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Tearing Down the Wall

Misinformation Creation and Reflection

“Build a wall and crime will fall!” (Donald Trump) was one of Donald’s Trumps most successful slogans during the 2016 presidential election campaign. The idea: build a wall on the southern border of the United States and the northern border of Mexico. The fear of illegal immigrants has been a long-lived fear many Americans have felt. The mixture of misinformation that illegal immigrants are going to take away jobs from American workers and massively increase crime rates are only two examples of the misinformation political candidates, lobbying, and misinformed individuals have spread that have further increased fear. In the first section of this paper, I will debunk the lies about illegal immigration in the United States hidden behind the misinformation wall built up by politicians. I will support the first section from the work of Vanda Falba-Brown, an author and senior fellow at Brookings Institution, in her essay “The Wall.” In the second part of this paper, I am interested in exploring how misinformation about illegal immigration is effectively made by creating a speech derived from the characteristics of Donald Trump’s speeches during his presidential campaigns. Through this essay, I hope I may tear down the wall of misinformation in order to promote the protection and safety of illegal immigrant children, parents, and families.

In the first part of my essay, I wanted to debunk the myths that are spread in order to promote fear among the American people. The most common fears that Americans have around the influx of illegal immigrants include – stealing jobs, importing and spreading the sale of illegal drugs, and increasing crime and homicide rates.

Myth 1: illegal immigrants are stealing jobs from hardworking Americans. Many Americans fear that immigrants will rob them of their well-deserved jobs. Additionally, many fear that illegal immigrants will take advantage of the social welfare systems present in the United States that are meant only for American citizens. According to Falba-Brown,” “To a large extent, however, undocumented workers often work the unpleasant, back-breaking jobs that native-born workers are not willing to do.” (The Wall). Illegal immigrants commonly work in agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and seafood processing with low wages and hazardous conditions where the average American would refuse to work. Additionally, because they usually work “under the table,” they do not receive benefits and protections from the government. The myth that illegal immigrants are stealing jobs from native-born workers is simply a myth. To an extent, we need them as workers to fill the jobs that Americans are often unwilling to do.

Myth 2: a wall will stop the trafficking of all illegal drugs into the United States. Yes, some smuggling of drugs through the unprotected parts of the Mexican border does and can occur. However, building a larger wall will not stop the majority of drugs from passing through the border. According to a statement from U.S Drug Enforcement Administration, “most of the smuggled marijuana, as well as cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamines, comes through the 52 legal ports of entry on the border.” Building a wall will not stop the entry of drugs into the United States. The opioid crisis is fueled by the import of illegal drugs, but it is not started and

continued by it. An important aspect of solving the illegal drug issue in the United States is solving the systematic issues of why people start using and continue to use. The United States must take some responsibility for the ongoing demand for illegal drugs in our country instead of using illegal immigration and smuggling as a scapegoat.

Myth 3: illegal immigrants increase homicide and crime rates. This myth is simply untrue. Falba-Brown writes, “In California, for example, where there is a large immigrant population, including undocumented migrants, U.S-born men were incarcerated at a rate 2.5 times higher than foreign-born men” (The Wall). This is logical. The majority of undocumented migrants come to the United States to make money and send money back to their families in their home countries. Likewise, “about 60 percent of undocumented have lived in the United States for at least a decade. A third of undocumented immigrants age 15 and older have at least one child who is a U.S.-born citizen” (The Wall). In fear of being exported, most illegal immigrants wish to avoid crime so that they may remain in the United States to provide for their families.

Misinformation on illegal immigration makes the United States unsafe for many undocumented migrants. Misinformation on illegal immigration is used to fuel hate against them which can lead to unethical legislation that promotes racism, the separation of families, and the captivity of children at the border. Through the second half of my essay, I will explain and analyze how effective misinformation is made in order to warn of the consequences.

I found Trump most effective at spreading misinformation on immigration when he was speaking at rallies. Although his speeches gave me a general sense of discomfort, I found his

speeches to be the most emotionally moving, to have the most interaction with listeners and, to be the most effective at spreading misinformation. Through the second section of my analysis, I will design and analyze the characteristics I would include to construct a speech formulated to misinform listeners on immigration. As a note, before I begin, I took a lot of inspiration for my choices based on observing Trump's speeches at the 2016 and 2020 election rallies.

I think one of the key reasons why Trump is so effective at spreading misinformation is because he centralizes his entire speech around one general audience in order to have his audience's full attention and trust. From the rhetoric he uses to the fears he targets, his speeches focus on middle-class, blue-collar, big government-hating, Americans as his audience. Because I believe the effectiveness of immigration misinformation is so reliant on the support of this audience, I will also be targeting this "traditional" American audience to spread misinformation through my speech. Each decision that I make when writing my speech will have the same target audience in mind.

In my speech, I would use rhetoric that is simple and easy to understand. I would want to use word choices and sentence structures that are pedestrian. Using the same speech and rhetoric that my audience uses daily, would allow my audience to believe that I am trustworthy because I do not elevate my language from the rhetoric of the group. I would want to present myself as a prototypical American who is acting as a voice for the common man or woman. Additionally, I would speak repetitively and with emotions such as anger and confidence, so that I may keep my audience's attention throughout my speech. Likely, using repetition would allow me to subconsciously force my audience members to accept my ideas as their own.

The combination of emotion and repetition would hopefully accomplish my goal to keep my audience's attention and make my audience leave my presentation with a feeling of anger for

the present state of immigration in the United States and make them feel fearful for their family and livelihood. Like Trump, I would want to use the “Enemy Outside” tactic in conspiracy theories. As illegal immigrants as the thing my listeners can fear and fight against, I could use this fear to manipulate my audience to believe the misinformation I spew. Trump effectively uses true events, such as the murder of one American child by an illegal immigrant, to make the extreme statement that all illegal immigrants are dangerous and a generalization that all have the same desire to murder American children. Furthermore, to make his storytelling more effective, Trump uses the name of the child and described the child’s unaccomplished dreams that he was never able to reach because he was murdered so young. Trump’s use of storytelling to describe the death of one child is personal and very effective in making his audience feel simultaneously sympathetic, angry, and fearful for their own children.

In my speech, I would want us the same technique in my storytelling and delivery I described above. When storytelling, I would humanize the victims and demonize the illegal immigrants. Through this, I would manipulate my audience members to believe that their lives could be ruined by illegal immigrants and the drugs that the immigrants smuggle through the Mexican border. I would then use heuristics and confirmation bias to my advantage. I would transition from my story to bold statements such as, “Gang violence would be destroyed if we removed illegal immigrants from our American communities.” Although I completely made up this “fact,” it could be very believable based on heuristics. Because I would tell a story that describes gang violence in one person’s life before making this statement, I would make a logical shortcut to the “fact” that illegal immigrants are the primary reason for gang violence everywhere in the United States.

In my speech, I would also make use of confirmation bias, the belief in the information that confirms pre-existing beliefs, due to my chosen audience. I grew up in Lancaster, PA, a traditional farming town turned cosmopolitan city within the last 10 years. The tension between those who newly moved into my hometown and those whose families have lived in Lancaster for generations is distinct. From my personal experience growing up in a traditionally American community, one of the primary fears that I have observed from those who have lived in Lancaster for generations is the “fear of change.” In a sense, the “fear of change” is the fear that those who appear different from you in skin color, language, and culture will bring dissonance and disturbance to your way of life. I would use confirmation bias that those who are different from you are dangerous to your way of life when structuring my speech.

One of the core ideas of my speech would be that people who are different from the traditional white Americans are dangerous. I believe Trump’s campaign is based on the danger of the opposition. His slogan, “Make America Great Again,” refers back to a time in the United States when the greatness of the United States was based on the success of the white males and the suppression of the minority and opposite sex. Although this is the reality of his slogan, it brings a sense of nostalgia and safety to many because it was a time before America had begun to change to what it is today. In my opinion, there was never a time in the United States when America was truly great – there was never a time when racism, sexism, or socioeconomic inequality did not exist. Yet, the slogan “Make America Great Again” was a very successful campaign because it lessens the fear that America will change even more than it already has. Although I do not necessarily support the use of fear tactics in our political climate, they are very successful in spreading misinformation. I would be sure to make fear tactics a primary component of my speech.

The final piece I would want to include in my speech is about the fact that I am female. Speaking about being a female in the climate of illegal immigrants could give me an advantage when projecting misinformation about illegal immigrants. Most likely, I would speak about my personal fear of rape and sexual assault by illegal immigrant gang members when in large cities. I would also speak about my fear of violence for my future children in my speech. My goal through this would be to gain the trust of women and the sympathy of men so that they believe the misinformation I am spreading. Often playing the “victim card” gains the emotional trust of listeners and would allow me to emotionally manipulate my audience.

The final element related to my speech is the audience I would surround myself with. I would want to take advantage of the psychological vulnerability, pluralistic ignorance. I would perform this psychological tactic by surrounding myself with people who would trust and support what I say as I perform speech, or at least acted like it. Pluralistic ignorance would allow my loyal audience members to make my speech look like the majority of the political view to the rest of my listeners and viewers. Because people often follow the majority, this would allow more people, who are not already loyal to me, to trust my misinformation speech.

Through this essay, I have learned to search for the truth so that I can debunk common myths that cause harm to illegal immigrants. On the contrary, I learned how to create effective lies and how to misinform an audience through the construction of my misinformation speech. I believe these skills have taught me to how to tear down walls of lies. In present-day America, it is essential that we are able to effectively identify where politicians, campaigns, and ads are trying to mislead us for their own benefit. Knowing the tactics behind misinformation allows us

to protect ourselves and those, like illegal immigrants, from deleterious misinformation that results in unethical, racist legislation.

Citations: (YouTube citations are videos of Trump speeches for inspiration)

Felbab-Brown, Vanda. "The Wall: The Real Costs of a Barrier between the United States and Mexico." *Brookings*, Brookings, 15 Sept. 2017, www.brookings.edu/essay/the-wall-the-real-costs-of-a-barrier-between-the-united-states-and-mexico/.

Trump, Donald. "'We Are Building a Wall Which Is Absolutely ... - Youtube.'" *Youtube*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFK1yJTz-tw.