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Right Turn at Reality: A Rhetorical Analysis of Right Wing Negotiations on Race and Masculinity in Online Spaces

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RIGHT TURN AT REALITY: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF RIGHT WING NEGOTIATIONS ON RACE AND MASCULINITY IN ONLINE SPACES

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, Communication

By

Andrew Hart

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ABSTRACT

The effects of right wing politically charged violence are more visible now than at any other point in recent American history. The Internet, and social media more specifically, has become a crucial nexus point in the dissemination of decentralized Alt-Right propaganda. The visual nature of social media has increased the importance of images a means of communication. Through this thesis, I analyze artifacts coming out of these spaces representing a conversation between creators and audiences, and how they work dialogically to introduce and reify symbols of white masculine supremacy within this subgroup. Through this process, I find multiple recurring patterns and motifs which transmit these ideas through the use of drawn images, and explain why the use of the image expands the rhetorical possibilities for this communicative form.

KEYWORDS: political cartoons, alt-right, race, masculinity, Ben Garrison, white supremacy, metaphor, algorithm, enthymeme

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I dedicate this thesis to the victims of right-wing political violence. Social media is a critical nexus for violent messages which inspire violent acts, only by identifying and problematizing them can we begin to fight back and save lives.

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INTRODUCTION

January 6, 2021 is a day which should haunt the memories of every living American. By the time the insurgents were repelled, and Capitol Police reestablished calm within the Rotunda, the world had already bore witness to the destructive potentiality of the Alt-Right movement. The movement's capacity for violence was no longer questionable. The question then shifts to better understanding how seemingly average American citizens radicalized to the point of coup. With this in mind, any discussion of the Alt-Right without a discussion of the social media platforms and their attendant algorithms finds itself sorely lacking. Although the ideology of the Alt-Right is in no way new or novel, its use of the internet (and social media more specifically) as a way to spread its ideology is noteworthy (Daniels 2018). Even considering that January 6 was far from the only public demonstration of Alt-Right violence in recent memory, the Capitol insurrection was undoubtedly the movement's first public attempt to actively challenge a system of governance and elections that had experienced relative security and support for most of its existence. Despite being unsuccessful in their attempt to overturn the election results, the riot nevertheless displayed a profound influence on American political discussion and thought. Indeed, as of February 2021, over two-thirds of Republicans still believe the 2020 election was invalid (Easley 2021). The long and short-term effects of this phenomenon remain to be seen and are beyond the scope of this analysis. Looking forward, although integral, is only part of the solution. Scholars have a duty to look back, investigating how the multiple corners of the internet have a role in the radicalization of a substantial segment of the populace.

In this way, the riot itself is merely a symptom of the ubiquity of these viewpoints within the right wing of American politics. Similarly, the riot cannot be seen as an endpoint for the

movement. The multi-nodal nature of the 21st Century internet allows for people to be influenced in myriad manners. A full rhetorical analysis of the internet and social media would be both impossible and ill-advised. The criticism herein necessarily condenses down to a single medium, the political cartoon. It is not meant to be holistic, but instead to have explanatory value. It is certainly true that individuals are likely influenced by different actors and media in different ways. However, by isolating the tropes used in these media and analyzing the messages they set out, patterns begin to appear which can be applied in different situations. Understanding the underlying enthymematic processes at work in the various Alt-Right corners of the internet therefore becomes prudent to begin developing an understanding of the communicative mechanisms allowing the movement to rise to prominence, and eventually come to attempt an overthrow of the government of the United States.

Before proceeding too far, a working definition of the Alt-Right seems beneficial. For purposes of this thesis' criticism, the definition need not be strict. In fact, demarcating this group too strictly would open the potential for gaps in the criticism. Therefore, this thesis defines "Alt-Right" to include any number of groups, often (but not exclusively) forming and operating within digital online spaces, who engage in discourses and actions in which white supremacy and masculinity are advanced. The most important note about the rise of the Alt-Right as a political and cultural force is its existence in convergence of white supremacy and the internet (Daniels 2018). The social media landscape of the 21st Century provides a safe space for the dispersal of white supremacist content, giving it unprecedented reach. It should also be noted that although the movement rose to national prominence with the election of Donald J. Trump to the American Presidency in 2016, his campaign was not the origin of the movement. However, the election was undoubtedly pivotal for the entrance of the Alt-Right onto the national political stage (Anti-

Defamation League 2018). Former President Trump's infamous use of social media platform Twitter only served to deepen the connections between this decentralized network of right-wing activists and the internet.

Within these online spaces, images often function as the de facto sociocultural currency. Often, this takes the form of the meme (Jenkins 2014; Huntington 2019). However, memes are not the only form of visual communication being spread through Alt-Right internet spaces. Although a comparatively ancient form of visual communication, the political cartoon has made a comeback through social media. More specifically, the set of objects analyzed are the works of Alt-Right political cartoonist Ben Garrison. Garrison has become a favorite artist of the Alt-Right movement, having his work spread by some of their most notable outlets (Infowars), their most strident advocates (Mike Cernovich) and even members of the Trump administration (Dan Scavino) (Ellis 2017; Cohen 2020). This reach is in addition to his own social media presence currently registering at nearly 80,000 followers on Facebook, and more than 51,000 on Instagram. More importantly, Garrison amassed nearly 230,000 followers on Twitter before his account (much like the former President's) was suspended following the January 6 insurrection Garrison's account has since been reinstated, but does not appear to be in use by Garrison (Garrison n.d.). While his ban from Twitter almost certainly hampered his outreach, it does not prevent his comics from being shared on social media.

Certainly, Garrison's comics do not require his active dissemination to proliferate in digital spaces. These comics are still found and shared on Twitter. That he still has a notable presence on both Facebook and Instagram gives him further opportunities to spread his ideologically driven cartoons. Although there is almost certainly some follower overlap between these various platforms, social media algorithms virtually guarantee that Garrison's posts will

reach more eyes than just those which subscribe to him. Any one of these factors make these cartoons worthy of further study. However, the pièce de résistance is the invitation of Garrison by President Trump to a 2019 Social Media Summit at the White House for Alt-Right influencers, members, and internet personalities. The fact that Garrison's invitation was rescinded following outcry from some of his earlier comics which depict anti-Semitic tropes is of little consequence (Cohen 2020). The mere invitation elevates these comics and their artist to a higher level of visibility and outreach. The fact that the decision to rescind the invitation was internally contentious for the White House and only occurred after multiple attempts to question the initial invite from media both social and traditional magnifies the significance of the invitation (Palmer, Sherman, and Lippman 2019). The decision was not made because of the content of the comics, but rather the undesirable media attention it was garnering.

Like many political cartoonists, Garrison's volume of work is expansive. The analysis presented below does not attempt to make a longitudinal understanding of Garrison's work and the meanings and motives transmitted and interpreted by it. Instead, it primarily analyses just five of these comics: "Trump the Dragon Slayer," "The Siren Song of Socialism," "AOC's Bar – Drink Up Suckers," "Malarkey Bus 2020," and "Trump's Counterpunch" (Garrison 2016; 2019a; 2019b; 2020a; 2020b). The cartoons were drawn and published between 2016 and 2020, occupying a space in time where the Alt-Right began to rise and take power within the American politics. It should go without saying that any amount of causation or attribution between these political cartoons and the increasing strength of the Alt-Right movement risks overstating their influence. However, their content and popularity are both indicative and constitutive of many of the underlying logics of the Alt-Right. Garrison engages in a self-reinforcing cycle of reference and creation. Although original creations, his comics serve to reference ideologies familiar to his

audience which simultaneously recreating them. With this in mind, the claim that he has no responsibility would be just as erroneous as attributing full responsibility. The factors which gave rise to the movement are far too varied for a single source. Rather, the criticism is the meant to explain how these political cartoons function to foster and create identification which legitimates this ideology within the shared social world of the Alt-Right.

The hope then arises that greater understanding of the rhetorical formations present within these media can open up the space for pathways to resistance, helping citizens develop tools to either prevent radicalization of their friends, neighbors and loved ones, or to begin the process of de-radicalization for those already affected. This is not an easy process, nor one with guaranteed success. The rhetorical tools of the Alt-Right are effective precisely because they prey upon deep-seated ideologies that have far-reaching roots within the foundations of social reality. Appeals to white supremacy and masculinity are both affective and effective to members of the Alt-Right precisely because so much of American society has been invisibly formulated upon these constructs (Matias and Newlove 2017).

Because of this institutionalized assistance, the Alt-Right did not arise in a vacuum, nor does it take hold in an individual after one exposure. The process of radicalization is gradual and can easily start with actions as simple as sharing a seemingly funny cartoon or meme. This essay positions itself as a critical intervention into the modes and mechanisms of internet discourses which enabled the dissemination of Alt-Right ideology. By highlighting the dangerous and unavoidably violent discourses present within the cartoons of Garrison, it hopes to contribute to understandings of how these discourses have such staying power and contribute to the further fracturing of the collective American psyche.

The Alt-Right is novel (if not unique) among white supremacist movements because of the conjunction of two forms of power and domination: whiteness and masculinity (Anti-Defamation League 2018). It is easily and convincingly argued that masculinity and white supremacy work in conjunction to create systems and institutions which generate and retain power (Boehme and Isom Scott, 2019). In this way, the Alt-Right is given legitimacy from dual conceptions of misogyny and white supremacy. The objects analyzed below are no exception. Garrison's works are filled with open and visceral contempt for women, people of color, Democrats and even would-be political allies who are sacrificed in an appeal to power that is as idealized as it is unobtainable. They seek to delegitimize, discredit, and ultimately destroy anyone who might stand in the way of whatever protagonist the comic depicts that day (often the former President). Relatedly, the President's rhetoric often features implied appeals to these same ideals (Ohlheiser 2019). Indeed, the President's appeals to his own strength and vigor rely on an understanding in his audience about those same ideals. In this way, the rhetorical constructions of both Garrison and Trump simultaneous rely upon and reinforce these conceptions of masculine whiteness, serving to help deepen the acceptability and validity of these concepts in the rank-and-file members of the Alt-Right.

These objects appear, at first, to be monological. Their messages are unchanging, fixed in time and place, and sent out into the world for consumption. In some respects they are one man's viewpoints made public. However, the act spreading and sharing of these comics and videos on social media functions dialogically between members of the Alt-Right. Every Like, every Retweet, and every Share sends an implicit message that the rhetoric present within these political cartoons has validity and utility to anyone who comes across them. As these processes

occur over social media, consensus is solidified, and themes begin to emerge from this process of negotiation within the group allowing for the formation of a shared identity.

Although amplified in scale by the internet, these dynamics mirror the types of communicative phenomena which Bormann (1972) expanded upon when theorizing upon group fantasy themes. Changed in form through the digital age, the dialogues which occur over social media in Alt-Right circles are no less impactful than those that happen in person. The rise in prominence and effectivity of the movement over the past few years is proof enough of this. Bormann (1972) seems almost prescient as he describes the situation in which a movement like the Alt-Right can arise, "On occasion, however, small, highly dedicated groups of people generate and sustain rhetorical visions so out of joint with the common-sense and everyday experience of the majority of a community that their appeal is very limited." (p.400). What Bormann could not have possibly conceived is how the rise of social media would break down the barriers that separated these groups within larger communities. The effects of the confluence of these two occurrences cannot be understated. Although, a full Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA) is not the intent of this thesis, understanding how these dialogical formations evolve through the internet and social media becomes imperative for understanding the dangerous messages that are present within Alt-Right internet circles

Garrison's comics, aided by the algorithmic processes of social media, creates characters and situations unique to the group, becoming a shorthand for understanding the processes and players on the political stage. The responses to these fantasies by members of the Alt-Right informs their interactions and engagements with people outside of these circles. Sometimes these occur in opposition, causing conflict potentially expanding the possibility of violence, as seen by the clashes between Black Lives Matter protestors and various Alt-Right groups such as the

Proud Boys in the summer of 2020. Other times, these fantasies serve to engage with individuals outside of the group, creating new membership and allyship for the Alt-Right. Having a stronger understanding of the subjectivities expressed in these rhetorical visions is a necessity for a political world that will continue to be affected by the Alt-Right.

The Alt-Right is a new phenomenon based upon a fantasy of American life that no longer exists, if it ever did (Kelly 2017). Their constructed social world has impacted social relations and politics in such a way that a more in-depth understanding is not only helpful but necessary. The decentralized, libertarian nature of internet technologies has as Daniels (2018) explained, "left an opening for White nationalists—and they are always looking for opportunities to push their ideology" (p. 63). Hate is likely inextricable from society. If hate cannot be eliminated, it must be managed. A prerequisite to management is understanding.

The task, therefore, is to understand this hate, fashion pathways to circumvent it, and make it socially untenable. In order to begin the process of insight, the rest of the essay unfolds as follows: First a literature review, which touches upon both the communicative aspects that unfolding on millions of screens daily. This necessarily involves a discussion of visual rhetoric as well as the use of iconography and the employment of enthymemes in rhetorical structures. Additionally, the literature review will look into the concepts of both white supremacy and masculinity as organizing societal principles. Although a very deep literature base at this point, understanding the development of masculine white supremacy becomes pivotal to understanding the appeal of the Alt-Right's ideology. Following a brief discussion of methodology, analysis of Garrison's comics will be presented. A discussion of relevance and connections between Garrison's work and larger social structures will conclude the essay.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual Rhetoric

Foss (2004) traces the development of visual rhetoric from the 1970s through the modern era. Although initially discredited, the communication discipline has since evolved, with visual rhetoric increasingly occupying a larger subsection of the discipline. Despite the rather slow acceptance, the rhetoricity of visual images is well established by this point. Foss (2004, 143) further breaks down the dual meaning of visual rhetoric as, "both a visual object or artifact and a perspective on the study of visual data". The recognition of an image's symbolic qualities is necessary for understanding communication in the modern day. Fully utilizing this dual meaning assists in the extraction of intended meanings and audiences from a piece of visual rhetoric. Foss stressed the limits (or lack thereof) of using visual rhetoric as a perspective. More specifically, by focusing on the communicative qualities of a piece of visual rhetoric rather than its inherent material and aesthetic qualities, critics can begin to decode the messages present within a visual work that non-visual approaches would be ill-suited for. These meaning-making process are already occurring in audiences, so critics must begin to understand the rhetorical nature of images on the internet. Moreover, the presence of an audience further allows rhetoricians to pull meaning out of the symbolic representations present. Perhaps most importantly, Foss provides frameworks for which scholars can begin to analyze visual rhetoric: nature, function, and/or evaluation (Foss 2004, 146-7). The nature of the image concerns both the physical, presented elements as well as the symbolic suggested elements. As some element of artistic/authorial intent is implied through the concept of nature, function therefore reckons with the nature audience interpretation of the image. Although there can certainly be connective tissue between the

producer's intent and the message the audience takes from it, preferring the former over the latter produces criticism which comes up lacking. Evaluation allows for critics to assess the overall success of an image's nature and/or function.

Blair (2004) furthers this discussion by explicating upon the argumentative nature of visual images. In detailing the oral/written (both are verbal) history of argument, Blair traces argument's ties to speech acts by virtue of a statement's propositional truth value. In countering this, he explicitly points to the ability of historical political cartoons to be able to create definite propositions of argument. Interestingly, Blair (2004, 49) does contend that there is likely no argument that is purely visual, but rather, "most communications that are candidates for visual arguments are combinations of the verbal and the visual. The words might be in print (as in cartoons), or voiced (in the case of television or film)". At the very least, this does point to the validity and utility of the current analysis. It is precisely the confluence between visuals and verbal components that makes visual rhetoric a necessary aspect of rhetorical practice. Given multimedia nature of social media, the argumentative interplay between verbal and visual cues creates new spaces of suasive potentiality ripe for examination. Perhaps most notably, Blair does expound upon the affective benefits of visual rhetoric that purely verbal explanations lack. Their evocative nature combined with humans' ability to process visual images faster than either read or heard words provides definitive proof of visuals narrative strength.

Metaphor and Affect. This strength comes, at least partially, from the affective qualities of visual images. Hawhee and Messaris (2009, 217-8) explore some of the material qualities of images and what the recognition of the visual within rhetorical studies can bring to the discipline. Specifically, the nature of artistic representation and other "illusionistic devices", "create the common ground on which emotion can build and persuasion can take hold…doing something

that words literally, physically, cannot do". This affective dimension of visual media therefore becomes integral to its persuasive potential. Visual media, by its mere existence, is eminently emotional. It stands to reason that ignoring this emotional element of visual media is detrimental to analysis. This is especially true when analyzing the Alt-Right. The violence associated with many public demonstrations of the movement necessarily come from an emotional attachment to a perceived loss of shared social reality. The continually expanding list of "enemies" points to the presence of an affective element of the Alt-Right that should be reflected in their visual media.

The presence of this affective communication within visual media of the Alt-Right shows the need for an understanding of signification within the study of visual rhetoric. Danesi (2017) explicates that cultural connotations are a critical component of understanding the semiotics of visual communication. These cultural contexts need not extend to the societal/national level. Interestingly enough, Danesi does stress the ways in which visual rhetoric influences both affective and cognitive responses. In this way, the affective processes at play in the colors, composition and image field subtly influence the cognitive processes in play as well. Tying these process in with cultural context, pushes us to better understand the interplay between these forces in how visual rhetoric is received by audiences.

Cultural context is especially important in developing a more holistic understanding of the processes of hegemonic signification through visual rhetoric. Ventsel's (2014) examination of these processes in the context of Soviet Estonia provides a direction for which we can begin to look to hegemonic presences (and the cultural signification thereof) present within the rhetoric of visual media. By building off Althusserian theories of state apparatuses and Gramscian and Foucauldian theories of power as "a means of repression", Ventsel forwards a necessary

conception going forward: the nature of propaganda within ideological state apparatuses and how visual media can serve as an enactment of repressive state power. More specifically, the rise of visual media in the 20th Century can fundamentally changes how the state employs and utilizes power in the modern era. This "softer" influence for social control (as opposed to the "harder" use of police/military power in order to maintain order) has strong implications for the negotiation of power relations through the institutionalization of hegemonic influence. This is to say that the logic and persuasive power of visual representations, when embedded within a context of cultural signification, can create new, more concrete meanings for audiences. When coming from sources who are either in direct positions of power, or those who influence those in power, the process of signification within visual rhetoric is significantly influenced. Ventsel's concluding articulation about a de facto canonization of leader depictions speaks to their utility as a way to signify hegemonic practices of exclusion will be particularly relevant to this essay.

Euben (2017), through her study of the digital distribution of ISIS execution videos, argues that the visual violence at work in those videos only explains part of their rhetorical power. Notably taking that into account, it is imprudent to deny the rhetorical power of said violence. The visual imagery in play in this videos is critical to their messaging capabilities. Euben's conception of digital time merits further discussion. Noting the dialogical nature of modern digital media (in contrast with the monological nature that characterizes 20th Century mass media), Euben (2017, 1023) explains:

> Watching can turn into a (sic) intense, personal, and immediate experience of witnessing, not in the sense of 'bearing witness' to events that have already transpired, but in a simulacrum of eye-witnessing…*as it happens* [emphasis in original]… At such a level of affective engagement, it takes Just a small step—or a few clicks—for a watcher-witness to interpellate [them]self into the enactment itself.

Powerful affective responses to visual media are regulated, strengthened, and perpetuated through what Euben calls digital time, "'set' by the synergistic conjunction of increased global connectivity, light-speed communication, unlimited repetition, and the interactivity that constitutes 'users' as virtual or vicarious participants" (1023). That is to say that the impossibility of distance, stoppages or pauses in the circulation of visual rhetoric in the digital domain necessarily increases their already notable affective dimensions. The lack of distance and ability to decompress from this rhetoric contributes to the popular conception of social media echo chambers. This concept, in conjunction with Daniels' (2018) study on algorithmic proliferation of the Alt-Right points to a need for better understanding how these processes work in the corners of the internet outside of the mainstream. At its core, digital time encourages affective reaction over critical thinking and introspection. The job of rhetoricians, therefore, must be to analyze and call attention to the effect that digital time has on the formation of meaning making within rhetoric.

Enthymemes. In addition the discussion of metonymy and digital time represented by Ventsel and Euben respectively, understanding the role of enthymemes in visual rhetoric can further develop the processes in play in this study's artifacts. The role of enthymemes in persuasion and rhetoric is well-worn ground at this point, dating back to Aristotle's formative writings. As Bitzer (1959) explains, enthymemes function as an act of joint production between speaker and audience, allowing for self-persuasion precisely because the audience supplies a segment of the syllogism. Similarly, Macagno and Damale (2018) further this, by explicating that the effectiveness of an enthymeme is precisely reliant on the *kairos*, or appropriateness for the moment, of the speaker's implicit premises to the audience. This does raise the question: Can enthymemes still be effective when removed from a specific temporal and/or spatial location?

Considering the convergence of digital time and algorithmic connection, it is arguable that enthymemes in digital communication can become even more potent. The temporal and spatial divide between speaker and audience in the digital realm creates multiple rhetorical situations in which a speaker can find an audience. No longer reliant on a physical connection to speaker or event, the repetition of rhetoric within digital spaces allows for suasory potential months, years, or even decades after the act. By utilizing enthymematic argument, communicators can bridge divides allowing for the furthering of ideological arguments that (at one point) fell out of common discussion, creating situations for the renewed proliferation of alternative viewpoints. This amplifies what Macagno and Damele (2018) call the "strategic" utility of enthymeme in persuasion in 21st Century digital spaces. By widening the possible *kairos* for a rhetorical act, digital time within digital spaces opens up new potential avenues for persuasion of said act.

Just as digital spaces stand to improve the efficacy of enthymematic arguments, the nature of artistic representation means that visual rhetoric and enthymemes are easily conjoined. Smith (2007) builds the case for the inclusion of visual rhetoric as enthymematic. Moving away from modern popular interpretations of enthymemes and returning closer to their classical Aristotelian meaning allows for a reconceptualization in which visual rhetoric is enthymematic. Smith focuses on three key facets of enthymemes which, "Involves probable premises and conclusions…Accommodates ethical and emotional dimensions of argument… Depends on agreement between speaker and audience" (116-7). Smith finds that the interpretive potentialities afforded to visual communication allow for demonstration of all three of these facets within visual rhetoric. Holding Smith's conclusions as conceptually sound promotes a more varied and

useful theoretical basis for decoding the myriad forms of visual communication in the 21st Century.

Political Cartoons. The idea that political cartoons are inherently rhetorical is well-tilled ground by this point. Morrison (1969, 260) provides one of the earlies articulations that the political cartoonist, "Telescopes a whole chain of ideas into one clear image. The cartoonist does not father the image, he is the midwife in its birth". Putting aside that visceral imagery and gendered language, the point remains salient. The images and ideas advanced within political cartoons function as part of an ongoing conversation between the artist and audience. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981) build upon this work, articulating a stronger conception of the rhetorical dimensions of political cartoons, explicitly tying it to the neoclassical canons. Although the aims of their essay are not particularly applicable for the purposes of this essay, it does represent a vital moment within the discipline expanding rhetoric into the visual realm. This does not, however, mean that the conclusions reached are completely irrelevant. Their work on memory is particularly useful for understanding the shared *topoi* that artists tap into and how that functions with collective, social memory. This formulation is critical. By tapping into collective memory, the artist rhetorically transmits the concepts of their memory onto the page (or screen in this case) for their audience. The audience then unpacks these concepts, further entrenching individual ideas and memories into cultural memories to be unpacked at later opportunities (Medhurst and DeSousa 1981, 222-3).

Cartoonists further chain these memories through the use of repeating metaphorical structures. Through the repetition of visual metaphors (especially the repeated representations of specific individuals), political cartoons engage in a narrative form from strip-to-strip that subtly influences perceptions of those figures over time (Abdel-Raheem 2020). This use of metaphor,

therefore, becomes critical for the rhetorical dimensions of political cartoons (Morris 1993). Metaphor becomes the central creator of meaning within political cartoons, vital to its persuasive function.

Visual metaphor within political cartoons is simultaneously complicated and assisted by the phenomenon that El Refaie (2003, 90) refers to as, "the difficulty of distinguishing between a literal and a metaphorical depiction". That is to say, interpretation is predicated upon its socio-political context. Especially within the realm of political cartoons, attempting to analyze an artifact without considering that context serves to undermine the analysis from the very outset. The heavy use of metaphor within political cartoons virtually mandates an examination of its use. El Refaie (2009) builds upon this with a study which finds that verbal and visual elements in political cartoons work in concert in order to create meaning that would be impossible with either one alone. This conjunction also further elucidates the socio-political context of political cartooning. Synergy between visual metaphor and verbal rhetoric within cartoons is anchored to a cultural context which adds meaning to those within the culture. Necessarily, visual metaphor and argument within political cartoons relies on a shared social knowledge that audiences tap into when engaging with this medium. It does stand to note that although misinterpretation is entirely possible for someone reading a political cartoon, understanding its cultural context provides a solid grounding upon which interpretation can successfully isolate the arguments and rhetorical structures provided by the artist (Greenberg 2002). If metaphor is a lock of meaning-making within political cartoons, then socio-cultural context surely becomes the key.

By acting within a social order, political cartoons necessarily engage in social commentary. A key area of inquiry should be the use of political cartoons to give meaning through their engagement in the symbolic over mere iconic representation. Political cartoonists,

according to Abraham (2009), predominantly rely upon four tropes: The utilization of commonly recurring political situations (the economy, defense, etc.), topical recent events, caricature, and use of literary/mythic imagery. These mechanisms allow political cartoonist to engage the symbolic and drives social criticism in the form. Engaging in the use of these four tropes (but especially the latter two according to Abraham) grant political cartoons entrance into social criticism and the ability to transmit complex social commentary with minimal (if any) word use. Political cartoons have also been shown to help with the setting of social agendas (Sani et al. 2012). Their suasive ability around areas of cultural contestation points to a need to better understand the processes involved at the socio-cultural level.

Socio-political/cultural contexts can fundamentally alter how subgroups interpret and react to a piece of visual political communication (Labuschagne 2011). By tailoring the message to a specific audience rather than a newspaper or magazine's general audience, the transmission of these messages ought to have a higher chance of successful transmission of the intended message. Empirical examples appear to confirm this. The formation of Palestinian refugee identity through the political cartoons of artist Naji al-Ali provides an example. The highly specific and referential nature of these cartoons to the Palestinian context helped shepherd the Palestinian identity from disjointed diaspora into a fully realized political movement (Najjar 2007). The use of highly particular symbolic imagery fostered unity throughout the Palestinian diaspora and pushed for movements in which Palestinian identity was respected and desirable. Although an ominous mark for an artist, the death threats and (ultimately) his assassination in 1987 at least provides some evidence of the efficacy of al-Ali's symbolic imagery on the political realities that constitute the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Here it becomes useful to draw a (careful) parallel between Garrison's work as a form of persuasive communication with the Alt-Right with al-Ali's work with the Palestinian diaspora. Both groups represent small, yet impactful subsets of their populations. Tailoring their work to a specific audience greatly improved their work's persuasive potentiality. No longer tethered to engaging with a large and diverse audience, the artists are therefore able to more explicitly engage in metaphorical constructs to which the intended audience will be both familiar and receptive. These two examples do point to the presence of what Werner (2004) identifies as intertextuality creating an ideal audience for political cartoons. Intertextual context allows al-Ali's and Garrison's works to be incredibly effective messaging for their target audiences.

Najjar's is far from the only account of the efficacy of political cartoons as symbolic political rhetoric. Bormann, Koester, and Bennett (1978) provide specific evidence of the ability of political cartoons to create and sustain fantasy chains within a citizenry. Although not technically criticism, it does promote the link between political cartooning and the creation and proliferation of fantasy themes within a mass media context. Importantly, the study does provide support that extrapolations and/or predictions can be made of individual behavior based upon analysis of fantasy themes. If the mass communication methods of the late 1970s could produce buy-in to various rhetorical visions and their attendant fantasy themes, then certainly the advent and growth of the internet would produce similar effects. It further stands to reason that the highly specific nature of Garrison's audience would mean his effect is somewhat similar. With the rise of movements such as the Alt-Right, understanding the messages and argumentative structures presented through social media channels becomes critical to understanding and eventually countering them. That these groups have often been on the cutting edge of technological innovations only makes the matter more pressing (Daniels 2018). Although

analyzing a different era of internet development, Duffy's (2003) analysis of online hate groups and the rhetorical visions they construct on their message boards and websites provides a useful starting point for thinking about how these spaces on the internet allow for the growth and dissemination of these ideologies.

Masculinity, White Supremacy, and the Alt-Right

Before discussion of masculinity, white supremacy and their confluence within the Alt-Right, it is important to understand how visual rhetorical studies can aid in study of these phenomena, Olson (2007, 2) provides a helpful backwards look at 50 years of developmental thinking within visual rhetoric, pointing out that, "because of a proliferation of new, highly visual media technologies with profound ramifications for communication, academic interest in visual rhetoric deepened noticeably". That is, emphasis in modern media on the visual image demands inspection of the ways in which the visual changes the rhetorical structure of an artifact. To overlook this facilitates an incomplete look at the rhetorical phenomena at play within the various media channels of the 21st Century. Importantly, Olson points out that the study of visual rhetoric creates openings an opportunities for better understanding non-white cultures, especially those who do not prioritize oratorical and/or written expression (or presumably those whose examples of oratorical or written expression were wiped out by centuries of exploitation and colonial privilege). This opening represents a key area in which rhetorical studies more broadly can help to focus on de-centering white perspectives within the discipline. This is clearly an area where the discipline requires stronger, more pointed direction on (Chakravartty et al. 2018; Wanzer-Serrano 2019).

A necessary component of this direction necessarily involves calling attention to rhetorical practices where white perspectives are promoting practices which serve to further marginalize non-white, non-masculine perspectives. More specifically, it means calling attention to the seemingly common practices which institutionalize racist practices within our political and social systems. It further requires self-introspection by white scholars working within these spaces in order to decode our own hidden biases and intellectual blind spots which allow for the perpetuation and proliferation of systemic racism within rhetoric specifically and the academy more generally (Wanzer-Serrano 2019). To be sure, this paper is an insufficient intervention into the issues that Chakravartty and Wanzer-Serrano raise in the communication discipline. With that in mind, it hopefully serves as part of the movement to better understand how institutionalized white supremacy affects social relations and the construction of shared social reality.

Critical understanding of the effects of hegemonic masculinity and white supremacy are still ongoing disciplinarily. This essay primarily concerns itself with the manners in which masculinity and white supremacy conjoin within the realm of political/social activism, namely through the actions of conservative political thought giving rise to the Alt-Right movement. The manifestations of white supremacy and/or masculinity in social/political spheres takes place within both physical and digital spaces, necessitating a discussion of these manifestations in both contexts.

Messner (2007) describes the malleability of masculinity in American electoral politics. By creating situations for dominant forms of masculinity, which forefront strength and the possibility of violence as operating principles, to shift and contort itself in order to maintain its grip on power. Using the façade of compassion allows masculinity to reassert itself within

structures of power without fundamentally changing its internal organizing nature. This is particularly effective within American electoral politics, where the voting public naturally responds to perceptions of toughness from their leaders. Messner (2007, 478) further explains that these traditional standards serve to limit, "women's opportunities to seek high office…Women's activism…challenges these limitations, but if meaningful change is to occur…leaders must also stop conforming to a singular masculine…leadership style". Absent a concentrated effort to move from traditional masculinity in electoral politics, the American political system will continue to be beheld to that strategy.

The implicit violence, identified by Messner (2007), present within appeals to traditional masculinity within American politics work to mobilize and grow right-wing movements. Blee and Creasap (2010) explain that the identification of enemies by these groups allows these movements to structure tactics and foment in-group identification. Notably, these movements moved away from external enemies such as Soviets and communists towards feminists and sexual minorities as their identified enemies. This is not to say that xenophobia does not continue to be a consistent source of animus for the new right-wing movements. Demonization of external others is still frequent, but is now conjoined with disdain for those who fail to adhere to normative standards they have set. Notably, they further identify that the digital spaces have become key areas in which to spread ideology and gain membership without members risking their social and professional relationships. These digital scenes work affectively by creating communities that were previously separated by physical distance. The sense of camaraderie created through digital spaces allows for greater comfort with ideas that might have floundered without the safe space provided by online forums, websites, and social media.

Kendall (2000) traces some of the earliest instances of the internet as a space for the reification of hegemonically masculine identification. Notably, the internet, especially in its earlier incarnations, allowed for simultaneous convergence/divergence of masculinity which highlights hegemonic masculinity's ability to reconfigure itself without having to reconceptualize itself. That is to say, those who fall outside of traditional masculinity (such as homosexual men) can engage in discourses which treat women as "both desired and disgusting objects" allowing their own performance in traditional masculine structures despite often operating outside of it (Kendall 2000, 271). These same spaces also present similar phenomenon for white supremacy. Although online participants often distance themselves from some forms of white supremacy, they deepen their own relation to it through the denigration of racially oppressed groups. In this way, white supremacy and masculinity display an aptitude for adaptation that allows for subjugation of racial or sexual others without needing full identification within the dominant group. While not adhering to the platonic ideal of either masculinity or white supremacy, participants in online forums can still participate in discourses which serve to otherize racial, sexual, or gendered individuals. Full identification with white masculinity is unnecessary, rather the desire to marginalize those further outside the norms creates enough of a connection for white masculinity to continue manners of domination in online spaces.

Kelly (2017, 69) moves this thought into the current rise of the Alt-Right as less of a coherent, contiguous movement of activism, but rather multiple decentralized nodes of like-minded individuals, "inspired and inspired and defined by a discourse of anxiety about traditional white masculinity, which is seen as being artificially but powerfully 'degenerated'". Kelly notes the discursive successes of the Alt-Right have their roots in the crises of masculinity

already present within American politics. The growth of the Alt-Right is aided by the implicit acceptance of masculinity within American political thought. Kelly concludes by calling for fashioning pathways of resistance to the normalization of Alt-Right thought. This process is critical as the Alt-Right's adherents continue to gain positions of power within American government.

The Alt-Right also functions through the utilization of gendered victimhood. The internalization of traditional heteronormative social structures creates vulnerability within traditionally white and heteronormative individuals when those ideals are threatened (Johnson 2017; Boehme and Isom Scott 2019). This is not restricted exclusively to white men. The support for traditional patriarchal family structures within Alt-Right ideology can drive women to support Alt-Right movements, even if they disagree with some of its tenets. The Alt-Right, therefore, is no longer a movement for young white men feeling displaced within the current multicultural United States. Rather it is protecting a fantastical, nostalgic vision of White America in which gendered roles are clearly defined and protected (Kelly 2017; Boehme and Isom Scott 2019). Because this vision is perceived as being under attack, Alt-Right followers consider themselves as victims, legitimizing more drastic measures, such as violent intervention, in order to defend this worldview. Trump's demagogic rhetoric accesses these fears, which helps explain the affective engagement of the Alt-Right with his campaign and subsequent Presidency, because it helps them imagine themselves as victims of a political tragedy centered around the displacement of 'real America' from the political center by a feminized political establishment" (Johnson 2017, 230).

Notably, Johnson (2017, 231) highlights this victimhood as indicative of, "precarity rather than vulnerability". This is an important distinction precisely because it reasserts

hegemonic white masculinity as power-being-threatened, rather than existing in a state of disrepair. The fight against, multiculturalism, feminism, leftism, etc. is to fortify the existing order under attack. These institutions have not lost strength, but are under attack. This legitimizes the Alt-Right's tendency to support political aggression in both policy preferences and specific politicians (DiMuccio and Knowles 2020). DiMuccio and Knowles (2020) further explain that Trump's rhetorical prowess has amplified existing tensions which serves as the foundation of the Alt-Right, allowing it to realign conservative politics, similar to the demographic shifts following the Southern Strategy of the 1960s and 1970s. His reliance on discursive symbolic violence is a necessary factor for this shift, as it allows him to reassert his (and his followers) masculinity while simultaneously demeaning that of his opponents, thus alleviating existing precarity in relation to perceived enemies (Smith and Higgins, 2020).

METHOD

Process

Foss (2004), in trying to sketch out a methodological approach to visual rhetoric details two main approaches: Deductive and Inductive. Inductive approaches are a necessary application for building theoretical approaches which advance the discipline. This expansion is vital for the field of visual rhetoric to continue to expand and flourish. However, this does not mean that deductive approaches lack merit. As Foss (2004, 150) notes the deductive approach, "offers ease of connection to rhetorical theory". Because this essay is more concerned with the specific rhetoric emanating from the image medium, a deductive approach becomes the most prudent. Understanding how these media use visual metaphor as a rhetorical device, is critical to decoding the explicit and implicit arguments being transmitted through the artifacts making up this study.

Because this thesis is meant to better understand the arguments arising from the selected artifacts, its method need not reinvent the wheel. The deductive approach outlined by Foss provides us with a direction in which to take the research. Similarly, this essay's methodology is meant to recognize the role of the critic in the formation of these texts (McGee 1990). The very act of choosing a series of objects to study necessarily inserts the critic into an authorial role. The chosen comics exist within a larger spectrum of Garrison's work, forwarding ideas on a range of subjects. By narrowing these objects down into a set more suitable for close examination, my own role in the creation of a new set of objects is clear. It is my own interest in the material implications of the rise of the Alt-Right movement which pushes this study. The recognition of this does not change the nature of the criticism nor the insights gained into the rhetorical processes at work. Rather, it functions as a recognition that modern rhetoric exists in a

fragmented state waiting to be reconstructed. These fragments are influenced by a range of societal viewpoints which shape Garrison's construction of visual rhetorical argument. To wit: They are, by Garrison's own admission, influenced by popular responses to his work (Garrison 2019b). The job of the critic is to understand how these fragments work together to create suasive rhetorical constructions for their audience. More succinctly, this method recognizes that the context surrounding an artifact is precisely as important as the "text" itself, even if that context is ever shifting thanks to the aid of digital time.

Relatedly, this essay's approach to criticism builds off Dow's (2001) critique of the ideological rigidity of method within rhetorical studies. Indeed, the strict adherence to methodology is at odds with the artistic origins of criticism. This is not to say that method should be frowned upon, but rather that pushing method-as-dogma within the discipline elevates method at the expense of criticism. Instead, criticism in this manner, "creates perspective through its enactment: there is nothing behind the veil until we put it there" (Dow 2001, 342). In this way, power dynamics arising from studies of white supremacy and masculinity become a lens with which to analyze these works. This essay is not an attempt to "uncover" hidden or nefarious meanings in either sets of objects. Rather, it is trying to understand the rhetorical structures at play in these pieces of visual media. Ideology, therefore, allows deeper understanding to the messages transmitted through these political cartoons.

It should be noted, however, that this does not mean that the arguments presented by these media will simply be identified. Wanzer's (2012) critique/updating/radicalizing of McGee's fragmentation thesis proves instrumental here. Wanzer's approach functions for this thesis in two ways methodologically. First, it functions as a response to Wanzer's call to action that the process of decoloniality cannot solely be put on scholars of color. By deploying,

recognizing, and denouncing my own privilege in the service of decoloniality, we can, "Engage in forms of praxis that can more productively negotiate the borderlands between inside and outside, in thought and in being" (Wanzer 2012, 654). Viewed from this perspective, understanding the relationship between the Alt-Right's weaponization of white nationalism and white nationalism's relation to coloniality, the importance of analysis like this thesis is magnified.

Another benefit of Wanzer's approach is that it bridges the divide between McGee's and Dow's conceptions of fragmentation. Holding Wanzer's argument that, "McGee unreflexively reproduces a dominating narrative of Western/American centrality from within the borders of the modern/colonial world system" as true, then using McGee as a basis for criticism of white, heterosexual, masculine hegemony is, at the very least, problematized (Wanzer 2012, 647). Wanzer's approach allows for an updating of McGee's thesis more in line with Dow's conception of text fragmentation that the origin of texts is irrelevant. They are necessarily constructed through a multitude of contexts, of which the critic is certainly one. This is in line with Wanzer's (2012, 648) claim that, "'Texts'…never existed cohesively in the first place". If recognition of this allows for greater effort within criticism to better understand the ubiquity of hegemonic practices, then it should certainly be utilized as such.

The visual nature of these means that a detailed description of these artifacts is prudent. This chapter concludes with that description.

As was stated above, the analyzed artifacts are a series of web-based political cartoons made by Alt-Right political cartoonist Ben Garrison dating between 2016 and 2020. While the five comics analyzed in this study make up only a small percentage of Garrison's overall portfolio, they are also largely representative of the themes and metaphors present in much of

Garrison's work. They are also chosen because of the nature of the subjects portrayed within them. The political figures presented within these cartoons are frequent targets for either the ire or admiration of members of the Alt-Right. What follows will be a brief description of each comic in order to create a stronger connection for readers.

Artifacts

"Trump the Dragon Slayer" (herein "Dragon Slayer", see Figure 1.) is a 2016 comic which depicts then presidential candidate Trump as a knight in shining armor having recently slain a dragon labelled as "Political Correctness". Trump's foot is placed upon the neck of the dragon next to a gaping wound still containing the sword with which Trump struck the killing blow. Smoke, the last vestiges of the dragon's fire breath, smolders in the nostrils of the dragon as it lies defeated on the ground. In the background, former presidential candidate JEB Bush is depicted as being both visibly worried, excoriating Trump with the phrasing "You Brute! You Killed Him!! You Big Bully!! You Racist!! You Sexist!! You're not a nice person!! What a Man!" It should also be noted that Bush has been depicted as a knock-kneed medieval/fantasy princess; a stereotypical damsel-in-distress (Garrison 2016).

The second comic, "AOC's Bar – Drink Up Suckers" (herein "AOC's Bar", see Figure 2.) is one of Garrison's most heavily detailed works. Playing off the well-documented work history of Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the cartoon places Ocasio-Cortez back into a bar setting serving various beverages including the cleverly-named "Stalin Stale Ale", "Marxarita," and "Tax on the Beach," as well as a few drinks sporting substantially less inventive names such as, "Venezuelan Surprise" (which includes a skull within the glass as well as a garnish featuring a mouse impaled upon a straw recreating the caduceus), "Green New

Deal", a tiny, nearly insignificant shot of "reason and logic liqueur" and "Late Term Abortion". Ocasio-Cortez herself is visualized in a low-cut, Midriff-revealing top with a necklace of the Puerto Rican flag around her neck. Here we see some of the aspects of caricature at work here as Ocasio-Cortez is depicted with rather grotesque facial features and expressions, in an almost jarring juxtaposition between the sexualized attire she is wearing (Garrison 2019a).

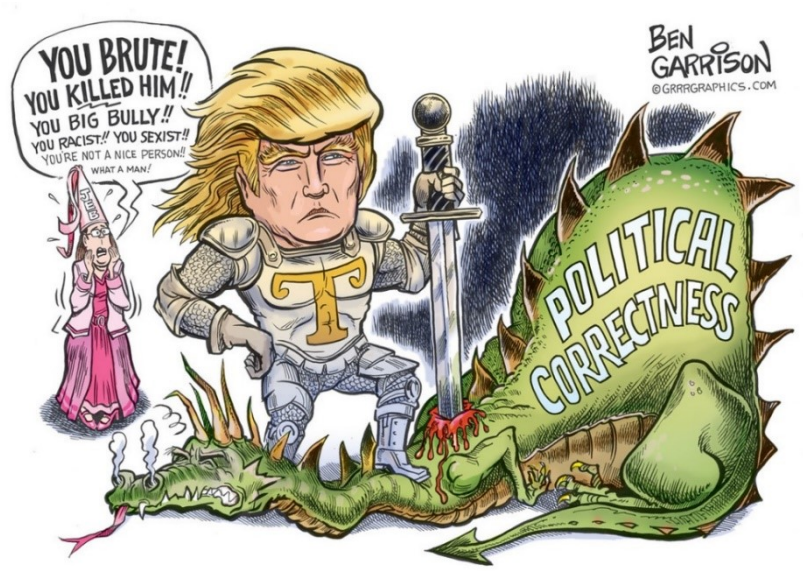

Figure 1. Trump the Dragon Slayer

The third cartoon is 2019's "The Siren Song of Socialism" (herein "Siren Song", see Figure 3.). Playing off the myth of Odysseus and the Sirens, features a man (featuring the label "Millennials") tied to the mast of a ship as he visibly gasps and wags his tongue at the three sirens attempting to crash the ship (visually referenced as the USA) upon the rocky shores of an island identified as socialism. A ship labelled as "Venezuela" has previously crashed upon the shore. The three sirens are portrayed by then-Senator Kamala Harris, then-Representative Tulsi Gabbard (both seen wearing tankinis and playing the flute and harp respectively), and Representative Ocasio-Cortez (donning a grass skirt, bikini bottom, and clamshell top) singing,

"Free stuff and equality". Similar to "AOC's Bar", the three women are caricatured with their facial features belying their sexualized attire. Finally, we have another visual representation of former President Trump. In "Siren Song" he is shown as the captain, steering the ship/country away from near certain doom exclaiming, "We're not going there!" Although not the muscle-bound strongman he is displayed as in some of Garrison's other work, Trump here is still depicted as lithe, strong, and incredibly fit (Garrison 2019b).

Figure 2. AOC's Bar

The penultimate cartoon is "Malarkey Bus 2020" (herein "Malarkey Bus", see Figure 4.). This comic depicts the Joseph Biden/Kamala Harris campaign bus broken down on a set of railroad tracks. Within the bus we see representations (from left to right) of Biden, Harris (who is driving the bus), former presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton, former President Barack Obama, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Senator Bernie Sanders, and an anthropomorphized donkey representing the Democratic Party as a whole. The bus itself can be seen sporting a flat tire, engine fluid leaks, and a cloth mask similar to those worn during the

COVID-19 pandemic. The bus is also seen wheezing and sputtering out the phrase "I can't breathe" through the mask. Although already a densely packed comic, the comic also shows a visualization of the President as a train engine (a literal Trump Train) speeding into the path of the broken-down campaign bus. The train, labeled as the "TRUMP 2020 Express" has three cars which are labeled as "Law & Order", "Jobs" and "MAGA". (Garrison 2020a).

Figure 3. The Siren Song of Socialism

The final comic is another commentary on the 2020 election, "Trump's Counterpunch" (herein "Counterpunch", see Figure 5). Depicting a boxing match, it depicts the two 2020 Presidential candidates attempting to trade dueling punches of "election fraud" (from Biden) and "lawsuits" (from Trump). Biden, depicted as a frail old man, has missed his supposed punch because of superior timing and stamina from Trump, here depicted as an idealized Nietzschean Übermensch. Trump's blow specifically is depicted as almost coming from the skies themselves as Trump proclaims that he, "Saw that one coming, Joe" (Garrison 2020b). Although relatively sparse compared to some of Garrison's other work, this one was chosen because boxing is a

frequent motif within Garrison's work, as well as the noteworthiness of the physical depiction of the former President.

Figure 4. Malarkey Bus

Garrison's comics are representative of his larger portfolio. They echo and repeat arguments as Garrison engages in a passive dialogue with his audience. By utilizing recurring motifs within his work, Garrison pushes a worldview that weaponizes otherization via misogyny and white supremacy. Using the fragments presented here, decoding these argumentative formations allows for a more holistic understanding of the tenets of the Alt-Right and how those messages are disseminated in the digital age. Because many of Garrison's visual arguments employ repetitious imagery spanning multiple years, these works are able to be continuously repackaged. Because the nature of the internet and social media causes the texts fragment naturally, this research's direction provides a way in which to better understand these fragments' ability to disseminate messages of white male supremacy. Advancing this process in the name of

decoloniality provides a way to study these perspectives so as to problematize their conception as legitimate political discourse.

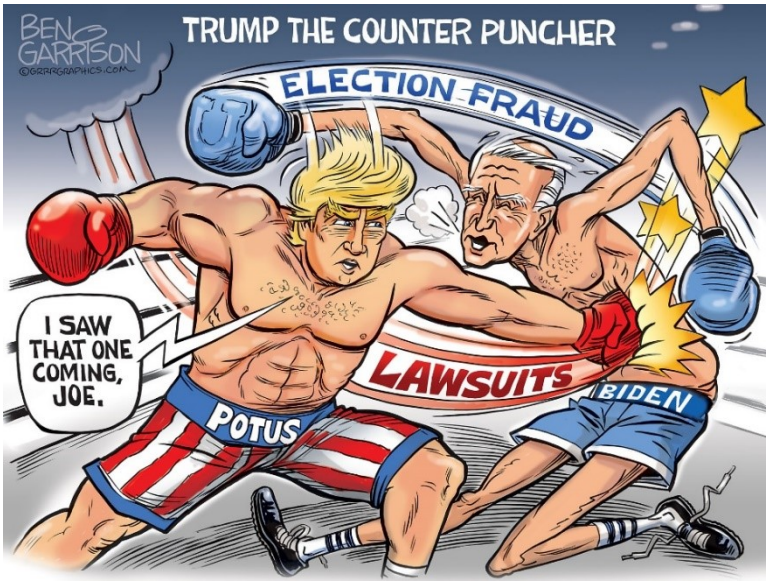

Figure 5. Trump's Counterpunch

ANALYSIS

Garrison's cartoons function as an overture to a particular conception of power achieved through white supremacy and masculinity. The appeals present within these comics might skew closer to one of these formations than the other, but often these forces work hand-in-hand in order to articulate a worldview in which power, enacted by those who embody masculinity and whiteness at its maximum potentiality, is the dominating ideal (Kelly 2017; DiMuccio and Knowles 2020).

I first wish to look at the visualization of masculinity within these comics. These comics often feature an appeal to power where masculinity is positioned as both a solution to problems and a deflection from criticism. The comics themselves seem enamored with power as well as its attendant violence. The elevation of power in "Dragon Slayer" is evident. Political correctness is positioned as antithetical and threatening to traditional masculinity. As seen by Princess Bush's final statement ("What a man!") The best solution is to violently slay it, ending its threat. That Garrison, and his Alt-Right audience, perceive the utility of a violent intervention against that which threatens their masculinity is given credibility when viewed through the lens of DiMuccio and Knowles (2020) findings on precarious manhood and its relation to political aggression. The connection between the necessity for violent response to a "manhood" which is always teetering on the edge of collapse and support for a political agenda that enacts strength performatively is notable. That Trump is depicted as a classical depiction of masculinity (a well-muscled Knight with a full and flowing mane of hair) further sells the point. Interestingly, the comic functionally concedes that Trump is racist, sexist and a bully. Bush's conclusion gives the impression those factors are not detrimental to either Trump or his masculinity, but rather are a necessary

component of manhood. The juxtaposition of comic Trump's physicality and his violent actions against the dragon that is PC culture, audiences should assume that this is a feature rather than a bug. More directly, in "Dragon Slayer" Garrison positions traditional masculinity as both a shield from criticism as well as an organizing principle for life. Simply stated, political correctness prevents men from being men. However, enacting masculinity (especially through violence) provides a way for Garrison's conception of man, to be that which he desires.

"Counterpunch" works in a similar manner. The comparison between the two male figures is immediately evident. Biden depicted as ancient and decrepit can barely muster the strength to fight. His punch is explicitly labeled as fraudulent. He has lost his masculinity. He has no choice but to fall to the stronger man. Trump wins not only through pure strength, but also through righteous virtue[1]. The wind from Trump's punch is descending from heaven itself. This appeal to divinity and thus rightness only strengthens the convictions the election lawsuits will bring about the true result of the election. Trump wins not because of the validity of his arguments but rather by the righteous strength of his convictions. By depicting the post-election lawsuits as a boxing match, Garrison has forwarded an almost tautological notion that might makes right, and that rightness justifies the employment of might. The reframing of the legal challenge to the election merits further discussion. What is in reality a matter of truth, logic, and argumentation has become a display of physicality and strength. The notion of strength is a well-documented within American politics (Messner 2007). Politicians, as a general rule, will pursue retributive criminal justice policies in order to look "tough on crime" and cuts to military spending are a signal of weakness to the United States' enemies. At the very least, this illustrates

[1] I should clarify that virtuous in this sense is not necessarily denotative. Here I use virtuous to mean extolling the virtues and ideals of the power and masculinity; virtues which Trump and Garrison advocate.

what Messner (2007, 478) identifies as, “the ways that dominant forms of masculinity…continue to serve as a nexus of power”.

Although not an explicit depiction of human power, “Malarkey Bus” nevertheless exhibits an offensive display of power. The visage of Trump as a speeding train confirms, from Garrison’s perspective, that power is so wrapped up in masculinity that it is impossible to divorce the two. By depicting two vehicles, one sputtering and broken down and the other moving so fast that it is only seen as a blur, Garrison continues this through-line about power and its uses/value. The use of vehicles is an interesting rhetorical choice. Trains continue to be a shorthand for symbolic power. That trains only stop when intended to stop is essential to the metaphor. Here we see a narrative continuation of these concepts of power: One that should not (and cannot) be stopped by outside forces. The placement of each of Trump and Biden within the cartoon bears mentioning. Biden is seen within his campaign bus while Trump *is* the train. If trains are indeed power incarnate, then how could Trump be anything but that as well. He transcends physicality; embodying an ideal of power that is unyielding. The only response is to get out of the way or be destroyed.

Visualization of Trump’s power is deepened by the labeling of the train cars behind the engine. Trump’s well-worn slogan “Make America Great Again” requires the least explanation. The idea that America has fallen from its apex and that only Trump could restore it to its full power and glory was immensely successful during both the 2016 primary and general elections. The middle car’s label of “Jobs” works in two ways. First, it is a necessary part of Making America Great Again. If the country does not work, it cannot be great. It also serves to reinforce Trump’s claim to economic greatness. More importantly, jobs and masculinity are intrinsically linked for many within the Alt-Right (Boehme and Isom Scott 2019). Many with Alt-Right

affiliations strongly adhere to heteronormative conceptions of family. Men need jobs in order to support their family. If they are unable to do so, they have sacrificed some amount of their manhood. The inability to fulfill these traditional roles within the family structure can often lead to affiliation with the Alt-Right in the first place (Boehme and Isom Scott 2019). The ability of Trump to fix this deficiency should function as a form of cultural currency for Garrison's audience.

One last note should be made about the depictions of strength within Garrison's comics: that of physical fitness. Three of the five comics chosen include a depiction of Trump with a human figure. In all three of those the President is depicted as Adonis-like figure. This is largely representative of Garrison's depictions of the former President. It seems the only occasions where Trump is not depicted at the peak of physical fitness are those where he is manifesting as a physical embodiment of power (i.e. the Trump Train in "Malarkey Bus"). Sometimes he is slim, but powerful ("Siren Song"), other times he is a Herculean figure of idealized strength ("Dragon Slayer", "Counterpunch"). It should be stressed that these depictions are metaphorical and not reflective of physical reality, as the former President eschews most forms of physical exercise (Rettner 2017). However, this framing of Trump is a common and recurring reference point within Alt-Right, something that Garrison has publicly admitted to as well (Ohlheiser 2019). The depictions of fit Trump fundamentally demonstrate a worldview where strength is both tool and goal. That the President embraces this conception only reinforces its versatility as a concept (Ohlheiser 2019). Even if it doesn't match physical reality, equating Trump with strength reinforces positive conceptions (and a sense of rightness) of the practices and policies which Trump and his followers support.

In these cartoons, Garrison's utilization of visual metaphor supposes an enthymematic argument about the nature of power/strength within the political realm. By compositionally placing Trump into positions of power (a knight in shining armor, a prize fighter, and a literal unstoppable train). It is easy to see how this meets all three tenets of Smith's (2007) linking of visual metaphor to enthymemes. If the premise of the comics is that the enactment of violent power is useful and provides demonstrable good for its enactors, and the implied premise (using visual metaphor) that Trump is powerful, necessarily gives the probable conclusion that Trump himself is good. These probable premises about power necessarily work persuasively for Garrison's audience. The affective/ethical dimensions of Garrison's visual metaphor are easily seen as well. The precariousness of masculinity necessarily engages in a display in which audiences are invited to vicariously take back their manhood from those that have stolen it from them (DiMuccio and Knowles 2020). Losing this manhood is akin to losing one's identity and the resulting loss of agency from that. By communicating that power has the ability to restore wholeness to an auditor at the precipice of impotence, Garrison capitalizes on his audience's own internalized precarious masculinity. The third component of Smith's linkage between visual argumentation and enthymemes might actually be clearer than the second stipulation. Garrison's status as a favorite web artist of the Alt-Right surely positions his comics as already fitting into their worldview (Ellis 2017). His elevation of power falls in line with many of the tenets of the Alt-Right (Anti-Defamation League 2018).

Power, as conceptualized and forwarded through Garrison's comics, is a key recurring theme. However, this is not the only effect that masculine identity brings to these comics and the messages they transmit. Trump as a political figure has encountered numerous barriers to enacting his preferred worldview. These impediments come from multiple, very ideologically

diverse segments of the political spectrum. Some, such as Hillary Clinton, were overcome through sheer masculine identity. Trump was a strong man, and he was easily able to beat those who do not or cannot embody those values. However, this outlook does raise the question, "If masculinized power is the means through which one achieves victory, what tactics must be utilized to defeat those who are also masculine?"

The answer lies in emasculation. Garrison repeatedly uses this tactic as a way to lessen and demean masculine figures deemed threatening to Trump. The most obvious example is the portrayal of JEB Bush in "Dragon Slayer". Going into 2016, Bush was the early favorite for the GOP presidential nomination. Trump was seen as a distant prospect (Gass 2015). For all intents and purposes, JEB Bush is a fairly normative cisgender white man. As was seen in 2016, Trump went on the rhetorical attack, with "low energy JEB" becoming a common refrain on the campaign trail. Garrison builds on this conception by placing Bush in a subservient position of a princess. Playing up the mythological trope of the "damsel in distress" serves to relegate Bush to a lesser position. Bush's emasculation can thus be used to discredit his policies, manhood and legitimacy. Bush's final exclamation ("What a man!") pushes a value proposition that anyone who opposes Trump's blatant disregard for political correctness is necessarily a lesser man. The unequivocal nature of these discursive constructions leaves little for the audience's imagination to fill in. However, the dialogical connections between Trump's campaign rhetoric and Garrison's depictions likely provide context that all for the intended reception by Garrison's Alt-Right audience.

Feminization is not the only means through which emasculation of male political enemies occurs within Garrison's comics. Both "Counterpunch" and "Malarkey Bus" serve to lessen the masculine perception that audiences will have of Biden. The visualization of Biden as an old and

weakened man in “Counterpunch”, in contrast with the more youthful and stronger Trump forwards ideas about longevity and strength. By positioning Biden in such stark contrast with Trump, the only logical conclusion to come to from looking at the comic is that Trump, and only Trump, has the masculine powers necessary to fight for the nation and for their own particular concepts of virtue and rightness. Even outside of the differences in physical manifestations, Biden and Trump are not co-equals within “Counterpunch”. Biden’s boxing shorts are labeled with his name. Trump, however, is labeled with his title: “POTUS”. The added legitimacy of having the office of the Presidency backing his challenge to Biden boosts Trump’s challenge. Not only does he have physical supremacy, but he has institutional legitimacy. Biden’s shaking legs adds to this conception. He cannot possibly muster the power necessary to overcome Trump’s overwhelming advantages.

“Malarkey Bus” serves not as a comparison of masculinity between the two candidates, but rather emasculates Democratic men in relation to femininity. The highlighting of Democratic women serves to show how Democratic men have lost their authority and thus their masculinity. Inside the Campaign Bus, we see Biden looking angry and confused at the driver of the bus, Harris. That Harris is the driver of the bus in the first place is notable. Biden is not in charge. Within the comic, he has been relegated to secondary status by not just a woman, but a woman of color. A similar phenomenon occurs with the other four public figures in the bus. Each of the male figures (Obama and Sanders) have been subordinated to a woman (Clinton and Ocasio-Cortez). Their very presence in the comic is of note. Outside of Obama there is no discernable reason why these four figures belong in the bus at all. Clinton was not a major factor on the campaign trail, Sanders was an opponent who largely fell out of the spotlight once the Democratic National Convention ended, and Ocasio-Cortez (despite being a frequent punching

bag for Republican operatives) was not a major player in Biden's campaign either. The most likely explanation for their presence and sequencing is in order to lessen them in some way. Biden's extensive history in the public eye necessitated methods by conservative commentators to link him directly to a Democratic base that was much further left than candidate Biden politics would indicate (Otterbein and Isenstadt 2020; Balz 2020). Here, Garrison engages in a similar effort. It is precisely the positioning of Democratic men in relation to Democratic women which prompts the transference of the Alt Right's opinions on Harris, Clinton and Ocasio-Cortez onto Garrison's depiction of Biden, Obama and Sanders. Garrison Diminishes these men through a female ally in order to lessen both parties. Specifically within the context of this work, Biden's deferential attitude towards Harris promotes an understanding that even if Biden himself is not particularly threatening, those behind him in power are a worse threat. In this way, not only are the men emasculated, but the women are then seen to be aggressive, abrasive, or domineering. The sneering facial expressions for each woman in "Malarkey Bus" seems to support this framing. This additionally serves to displace their femininity not with masculinity, but rather a lesser hybrid of the two.

The second layer of analysis of Garrison's cartoons concerns the predominance of white supremacy in its depictions of people, especially women of color. It could easily be said that the masculinity embodied above is one of white masculinity. These comics, by virtue of their subject matter, clearly place white masculinity as a value above all else. Indeed, the analysis below certainly has some basis in masculinity studies as well. The only two comics which have yet to be discussed are the two featuring women of color as focal points for the cartoon. In these comics, masculinity is used as a tool for further otherizing their non-white subjects. To be clear, masculine denigration is a necessary component of the symbolicity present within "Siren Song"

and “AOC’s Bar”. White supremacy becomes the dominating perspective of these comics that uses masculine perspectives in order to advance their argument.

“Malarkey Bus” serves as a touchstone for this second component of analysis. In this comic, Ocasio-Cortez’s caricature is contrasted with the other two women on the bus. Both Harris and Clinton are depicted wearing fairly standard attire for women of their positions and stations in life. They are both wearing conservative suits. Ocasio-Cortez, however, is not depicted in nearly the same way. From her window seat on the bus you can clearly see her feminine figure with a visible cleavage line. As “Malarkey Bus” chronologically follows both “Siren Song” and “AOC’s Bar”. This seems to be a continuation of tropes that Garrison uses in relation to Ocasio-Cortez. This overt sexualization of the female form will be explored more in depth with the other two cartoons.

While sexualization might seem by default masculine, the racial backgrounds of the women sexualized cannot be ignored. “Siren Song”, featuring three women of color from three different ethnic backgrounds is positively stunning in how it sexualizes the female form. Despite some erroneous assertions on the politics of these three women (it seems they would define themselves as progressive rather than socialist), the placement of three women of color as the sirens of socialism serves to delegitimize the idea through the confluence of their race and gender. The sexualization of the three women serves as an attempt to weaken the reception of those policies in the first place. Simply put, the selling of their ideology with sex appeal makes it a lesser ideology. Only the strength of a white masculine figure such as Trump can steer the ship(nation) away from this threat. By positioning hypersexualized women of color as the purveyors of dangerous ideology and the savior as being a white man (saving a lesser white man) Garrison attempts to undercut their perceived message. Garrison forwards their ideas as lesser

because they only way they can entice impressionable millennials is through their innate sexual nature. Ocasio-Cortez's grass skirt and clamshell top only serve to further exoticize the Representative and her companions. Sexualization as a tool to otherize and diminish women of color in service of masculine goals of dominance and power are as Ono and Sloop (1995, 35) explain, "a racial and gendered subjectivity for women…that is ideologically numbing". Drawing attention to these features gives legitimacy for audience members to discredit them publicly and privately.

That the ship which has crashed on the rocks is of Venezuela and not of any of the other socialist/communist nations (the USSR being the most vivid example) which have collapsed over the course of the 20th Century is intentional. By racializing socialism, Garrison attempts to delegitimize the ideology. The juxtaposition of Venezuela having crashed on the shores, the racial minority status of the Sirens, and their song's only lyrics being "Free Stuff and Equality" is intentional. Garrison conceives equality as the cry and desire of anyone who is non-white. By explicitly linking the concept of equality with his racialized visualization of socialism, Garrison focuses a new argumentative formation for his Alt-Right audience. As Trump is steering the ship, and the white male millennial entranced by socialism, away from equality, Garrison creates an implicit premise that it has no place in a society controlled and dominated by white supremacy. Trump's exclamation that, "We're not going there!" solidifies this connection. The "We" in Trump's statement, as evidenced by the race of the two individuals on the ship, can be taken to mean more than just the United States as a country. By only populating the ship with white individuals, Garrison implicitly makes an argument for a racialized conception of the United States. In "Siren Song", Garrison's explicit declaration is that the white United States and equality are incompatible. To court equality is to invite disaster.

The fact that the three sirens are identified as three women of color further solidifies this linkage. The 116th Congress was notable for having a larger share of female representation than any previous Congress in history, many of them members of the Democratic Party (Hansen 2018). Garrison had a wide range of individuals to choose from, but deliberately chose three women of color to portray the sirens and the danger of socialism. Ocasio-Cortez had only been in office for a matter of months, Harris was elected to the Senate in 2017, and Gabbard, although in the House since 2014, was not particularly well known outside of Democratic Party circles. The positioning of three women of color as an existential threat to the nation is necessarily an enthymeme that Garrison's audience would receive. Even an audience that was not well versed on Democratic Party members, could pick up the sexualization of the exotic other present in "Siren Song".

"AOC's Bar" engages in a similar pattern of overt sexualization, but largely focuses on the figure of Ocasio-Cortez. One of the most prominent displays we see of Ocasio-Cortez's necklace showing the Puerto Rican flag. Given her status as a natural-born United States citizen, the only possible reason for this inclusion is to render Ocasio-Cortez as a foreign other. Additionally, it is impossible to ignore that both her setting and attire are deeply sexualized. The role of sexualization within Garrison's cartoons was covered above, so it is unnecessary to repeat at length. However, the setting is necessary to investigate further. Ocasio-Cortez's having been a bartender is well-documented. The fact that bartending is an inherently sexualized and precarious occupation for women contributes to the choice of using sexuality in order to diminish Ocasio-Cortez (Harrell 2011).

There is one final note on the role of white supremacy on the sexualization of bodies perceived as foreign. "Siren Song" "AOC's Bar" and "Malarkey Bus" engage in a practice of

sexualizing an exotic other while also depicting these bodies as simultaneously grotesque. Especially in "AOC's Bar" we see aggressive facial features and body language, numerous lines and wrinkles covering the face of someone barely over the age of 30, and large buck teeth prominently displayed. Some of this can be attributed to the nature of the form. Abraham (2009) details how caricature is a necessary component of political cartooning and necessary for the desired affective responses. It is precisely these affective responses which gives Garrison's caricature rhetorical power. However, the detail in which Garrison goes seems to transcend mere caricature. Either one of these tactics would seem to serve his purpose to diminish both the people and the ideas they stand for. The unique juxtaposition of sexualization and grotesqueness work in tandem lessen the women depicted in these comics. It is not enough for women of color to be sexualized into irrelevance. Instead they must be made repulsive to make it easier to reject her and her ideals. Sexualization alone does not adequately communicate the Garrison's desired message. Their ideas must be lesser by their use of their sexuality, but they themselves should be discredited via their caricatured appearance. By pushing these two visual movements together at once Garrison creates the space for any woman of color to be lessened by virtue of their otherness in relation to white masculinity.

Garrison's works frequently forward a worldview in which only a particular conception of whiteness is deemed acceptable. Embodied conceptually through Garrison's depiction of Trump, anyone who cannot meet the Alt-Right's criteria for masculinity is therefore eligible for, and should expect, diminishment, otherization and violence. Garrison's heavy use of symbolicity within his argumentative formations allows for him to allow audiences to discern meaning from the work without a need for an explicit textual argument; the visual medium allows Garrison a degree of plausible deniability of the implications of his arguments.

DISCUSSION

Shared Rhetorical Realities

Garrison's melding of iconic representation with symbolicity should forefront discussion of his work. His depictions of Trump present a key area of inquiry into this phenomenon. Despite not having much (if any) resemblance to reality, Garrison's cartoons are both instantly recognizable as iconic depictions of Trump, but also as symbolic representations for the qualities Trump embodies for the Alt-Right (Rettner 2017; Ohlheiser 2019). This repetition throughout comics separated by multiple years functions as a rhetorical narrative, that is essential to meaning making for the audience (Abdel-Raheem 2020). By building upon the idea of Trump as the masculine ideal, Garrison engages in an asynchronous, multi-nodal dialogue with other members of the Alt-Right which utilizes this iconic representation to symbolically equate Trump (and the Alt-Right membership who supports him) with notions of power and strength. This transcends Abraham's (2009) identification of caricature as a key trope of political cartooning. In these works, Garrison utilizes caricature in order to communicate a symbolic worldview of power's utility. Caricature is not solely for ease of identification, but rather for communicating a specific worldview. It is specifically through the depiction's divergence from reality that amplifies the message Garrison is transmitting.

The dialogic nature of this symbolic repetition is magnified through its repetition in social media. Social media algorithms repeatedly create new situations for Garrison's rhetorical constructions to be experienced. Every Like, every Retweet, and every share functions as a new conversation waiting to be picked up by an audience whose specific forum is unknown to the agent. Because these forms of dissemination inevitably make their way back to the author in the

form of notifications, the dialogic circle completes itself. Garrison's ability to recognize when an iconic symbol is resonating with his audience in real time provides feedback which influences future work. In this way, Garrison's political cartoons both create and reference, through a process of nonsequential negotiation, the recurring themes of power, strength and masculinity which sustain the growth of the Alt-Right.

Garrison's manner of depicting perceived enemies in his comics also merits a deeper interrogation. It is not sufficient that Garrison's protagonists bear the hallmarks of physical strength. Instead, antagonists must be diminished in such a way that they no longer pose a threat to the cartoon's hero. The feminizing of Bush in "Dragon Slayer", Biden's emasculation in "Counterpunch" and "Malarkey Bus", and the sexualization of Ocasio-Cortez, Harris and Gabbard in "Siren Song" and "AOC's Bar" are all byproducts of what Smith and Higgins (2020) refer to as the normalization of hypermasculinity. For clarification, Smith and Higgins (2020) rely upon Mosher and Sirkin's (1984, 150) conceptualization of hypermasculinity as, "consisting of three components: (a) calloused sex attitudes toward women, (b) violence as manly, and (c) danger as exciting". Performing hypermasculinity involves, "the deployment of a lexicon of gender distinction in assessing such virtues as masculine courage, set against weakness; and of success set against defeat" (Smith and Higgins 2020, 560). Through their enactment of violence against antagonists, Garrison's protagonists perform hypermasculinity in order to set themselves apart from perceived political enemies. In doing so, they emerge victorious, their masculinity intact and no longer threatened. These messages are communicated through Garrison's work to his Alt-Right audience. Their support for politics of aggression points towards their acceptance of the message (DiMuccio and Knowles 2020).

In “Dragon Slayer”, “Counterpunch”, and “Malarkey Bus”, the hypermasculine depictions of Trump as powerful, successful, and courageous while his opponents are weak, failures, and cowardly forwards enthymematic arguments regarding the virtue of the differing sides of these issues. The depictions of Trump as fully realized strength, allows the audience to engage affectively with the comics. In line with DiMuccio and Knowles (2020) connection between precarious manhood and support for aggressive political action and speech, the utilization of hypermasculine actions in Garrison’s comics provide ways to vicariously strengthen the audience’s own precarious masculinity. These affective dimensions are necessarily enthymematic (Smith 2007). The audience prizes performative machismo and Garrison draws situations in which that version of masculinity is performed. The comics are persuasive precisely because they function as a joint production between artist and audience (Bitzer 1959). Garrison’s audience equates Trump with strength (Ohlheiser 2019). Depictions of Trump in Garrison’s work allows for this premise to be unstated. In this way, Garrison both creates the connection between Trump and power and reinforces that conception with his audience.

The sexualization of the exotic other in “Malarkey Bus”, “Siren Song”, and “AOC’s Bar” combined with the grotesqueness of Garrison’s depictions of women of color functions in much the same way. The juxtaposition of Mosher and Sirkin’s (1984) first component of hypermasculinity (calloused sex attitudes towards women), and Ono and Sloop’s (1995) connection between the objectification of the “exotic” woman as a form of marginalization and delegitimization provide further grounding for the status of Garrison’s comics as enthymematic. Because Garrison draws these women in a sexualizing nature, the Alt-Right audience’s implicit acceptance of them as such allows for them to be diminished. If the Alt-Right prefers displays of

hypermasculinity, they are predisposed to react to those displays in accordance with Garrison's preferred message. The fact that their likenesses are also drawn in such a way as to maximize traditionally unattractive features (i.e. buck teeth, sneering expressions, wrinkles, puffy eyes) serves to further delegitimize them. Audiences fill in the details that these women of color should be dismissed because of their sexualized behavior. Upon closer inspection, audiences realize that the sexualization is a cover for their inherent grotesqueness only serves to solidify the correctness of these assumptions. The visual nature of the medium is paramount for the successful transmission of these enthymemes. Especially in the 21st Century, most speakers would be delegitimized themselves if they attempted to discredit Ocasio-Cortez, Harris or Gabbard by virtue of their appearance (Trump's frequent use of this framing notwithstanding) (Smith and Higgins 2020). The visual medium, however, allows for these arguments to be left unsaid, and left to the interpretation of the audience. These depictions' engagement in affective, hypermasculine framing of women of color, creates space for audiences to add deeper meaning than would be possible in a speech or form of writing.

The hypermasculine performance of power and its attendant violence in "Dragon Slayer", "Counterpunch" and "Malarkey Bus" further point to the strength of visual rhetoric, and especially political cartoons, to engage in metonymic practices which enhance the messages received by audiences. The depictions of Trump specifically are metonymic in that the visage of the former President rarely only represents himself. Ventsel (2014), in their study of Soviet Estonia, identified the metonymic ways leadership becomes synonymous with the power behind them. Trump, in Garrison's political cartoons, becomes a shorthand for the movement behind him. Audiences begin to see his strength as their strength. He emphatically fights, kills, or destroys their own objects of ire: Political correctness, illegitimate elections, and the modern

man rendered subservient to the women around them. These fantastical enactments of violence posit power as a solution to problems and also a deflection from criticism. Bush's turn in "Dragon Slayer" from disgust to deflection points to the ability of power and violence to turn rivals into admirers. The rhetorical move that allows Trump to serve as a stand-in for the movement as a whole legitimates more violent actions by other parts of the movement in defense of the metonym, such as the Charlottesville white nationalist rally or the January 6th riot at the Capitol in Washington, D.C.

It should go without saying that Garrison's political cartoons are not responsible for either of these events. However, the nature of the 21st Century internet displaces these works from their place in time and space. They are always accessible and can be endlessly shared and reshared. Digital time, created and aided through the rise of the internet and social media, allows *kairos*-displaced rhetoric to constantly create new dialogues with new audiences (Euben 2017; Macagno and Damale 2018). The combination of the emotional components of the Alt-Right as well as the affective qualities of Garrison's cartoons create, through digital time, new opportunities for, "for a watcher-witness to interpellate [them]self into the enactment itself" (Euben 2017, 1023). That is, as Garrison's work is transmitted via social media channels away from its initial instance in time and space, digital time allows for an ever-repeating recontextualization of the image allowing for new meaning making to take place. It is precisely because of this recontextualization that the visual rhetoric of cartoons provides the possibility for meaning to evolve and develop as their communicants continue the process of social media sharing. However, intertextual context and algorithmic nature of social media allows for Garrison's intended messages to be successfully transmitted outside of their original context (Werner 2004; Daniels 2018). Context is constantly reconstituted, with new meaning being

derived by virtue of the new sociocultural milieu the rhetoric finds itself in. Garrison's comic, "AOC's Bar", for example, can be recontextualized with what audiences have learned about the Representative. Even though the initial context for the comic, might be lost. New information provides opportunities for Garrison's messages to continue to transmit their intended messages. This dialogic evolution between artist and audience provides new opportunities for new meaning to be received by audiences. The affective qualities of Garrison's work combined with the emotional, hypermasculine components present within the Alt-Right work to create an intertextual dialogue that helps promote its intended reception regardless of the context. It is not that the core meaning has changed, but rather digital time provides new avenues for meaning to develop. As such, Garrison's work utilizes the nature of visual rhetoric and political cartoons in order to supply enthymematic work that is decodable even outside of its initial context, while digital time allows for recontextualization that can deepen engagement with an audience.

This speaks to the power that the image holds in the modern communication landscape. Aided by the internet, images allow for messages to be quickly transmitted and engaged with both analytically and affectively by millions of individuals simultaneously. As Howard (2008, 509) explains, "pulses of electricity dance in changing shapes rendered from digital bits imbued with significance…its vectors originate from and return to the lives of real individuals, and these vectors carry the potential of transformation". The ubiquity of the internet in modern communication fundamentally changed how individuals engage with one another. The task of communication scholars should be to engage with these transformative communicative modes in order to better understand not only how and why they function, but also the possible effects these new modes can have socially.

While this thesis only scratches the surface of that potentiality, it does speak to this phenomenon within a growing and influential segment of American political life. The Alt-Right (and similar right-wing movements globally) continues to gain acceptance within political institutions (Miller-Idriss 2021). The violence attendant with this ideology requires a deeper look into its causes and appeal. It also requires knowledge of what is being transmitted within these spaces. The algorithmic nature of social media opens up new spaces for the dissemination of discourses of misogyny and white supremacy, while simultaneously closing off those discourses within other spaces. Decoding these practices now, sets a stage for further scholarly intervention in how this mode of expression evolves in the future. This function of social media allows for these ideas to flourish functionally unchecked until the leave their virtual confines and create real and lasting effects on institutions, relationships, and society writ large.

Conclusion

Taken as indicative of Garrison's larger portfolio, the artifacts analyzed here represent a continued process of implicit dialogic interaction between Garrison, political figures such as former President Trump, and social media users. Although the reactions to his work can be either laudatory or incendiary, they are no doubt effective precisely because of their ability to engage in the affective dimensions of visual argument. By employing enthymematic argument within a visual context, Garrison is able to forward arguments that would almost certainly be perceived differently if presented in a different format. Speeches, essays, and videos necessarily engage audiences differently than Garrison's preferred static political cartoons. The ability for political cartoons to engage in both affect and argument deserves greater inquiry given the ubiquity of the image as social currency within social media. This essay serves to function as part of this

inquiry, into the ways that specialized rhetoric arises thanks to the internet and algorithmic processes of social media.

It also serves to call attention to practices which seek to reinscribe hegemonic white masculinity within American society and politics. The election of Donald Trump to the Presidency of the United States was not the apex of the Alt-Right movement, nor was the failure of his reelection campaign its downfall. The Capitol insurrection on January 6th, 2021, by Trump's supporters was just a small display of the Alt-Rights capacity for destructive violence. The number of Alt-Right adherents either running for or elected to Congress continues to grow (Palmer, 2020, 2021). No longer confined to the dark corners of the internet, the Alt-Right has begun encroaching into institutions of power. Understanding both what is being communicated through online spaces and how these messages spread is vital to develop methods of resistance.

While this is still a nascent effort, it is one of dire importance. At its core, the Alt-Right is a movement that engages in discourses of masculinity and white supremacy in order to reverse and prevent further social progress. To say that they are the only threat to this progress would be mistaken. However, the rapid growth of the movement, its ability to affectively engage with white anxiety, and its destructive capacity prove that countering it should be a focal point of critical, political, and social justice efforts going forward.

The deep-seated forms of hate, anxiety, and anger within these movements demands scholars better understand these phenomena as they appear in the socio-political world. This requires calling attention to implicit premises of the Alt-Right's rhetoric, rendering them knowable. As a discipline, rhetoric is uniquely situated to generate epistemological pathways of knowing and resistance. While social media sites have taken greater steps in curbing extremism on their platforms following the January 6th insurrection, rhetoric's role should function to uncover

implicit and hidden discourses that allow for messages to be transmitted and received without engaging in explicit hate speech. The ability for visual media to utilize symbolism and enthymematic argument in order to push concepts that might be otherwise regulated points to a need for increased study of these issues within rhetoric. Only then can the nation truly begin to move on from the Trump Presidency and the Alt-Right movement, and towards a future that is more equitable, peaceful, and just.

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