

Anti-Intellectualism in Populist Discourse and Its Role in Identity Construction: A Comparative Study between the United States of America and France

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Abstract : 'Language is no longer regarded as peripheral to our grasp of the world we live in, but as central to it. Words are not mere vocal labels or communicational adjuncts superimposed upon an already given order of things. They are collective products of social interaction, essential instruments through which human beings constitute and articulate their world', said Roy Harris. If we were to accept the above-mentioned premise, then we surely must accept that discourse, generally, - and political discourse, specifically -, bears a crucial importance to one's perception of reality. The way in which political rhetoric constructs reality changes the relationship between the voter and his/her view of the world, which, in turn, influences greatly the future trends of political participation. In this context, our inquiry focuses on the role of populist discourses in the post 9/11 political rhetoric, and how this led to the formation, construction and reconstruction of identity within the 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy. It is our hypothesis that anti-intellectualistic elements played a significant role in the manner in which identity construction had been carried out on a discursive level. By adopting a comparative approach, we intend to identify the similarities and differences between the use of such anti-intellectualist elements in the United States of America on one hand - within the discourse of Rick Santorum, - and France on the other - with Marine le Pen's discourse. Our methodological approach uses close textual analysis of primary source material (discourse analysis); historical contextualization of both primary documents and broader socio-political and cultural framework through archival research and secondary sources; as well as interpretation of primary texts through theoretical frameworks (qualitative research). We hope that the output of our endeavor will be useful in better understanding the different correlations that exist between anti-intellectualism and populism and how the interactions between these two elements aids in political identity construction through discourse.

Keywords : anti-intellectualism, discourse theory, France, identity construction, populism, United States of America

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