

Trump and Kennedy's racist tirades against Muslims and Arabs: The fascist degradation of American politics

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In the closing days of the midterm election campaign, the president of the United States and a leading member of his cabinet delivered two of the most openly racist speeches in the modern history of the United States. Both speakers targeted Arab Americans, and they did so in appearances in Michigan, the state with the largest proportion of residents of Arab descent, numbering more than 400,000.

At a rally Sunday in Port Huron, Trump devoted the better part of a two-hour rally to attacking Abdul El-Sayed, the Democratic candidate for the US Senate, a physician and former Detroit health director born in Michigan. He called El-Sayed a “jihadist Muslim Brotherhood member” who is “on the side of the terrorists” and “would much prefer Sharia law.” He said El-Sayed would “have to go through a metal detector before he’s allowed to go into the Senate,” that anyone with such a record would be “unable to get a seat on an airplane,” and that as a senator he would have access to “our nation’s most closely guarded national security secrets.”

Trump compared those campaigning against El-Sayed to the passengers who fought the hijackers of United Flight 93, bringing the father of passenger Todd Beamer onto the platform and telling the crowd that Michigan “needs to stand up and fight just like Todd did to stop a jihadist from walking into the Capitol.”

David Beamer denounced El-Sayed, born in the Detroit suburbs, saying, “A birth certificate doesn’t make you an American.” He then shifted focus from Muslims to socialists, declaring that the enemy “is right here among us... They call themselves Democratic Socialists of America.” Trump embraced this amalgam of the DSA and Al Qaeda, declaring, “And we’re not gonna surrender America to communists, jihadists. We’re not gonna do it here.”

The next day, in Grand Rapids, Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. extended this smear campaign in a broader attack on the entire Arab population of the planet. After denouncing the Muslim Brotherhood as a “death cult” supposedly immersed in an ideology of “genocide,” he went on to say: “There’s 500 million Arabs in the world. And yet they don’t produce science. They don’t win the Nobel Prize. They don’t win the Fields Prize. They don’t win the Wolf Prize. They don’t produce literature.”

Kennedy’s claim is ignorant as well as vile. The civilizations he dismisses preserved and extended the culture and science of Greece and Rome through the centuries in which Western Europe had lost touch with it. The entire world counts in Arabic numerals, so called because, although first developed in India, they were modified and improved in Persia (modern Iran) and in Arab countries before being passed on to Europe via North Africa and then Spain. Algebra, from

the Arabic *al-jabr*, and algorithm, from the name of the 9th century mathematician al-Khwarizmi, who wrote in Arabic in Baghdad, are only the best-known of many such terms.

The Nobel Prize has gone to Naguib Mahfouz for literature and to Ahmed Zewail for chemistry, both Egyptians. The chemistry prize went to Mounji Bawendi, the son of a Tunisian mathematician, in 2023 and to Omar Yaghi, born in Amman to Palestinian refugees driven from their village in 1948, in 2025. Zewail and Yaghi also won the Wolf Prize in chemistry, one of the very awards Kennedy named. The Fields Medal, the top mathematics prize, went in 1966 to Michael Atiyah, of Lebanese and Scottish descent. The National Institutes of Health, part of the department Kennedy now heads, was directed from 2002 to 2008 by the Algerian-born radiologist Elias Zerhouni.

These are only the most famous names among the countless Arab scientists, physicians, engineers and scholars who have shaped their fields in recent decades. Among them are Huda Zoghbi, the Lebanese American neuroscientist who identified the gene responsible for Rett syndrome; Charles Elachi, who directed NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory for 15 years; Mona Hanna-Attisha, the Iraqi American pediatrician who exposed the lead poisoning of the children of Flint, Michigan; and the Iraqi British architect Zaha Hadid, the first woman to win the Pritzker Prize.

The Arab world today has poets, novelists and dramatists read everywhere. The poetry of Mahmoud Darwish and Adonis and the novels of Tayeb Salih, Ghassan Kanafani and Elias Khoury have been translated into dozens of languages, and in 2019 the Omani writer Jokha Alharthi’s *Celestial Bodies* became the first Arabic novel to win the International Booker Prize. Scientists from the Arab world work in major laboratories around the world, including many in the United States.

The destruction of Arab universities and libraries in the modern era has been caused above all by American and Israeli bombing and by the occupations that followed them: in Baghdad, where Iraq’s National Library burned in the first days of the US occupation and hundreds of academics were assassinated in the years that followed; in Beirut, bombed repeatedly by Israel since 1982; and in Gaza, where every university has been damaged or destroyed. In Iran, Israel has assassinated one physicist after another, killing at least 14 in the June 2025 war that Washington joined.

Kennedy, meanwhile, deserves something of a Nobel Prize in reverse for his onslaught against medical science, particularly in the areas of vaccination and public health. His selection by Trump to head the Department of Health and Human Services was a signal that the

second Trump administration would wage war against scientific knowledge by promoting ignorance, hysteria and religious prejudice. One of the most notorious anti-vaccine quacks in the world, Kennedy campaigned in Samoa in 2019, months before a measles epidemic there killed 83 people, most of them young children, and he now presides over the worst measles resurgence in the United States since 1991. Peddling pseudoscience and outright lies, he has eliminated some 20,000 jobs at HHS, purged the CDC's vaccine advisory panel, slashed the childhood vaccine schedule and gutted the agencies of his department, subordinating the health of the population to the dictates of the financial oligarchy.

The Trump administration is seeking to promote a pogrom atmosphere within the United States, directed initially against Arabs and Muslims, to provide an ideological justification for both internal repression and external aggression.

Externally, Trump is at war with Iran and is facilitating the ongoing Israeli mass murder in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and Syria, directed at the Arab population. The campaign of anti-Muslim propaganda dehumanizes the victims of American and Israeli bombs and missiles. It coincides with preparations to resume heavy bombing of Iran immediately after the election, as well as discussion of US intervention in Yemen against the Houthi rebels.

Internally, Arab Americans and Muslim Americans are portrayed as the "enemy within," with a level of racist invective and incitement that is extraordinary even for the Trump administration. This incitement accompanies the administration's preparations to reject the anticipated Republican electoral defeats in the November 3 midterm election: the administration's demand on Monday that Washington state set aside the ballots of more than 400 voters whom the administration claims may be noncitizens, the suit to set aside 20,000 ballots in California and the suit to block certification in Alaska.

Trump allies like Texas Governor Greg Abbott have used these smear tactics in increasingly farfetched ways, as in his claim that his Democratic opponent, Gina Hinojosa, a Latina from Austin, is somehow a supporter of "sharia law." Texas legislators have introduced legislation to ban sharia law—even though no one has proposed introducing it—restrict the building of mosques and otherwise destroy the constitutional rights of Muslim Americans to practice their religion and engage in politics.

These methods are not unique to Trump and his fascist acolytes in the United States. Every European government is playing the same card. In Italy, the neo-fascist Meloni government has answered the mass protests of the past month with raids on the homes of "pro-Hamas activists," the arrest of an Italian Moroccan dual citizen accused of running an Instagram account that called for a demonstration, and the narrative that the unrest is the work of foreign forces. Trump himself described the French protests as the product of immigration. The Islamophobia fostered during the Biden-era crackdown on the movement against the Gaza genocide is now an instrument against the movement of youth and workers over social conditions.

Trump is the political representative of a financial oligarchy that has accumulated wealth on a scale without historical precedent, while the living standards of the population decline, that has launched an illegal war whose cost is now borne in prices and wages, and that has run up a national debt of more than \$40 trillion. The chasm between the scale of the American and global crisis and the content of this election is the measure of the decline of American capitalism.

That a repulsive figure like Trump is president is not the cause of

that decline but rather its product.

The Democratic Party, for its part, has no answer. No Democratic leader has described Trump's Port Huron speech as what it is. Obama, campaigning with El-Sayed in Detroit the day before, treated Trump as a butt for jokes and said nothing about the administration's moves against the election. The party shares the policy of war; the party's quarrel with Trump concerns its demand for a greater focus on Russia rather than Iran.

And it is terrified of the only force that could oppose him, the movement from below, which it has worked at every stage to channel back into its own campaigns. The No Kings protests that brought millions into the streets last year and in March were converted by October into a get-out-the-vote drive at which speakers said nothing about Iran, Gaza or the attacks on democratic rights and the election itself.

Nothing in the US political crisis will be resolved by the vote on November 3. Whatever the outcome, there will be an escalation of the war and of the attacks on the working class, and the campaign of incitement will continue, because the crisis that produces it will continue. The answer lies where it has begun to emerge in France, Spain, Italy and Serbia: in the independent movement of youth and workers against war, austerity and dictatorship. What that movement requires in the United States is a political form of its own, a party of the working class that opposes both the fascist incitement of the administration and the capitalist system, defended by both parties, that has brought American politics to this level.

Eleven years ago, in a commentary on the first Republican presidential debate in which Donald Trump participated, we sought to illustrate the degraded character of this event by recalling the words of the founder of the Fourth International, in the manifesto "Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution," adopted during the opening months of World War II:

Leon Trotsky once wrote that Nazi propaganda reduced political thought to the level of "the dog's bark and the pig's grunt." Something similar is happening in the disintegrating capitalist political system of the United States.

Trotsky was referring particularly to the frenzied antisemitism of Hitler, Goebbels and Julius Streicher, the editor of the Nazi weekly *Der Stürmer*. Today, these words apply with equal force to the demonization of Arabs and Muslims by Trump, Vance, Kennedy and Abbott.

We might even make apologies to dogs and pigs, eminently useful and intelligent animals, and conclude that the intellectual degradation of the representatives of American imperialism has sunk to levels beyond that metaphor. Their stupidity, vulgarity and sheer backwardness demonstrate both the failure of the profit system and the urgent necessity for the working class to mobilize its class strength to put an end to capitalism and establish socialism.



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