

The Elon-Musk-Is-a-Secret-Nazi Meme

A kooky accusation goes from social media, to the press, to the Senate.

By [The Editorial Board](#)

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Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk gestures as he speaks during the inaugural parade inside Capitol One Arena, in Washington on Monday. Photo: angela weiss/Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

If Democrats are so worried about disinformation, they should stop spreading disinformation. Witness Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy on Tuesday, questioning Elise Stefanik, President Trump’s nominee to be Ambassador to the United Nations:

“What do you think of [Elon Musk](#), perhaps the President’s most visible adviser, doing two ‘heil Hitler’ salutes last night at the President’s televised rally?”

What an object lesson in the laundering of a kooky online smear. Roll back the tape, and Mr. Musk is reacting to a roaring arena as he says the 2024 election really mattered, and his heart goes out to the crowd. He slaps his chest and waves an arm toward the audience. The peanut gallery on social media went nuts, suggesting it was an intentional Nazi salute, which mainstream outlets then cited to justify covering the supposed controversy.

“Elon Musk ignited speculation and chatter online,” the [New York Times](#) said, quoting the X account of “a popular streamer.” Or here’s the Atlantic: “Did Elon Musk actually toss off a *Sieg heil!* at [Donald Trump](#)’s inauguration rally today? A lot of people online seem to think he did.” Soon enough, it hardly mattered what Mr. Musk intended: His gesture, the AP said, had been “embraced by right-wing extremists regardless of what he meant.”

In response, Mr. Musk reposted pictures of Hillary Clinton, Taylor Swift, and others photographed with one arm straight out, palm down. “Frankly, they need better dirty tricks,” he wrote. “The ‘everyone is Hitler’ attack is sooo tired.”

The Anti-Defamation League said it recognizes that many Americans are “on edge,” but Mr. Musk “made an awkward gesture in a moment of enthusiasm, not a Nazi salute.”

Mr. Musk might cop to awkwardness. When he appeared on “Saturday Night Live” a few years ago, his monologue included a comedic bit about “making history tonight as the first person with Asperger’s to host,” meaning that “I won’t make a lot of eye contact with the cast tonight, but don’t worry, I’m pretty good at running ‘human’ in emulation mode.”

Also, recall Mr. Musk's exuberant if dorky leap at a Trump rally last year? [Tim Walz](#), the Democratic VP nominee, mocked him for "skipping like a dips—."

No, he's really a Nazi, some Democrats now say. "I never imagined we would see the day when what appears to be a Heil Hitler salute would be made behind the Presidential seal," Rep. Jerrold Nadler wrote. "I urge all of my colleagues to unite in condemning this hateful gesture for what it is: antisemitism."

There it is, the birth of a partisan talking point—and the spreading of disinformation.