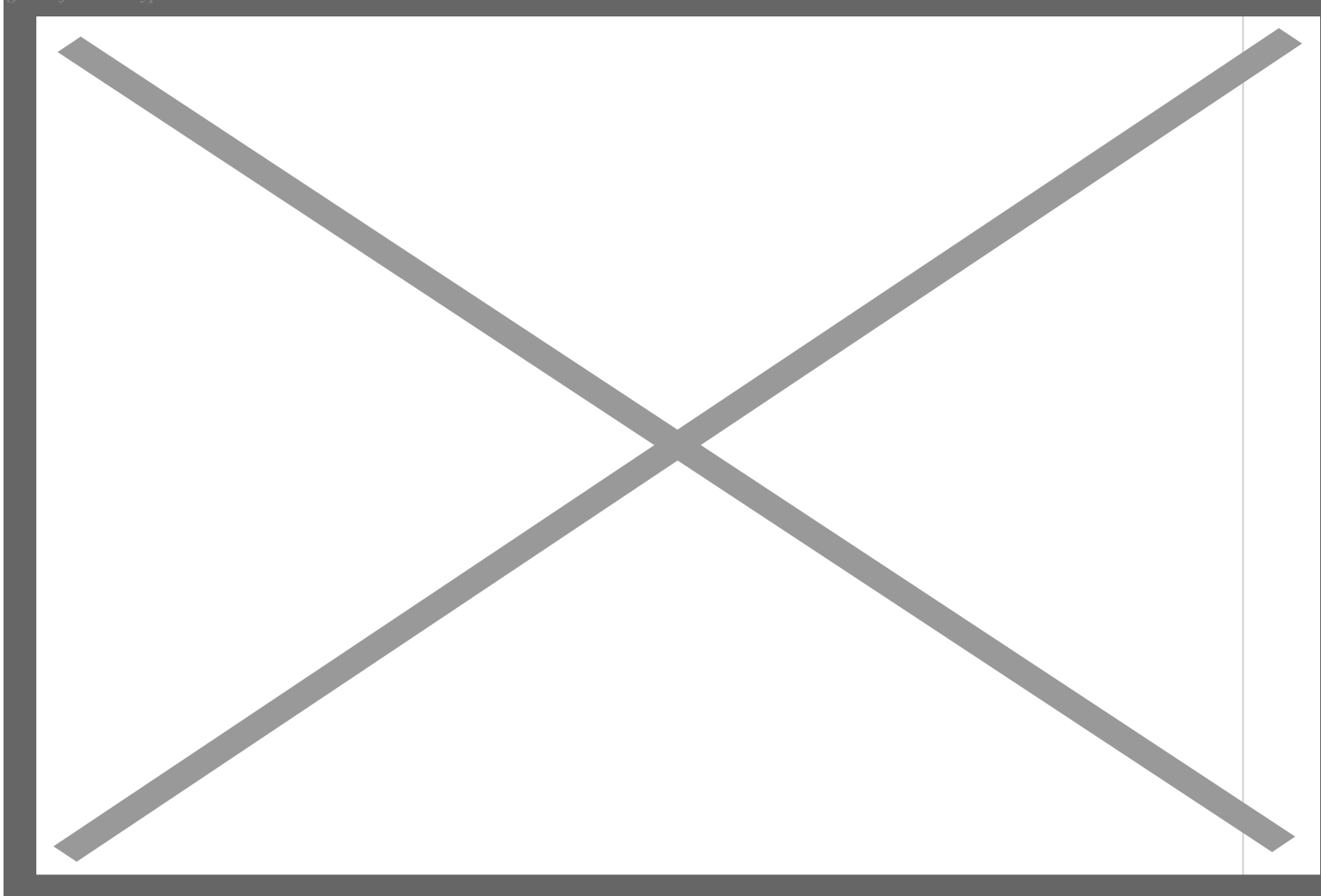


More outrage after Trump calls controversial New York rally a lovefest

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Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks at a news conference at Mar-a-Lago, in Palm Beach, Florida, October 29 [Marco Bello/Reuters]

Miami, October 30 (RHC)-- The U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump is facing more blowback from a controversial Madison Square Garden rally marred by sexist and racist insults, by calling it a “beautiful” event and “an absolute lovefest.”

Trump made the comments during a news conference at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida on Tuesday, saying the rally in which a headline comedian, Tony Hinchcliffe, called Puerto Rico a “floating island of trash” was an unprecedented display of affection.

Despite a firestorm of outrage on social media from Democrats and a host of Puerto Rican celebrities, as well as some leading Republicans, Trump made no apology for the racist comments by Hinchcliffe and others.

Instead, he brushed off the critics who compared it to a 1939 Nazi event at the arena.

“There was love in the room. The love in that room was breathtaking,” Trump said. “Politicians that have been doing this for a long time – 30 and 40 years – said there’s never been an event so beautiful,” he added. “It was like a love fest, an absolute love fest, and it was my honor to be involved.”

“It was not full of love, except for him. There was a lot of love for Donald Trump there,” quipped CNN’s political reporter, Dana Bash.

The Lincoln Project, an anti-Trump political action committee, was quick to slam Trump’s characterisation of the event and called on voters to end his election hopes. “No explanation, no apology,” the group wrote on X. “He’s trash, throw him away in the dustbin of history in 7 days.”

Trump’s comments were reminiscent of other notorious events which he has sought to describe in positive terms. When hundreds of pro-Trump rioters stormed the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, injuring policemen in the process, Trump called it a “day of love.”

Trump’s New York rally on Monday involved some 30 speakers dishing out multiple insults aimed at Black people, Latinos and Democrats. One speaker described Vice President Kamala Harris as “the devil” and “the antichrist,” while former Fox News host Tucker Carlson mocked Harris’s biracial heritage.

But the fiercest backlash came from Americans of Puerto Rican descent, some 500,000 of whom live in the key swing state of Pennsylvania.

“Right now, we have no business and no relationship with Trump,” Angel M Cintron, the Republican party’s chair in Puerto Rico, said during a Monday talk show. “If Donald Trump doesn’t apologise, we won’t vote for him.”

The popular Puerto Rican singer, Bad Bunny, released an eight-minute tribute video to his homeland on Tuesday. Touching on the controversy, he captioned it simply “garbage” on his Instagram page which has more than 45 million followers.

The rally also prompted a harsh editorial in the island’s leading newspaper, “El Nuevo Dia,” which called on Puerto Ricans who can vote in the United States to support Democrat Kamala Harris.

“Politics is not a joke and hiding behind a comedian is cowardly,” wrote the paper’s editor, Maria Luisa Ferre Rangel, in the editorial that appeared on Tuesday’s front page and the website.

Trying to stem the damage, Trump’s campaign has sought to distance itself from the Puerto Rico quip by Hinchcliffe, even though it reviewed at least part of the routine beforehand, reported The Bulwark.

Campaign spokesperson Daniella Alvarez said Hinchcliffe’s joke “does not reflect the views of President Trump or the campaign.” Trump simply said: “I don’t know him, someone put him up there”, when asked

about the comedian by ABC News.

The U.S. took Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Philippines and other colonial possessions from Spain during the brief Spanish-American War in 1898. The first large wave of migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States occurred after World War II to ease labor shortages on the mainland.

Today, about 5.9 million people identify as ethnically Puerto Rican, according to 2022 estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, making up the second-largest population of Hispanic origin in the U.S. after Mexicans.

Steve Herman, chief national correspondent at Voice of America, told Al Jazeera that Puerto Rican voters who choose to punish Trump at the ballot box could have a huge impact, especially in Pennsylvania.

"Pennsylvania is a bellwether state, and it's very unlikely that either candidate will win enough electoral votes to become president without [it]," said Herman. "It's possible that a few Puerto Ricans who were planning on voting for Trump would now be so angry that they would vote for Harris or not vote at all." And he added that a few thousand votes could be sufficient to swing the election result. "That's just how tight this is."

Trump spent much of his Tuesday news conference railing against the administration of his Democratic opponent Kamala Harris, accused her of running "a campaign of absolute hate."

Trump zeroed in on immigration, a central issue of his, blaming Harris and President Joe Biden for weakening the U.S. border, as well as "runaway inflation" and triggering global instability.

"They've unleashed a war and chaos all over the world ... look around, everything's blowing up or getting ready to blow up," said Trump, speaking in front of a banner with the words "Trump will fix it!"

He also repeated several campaign pledges, including to ramp up tariffs, end taxes on social security and impose the death penalty for migrants who commit murder in the United States.

Trump pledged that if he's elected he will seize "the assets of the criminal gangs and drug cartels ... and we will use those assets to create a compensation fund to provide restitution for the victims of migrant crime."

While Trump said his campaign is doing "very well," he claimed there are "some bad spots in Pennsylvania," without elaborating. Later on X, Trump repeated unproven claims that thousands of fraudulent ballots had been filed in Pennsylvania.

With just a week to go before election day, Trump and Harris are neck to neck in the polls, with analysts predicting that the election will come down to razor-thin margins in a few key swing states.

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