



The Trouble With Candace Owens

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Candace Owens, the black conservative activist who has previously made waves by calling Donald Trump the “savior” of the West and asserting that there is something “bio-chemically” (*sic*) wrong with single, childless women, has done it again. (You knew she would, right?)

In fact, this time she may have outdone herself with a unique take on Hitler: The 29-year-old communications director for Turning Point USA seemed to suggest that the Fuehrer would have been all right if only he hadn’t been such an internationalist. In short, Hitler: OK, taking Hitler global = bad.

When asked about nationalism at a London event on December 11 of last year, where Turning Point launched its British affiliate, Owens complained that nationalism often gets tarred by association with Hitler even though he was really a “globalist,” not a nationalist: “If Hitler just wanted to make Germany great and have things run well, okay, fine. The problem is that he wanted, he had dreams outside of Germany. He wanted to globalize.”

After a Twitter drubbing, Owens released a short, rambling video in which she both defiantly stood by her comments (she claimed that media accounts distorted her real point, which was that Hitler wasn’t a nationalist) and tried to half-walk them back, clarifying that Hitler would have been okay if he hadn’t been a globalist *and* a “homicidal, psychotic maniac.” She also argued that Hitler was not a true nationalist since “he wasn’t about putting Germans first,” as evidenced by his persecution of German Jews—a rather bizarre argument, since Hitler’s nationalism specifically excluded Jews from the category of “Germans.”

A Twitter user has pointed out the resemblance between Owens’s original remarks and a Prager University video by Yoram Hazony, “Why You Should Be a Nationalist,” which also claims that nationalism has been unfairly linked to Nazism and that “Adolf Hitler was no nationalist.” One might assume that Owens was channeling the video; however, it was actually released several days *after* her London appearance. It’s hard to say whether Owens (herself a Prager University contributor) saw a preview or picked up the idea from Hazony elsewhere; that she would have independently come up with such an odd defense of nationalism is possible but unlikely.

In any case, whatever one thinks of the Hazony thesis—which has been convincingly challenged, among others, by the Cato Institute’s Alex Nowrasteh—his comments in the video differ from Owens’s in some key ways. For one thing, he calls Hitler an “imperialist,” not a “globalist”; this is at least an accurate label, even if one may question Hazony’s belief that imperialism and nationalism cannot coexist. No less important, Hazony says that “[i]f [Hitler’s] ambitions had been limited to ruling Germans, it would have been terrible for Germany,” but other nations “would have been spared a world war.” This is quite different from Owens’s assertion that a Germany-focused Hitler would have been basically fine.

The most charitable explanation of Owens’s remarks, if she deserves charity, is that they were glib, thoughtless and ignorant: it’s quite possible she didn’t know that Hitler’s *domestic* plan for German greatness included banning opposition parties, muzzling the press, terrorizing and imprisoning dissidents, building a police state, and disenfranchising Jews. The less charitable explanation is that in Owens doesn’t have much of a problem with domestic authoritarianism. After all, this is the woman who, a year ago, tweeted an exhortation to “lock every last single one of them up”—not only Hillary and Bill Clinton but Robert Mueller, James Comey, George Soros, Jeff Bezos, and “ALL compliant members of the #FakeNews media” such as Jake Tapper, Rachel Maddow and Jim Acosta.

As I detailed in a *Quillette* article last May, Owens has had a rather peculiar journey to the Trumpian right. A one-time journalism major at the University of Rhode Island who briefly worked for *Vogue* and was an administrative assistant for a finance firm, in 2015-2016 she ran a website, Degree180, that combined lifestyle and personal-empowerment material with leftist politics. In April 2016, she first captured the spotlight by announcing the launch of an anti-cyberbullying initiative, Social Autopsy, intended to track the online footprint of trolls and harassers. Widely regarded as at best an ill-thought-out venture and at worst an outright scam, Social Autopsy briefly managed to unite *Breitbart News* and social justice activists in opposition. Then, Owens got into a nasty war of words with some leftist anti-harassment advocates, and some of her erstwhile enemies on the right suddenly became allies; among others, she became friendly with Milo Yiannopoulos and some alt-right personalities in his orbit. (At the time, I covered the Owens saga for the now-defunct blog site AllThink.com; my articles on the subject can be found via Internet Archive.)

With her anti-bullying start-up dead in the water, Owens lay low for a while—and then made a comeback as a conservative, pro-Trump YouTuber going by “RedPillBlack.” In a September 2017 interview with right-of-center webcast host Dave Rubin, she asserted that her alleged persecution and smearing by the left, combined with the support she got from the right, became her “redpill moment”: she became sympathetic to Trump’s attacks on “the lying media” and then started questioning other liberal dogma as well.

Is Owens sincere about her new beliefs? Or is she a fraud whose accidental alliance with opportunistic friends on the far right led her to discover a bigger and better scam? Obviously, no one can answer that question without mind-reading—though the examples of her dishonesty are plenty. (Among other things, her self-serving account of what happened to her start-up omits any mention of its libertarian and conservative critics.) After my *Quillette* article came out, some

Owens supporters told me that regardless of her history and possible motives, she should be given a second chance as someone who has a positive message—particularly as a young African-American woman who embraces conservative values.

No thank you.

What exactly is *that* message and what are *those* values, other than boilerplate rhetoric about personal responsibility? A Trump personality cult? Locking up journalists who report the news in a way the President dislikes? A conservative version of tribalism and victimhood? (Owens has told her followers that conservatives shouldn't “become skeptics” when they hear negative things about “one of our own.”) Mocking concerns about the resurgence of white supremacism, as she did in a video shortly after the white nationalist march in Charlottesville in which one of the participants ran down and killed a protester? Conspiracy theories such as speculation that white nationalist Richard Spencer is a Democratic plant?

If you're getting the sense that Owens is not a serious person, well...

It should be obvious to anyone except Trump cultists that Owens does little more than throw red meat to the base and feed its fantasies of a mass black exodus from the Democratic Party (which she's taken to calling “Blexit”). It should be equally obvious that she is giving conservatism a bad name—and, worst of all, giving credence to the smear that black people who dissent from the leftist party line are paid grifters and puppets of the right.

Yet, at least so far, Owens's popularity remains undiminished. In a few weeks, she will speak at the Conservative Political Action Conference. And in July, in a truly shocking turn, she will speak at FreedomFest, a major annual conservative/libertarian gathering. I, for one, am excited about the pro-freedom take on locking up the opposition and on Hitler's positive domestic agenda.

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