “Trump Retweets Meme of if his Obama ‘Eclipse,’” *CNN*, August 25, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/08/24/politics/trump-eclipse-meme-obama/index.html>.

⁷⁶ Brian Stelter, “Trump Punches CNN in a Juvenile Tweet,” *CNN*, July 2, 2017, <http://money.cnn.com/2017/07/02/media/president-trump-cnn-video/index.html>.

⁷⁷ Dan Merica, “White House Stays Silent on antisemitic Connection of Trump’s Anti-CNN Video,” *CNN*, July 3, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/07/03/politics/white-house-video-antisemitic-connection/index.html>.

⁷⁸ Dana Milbank, “Antisemitism is no Longer an Undertone of Trump’s Campaign. It’s the Melody,” *Washington Post*, November 7, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/antisemitism-is-no-longer-an-undertone-of-trumps-campaign-its-the-melody/2016/11/07/b1ad6e22-a50a-11e6-8042-f4d11c862d1_story.html?utm_term=.0098226a46a4.

⁷⁹ Trevor Martin, “Dissecting Trump’s Most Rabid Online Following,” *538*, March 23, 2017, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/dissecting-trumps-most-rabid-online-following/>.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² “Alex Jones,” *SPLC*, accessed on September 29, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/alex-jones>.

⁸³ Zhang, Wells, Wang, and Rohe, under review

Paralytic Silence

Richard Benjamin Crosby describes “paralytic rhetoric” as one that simultaneously “strikes through” and “highlights,” rendering a text as a “both/and.”⁸⁴ In other words, it is saying by *not saying*—for example, when President Trump said, in a speech before the primary, “But I won’t talk about Jeb Bush. I will not say—I will not say he’s low energy. I will not say it.”⁸⁵ I am borrowing Crosby’s interpretation of paralipsis to argue that the message that is inferred but unsaid is, in effect, silent. Trump has used paralipsis to deny his antisemitism—in the context of antisemitism.

Jake Turx, a young Hasidic reporter for *Ami* magazine, an Orthodox Jewish weekly, was given the opportunity to ask President Trump a question during a press conference because he promised he would ask a “simple question.”⁸⁶ Unlike other Jewish Americans, who are reliably one of the most-Democrat-voting groups in the US (77% currently disapprove of Trump, according to a recent poll), Orthodox Jews reliably vote Republican (71% currently *approve* of Trump’s performance).⁸⁷ Turx wanted to ask about Trump’s silence on antisemitism’s recent rise. Turx softened his question by first stating, “I haven’t seen anybody in my community accuse either yourself or anyone on your staff of being antisemitic. We understand that you have Jewish grandchildren. You are their *zayde* [grandfather].”⁸⁸ As Turx launched into the question, Trump interrupted him, saying the question was unfair. He told Turx to “sit down,” and said, “So, here’s the story folks. No. 1, I am the least antisemitic person that you’ve ever seen in your entire life. No. 2, racism, the least racist person.” When Turx attempted to clarify, Trump said “Quiet, quiet, quiet.” He accused Turx of lying about having a simple question, and said that he found the very voicing of the question (about *his* antisemitism—which the question was not) to be “repulsive.” He concluded by telling Turx that he had an “insulting question,” and then made Turx a metonym for the press (the Jewish media is another antisemitic canard) by saying, “Just shows you about the press, but that’s the way the press is.” Trump’s statement that “I am the least antisemitic person that you’ve ever seen in your life”—while literally shouting down a question about antisemitism—is paralytic. The bullying of a visibly-Jewish reporter, asking a (friendly) question concerning his community, certainly has the whiff of antisemitism. It falls into the larger discussion of silence because it is yet another example of “refusing to say” or articulate what he seems to be saying and articulating. Trump’s paralytic rhetoric is contextual—his claim to be the “least antisemitic person” reads like antisemitism in part because his claim to be the least sexist person is countered by the times he has called women fat and ugly, talked about grabbing pussies, and blamed Hillary Clinton for her husband’s infidelities, and because his claim to be the least racist seems unlikely because he has called for a wall, belittled Muslims and refused Black people rent. Those paralytic moments seem designed to cloak his bigotry.

⁸⁴ Richard Benjamin Crosby, “Mitt Romney’s Paralipsis: (Un)Veiling Jesus in ‘Faith in America,’” *Rhetoric Review*, 32, no.2 (2013): 119-136.

⁸⁵ In Nolan McCaskill, “The GOP’s 24-Hour Meltdown,” *Politico*, May 6, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/05/the-gops-24-hour-meltdown-222921>.

⁸⁶ Laurie Goodstein, “A Jewish Reporter got to Ask Trump a Question. It Didn’t go Well,” *New York Times*, February 17, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/us/politics/trump-press-conference-jake-turx.html?mcubz=1>.

⁸⁷ Steve Lipman, “Orthodox Jews Emerging as Trump’s Truest Believers,” *Jewish Week*, September 20, 2017, <http://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/orthodox-jews-emerging-as-trumps-truest-believers/>.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Dog-Whistled Silences

“Dog-whistle” refers to intentionally-coded language meant to draw the attention of some, while going unnoticed by others: “Dog-whistling is both a form of race talk and a way to ensure silence about race.”⁸⁹ They are meant to be noticed by those who understands the rhetor, and unnoticed or denied by those who “don’t.” Dog-whistling may provide the strongest case for Trump’s anti-semitism.

The sheer number of dog-whistles is staggering. On October 2, 2016, Trump cautioned against the “blood suckers” who support international trade. On October 13, he warned that Clinton “‘meets in secret with international banks to plot the destruction of U.S. sovereignty’ and that ‘a global power structure’ is conspiring against ordinary Americans.” The most staggering dog-whistle was Trump’s closing campaign ad, which Senator Al Franken likened to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (a landmark piece of antisemitic propaganda, which “revealed” a Jewish plot for global domination through control of the world’s press and economies). The ad spotlights Clinton aiding and abetting the “global special interests” who “control the levers of power” and “don’t have your good in mind.” It continues, “It’s a global power structure that is responsible for the economic decisions that have robbed our working class, stripped our country of its wealth and put that money into the pockets of a handful of large corporations and political entities.”⁹⁰ Accompanying each of these key phrases are images of Janet Yellen (Chair of the Federal Reserve), George Soros (investor/philanthropist), and Lloyd Blankfein (Goldman Sachs CEO)—all of whom are Jewish, and who would likely not appear otherwise.

These phrases/images are all dog-whistles, steeped in the echoes of history. The notion that Jews are nomadic vampires (literally and figuratively) endlessly wandering in search of global control, puppet masters whose hands control the strings of media and finance, is archaic. These discourses have played major roles in Jewish persecution, from the time of Hellenization through to the Holocaust. Reisigl and Wodak list the following stereotypes about Jews: “power-hungry and powerful clandestine wire-pullers”; “criminal world conspirators”; “dishonourable, dishonest and false”; ‘business-minded, tricky and fraudulent’; and “the prototypical capitalists.”⁹¹ Trump’s phrases are part of a well-known—by antisemites and Jews—antisemitic vocabulary. Terms such as “globalist” have long been used as antisemitic dog-whistles, and echo pernicious anti-Jewish conspiracy theories.⁹² The notion of “global control” is the *lifeblood* of antisemitism.⁹³

Antisemitism is generally coded. It is more likely to be a dog-whistled, pseudo-intellectual *discursive* attack than a physical one (though the fear is that the former garners support for the latter): as Cohen puts it, this is the dichotomy between “bierkeller” and “bistro” antisemitism.⁹⁴ The question might be, however, “why is Trump dog-whistling antisemitism when he yells his

⁸⁹ Ian Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 134.

⁹⁰ Josh Marshall, “Trump Rolls out Antisemitic Ad.” *Talking Points Memo*, November 5, 2016, <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/edblog/trump-rolls-out-antisemitic-closing-ad>.

⁹¹ Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, (London: Routledge, 2000): 56.

⁹² Ben Sales, “Why Jews get Uneasy when Steve Bannon calls Jared Kushner a ‘Globalist,’” *Forward*, April 9, 2017, <http://forward.com/news/breaking-news/368490/stephen-bannon-called-jared-kushner-a-globalist-here-s-why-the-term-makes-s/>.

⁹³ Ron Kampeas, “Donald Trump’s ‘International Bankers’ Speech Leaves some Uneasy,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 14, 2016, <https://www.jta.org/2016/10/14/news-opinion/politics/donald-trumps-conspiracy-theories-stir-uneasy-echoes>.

⁹⁴ In David Hirsh, *Contemporary Left Antisemitism*, (London: Routledge, 2016).

other -isms?” Some argue that the dog-whistle is now defunct technology; Trump’s volume has plunged it into obsolescence.⁹⁵ I argue that while his other bigotry is loud, there are multiple reasons antisemitism is primarily dog-whistled—because: Jews are seen by antisemites as *The Establishment*; Americans seem unlikely to accept antisemitism as a central narrative; Americans seem unlikely to *recognize* antisemitism as a central narrative, because structural bigotry is often unnoticed by those in power; the Holocaust is a key component of the American story; US’ ties to Israel; and antisemitism does not promote Trump’s agenda in the same way that Islamophobia does.

Terms like “globalist” have become metonyms for “Jews,” and “enable the speakers to conjure away responsible, involved or affected actors (whether victims or perpetrators), or to keep them in the semantic background.”⁹⁶ Henry Ford, for instance, authored a book titled *The International Jew: The World’s Foremost Problem*. There are too many examples to include here, but some notable ones include: Hitler speeches inculcating “the *international Jewish financiers*” for both war and their own eventual annihilation⁹⁷; Nazi propaganda elucidating the Jewish motivation for “*gaining the power that makes it possible for him to make others work for him*”⁹⁸; David Duke’s article entitled, “Another Virulent Zionist with his Hands on the *Levers of Power*”⁹⁹; and a Holocaust-denying tract arguing that world governments have been vitiated by “*Jews manipulating the levers of power.*”¹⁰⁰ Other examples of Trump’s dog-whistles are: a key campaign phrase, “America first,” echoing the U.S.’ antisemitic past, referencing a committee that argued against entry into WWII and featuring many notable antisemites including Charles Lindbergh, Henry Ford, and Avery Brundage¹⁰¹; and his tweet calling Jon Stewart “Jonathan Leibowitz,” which is a verbal ((())) “outing” Stewart as a Jew.¹⁰²

Dog-whistles’ power lie in their deniability; if those in the mainstream don’t hear them, then it is easy to deny that *anyone* does. Pointing to Trump’s antisemitism is met with condescension, and reinitiates a cycle of attacks. For instance, Jason Greenblatt, Trump’s former Chief Legal Officer, said, “The ADL should focus on real antisemitism and hatred, and not try to find any where none exist. I am offended and concerned that an institution such as the ADL would involve itself in partisan politics instead of focusing on its important mission.”¹⁰³ Such rhetoric not only denies the dog-whistle, but also makes Jews the aggressor and Trump the victim.

This multitude of silences has had—and will have—multiple effects. In the final section, I discuss how these rhetorical silences are sending a message of hope to Trump’s antisemitic followers and helping to *normalize* them, and how the resurfacing neo-Nazi movement aids in Trump’s appeal.

⁹⁵ Kate Knibbs, “Lexicon: The Political ‘Dog Whistle’ is Obsolete,” *The Ringer*, September 29, 2017, <https://www.theringer.com/2017/9/29/16385388/lexicon-dog-whistle>.

⁹⁶ *Discourse and Discrimination*, 58.

⁹⁷ Adolf Hitler, “Speech Delivered before the German Reichstag,” January 30, 1939, https://archive.org/stream/SpeechOfJan.301939/SpeHit_djvu.txt.

⁹⁸ Reichspropagandaleitung, “Our Battle against Judah,” *Calvin College*, August, 1935, <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/rim3.htm>.

⁹⁹ December 10, 2007, <http://davidduke.com/another-virulent-zionist-with-his-hands-on-the-levers-of-power/>.

¹⁰⁰ Gyeorgos Ceres Hatonn, *The Trillion Dollar Lie: The Holocaust*, (Tehachapi: America West, 1991): 160.

¹⁰¹ Krishnadev Calamur, “A Short History of ‘America First,’” *Atlantic*, January 21, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/01/trump-america-first/514037/>.

¹⁰² Accessed on October 1, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/327076720425451523?lang=en>.

¹⁰³ In Reena Flores, “Trump Campaign Fires back after Jewish Group Blasts Antisemitic Imagery in Trump Ad,” *CBS News*, November 6, 2016, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-campaign-fires-back-adl-blasts-antisemitic-imagery-trump-ad/>.

Reclaiming Whiteness, and the Radical Flank

A longstanding antisemitic trope is, “Hatred of Jews qua Jews is the only time when antisemitism can be called by its name. Everything else is an invention.”¹⁰⁴ Antisemitism that is not a *direct* attack on Jews is oft-treated as nonspecific, and therefore *not* antisemitic, placing the role of defining antisemitism in the hands of antisemites. As Cohen puts it (facetiously), “the Jews can’t be trusted to diagnose what constitutes antisemitism.”¹⁰⁵ Antisemitism is read as the cry of the knee-jerk liberal, or of the staunch Zionist, and therefore suspect. Antisemitism *denial* has a long history in the United States—on “both sides” of the political aisle. Importantly, the “liberal” and “politically correct” cry of antisemitism, the argument goes, is not about protecting American Jews, but about oppressing the truly marginalized in the US—the dispossessed, lower/middle class, White American.

Part of the reason for this lies in the complicated history of Jews in the US, and their (supposed) achievement of Whiteness.¹⁰⁶ Jewish “Whiteness” is liminal; Jews are simultaneously seen as White and Other.¹⁰⁷ Whiteness plays into the antisemitic notion of “globalist” Jews; their desire to spread their global reach (read: Zionism) is a metonym for their privilege, and their privilege is a metonym for the “oppressed” White Supremacist. In fact, the familiar tropes of antisemitism (Jews as an undesirable race—known as “Second-wave Antisemitism”) have been augmented by a “Third-wave Antisemitism,” manifesting as opposition to globalism vis-à-vis opposition to Israel and Zionism.¹⁰⁸ While this might just seem like garden-variety antisemitism with a slight spin, it is key to note the centrality of privilege—Jews as White *and* colonizing global power. Cohen links the *denial* of antisemitism with the notion that Jews have *made it*—they are associated with social/class privilege and high-profile intellectual jobs (read: Whiteness), and with the dispossession of native Palestinians.¹⁰⁹ Many anti-Zionists have reached the conclusion that, “Those who truly suffer from antisemitism today are not Jews, but those who are accused of being antisemitic. Those mere speakers of truth...are being made to pay for centuries of hateful prejudice.”¹¹⁰ Jews are thus stuck in a Catch-22; they are victims of antisemitism, and they are made out to be the aggressor—victimizing those who are defending White nationalism—when they claim antisemitism.

A correlation can be made between Trump’s victory and the notion of Jews as privileged elite. Kathy Cramer’s work on socioeconomic status argues that the fuel propelling Trump’s victory was a “politics of resentment.”¹¹¹ For the dispossessed—rural voters in particular—the election was about power and fairness. Rural voters “felt a deep sense of bitterness toward elites and city dwell-

¹⁰⁴ Ben Cohen, “Antisemitism is Toxic, Whether Intentional or Not,” *Haaretz*, August 2, 2012, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/antisemitism-is-toxic-whether-intentional-or-not-1.455602>.

¹⁰⁵ Ben Cohen, “The Big Lie Returns,” *Commentary*, February 1, 2012, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-big-lie-returns/>.

¹⁰⁶ See Brodtkin, *Jews Became White Folks*.

¹⁰⁷ Jamie Moshin and Richard Crosby, “Liminally White: Jews, Mormons and Whiteness,” forthcoming.

¹⁰⁸ Manfred Gerstenfeld, “The Deep Roots of Antisemitism in European Society,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 17, no. 1-2 (2005).

¹⁰⁹ Cohen, “Big Lie.”

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Jeff Guo, “Donald Trump didn’t ‘Hoodwink’ his Voters,” *Washington Post*, November 15, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/11/15/donald-trump-didnt-hoodwink-his-voters-says-professor-whos-spent-nearly-a-decade-researching-them/?utm_term=.4fa341844549.

ers; just about all of them felt tread on, disrespected and cheated out of what they felt they deserved.”¹¹² Connected to this is the canard conflating Jews with cosmopolitanism. Tying “the power of the Jews” to the “downfall of the State”—and to the ensuing rise of fascist governments—is much older than this election.¹¹³ This perception is aided by certain realities—Jews are the most financially-successful, most-educated, religious group in the US.¹¹⁴ The cosmopolitan dog-whistle worked on voters who may not have heard the actual dog-whistle—“globalists” who control the money are an evil for the dispossessed, whether or not they are read as Jews.

The rise in discourses *about* privilege, Whiteness, and multiculturalism have left many White Americans—particularly men—feeling dispossessed.¹¹⁵ Discourses about White male privilege have made White men feel like “the enemy,” threatening their power. These discourses have made White men experience a “boomerang effect”; the foregrounding of White racial pain is a strategic means of recovering lost racial ground.¹¹⁶

This is fundamental to both Trump’s rhetorics, and the reactions to them. A common response to Trump has been racialized rhetorics about Jews, harkening to Nazi rhetorics of extermination and signaling a *fear* of White erasure: “At their Friday night rally at the University of Virginia, the white nationalists brandished torches and chanted antisemitic and Nazi slogans, including ‘blood and soil’ (an English rendering of the Nazi ‘blut und boden’) and ‘Jews will not replace us’—all crafted to cast Jews as foreign interlopers who need to be expunged.”¹¹⁷ “Jews will not replace us” is the ur-rhetoric of fear, of the loss of home and of property.¹¹⁸ It is also a *positive* response, a joyous chorus to Trump’s (veiled) verse that the US is the home of the alt-right. Just as Nazi arguments were not about religion, but about race and nationality (which became conflated), so too are *neo*-Nazi arguments: Jews are a race, Jews are not American, Jews do not belong (at best). Part of the strategy for racial recovery, then, is cementing the Whiteness of the alt-right—evidenced, for instance, in the surge of White Nationalists taking DNA tests to “prove” their Whiteness.¹¹⁹

The other part of the strategy—more veiled, and more sinister—lies in Donald Trump’s refusal to indict David Duke, the marchers in Charlottesville, and others. It lies in the explicit responses to Trump’s dog-whistles: the signs hanging from highway overpasses in Oregon during the eclipse

¹¹² Jeff Guo, “A New Theory for why Trump Voters are so Angry,” *Washington Post*, November 8, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/11/08/a-new-theory-for-why-trump-voters-are-so-angry-that-actually-makes-sense/?utm_term=.2f1d3ea5af4a.

¹¹³ See Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994).

¹¹⁴ David Masci, “How Income Varies Among U.S. Religious Groups,” *Pew Research Center*, October 11, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/11/how-income-varies-among-u-s-religious-groups/>.

¹¹⁵ Jamie Moshin and Ronald L. Jackson III, “Inscribing Racial Bodies and Relieving Responsibility,” in Michael Lacy and Kent Ono (Eds.), *Critical Rhetorics of Race*, (New York: NYU Press, 2011): 214-232.

¹¹⁶ Aaron David Gresson III, *America’s Atonement: Racial Pain, Recovery Rhetoric, and the Pedagogy of Healing*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

¹¹⁷ Yair Rosenberg, “‘Jews will not Replace us’: Why White Supremacists go After Jews,” *Washington Post*, August 14, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/08/14/jews-will-not-replace-us-why-white-supremacists-go-after-jews/?utm_term=.14c945368ffd.

¹¹⁸ Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review*, 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707-1791.

¹¹⁹ Sarah Zhang, “When White Nationalists get DNA Tests the Reveal their African Ancestry,” *Atlantic*, August 17, 2007, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/08/white-nationalists-dna-ancestry/537108/>.

reading “UNJEW HUMANITY” and “Jewish Financing Available”¹²⁰; a truck plastered with billboards proclaiming, “90% of the 1% = Jews; Jews are a race; End racial supremacy”¹²¹; and Trump supporters telling Jewish journalists that their families should be put in gas chambers.¹²²

These rhetorics, coming directly from Trump’s supporters, *but not from Trump himself* are crucial for a number of intersecting reasons. First, neo-Nazis, the KKK, and others like them are frequently read as a joke culture—they are not seen as *real Nazis*. Today’s neo-Nazis are oft-read as ironic and outrageous, even foolish (e.g. marching with tiki torches from Pier One). They are also easy to lambaste as indicators of a radical, individualistic antisemitism, drawing attention away from a deeper, and far more troubling, systemic one. As Cohen puts it,

Do we need to sink to the depths of the 1930s in order for antisemitism to be taken seriously? Furthermore, we must ask, do Jews need to be subjected to acts of violence and discrimination in order to remind the wider world who the true victims of antisemitism are? And even then, can we be confident that the blame for physical manifestations of antisemitism will be placed upon the antisemites and not the Jews?¹²³

Second, these “fringe” groups are rhetorically and symbolically important to the Trump presidency because, per Burke’s notion of terministic screens,¹²⁴ they draw barriers around and between “hate rhetorics” and the rhetorics of the alt-right. Neo-Nazis and the KKK make the alt-right *not* Neo-Nazis and the KKK. The (comparatively) reasonable rhetorics of Trump and the alt-right benefit from this comparison. This is what social movement scholars call the “radical flank effect”—in which more radical groups “provided greater legitimacy to more moderate organizations and therefore increased their effectiveness.”¹²⁵ Radical flank is a strategy; there is often an agreement between moderate and radical groups because *both* benefit from the moving of the political needle.¹²⁶ Trump’s refusal to engage—let alone condemn—can, in this light, be seen as tacit approval.

Hello Darkness

The radical flank—read contextually alongside Trump’s manipulative silences—evinces a more skeptical critique. Read together, his many types of silence, his direct antisemitic jabs, and the convoluted backstory of Breitbart and the creation of the alt-Right that links to Trump’s campaign in so many fundamental ways,¹²⁷ tell the story of someone who is not *accidentally* or casually brushing up against antisemitism. Trump has made clear, repeatedly, that he has an “us versus

¹²⁰ Jessica Floum, “Oregon Eclipse Tourists Greeted by Antisemitic Banners on Overpass,” *Oregonian*, August 20, 2017, http://www.oregonlive.com/eclipse/2017/08/oregon_eclipse_tourists_greete.html.

¹²¹ <https://twitter.com/genocidejimmy?lang=en>, August 18, 2017.

¹²² Sandy Goodman, “Is Trump an Antisemite? Look at the Record,” *Huffington Post*, February 28, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/is-trump-an-antisemite-you-bet-he-is_us_58b511cfe4b0658fc20f99ba.

¹²³ “Big Lie.”

¹²⁴ Kenneth Burke, “Terministic Screens,” *Language as Symbolic Action*, 45 (1966).

¹²⁵ Courtney Dillard, *The Rhetorical Dimensions of Radical Flank Effects*, (Austin: University of Texas, 2002): 28.

¹²⁶ Will Potter, *Green is the New Red: An Insider’s Account of a Social Movement Under Siege*, (San Francisco: City Lights, 2011).

¹²⁷ Joseph Bernstein, “Here’s how Breitbart and Milo Smuggled Nazi and White Nationalist Ideas into the Mainstream,” *BuzzFeed*, October 5, 2017, https://www.buzzfeed.com/josephbernstein/heres-how-breitbart-and-milo-smuggled-white-nationalism?utm_term=.yaYKa0XRa#.xopOYae9Y.

them” mentality; unfortunately, his “us” can often be read as White Supremacists. In Charlottesville, for instance, he said (of the Antifas), “you have some pretty bad dudes on the other side also.”¹²⁸

What, then, is the purpose of Trump’s coded rhetorics and weighted silences? The answer can be found in silence itself. Chuck Morris III here describes the social and political necessity of silence, which is essential in creating the rhetorical act of *passing*:

A secret of dangerous difference motivates some to develop and sustain a double-consciousness in order to survive amid and sometimes to resist dominant, oppressive cultural practices. Especially when the markers of one's difference—skin, behavior, dress—can be camouflaged, "double-lives" manifest themselves publicly in skilled performances evincing the rhetorical forms of secrecy and disclosure. To succeed in veiling one's identity, i.e., convincing certain audiences of an "acceptable" persona, these rhetors-with-secrets employ tactics of impersonation, deflection, and silence in the public sphere.¹²⁹

While Morris discusses this in the context of homosexual panic, one could *easily* read this while imagining the polo- and khakis-wearing, torch-carrying marchers in Charlottesville. The same marchers who, when “outed,” vociferously denied their racism, wept about being unfairly targeted, were fired from their jobs, and were disowned by their families. What we see here is White Supremacists attempting to pass because their ideology is not accepted; they are passing *into* the mainstream, wearing not hoods but Dockers.

We also see a Leader-in-Chief who is *also passing*—whose “silences” are rhetorical, meant for an audience to whom those silences are legible. Morris speaks of the “triangular theater of the pass,” in which the rhetorical act of passing is visible to some and invisible to others: “Every act of passing is enacted...by...a collusive audience constituted by the textual wink.”¹³⁰ In this framing, Trumps’ silences are eminently audible to those for whom the textual wink is intended—the collusive audience that shares his ideology. As Morris puts it, “Instead of a silence that negates and excludes...here silence functions constructively as the medium of collusive exchange. What is not said is nonetheless performative, a speech act that can be read by certain audiences, and calls those audience members into being as abettors.”¹³¹

Trump’s textual winks can be read as both recruitment for the disaffected, and as a message to those on board that “our time is coming.” The wink says, “blend into the mainstream...for soon we will be the mainstream.” Trump’s ability to blend antisemitism into presidential rhetorics interpellates new audiences willing to accept these rhetorics—they’re just more unvarnished truths from a straight-talker, wrapped in the guise of something else—and creates and expands the acceptance of these rhetorics. And, those audiences who do not, will not or cannot pass constitute the radical flank, serving their own rhetorical purpose. Indeed, part of their purpose might be showing us, via their inspiration and enthusiasm—that this is indeed happening.

Donald Trump has made stirring, impassioned music out of silence—he has managed to play the dog-whistle, as well as other instruments of quietness, with virtuosity. In so doing, he has made Jewish Americans and their allies doubt what they are hearing, told the newly dispossessed that

¹²⁸ Abigail Adams, “President Trump once again says there were ‘Bad Dudes on the Other Side’ in Charlottesville,” *Time*, September 14, 2017, <http://time.com/4942797/donald-trump-tim-scott-both-sides-charlottesville-antifa/>.

¹²⁹ Charles Morris III, “Pink Herring & the Fourth Persona: J. Edgar Hoover’s Sex Crime Panic,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 88, no. 2 (2009): 228-244, 230.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

their time will come (again), and stirred the radical flank to a swelling, unafraid chorus. His rhetorical silences serve as a lesson and warning for rhetorical scholars, encouraging us all to listen to the darkness.