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# Professor, You're Fired! Or, the Education of a Trump Voter



By Marty Kaplan



SEAN RAYFORD VIA GETTY IMAGES

*@marty kaplan Let me guess Marty you believe in global warming too Doctoral degree holder here*

There it was, captured in a single sad, hilarious tweet: the whole maddening trainwreck of American democracy, 2016.

Two days before that taunt from someone I don't know was launched into the twitterverse, I had posted a piece about a psychological disorder I called "Too Much Trump Media." Swiping Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's model of dying, I'd described how people like me were coping with the possibility, hyped by the media, that Donald Trump could actually win the Republican nomination and the general election, following the seven stages of shock, denial, anger, bargaining, guilt, depression and acceptance of a more-than-hypothetical President Trump.

The next day, a right-wing website whose mission is to expose "bias and abuse" on the nation's college campuses ran an investigative report putting my column on its readers' radar screen. The title of their alert: "USC prof. says Trump supporters are

'least educated segment of the population.'" The subhead noted that Prof. Marty Kaplan had described Donald Trump "as a fascist, narcissist, and extremist bully," but it was the this-jerk-says-you're-stupid headline that went viral in conservative media.

They quoted me accurately. "His supporters are the least educated segment of the population," is what I wrote. On Twitter and in online chat rooms popular with the right, the alert, as intended, lit a little firestorm, prompting responses like these: "I have an MBA, proudly supporting Trump." And "I have my Master's in Education.... I support Trump. My wife has a B.S. in Clinical Laboratory Science.... She supports Trump." Plus the aforementioned doctorate, who had guessed, accurately, that I "believe in global warming too."

Other comments weren't about their education; they were about my religion. "L.A. Liberal democrat. Love going to watch you squirm when the Gentile Trump takes office." "*Kaplan*. Wouldn't expect him to be a Trump supporter." "Just another self-hating Jew." Race came up, too. "Is anyone less educated than Barack Obama's racial rabble?" "When I think of the inner cities... (you know places that had almost 100% Obama support), the first thing that comes to mind is stratospheric levels of education."

I considered jumping into that fray. After all, I had the facts on my side. What I'd reported about Trump supporters' education wasn't a smear; it was data.

It was the *National Journal's* Ron Brownstein who in October first laid out the evidence of a "Trump gap" in education. "Even in a sprawling field of 15 candidates," he wrote, "Trump has opened a wide lead among Republicans without a college education almost everywhere," a point he documented with polling data from Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Nevada, Virginia, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania. "The Diploma Divide" was how David Wasserman's piece the next month, on the website FiveThirtyEight, described a Republican party "badly divided by education" and Trump's weakness among college graduates. "Trump's strong showings," he wrote, "are entirely attributable to huge leads among voters without a college degree." In three separate polls taken in December by CNN, NBC News/The Wall Street Journal and Quinnipiac, "Trump led by double digits among voters without degrees, but trailed among degree holders."

Yes, I know that people with a college degree can be boobs, and people without one can be geniuses. But demographics are demographics. College-educated Republicans prefer Trump's GOP opponents by a country mile.

So why didn't I rebut Doctorates for Donald with the numbers? Because facts don't matter the way we wish them to.

If data made a difference, graphs of rising atmospheric carbon dioxide and earth surface temperatures would melt a climate-change-denier's denial like greenhouse gases are melting Greenland. If facts had standing, no sane person could maintain that the slaughtered children of Sandy Hook Elementary were actors. If reality had a vote, no radio host could persuade his listeners that Operation Jade Helm, a Navy Seal/Green Beret training exercise, was a false flag operation — a cover for imposing federal martial law, seizing citizens' guns and transporting political prisoners to FEMA camps secretly set up in West Texas Walmarts.

I'm not making this up. Republicans are the only climate-science-denying party on the face of the earth; Donald Trump, Ted Cruz and Dr. Let-me-guess-Marty-you-believe-in-global-warming-too would be considered loons and cranks in every other democracy on the planet. Another PhD, an associate professor of communications at Florida Atlantic University, until recently was telling his students that the mass shootings in Newtown, Conn., Charleston, S.C. and San Bernardino, Calif., were Obama administration hoaxes concocted to boost support for gun control; a few days ago, that tenured professor was fired, though not for being nuts - it was for failing to file paperwork about outside income. It was like nailing Al Capone for income tax evasion.

Last week, at CNN's "Guns in America Town Hall," President Obama told Anderson Cooper that Jade Helm paranoia and other "conspiracy theories floating around the Internet these days all the time" were wrapped up in the opposition to gun control. What followed was revealing about journalism, about politics and about the epistemological toxin poisoning democracy.

*COOPER: Now, let me just jump in here, is it fair to call it a conspiracy -*

*OBAMA: Well, yeah -*

COOPER: - because a lot of people really believe this deeply, that they just don't -

OBAMA: No -

COOPER: - they just don't trust you.

OBAMA: I'm sorry, Cooper. Yes, it is fair to call it a conspiracy. What are you saying? Are you suggesting that the notion that we are creating a plot to take everybody's guns away so that we can impose martial law -

COOPER: - not everybody, but there's certainly a lot of -

OBAMA: Is a conspiracy? Yes, that is a conspiracy! I would hope that you would agree with that. (APPLAUSE) Is that controversial, except on some websites around the country?

Follow the reasoning: Cooper says that it's unfair to suggest that Jade Helm conspiracy theorists are conspiracy theorists, that it's unfair to fault them for claiming that Jade Helm is part of an Obama plot to take everyone's guns away, because "a lot of people really believe this deeply." In other words, whether a claim is true or false doesn't hinge on facts; it turns instead on the sincerity of public feeling.

I love how Obama nailed Cooper for that. Way worse than the so-called political correctness that Trump assails is the learned helplessness of journalists, public intellectuals and anyone else with half a brain and access to a media platform. Why be disingenuous about knowledge and learning? Why be defensive about objective criteria for true and false? Elites making cultural excuses for the popular appeal of proto-fascism: that's what George W. Bush, who knew whereof he spoke, called "the soft bigotry of low expectations."

There is a social institution called education, and there is a faculty called critical thinking that education is designed to hone. It is not a statistical fluke that, on average, the more education Republican primary voters have, the less they support Donald Trump. That's how it's supposed to work.

*This is a crosspost of my column in the Jewish Journal, where you can reach me if you'd like at [martyk@jewishjournal.com](mailto:martyk@jewishjournal.com).*

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