

The Irony Everyone's Missing in the Hamilton-Pence Controversy

Four days after Mike Pence was [lectured](#) by the cast of the hit musical Hamilton and booed by its audience, the controversy rages on. President-elect Trump sent out the expected angry [tweet](#) demanding an apology. The left melodramatically gasped, "freedom of speech," even though no one has suggested government action against the actors. And, suddenly, the right is more offended than an SJW at an Ann Coulter lecture. Even Trump whined about the theater being a "safe space."

The only person who doesn't have a strong opinion on this is Mike Pence. He [handled](#) the situation with uncommon grace, shrugging off the boos from the crowd with a line for the ages: "That is what freedom sounds like."

All of this pales in comparison to the supreme irony everyone is missing in this whole overblown controversy. Here we have the cast of a musical that holds Alexander Hamilton in an admiring light expressing deep anxiety about a president who just won a stunning upset victory after running his campaign largely based on the political ideas of – wait for it – Alexander Hamilton.

Is Trump "Literally" Hitler?

The left likes to characterize Trump as the new Hitler. And while references to the dictator are never absent from political hyperbole, one can't help but wonder if there isn't a bit more legitimacy to them when it comes to The Donald. Even the creator of Godwin's [law](#) won't [dismiss](#) the comparison out of hand.

Superficially, there is something there. Trump appeals to the

same kind of nationalist worldview that inspired Hitler's supporters. Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again," isn't substantively different from Hitler's. Neither are his arguments for what has caused the decline: corrupt politicians who have sold out the nation, the presence of subversive or merely unwanted elements (Jews and communists for Hitler; illegal immigrants and Muslim refugees for Trump), and inept economic policy, meaning not enough, or the wrong kind, of state intervention.

Like Hitler, Trump touts himself as the only hope to save his country, a strongman-type leader who will run a command economy, rid the country of subversive elements, and restore lost international respect. His disdain for civil liberties like [free speech](#) and open [support](#) of torture are an even more chilling similarity. For Trump, government isn't the problem, it's the solution, as long as the right leader is running it.

But for all the similarities, there are important differences. Despite the implication of Hamilton star Brandon Victor Dixon's comments, Trump certainly can't be accused of sharing Hitler's racial beliefs. Trump's wall to keep out illegal immigrants from Mexico will have a yuuuge door in the middle to admit legal immigrants of the same ethnicity. He has repeatedly voiced his admiration and respect for the Chinese, because "you can still respect someone who's knocking the hell out of you."

Most striking is Trump's foreign policy differences with the Führer. While Trump does advocate some sort of military action against ISIS, he's strikingly [noninterventionist](#) in general. His willingness to admit the Iraq War was a mistake and his general view that America should start questioning its ongoing military posture everywhere, including NATO, are the opposite of the military aggressiveness integral to Hitler's plan from the beginning.

Trump's High Federalism

So what do you call Trump's brand of nationalism, if not outright fascism? If you take away the boorishness of Trump's personality and insert more thoughtful, elegant rhetoric, you'd call it traditional American conservatism, before it was infiltrated by more libertarian ideas. American conservatism was always about creating an American version of the mercantilist British Empire and it really never changed. Its founding champion was Alexander Hamilton, who told his fellow delegates at the Constitutional Convention America should imitate Great Britain as closely as possible.

From the moment he became the first Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton argued for a strong central government that subsidized domestic corporations to build roads and infrastructure, levied high protectionist tariffs, and ran a central bank. This was the Federalist platform for the party's entire existence. Once the Federalist Party died, Henry Clay and the Whigs adopted it. From the ashes of the Whigs emerged Lincoln and the Republicans, who were finally able to install Clay's "American System" after decades of electoral failure.

The Republican Party has remained startlingly consistent in its economic principles, despite incorporating free market rhetoric in the 20th century. Republicans from Lincoln to McKinley to Coolidge to George W. Bush have been protectionists. Hoover reacted to the Depression by signing the Smoot-Hawley tariff, for all the same reasons Trump threatens tariffs now. And what was the first thing Republicans did in the 1950s, after two decades electoral exile? A huge government roads project that had Hamilton smiling in his grave.

Trump promises more of the same, justifying his stance against international nation-building by saying, "I just think we have to rebuild our country." And despite a white [paper](#) arguing for a partially-privatized road system, Trump's plan will require \$167 billion in government funds and has all the hallmarks of the infrastructure boondoggles that lost election after

election for the Federalists and Whigs in the 19th century.

Charles C.W. Cooke pointed out additional ironies when he [tweeted](#), “For the record, Alexander Hamilton was an immigration hawk who endorsed the Alien and Sedition Acts and wanted to deport troublemakers.” That makes the hand-wringing of the cast and fans of Hamilton over Trump’s threats against immigration, and against the freedom to speak truth to power, extra rich.

Trump isn’t Hitler. He’s Hamilton, advocating the kind of centralist government Hamilton [spoke](#) about in secret at the Constitutional Convention and attempted to achieve surreptitiously throughout the rest of his political life by eroding the same limits on federal government power he had trumpeted to sell the Constitution in the Federalist Papers. Trump wants to be Hamilton’s elected king, running a crony-capitalist, mercantilist economy just as Hamilton [envisioned](#).

Even Trump’s campaign slogan was Hamiltonian. Hamilton’s stated political goal was “national greatness.” I kid you not.

And while Hamilton was certainly a more eloquent and well-mannered spokesman for conservatism, Trump is superior to him in at least one way: Hamilton was a military interventionist, whose ambition to conquer the colonial possessions of Spain was much more like Hitler’s desire to seize the Ukraine for Germany than anything Trump wants to do internationally.

One has to wonder: is that the real reason neoconservatives like Bill Kristol, John McCain, and Lindsey Graham are so anti-Trump?

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