

BLACK AND STRONG RHINOS HORSES

**A TEMPLATE FOR
REFUTING THE
ANTI-HUNTER**

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Terrorism, death threats, and illogical reasoning have become the campaign tool of today's anti-hunting community. To date, the hunter-conservationist community has not adequately prepared a counter strategy. The time is now! The black rhino-Dallas Safari Club (DSC) saga chronicled nicely in the winter issue of *Fair Chase* serves as the perfect case in point.

I attended that DSC convention, where I interviewed Simeone Niilenge Negumbo, the Republic of Namibia's Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and his colleague, Elly Hamunyela, Namibia's deputy director of Wildlife Utilization. I also attended the auction that garnered \$350,000 for the hunt, interviewed DSC Executive Director Ben Carter and Chris Dorsey, co-founder of Orion Entertainment, a media production company.

Lessons can be gleaned on how to refute and strategically counter the anti-hunters' messages and methods by scrupulously analyzing the layers of economic and conservation issues inherent in this hunt, as well as the contemporaneous virulent personal social media threats made to people involved with it.

Facts pertaining to the rhino hunt are straightforward. One hunter, at considerable expense, will be permitted to kill one aged rhino that is no longer capable of reproducing, is a menace to other rhinos, and is destructive of habitat and humans. Auction funds will support anti-poaching, conservation, and re-location programs, thereby saving the lives

of many animals, including rhinos. Opponents cannot dispute these facts.

THE ABANDONMENT OF REASON

Ben Carter made the case for the hunt in logical and unemotional language. What would qualify for rational people as a prudent culling action and a fortuitous revenue source has been transformed into an anti-hunting battleground. Mr. Carter's dispassionate statement was directed to an audience larger than the anti-hunters, of course, and was based on three assumptions that: (1) truth mattered (2) reason mattered and (3) the conservation of the black rhino population mattered.

These assumptions do not apply to the anti-hunters and perhaps not to other like-minded constituents, for they are acting with reptilian predatory opportunism. The irrelevance of reason, facts, and truth to the anti-hunter dictates that creative rhetorical strategies be crafted to refute the hunting opponents and persuade a perhaps tentative larger audience of the hunt's legitimacy.

Every belief, every ideology has costs and consequences, which can be onerous and immoral. Thus, a key component of a strategy for persuasion on the merits of the hunt would be to establish with moral and factual clarity the negative costs and consequences of the anti-hunters' stated beliefs.

As examples, it would be prudent to emphasize the costs of what the anti-hunters were actually promoting: (1) the deaths of rhinos; (2) the deaths of other animal species by undermining the funding of anti-poaching programs and (3) aiding and abetting the destruction of healthy habitat, which leads to more animal deaths.

The anti-hunters should be asked bluntly: "Do you unambiguously condemn your like-minded colleagues that have sent

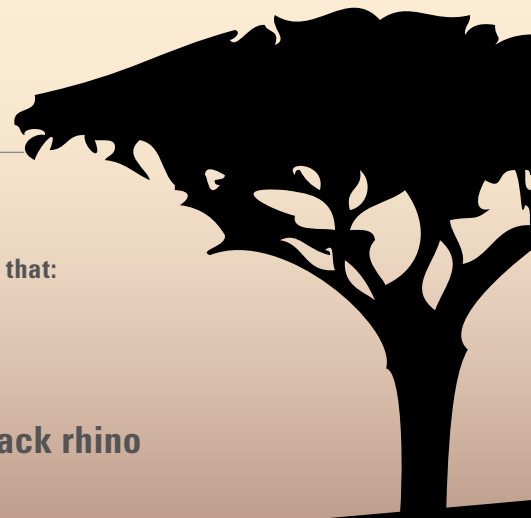
death threats to people involved in this hunt?" The answer is either yes or no. In either case, we gain insight into the morality of their character. "Yes" creates an ally with the hunter; "No" illustrates the moral bankruptcy of the individual. The reader may think of additional questions.

They should also be pressed to concede that more animals will die if anti-poaching programs are not instituted and that saving many animals is more ethical than saving one aged, non-reproducing animal. These points are not merely factual, they are profoundly moral. The incoherent disconnect between their alleged goals and the certain destructive consequences of their policies would be illuminated by the klieg light of reason. This disconnect should be pounded into the public's consciousness as if with a jackhammer.

MORAL CLARITY AND DECONSTRUCTING IDEOLOGICAL RHETORIC

Angela Antonisse Oxley of Dallas, who was recruiting opponents to attend a peaceful protest on the evening of the DSC auction, asserted it was barbaric to hunt and kill an animal just because it was old and unable to reproduce. Ms. Oxley's assertion merits scrutiny. Her character, her integrity are discerned not only by what she thinks is barbaric but by what she thinks is not barbaric. Herein lies the strategy for gaining moral clarity of her beliefs and which offers the most persuasive method to refute her positions.

Not barbaric to Ms. Oxley are the destruction and death, possibly to humans, caused by this aged rhino. Not barbaric to her is the increase in poaching as a consequence of the loss of revenue. Not barbaric to her is that many animals will not



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have the benefit of better habitat, water quality, and relocation opportunities which would yield more and healthier animals. None of these consequences is barbaric to Ms. Oxley and those for whom she purports to speak. Thus, we gain insights into their beliefs, and based on moral criteria, we can judge those beliefs as morally deficient. Beliefs have costs, and it is our responsibility to hold people accountable for the consequences of their beliefs.

As a sort of moral and intellectual judo performance, if Ms. Oxley's stated 14,000 Twitter and Facebook followers could have each contributed \$40 to fund the cause, Namibia would have obtained significant funds from both sides of the debate. It's the old put-your-money-where-your-mouth-is challenge. That would be a rhetorical and strategic victory for the DSC and Namibia, whether or not the money was raised.

BLACK RHINOS AND STRONG HORSES

After September 11, 2001, an unpleasant chap of Al Qaeda persuasion effusively pointed out that people are attracted to a strong horse and reject a weak horse. He was correct and still is, even though he's dead. Let's compare the horse of the anti-black rhino hunt folks with that of the pro-hunt group.

The anti-hunter group wants its opinions, beliefs and policies but does not want to pay their costs. They are smug and want to feel good, but they do not want to acknowledge the unavoidable consequences of their beliefs. Thus, they are cowards, not only because they cannot face the consequences of their beliefs but also because they do not want to be responsible for the consequences of their vile anti-life beliefs. Despite their self-indulgent rhetoric, they

advance death, misery, destruction, corruption, and impoverishment. They are, thus, beneath contempt and morally worthless.

We fight back against their positions most persuasively by illuminating their malevolent moral structure. The pro-hunters should go on the offense with the subtlety of a twerking Miley Cyrus by making their case persuasively, confidently, and couched in an ethical framework. Then the pro-hunter rises beyond reason to the level of ethos and character. The pro-hunter's metaphoric horse is established as stronger because it has the stronger moral character and the better-reasoned arguments. It is more credible and persuasive to the widest ranges of audiences.

There is no moral equivalence between the two positions, and the pro-hunter should not grant it to the anti-hunter. More people are thus attracted to the pro-hunter's stronger horse; it wins the race, the election, and the prudence of public opinion. The more precisely we define the moral bankruptcy of the opponents' arguments, the more attractive we become, like iron filings drawn to a magnet. Those that oppose the hunt will tend to be silent rather than be humiliated, embarrassed, proved a fool or shown to be immoral.

THE NEW NORMAL

We now have a new normal where intimidation has supplanted reason and civilized discourse where argument is not challenged but is suppressed. Chris Dorsey explained how animal rights activists are engaged in a widespread, carefully orchestrated strategy to suppress opinions, redefine mainstream America's view of hunting, and intimidate both the media outlets that produce hunting content and their distributors. They use online flash mobs

to overwhelm media gatekeepers. Within their arsenal of tactics is the unrestrained use of death threats.

Dorsey explained that traditional magazine articles and white papers are useless when these groups can generate 30,000 emails in 48 hours, creating the kind of intimidation that brings even the biggest media companies and Fortune 500 advertisers to their knees almost instantaneously. New strategies, new alliances, and more aggressive rhetoric are needed to enable pro-hunting groups to hit those media outlets and advertisers with larger social media responses.

Resources to prosecute these cyber terrorists and new legislation are needed. Intimidation and bullying should not be euphemized as a lively exchange of ideas or as the measured presentation of the other side. That kind of thinking is intellectually sloppy and morally vacuous. Worse, it creates a moral equivalence between a reasoned position and any thuggery that an opponent tries to advance.

Let this serve as a call of action to our beloved hunter-conservation community. Let this serve as a basic guideline to initiate a plan for swift responses as well as preemptive strikes to the vile tactics of the anti-hunter. It is time to saddle a strong horse and ride. ■

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