



REALITY CHECK on TRUMP - Why Laughing is the Wrong Reaction, Either Way

"Nathan J. Robinson, [responding](#) to a small scandal that erupted last week when the gossip website [Gawker](#) tricked whoever runs Donald Trump's twitter into retweeting a quote from Mussolini, doesn't think the Trump jokes are funny anymore: "The stupid Mussolini gag is one small incident in a far larger pattern of hypocrisy among Trump's opponents. People who don't like Trump claim that he can be labelled a fascist (this includes *Gawker*).

And there's a plausible argument for applying that word; policies like banning religious minorities, suppressing press freedom, and shutting down speech are strongly reminiscent of 20th century dictatorships. But if someone *truly* thinks Trump a fascist, really and sincerely

believes this, then they should be arming a resistance militia rather than trying to coax an odious retweet.

At the same time as Trump's opponents insist that he poses a major threat to the country, they behave as if he is a harmless clown to be prodded and mocked. In other words, if he's not a fascist, then there's no point to the Mussolini trick, but if he *is* a fascist, then there's nothing to be amused about. In fact, even though the vast majority of progressives believe that the election could have a devastating global impact, most Trump coverage is still about the most asinine day-to-day trivia, like the size of his hands or his latest bit of theatrical prop-based insult comedy. Ostensibly serious news organizations run Trump GIFs as stories. Even the *New York Times* dutifully compiled a database of Trump's colorful gallery of Twitter insults.

In doing so, these organizations help lower our perceptions of the stakes; after all, if politics actually mattered, surely it would be reprehensible to spend even a second replacing Trump's eyes with lips rather than actually attempting to dissuade his supporters or building up an effective opposition force. By descending to Trump's level and revelling in gossip and minutiae, any sense of public urgency is steadily muted.

This is the way political media operates generally, though. It simultaneously treats politics as both extremely significant and totally inconsequential. Trump is an existential threat to the Earth's people, yet we can spend our time mocking his hair or watching him make funny faces. George W. Bush was a war criminal who was responsible for hundreds of thousands of Iraqi deaths, yet we could jest about his goofy malapropisms and difficulty handling Segways and pretzels. Liberals laugh at "robo-Rubio" and "fruit salad" fruitcake Ben Carson, but these individuals are competing to have access to *a vast arsenal of nuclear weaponry*.

By being both pervasive and superficial, political media manages to treat political actors as tremendously important and worth obsessing over, while somehow obscuring the fact that bad political decisions actually devastate people's lives ... while disaffection is understandable, a pernicious culture of easy ridicule also diminishes the seriousness of politics."

Source: *Amor Mundi* (Newsletter), 3/6/2016, The Hannah Arendt Center, Bard College, New York.

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