

BECOMING A STATECRAFT EXPERT COURTESY OF TWITTER



WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

Because what's in a name? Everything.

By Robin Eileen Bernstein

MAY 6, 2020

Before Trump's impeachment, I didn't give much thought to ambassadors.

But now? Now I can rattle off names like they're those of old friends: [Marie Yovanovitch](#) ... Bill Taylor ... Gordon Sondland. And there's one more whose name I know, but for a different reason: the U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic Robin Bernstein. I know her name because it happens to be my name too.

Thanks to this what-are-the-odds coincidence, I'm trapped in a bizarre alternate

Twitterverse where a Democratic anti-Trump New York writer (me) is routinely mistaken for a Republican, [Mar-a-Lago](#)-founding, Trump-appointed diplomat (not me). “I’m tagged, therefore I am” determines my dual and dueling Twitter identities. Someone taps right name, wrong person, and tag, you’re it.

I’M OFTEN TAGGED ALONGSIDE TRUMP.

I first became aware of my doppelgänger in 2017 after noticing a large uptick in followers, all from the [Dominican Republic](#). Her nomination later that year unleashed an onslaught of tagged tweets that continues to this day. The irony is that when I joined a still-nascent Twitter, I felt victorious to have first dibs on my easy-to-remember handle: @RobinBernstein. I was the early bird (aptly named Robin) who got the worm. But that worm has developed a distinctly Pyrrhic aftertaste.

It’s more than a little disconcerting that I’m regularly confused with a federal official who, by all accounts, is my political opposite, especially since I’m fairly vocal online about my liberal leanings. I’m now followed by scores of Dominicans who don’t seem to realize, or care, that I’m not Ambassador Robin Bernstein talking to the press about fighting corruption, but that I’m the Robin Bernstein who, on Day Two of the impeachment hearings, was eating a bagel while watching another ambassador testify about fighting corruption.

It doesn’t help that my diplomatic double and I also look alike. We’re both Jewish boomers, just six years apart (she’s older), and have shoulder-length brown hair with bangs. I eventually added my middle name, Eileen, to my profile, along with “Not the ambassador to the Dominican Republic!”

My pinned tweet, which I posted before the other Robin Bernstein’s Senate confirmation, reads in part: “Dear citizens of the #DominicanRepublic: Sorry, I’m NOT your future Ambassador. Same name, same hair, different person.”

Has this dampened the tagfest? It's hard to say.

Thanks to my pushback, a Dominican newspaper, *El Pregonero*, ran a story with the awkwardly translated headline “North American Citizen Clarifies the Confusion with New U.S. Ambassador in the Country.” It featured side-by-side headshots and, yes, we look like sisters. The photos have since been removed. One tweet managed to get it wrong twice, tagged with my name yet showing a photo of a third Robin Bernstein, a Harvard professor.

Now when I see a flurry of Twitter notifications, although I may sigh in annoyance, it legitimately worries me. I'm often tagged alongside Trump and other top officials like Dominican President Danilo Medina.

Since the tweeter in chief isn't exactly known for his tagging accuracy, my fear of being swept up in an Oval Office tweetstorm is enough to make me consider entering the witness protection program. I'm only one viral tag away from becoming the unwitting, and unwilling, star of my very own fake news story.

Yet the flip side is that each tag is like someone handing me a mic on a public stage where private citizens don't belong. Which gives me an opportunity to turn this lemon into something tastier — like lemonade. Spiked with Dominican rum. Although it's tempting to use it as a soapbox, I don't. What if I triggered an international incident?



Translated from Spanish by Google

#SinCortapisa The US reacts to the use of Chinese technology; ambassador **@RobinBernstein** asks to prosecute companies linked to the case of the Odebrecht construction company **READ MORE**

👉 bit.ly/2CQ3tul



👤 Jean Alain Rodríguez and 9 others

10:46 AM · Nov 15, 2019 · [Twitter Web Client](#)

1 Like



RobinEileenBernstein @RobinBernstein · Nov 15

Replying to [@sincortapisatv](#) [@JeanARodriguezS](#) and 9 others

Huh? Did you just tag me--your esteemed Alternate Ambassador in NYC? Why, yes you did! 😊 Sorry it took a while to reply -- I was busy eating a sesame bagel & watching another ambassador testify about corruption on TV.



No, I'd rather reveal my identity with a splash of humor and a twist of snark. If nothing else, it's an excuse to waste — I mean, spend — time crafting clever retorts to misdirected tweets. Like when I was tagged along with Trump and others in a media tweet, in which my ambassadorial alter ego urged Dominicans not to vote for corrupt candidates in 2020.

In my reply, I encouraged Americans to do the same, which was likely a little *too* snarky because my tweet is now unavailable. I take that as a small victory.

One of my comments even prompted an event invitation from Dominican-American Rep. Adriano Espaillat, D-N.Y. He now follows me.

My favorite so far — maybe it's because I play drums — is a video of alternate-me dancing the bachata; apparently my conservative counterpart and I share a sense of rhythm.

Still, it's a tiresome game of Whac-A-Mole and I wish it would stop. Yes, I could ignore it. But there's a core part of me — the part that recoils at being linked to a president whose lies, corruption and cruelty I abhor — that needs to respond, over and over, "I'm not her!"

It's like identity theft insurance. If I find myself at the center of a tweet-nado, at least I've left a digital trail to the truth, something in short supply these days.

I've often wondered whether anybody, perhaps at the embassy, is enjoying my attempts at wit. I got an answer a few months ago in the form of a note from someone at the State Department, which said in part: "For obvious reasons, I come across your Twitter handle quite often. Your good humor, despite the obvious frustration, frequently brightens my day... Let me know if you are ever in the running for an ambassadorship... I know a country where you'll fit right in. Thanks for the giggles." That made my day.

I don't know how long the other Robin Bernstein will remain an ambassador. But as long as she does, I'll keep doing what I'm doing, and I hope it prompts a few more giggles and brightens someone else's day. Speaking as the official alternate ambassador, I can't think of a better form of diplomacy than that.

Robin Eileen Bernstein, OZY Author

3 Comments

Top ↕



Sandra Jo Lane Ramsay

Terrific! Couldn't have wished this opportunity on a nicer person - I'm always delighting in what you've written!❤️ Oh, yes, don't ever let the bastards get you down!😬

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Mary Herbert Kirton Love

Great essay. I would probably be even less restrained. As in get out the megaphone!!

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Susan Green

Great article Robin. Love it.

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