

The Democrats' Undeserving and Uncivil Campaign

Joe Biden's party doesn't deserve to win with such nasty media support, a campaign so dishonest, such an extreme platform, and such mediocre candidates.

by Conrad Black



Seven weeks from the 2020 election, American politics have reached such an appalling state of incivility that there is no precedent for it in American presidential history.

Of course, there was terrible acrimony between Jefferson and Hamilton, and by and against Andrew Jackson, and in the awful contentiousness leading up to and through the Civil War. Theodore Roosevelt called William Jennings Bryan a “logothete and a human trombone.” Many raved against Franklin D.

Roosevelt as a communist. As a very young man, I was shocked to hear on the radio in 1956 someone say of President Eisenhower (whose memorial is being unveiled in Washington this week): "I cannot vote for a sick old man with one foot in the grave and the other in his mouth." The Nixon era produced its own levels of opprobrium, ending in crowds singing "Jail to the chief," and it became very tiresome to hear Ronald Reagan described, in the words of Washington legal eminence Clark Clifford, as "an amiable dunce."

None of this has prepared us for the sea-to-sea, round-the-clock mud-slinging of the 2020 campaign.

I wrote last week how I was shocked that Peggy Noonan described President Trump in the *Wall Street Journal* on September 5 as "a malignancy metastasizing in the oval office." A week later, she fell to mind-reading, as less distinguished journalists and indifferent historians frequently do, and announced that the president, a graduate of the New York Military Institute and the greatest White House friend the American military has had at least since General Eisenhower, believes with the elder son of the Godfather (in the famous Coppola film), that people who join the armed forces are fools because their personal interests are not directly involved.

Coming from a distinguished journalist and a very decent and conscientious person, these reflections are a disgrace. No president of the United States should ever under any circumstances be described by a fellow citizen as a "malignancy." The particular failure and hypocrisy of the Trump-haters is that the crudeness they claim to hate in Trump is magnified in their own antagonism toward him. This undermines their case and it incites the suspicion that some of the charges they make against Trump are more accurately directed against them.

Naked Bias

This problem is compounded by the grossly unprofessional bigotry of 90 percent of the national political media. The *New York Times* apologized for failing to inform its readers of the rise of the Trump phenomenon shortly after the 2016 election. They have since declared as a matter of policy that they are not so much engaged in presidential reporting as in opposing this president, and the principal token dissenter from that position at the *Times*, Bari Weiss, resigned in July, disillusioned by the farcical tokenism of her position.

In the last few weeks, we've seen numerous examples of the naked bias of the television media. CNN's Don Lemon urged Democrats to oppose the rioting rather than continue to ignore it, because the polls were turning against his network's favored party on the issue. The same network's Jake Tapper has been giving partisan tactical advice to Pennsylvania Democratic congressional candidates. Recordings of the same network's Christopher Cuomo have been released in which Cuomo carefully coached convicted former Trump lawyer Michael Cohen on how to present his pre-discredited allegations of wrongdoing against his former client in the now very tired folkloric tale of Stormy Daniels.

No one wants political campaigns to be bland, and in this election there are clear and important policy choices. But even Democratic socialist Senator Bernie Sanders acknowledges that the president is gaining ground because all the Biden campaign is doing is slagging off Trump, and so are 90 percent of the national political media. The normalization of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and between Israel and Bahrain, and especially Trump's nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize, have been almost completely ignored by the media.

The president stretches credulity also, in claiming that a vote for Biden is a vote for mob rule and the Chinese

domination of the world. There is no chance that Joe Biden favors either, though his utterances incite the inference that he is under-concerned about them.

Biden's failure to raise the issue of urban violence at his own convention and his early indulgence of the Chinese position and his enthusiasm for the potential for U.S.-Chinese relations generally, were mistakes. But they do not justify Trump's exaggerations nor add credence to the objections of the Trump supporters that the Democratic media are being unduly hard on their candidate.

The core of the problem is that Trump's supporters found it exhilarating when he took the Republicans by storm and pulled out the election and pierced the pomposity and inertia of "the swamp" in Washington. It did follow a lengthy period of inadequate government by both parties and Donald Trump was the authentic spokesman for large numbers of honestly aggrieved and short-changed citizens. Still, Trump and his supporters do not describe Biden and his cronies as "malignancies."

Outside the Norm

The president's supporters rightly celebrate the fact that he has delivered on his promises, and the Democratic leaders in the Congress, who could have had agreements on infrastructure renovation, a comprehensive immigration deal resolving the status of the dreamers, and an extension of assistance to economic victims of the coronavirus, have spurned all of this to escalate confrontation with the administration. They did not accept the election as legitimate, signed onto the Russian collusion nonsense, and to the fatuous vote to impeach. Having said he could not be elected, and then that he could be removed in mid-term, the Democrats comforted themselves with the contrived assurance that he easily could be defeated at the polls, and have raised the rhetorical aggression to a barbarous crescendo.

Both sides are presenting a Manichaeian choice between good and evil policy, and are portraying their opponent negatively, but the Democrats and NeverTrumpers are outside the previously accepted norms of adequately civilized political conduct. They claim that Trump started it. Trump and his supporters acknowledge that they attacked the system which they believed had failed the country but not that they initiated a form of political combat that consisted of slinging outright lies at individuals.

The attempted illegal sabotage of Trump's campaign and his administration was a unique historic disgrace that is being investigated. The attempted orchestration of phony scandals coming up to the election is shabby but expected. The claim that the president thought war dead were "suckers" and "losers" has crumbled; the succeeding week's dirty trick, perennial hitman Bob Woodward's accusation of misleading the people about the gravity of the coronavirus for discreditable reasons has been defanged by Trump's arguments that he wished to avoid inciting panic, and quoting Churchill and Roosevelt.

The Democrats don't deserve to win with such nasty media support, a campaign so dishonest, such an extreme platform, and such mediocre candidates. If they do win, it will only be because of the savage personal assault on Trump as a Wagnerian monster, and the moral and political consequences of such a victory are even more disconcerting than the thought of Joe Biden and his far-left minders and managers gaining control of the flailing levers of power of the American state.

First published in