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HUM II World History

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Discrimination in Presidential Campaigns

Rumor that Obama is Muslim: Cose, Ellis. "Facing Facts." *Newsweek*, September 1, 2008. Accessed September 18, 2016. LexisNexis Scholastic Edition.

President Obama has been a hero of mine since the morning I woke up to hear my parents screaming for joy. My parents made sure that I recognized how influential one president would be for our nation. Eight years later, I realize the gravitas of that belief. However, not everyone respected President Obama as much as my family and I did. When he first began his campaign in 2008, critics claimed that he was Muslim, although this rumor was proved false multiple times. I chose this source to dig deeper into the claims that were made.

Postcolonial lenses pose the question: how has the acceptance of religion progressed over the decades? Based on this controversy, it hasn’t gotten very far. As a nation we need to focus on being accepting and respectful towards religions we may not be familiar with. Rumors surrounding President Obama’s religion made for a long and hard campaign year in 2008. Even though he identified as Christian, many people were convinced he was secretly muslim. This problematic rumor brought up an even more problematic truth; this country hasn’t accepted that all religions have an equal right to govern.[[1]](#footnote-0) If President Obama was Muslim, it would not affect his political decisions or choices, in the same way that his Christianity does not affect the work that he has done during his time in office. As a government worker, there has to be a clear line between state and religion. If religion doesn’t affect President Obama’s decisions, why should it matter if he was Muslim?

Facts have not and still do not back up this rumor, making this theory even more confusing. Repeatedly, President Obama has claimed that he is Christian. Who are we to question someone’s religion, regardless of what we believe? We all have the right to believe what we choose to. By viewing this article from a postcolonial lens, I think this rumor was started because of our president’s race: one party doubting the authenticity of another party’s candidates. During other presidential campaigns, with the exception of Thomas Jefferson’s[[2]](#footnote-1), candidates were not accused of being Muslim. President Obama clarified his religion. He is a different race than the previous presidents, but this does not mean we can question his identity.

Hillary Clinton’s 2016 Campaign: Clinton, Hillary. Interview by Brandon Stanton. Humans Of New York. Accessed September 18, 2016. http://www.humansofnewyork.com/post/150136510691/im-not-barack-obama-im-not-bill-clinton-both.

I love the way Secretary Clinton speaks: purposefully and clearly. I originally came upon this interview on an Instagram account for the trending stories called Humans of New York (HONY). How I found the article was funny; the picture on the Instagram post was not loading, but I was so intrigued by the first few well-spoken sentences that I read the story through, and thoroughly enjoyed it. I loaded the picture and was surprised to see a picture of Secretary Clinton. It goes to show how looking at a story or text without a bias can be surprising; sometimes applying no previous knowledge to an article can prove a more powerful point.

“If you want to run for the Senate, or run for the Presidency, most of your role models are going to be men. And what works for them won’t work for you. Women are seen through a different lens.”[[3]](#footnote-2) In a recent interview with Brandon Stanton, the creator of HONY, Secretary Clinton spoke about how as a woman, she is treated differently than men who run for president. She describes how Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, two leaders she has worked intermittently with, tend to excite crowds by raising their voices and making strong gestures. She would like to do the same, but as a woman, the same gestures and tones are viewed as shrill rather than inspiring. Madame Secretary put into words herself how lenses are applied to her life, and by discovering what doesn’t “work for her” as a woman, she proves how she can view herself through different lenses and open her mind to other points of view than her own.

“Barack Obama has played the race card, and he played it from the bottom of the deck. It's divisive, negative, shameful and wrong.”[[4]](#footnote-3)

“The only card [Hillary Clinton] has is the woman's card. She's got nothing else to offer and frankly, if Hillary Clinton were a man, I don't think she'd get 5 percent of the vote.”[[5]](#footnote-4)

Above are two quotes that were spoken 4 years apart: the first from John McCain’s campaign manager and the second from Donald Trump. President Obama and Secretary Clinton have both faced discrimination during their campaigns. Both have been accused of using their differences as an advantage in their campaigns, although, if anything, these quotes prove how their differences make running campaigns much harder. They have to face stereotypes Trump and McCain never encounter. Trump’s comment, from a gender lens, or for that matter most[[6]](#footnote-5) lenses, is completely disrespectful. Hillary Clinton is much more than a woman. She is a leader, a change-maker, and a social justice warrior. His accusation shows how although we have progressed far enough to see a woman running for president, women are still treated differently than men. The same can be said for President Obama, whose hard work has brought this country so much, yet he has received great opposition from Republicans because of his race.

Ted Cruz is the Zodiac killer: Moore, Jack. "More Evidence Ted Cruz Might Be the Zodiac Killer." *GQ*, March 17, 2016. Accessed September 18, 2016. http://www.gq.com/story/ted-cruz-loves-soup-zodiac-killer-maybe.

Democratic. This a strong identifier for me because politics have been very influential throughout my life. Understandably, seeing a meme such as this one is a topic I am interested in. As mentioned in my previous two topics, the past two democratic presidential candidates have been exploited for their differences. Seeing the same happen on the republican side on a large scale, such as this rumor, is fascinating.

We all know the overall rumors and problems President Obama and Secretary Clinton have faced: discrimination, sexism, racism. These national issues turned into grand scheme conspiracies and rumors. The conspiracy that Ted Cruz is the Zodiac Killer is a satire of the problems democratic candidates have faced in their campaigns. This ridiculous rumor mocks the more serious but utterly false rumors about democratic candidates. Of course, I am reading through a biased lens, and so is the author of this article, who clearly appreciates the comedic aspect of the theory. In this situation, both the author and I are using the reader-response lens to appreciate the comedy of the situation from our own experiences and our own political beliefs, whereas a Republican might consider the rumor downright offensive.

To look through a separate reader-response lens, I can put myself in the shoes of a Ted Cruz supporter. Some republicans might find the rumors incredibly offensive, while others might see the theories as not serious enough to worry about. Although this is clearly a less serious issue than the problems Clinton and Obama faced, some republicans could be as offended as I was by the theories about democratic candidates. Using knowledge of a common republican belief, I could view the joke through a social lens. Some republicans, many upper class, believe that the upper class is treated unfairly- they worked hard to get where they are, why should they be taxed more? This belief might lead to the assumption that the theory makes fun of Cruz for being upper class, and refusing to pay more “unfair taxes”, or the theory was made to criticize another one of his beliefs. To view the article through a different lens, I tried (possibly unsuccessfully) putting myself in different political shoes.

Source 2- Dean, Michelle. "Ted Cruz Is the Zodiac Killer: The anatomy of a meme Gone wrong." *The Guardian*, March 9, 2016, US News. Accessed September 18, 2016. LexisNexis Scholastic Edition. (I would check this source out for funny tweets on the theory)

Seeing as this source is in relation to the previous topic, I have the same interest in it. The GQ blog is less professional of a source, but the images and tweets the article shares make light of the rumor, rather than looking at it from a more political stance. I appreciate the author’s taste in tweets and comedy, even though the images might seem a bit far-fetched for such a clearly false rumor.

The author of the GQ text seems to be speaking from a more partial and less professional lens. The Guardian writer spoke about the theory from a less subjective point of view, using a more impartial yet still liberal-leaning lens to observe the theory. By using different reader-response lenses to look at the rumor, the writers proved how even people with similar party beliefs can approach topics differently. One of my favorite GQ pictures is the tweet that compares a picture of the Zodiac killer to Ted Cruz- “This can’t be a coincidence”. Both pictures are of Ted Cruz. The first article addresses the more serious aspect of the rumor, while the other makes light and appreciates the meme.

From a postcolonial lens, I can consider how presidential campaigns have changed over the years- to my knowledge, conspiracy theories like this one weren’t mocking other conspiracy theories, unless they were very ahead of their time. How have our elections changed? Have they become more mature or more childlike? These questions apply to not only these conspiracy theories, but the actions of our candidates today, which make me doubt the maturity of our nationwide politics. These questions can be raised by looking through a postcolonial lens. The new historicism lens makes me ask quite similar questions. What would people have thought about political statements like these one hundred years ago? Would they be offended, or laugh it off? The argument these days is whether as Americans, we need tougher skin, and to not take possibly offensive jokes so seriously. Should we laugh off the impossibly false rumor about Ted Cruz? If this theory was created in another era, would it be seen from the same point of view?

1. Cose, Ellis. "Facing Facts." *Newsweek*, September 1, 2008. Accessed September 18, 2016. LexisNexis Scholastic Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Stephen Prothero, "Obama Isn’t The First U.S. President Accused Of Being Secretly Muslim," *The Huffington Post*, September 23, 2015, Religion, [Page #], accessed September 18, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/obama-secret-muslim\_us\_5603277be4b08820d91b9181. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Clinton, interview, Humans Of New York. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Associated Press, "McCain: Obama Playing Race Card," *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), August 1, 2008, Politics and Government, [Page #], accessed September 18, 2016, http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/politics-government/article8996573.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Team Marie Claire, "Donald Trump: The Man behind the Mouth," *Marie Claire*(blog), entry posted August 5, 2016, accessed September 18, 2016, http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/blogs/550112/donald-trump-quotes.html#SVIbbxqtM9VvbK9k.99. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Not all lenses: Republican reader might agree with Trump’s comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)