

The Rise of Othering – And Why We Must Fight It

by Jacqueline Carroll

We are living in an increasingly polarized time. America is facing a threat unlike any in a lifetime. There has been a rise in hatred and intolerance coming from our highest offices in government. This does not just stem from nationalism, racism, xenophobia or antisemitism. It stems from Othering. “Othering” is a term coined by John A. Powell, director of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, who writes:

Othering is not about liking or disliking someone. It is based on the conscious or unconscious assumptions that a certain identified group poses a threat to a favoured group. It is largely driven by politicians and the media, as opposed to personal contact. Overwhelming, people don’t “know” those that they are othering.¹

Othering plays on our sense of anxiety and is often purposefully used to divide and dehumanize groups as a way to capture and reshape governments. Othering is used to manipulate minds and slowly change people’s perception of that “other” group for their own benefit. A classic tactic for othering is dehumanization. There are five steps of dehumanization: 1) hinting at the sub-par intelligence or morality of a group; 2) the use of infestation analogies; 3) references and comparisons to animals; 4) threats of violence; and 5) the removal of the group from society.²

The Nazis were masters of othering. All five of the steps for dehumanization were used, including the depiction of Jews as rats in propaganda, making “the majority group feel like the minority is sub-human and inferior, allowing them to become more disposable.”³ Victor Klemperer, a Jewish-born German professor who chronicled his life under the Nazi regime, wrote that it was the repetition of individual words, phrases, and sentences—the language of the Nazis—that enabled the othering of the Jewish people to take root in the subconscious of the German people. ⁴“Words can be like tiny doses of arsenic, they are swallowed unnoticed, appear to have no effect, and then after a little time the toxic reaction sets in after all.”⁵

The othering of the Jewish people has made a comeback. The Anti-Defamation League identified 1,879 anti-Semitic incidents throughout the U.S. in 2018, including 39 assaults. This was a 99% rise from 2015 and does not even include online incidents. What is causing this rise? One cause is the normalization of othering in both regular and social media and our political figures’ failure to condemn and often incite such behavior. As Jim Morrison once said “Whoever controls the media, controls the mind.”

The Atlantic magazine produced an extraordinary article in December of 2017 entitled “The Making of an American Nazi,” concerning the rise of The Daily Stormer and its founder Andrew Anglin, who urged his followers to take their hate offline and into the real world.⁷ The Daily Stormer is for internet “truthers” who feel an anxiety about white displacement. They refer to the Holocaust as the “Holohoax” and blame everything they hate from feminism, liberalism and immigration on a “cabal of Jews” who have a “plot to undermine traditional white patriarchy so Jews can maintain a parasitic dominion over the Earth.”⁸ Anglin is infamous for sharing the personal contact information of a Jewish real estate agent and instructing his followers to troll her, leading to 700 harassing messages, including death threats and anti-Semitic slurs. The agent fought back, leading to a federal judge holding that Anglin “acted with actual malice” and awarding her \$14 million and ordering the removal of all posts encouraging contact with her and her family.⁹

Online websites like the Daily Stormer helped create a safe space for impressionable men to become killers. Brenton Tarrant wrote an anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim manifesto before streaming his shootings at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand live on Facebook.¹⁰ John Earnest, a 19-year-old nursing student, carried out a mass shooting at the Chabad of Poway synagogue near San Diego California, killing one and wounding three others after publishing a manifesto on the 8chan website. Earnest’s manifesto was predominantly anti-Jewish, but also slurred Middle Easterners, Latinos and African Americans, stating, “There has been little done when it comes to defending the European race. As an individual I can only kill so many Jews.”¹¹ Robert Bowers, a neo-Nazi follower of the Gab social network, entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh on October 27, 2018 and killed eleven people, wounding seven others. Bowers stated to police that Jews “were committing genocide to my people” and “I just want to kill Jews.” He chose that synagogue because it rented space to HIAS, a Jewish aid organization dedicated to assisting refugees. Gab ascribed to the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory that Jews were financially supporting the invasion of immigrants into the US, including the “migrant caravan.”¹²

The timing of the Tree of Life shooting is noteworthy. Othering is often used a tool for political gain. Prior to the 2018 midterm elections, the Trump administration and Fox News provided a platform for anti-immigrant activists to voice their arguments, portraying them as professing legitimate and acceptable positions.¹³ Trump tweeted that the caravan included “MANY CRIMINALS,” and Laura Ingraham declared on October 23, 2018, four days before the Tree of Life shooting, “We don’t know what people have coming in here. We have diseases in this country we haven’t had for decades.” The word “undocumented” became a synonym for “criminal” and “asylum seekers” became “illegal immigrants.” This barrage of othering in the media fostered false but real fear of the immigrant and asylum seeker.

Successful othering creates tolerance and justification for hateful and inhumane policies. The Trump administration created a “zero tolerance” policy towards migrants seeking to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, resulting in not just family separations but the detention of children in cages. Recently, the administration created a “remain in Mexico” policy, where asylum seekers are briefly processed, given a date of an immigration court hearing, then sent back across the border, stranding people in dangerous Mexican cities.¹⁴ The migrants seeking asylum left their homes in Central America to flee poverty and violence.¹⁵ As Jews, we are eternal refugees. From the days of Pharaoh and through the horrible fate of the S.S. St. Louis, where Jews escaping Nazi Germany after Kristallnacht were prevented from entering Cuba and then refused entry by the U.S. Government, who bent to Nazi propaganda and used the country’s yearly immigration quota as an excuse for exclusion. Incidents of hate are on the rise, but it is a Jewish moral imperative to stand up against the othering of immigrants and people of other races and religions. As Pastor Martin Neimöller famously wrote:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

Jacqueline Carroll is a trial attorney with the Bernstein Law Firm, who specializes in civil rights litigation, complex real estate and business litigation, appellate law and family law. Jacqueline serves on Decalogue’s board and co-chairs Decalogue’s Committee Against Anti-Semitism.

¹ John A. Powell, “Us v. Them: the sinister techniques of ‘Othering’- and how to avoid them,” The Guardian (Nov. 8, 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/nov/08/us-vs-them-the-sinister-techniques-of-othering-and-how-to-avoid-them>.

² Ronald E. Riggio & Clara Riggio, “The 5 Steps of Dehumanization,” Psychology Today (Nov. 8, 2018), <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/cutting-edge-leadership/201811/the-5-steps-dehumanization>.

³ Id.

⁴ Jörg Riecke, “Victor Klemperer: The Language of the Third Reich,” Inference (Mar. 1, 2019), <https://inference-review.com/article/the-language-of-the-third-reich>.

⁵ Id., citing Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich*, trans. Martin Brady (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 15-16.

⁶ Anti-Defamation League, “Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents: Year in Review 2018,” <https://www.adl.org/audit2018>.

⁷ Luke O’Brien, “The Making of an American Nazi,” The Atlantic (Dec. 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/12/the-making-of-an-american-nazi/544119/>.

⁸ Id.

⁹ “Federal Judge Finds Neo Nazi Publisher ‘Acted with Actual Malice,’” First Amendment Watch (July 16, 2019), <https://firstamendmentwatch.org/federal-judge-finds-neo-nazi-publisher-acted-with-actual-malice/>.

¹⁰ Shannon Van Sant, “Accused Shooter in New Zealand Mosque Attacks Charged with Terrorism,” NPR (May 21, 2019), <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/21/725390449/accused-shooter-in-new-zealand-mosque-attacks-charged-with-terrorism>.

¹¹ Michael Davis, “The Anti-Jewish Manifesto of John T. Earnest, the San Diego Synagogue Shooter,” Middle East Media Research Institute (May 15, 2019), <https://www.memri.org/reports/anti-iewish-manifesto-john-t-earnest-san-diego-synagogue-shooter>.

¹² Chas Danner & Adam K. Raymond, “What to Know About the Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting,” New York Intelligencer (Oct. 28, 2018), <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/10/what-to-know-about-the-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting.html>.

¹³ “Mainstreaming Hate: The Anti-Immigrant Movement in the U.S.,” Anti-Defamation League (Nov. 2018), <https://www.adl.org/the-anti-immigrant-movement-in-the-us#the-medias-role>.

¹⁴ Nomaan Merchant, “U.S. Government’s ‘Remain in Mexico’ Policy is Expanding, Stranding More People in Dangerous Mexican City,” Time (July 19, 2019), <https://time.com/5630490/government-migrant-mexico-policy/>.

¹⁵ Juan Montes et al., “Fleeing Poverty and Violence, Central American Women Explain Why They Join Caravans,” Wall Street Journal (Dec. 4, 2018), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/fleeing-poverty-and-violence-central-american-women-explain-why-they-join-caravans-1543947664>.