

The 1st Presidential Debate: Worse Is Yet to Come

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The 1st Presidential debate of 2020 held last night, September 29, was a reflection of the growing systemic social crisis in the USA. This is what we saw:

- 1) a refusal of the representatives (Trump & Biden) of the two wings of the Corporate Party of America to propose any actual solutions to the multiple crises now all intensifying across the country—health, economic, racism, and climate.
- 2) identity politics run amuck, now writ large at the highest political levels—i.e. the Great Distraction in full force, crowding out and preventing solutions to the crises.
- 3) a harbinger of political chaos just around the corner—at both a street level and in the major political institutions of the country—and the collapse of Democracy before our eyes.

The commentary of the media following the chaotic exchange (none dare call it a debate) focused on the ‘form’ rather than the content of the exchange: Trump went wild interrupting Biden and stealing much of Biden’s time. The moderator, Fox News’ Chris Wallace, was either incompetent in his inability to stop him or else willing to let him continue and intervening only when Trump had succeeded in drowning out most of Biden’s talk. Biden too was unable to deal with Trump’s antics, at times taking Trump’s bait and falling into his trap.

But what’s so new about all that? That’s Trump, who came to give a speech to his 40% voter ‘red’ base—i.e. the third party at the debate! Nevertheless, the media was shocked that Trump would engage in such an egotistical, disrespectful disregard for the rules of the debate which he had pre-agreed to. To the talking media heads the ‘form’ of the debate was thus more important than any content that might have addressed today’s multiple real crises.

1) The Multiple Crises Ignored (Economic, Health, Race, Climate)

Biden raised the New York Times’ story released over the weekend in which Trump’s tax returns showed Trump paid only \$750 in total federal income taxes over two years, 2016-2017. Trump of course denied it as ‘fake news’. And that was that. There was no follow up discussing the four decades long tax system rip off. Nor about why both parties (i.e. both wings of the one party) since 2001 have given investors, corporations, and the wealthiest US households more than \$15 trillion in tax cuts. GW Bush \$4.7T, Obama \$6.1T, Trump \$5T with both parties agreeing to another \$650B just last March.

Nor was there any mention of the escalating income inequality on both Republican & Democrat watches that was enabled by the \$15 trillion tax redistribution to corporations and the rich. Nothing was said why Trump's tax rip off resulted in wealthy investors getting \$3.4 trillion in stock buybacks and dividend payouts in just the last three years; or why under Obama they got more than \$6 trillion in buybacks & dividends on his watch!



And nothing was said by either of them why there are still 40 million American workers jobless, or why tens of millions of those lost jobs will never return, or why a long line of big corporations are now announcing permanent layoffs by the tens of thousands.

Biden never bothered to raise the point why millions of small businesses have gone under and millions more are about to do so. He could have quoted the National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB), the trade association arm of small businesses in the US, and its recent forecast that 21% of the roughly 30 million small businesses have already, or soon will close, if no real fiscal stimulus and bailout is passed. Trump of course ignored that altogether. He no doubt would have called the NFIB survey 'fake news'.

There was a brief exchange on US manufacturing by both candidates, but both were wrong on the facts. The business cycle in 2008-10 destroyed millions of manufacturing jobs, only some of which came back and then mostly as two tiered, temp, low paid, no benefits jobs. The current recession is now in repeat mode in manufacturing. Production is up but jobs aren't being restored. Biden could have indicated manufacturing was in a recession for the six months prior to Covid but he didn't. And neither candidate discussed why free trade deals, in addition to the recessions, have destroyed at least 4 million US manufacturing jobs. Biden clearly will not go there since they, like the Republicans, are champions of free trade deals. The Dems praised the recent phony NAFTA 2.0 agreement negotiated by Trump. Trump's promise to bring back those jobs in 2016 has been all smoke and mirrors. But did Biden bother to cite the facts?

And what about trade? Trump claimed his trade wars have been a glowing success. Is that why he's had to subsidize the farm sector with \$49 billion in cash handouts since 2018 (with \$17B more promised)! If his trade wars have been so successful, why has he had to funnel billions of dollars in hand outs to his agribusiness buddies? Why have more than 10,000 small farmers gone bankrupt in recent years every year? Biden said nothing of this subsidy to agribusiness still earning billions in profits or the bankruptcies of small family farms. For Biden the 'trade problem' is not the escalating subsidies to business or the destruction of jobs in the millions; it's just a China deficit issue, the numbers of which he couldn't even quote correctly.

So far as the health/Covid crisis is concerned, there was an exchange in last night's 'debate'. But it came down to Biden saying we should wear masks and Trump saying a vaccine was around the corner. That's it. Biden noted correctly, of course, that Trump has

grossly mismanaged the handling of the virus response. To which Trump simply retorted Biden would close down the entire economy again. Trump's position is 'Horror of horrors! We can't save grandma and grandpa if the profits of our nail salons are the cost'! Biden's position: Yes we can. Let's all wear masks.

But where was the discussion that the US total reliance on private businesses and 'markets' has in large part been responsible for the magnitude of the Covid crisis in the US? The US had outsourced its production of PPE to China and elsewhere before the crisis. There was no mention of that, because both parties have agreed for decades to provide business tax incentives to move operations offshore. There was not a word about the responsibility of US businesses that conveniently offshored critical US goods like PPE and now testing agents to ensure greater profits for themselves. Now, with a second Covid wave imminent this winter, the US still lacks reagents and other pharmaceutical materials needed to do effective testing. Six months into the Covid crisis US business continues to offshore production of critical health supplies, despite US deaths are now predicted to exceed 400,000 by year's end. That's more US dead in less than a year than occurred during nearly four years of World War II. But still no war production plan is in place in the US. Neither Trump or Biden has proposed one. Trump, the great admirer of private business and stock markets, is still reluctant act like a 'war president' in the worst war confronting the US since 1941. Why? Because he knows that means stepping on the toes of his business buddies and election campaign contributors. For the same reason Biden won't go there.

For Biden to propose putting the US on a war production footing would mean seizing the necessary production assets of private business, including big pharma companies, and returning it all to the US under a central war production plan. His wing of the Corporate Party of America is no more interested in doing that than Trump's wing. Nor Trump or Biden explained how a vaccine might be fairly distributed to all Americans next year, or how a million tests a day would be produced and administered.

Biden not surprisingly defended Obamacare, the ACA, focusing on how it protected pre-existing conditions. Trump bragged about how he gutted it by ending the individual mandate.

But what did both say about the fact nearly 50 million workers and families are again uninsured? And at least another 30-40 million grossly under-insured? Biden's answer was to add the 'public option' to Obamacare—which Obama himself pulled from the ACA in 2010. That way private employers can keep their tax write offs for continuing to provide their employees health insurance while the health insurers can continue to reap record profits from both private employer plans and the ACA. Biden specifically reject any notion of Medicare for All. Trump said he had an alternative plan to replace ACA—which he's been saying for three years but not showing!

In short, both candidates provided no answer to how to manage the continuing Covid crisis, nor to the even worse general health crisis in the US. The USA remains in the ranks of 3rd world banana republics when it comes to the health security of all but the wealthiest of its citizens.

And what about the discussion of race relations and policing in America? Here a heated exchange did occur. Biden's answer was to get local police departments, politicians and select community leaders together to 'unite America'. Somehow that would end systemic

racism and institutionalized police repression. Trump attacked that idea as well as race 'sensitivity' training programs in general, which he recently declared cancelled. According to Trump, the programs were demeaning to whites and suggested they were reverse racists. White folks don't want to be reminded of that, he said. Even more, they don't want to be forced to 'role play' as blacks. It's demeaning. And that was that, i.e. the full extent of the discussion of systemic racism in America: let's do more sensitivity training (Biden); let's not because it's reverse racism and might make his white folk political base uncomfortable. They don't like being even role played as black (Trump).

And climate change? Biden's answer was to rejoin the Paris Accords and maybe spend some more money on alternative energy infrastructure, as he went out of his way to reiterate his rejection of the notion of a 'Green New Deal'. Trump's answer to climate warming was it was too expensive for American business, even though they're reaping historical maximum profits and getting trillions of dollars of tax cuts and subsidies every year. Trump then attacked Biden for California being consumed by forest fires, saying the Dems there have mismanaged the forest floor by not raking up enough leaves. Biden said nothing in return about the fact that 65% of California's forests are federal land, and if anyone was responsible for not 'raking the leaves' it was Trump's own Interior Department. But he did say there were larger storms in Iowa, whatever that meant. Neither candidate has a clue what to do about the climate crisis.

In summary, neither Trump or Biden addressed the real issues or proposed any credible solutions to the multiple crises afflicting America today— multiple crises now intensifying, converging, and exacerbating each other.

2) Identity Politics Run Amuck

What we also saw in the first presidential debate is a reflection—at the highest level of politics and within the US elite itself—of the country's descent into the muck of identity politics.

US society is becoming mired in the plague of identity politics. At all levels, the focus is increasingly on extreme individualism—often at the expense of the public good. Rational discussion and solutions to collective crises are crowded out of public discourse. Replaced by fear-mongering appeals to identity among their political supporters by politicians and elites of both wings of the Corporate Party of America.

White European Americans are fearful their culture, jobs, and 'way of life' is about to give way to the 'others'—i.e. all peoples of color whether Latin, Muslim, and other immigrants coming into the country; and to those of color already (African Americans) here but growing in number as well.

Like the Jews in Germany, large sections of white European Americans see black Americans as the 'others' living within our midst but not really one of us. Like the German Jews, they are the foreigners allowed to come here by past politicians. As in Germany, the 'others' become the 'enemy within' and symbol of all the causes of their economic and social fears, insecurity, and anxiety—as politicians and elites re-direct the cause of social decay from their policies to the 'others'—i.e. immigrants, blacks, LGBTQ, etc. Immigrants, blacks, and gays are the cause of their declining standard of living, their culture, and their way of life—i.e. Trumpublicans and their media); white European 'deplorables' are preventing you people of color from achieving your rightful identity as equals to white European Americans—i.e. Democrats and their media.

It's all part of the 'Great Distraction', designed to allow the elites of both wings to continue to pick all our pockets while we're preoccupied with identity issues and politics. So long as we're immersed in issues of identity there's no need to divide and conquer so they can continue to pick our pockets. Identity means by definition we've divided ourselves from each other.

Technology of course plays a conscious role in enabling the descent into extreme individualism and dead end identity.

The youngest are mesmerized by their electronic gadgets that enable them to focus neurotically on themselves for hours upon hour every day, absorbing most of their waking lives. Young adults are immersed in social media sourced news and pseudo-facts. As they grow realize they are condemned to lives of indentured, low pay, part time and temp service employment, they desperately seek and embrace simplistic ideologies as an explanation for their plight. Middle age adult become increasingly insecure and fearful as they see their families' futures dim and realize they are approaching older age and retirement without pensions and sufficient income to keep themselves from poverty. They look for a 'strongman' to save them in time.

They all become fodder for clever manipulation, fear mongering by media talking heads, and conspiracy theories multiplying daily on social media that substitute for the thinking and evaluating facts and opinions that is necessary for rational thought. The network does the thinking for them. People fearful and in crisis grab the nearest exit and short cut to explain their situation and propose a solution.

The capitalist media no longer consists of objective presenters of facts and events but subjective interpreters and spinners of facts and events. The subjective media is the new priest providing the congregation of the fearful and desperate the answers it wants them to absorb—except now it all occurs on a daily and by the minute basis instead of just on Sunday mornings. The result is predictable: when confronted with objective facts, such facts are rejected since they don't conform to the rapidly expanding fantasy world of conspiracies and the messaging of media spin doctors.

Tell me what I already believe or I'll listen to someone else who will! Don't tell me what I don't want to hear'. Tell me something so that I can cheer: 'Hooray for our side'.

People are so concerned trying to understand who they are, that they are unable to see who they are becoming—at the hands of political elites who have found playing the identity card works well for keeping folks—white and non-white—from understanding the real source of their fears, their anxieties, their growing angst. That real source originates in the policies of both parties that are ever-enriching their wealthy elites at the expense of the rest of society.

Identity politics is the Heroin fix necessary to create the social stupor of the Great Distraction. And the flip side of the Great Distraction of identity politics is the Big Rip-off—where the same elites and politicians of both wings of the Corporate Party of America pick our pockets.

What we've just seen at the highest level in yesterday's 1st presidential debate is the same focus on Identity politics, albeit now write large at the highest level. The same Great Distraction that has been intensifying in America for years. The same Big Rip Off in action! As the former intensifies, the latter grows in tandem.

In the first presidential debate both Biden and Trump immersed themselves in a personality

food fight, like teenagers in a high school cafeteria: Trump attacked Biden as 'sleepy Joe' who Trump even suggested failed to graduate from the college. Adding to Trump's pre-debate comments that Joe has early onset dementia and has to take performance drugs to stay awake and debate. Biden in turn declared Trump a clown. A neurotic egotist. Sick. Mentally unfit.

The disease of identity politics in America has thus bubbled up like foul smelling swamp gas from society at large, to the very top echelons of the American political elite. Every election cycle we say the quality of the candidates put up to represent can't get worse; but it does.

Listening to the media commentators at CNN and other outlets after the 'debate', the talking head experts were perplexed and repeatedly asked each other why any voter would continue to support Trump after his childish performance in last night's debate? Conversely, at Fox the spin was his performance was precisely why his base continues to support him. What the former don't understand, and the latter won't admit, is that Trump's 40% base remains solid no matter what he says, how he says it, or what he does. And that's for a fundamental reason that also has to do with Identity.

For white European Americans, Trump is the bulwark against the 'others'. He stands unequivocally against the changing demographic where White Europeans will soon no longer constitute the majority. They fear should that happen, not only their jobs but their culture, their values, their religion, and 'their America' will be no more! That single, fundamental reason is why they overlook everything about Trump and still support him regardless of his racism, his misogyny, his proto-fascist inclinations, his disrespect for democratic practices and norms, his verbal slips about 'suckers and losers', and all the rest. Nothing matters except he hold back the wave of colored folks of varying hues that will take away their America.

And with more than 350 million guns in America (and more than 15 million assault rifles) many of them are prepared to go to violent extremes if need be. Many are just waiting for the 'Big Dog Whistle' from Trump.

3) A Political Crisis of Unimaginable Dimensions

In an essay entitled, 'A Most Dire Warning' a couple weeks ago this writer predicted the most likely scenario following the November 3 election. It included Trump taking legal action to stop the mail in ballot vote counting by turning to his now many Federal District and Appeals court recent ideological judge appointees. The scenario includes Trump declaring himself the winner on November 3-4, knowing that more Republicans will vote directly that day than will mail in ballots than Biden supporters will vote directly. CNN polls show 66% of Trump supporters will vote directly vs. only 22% Biden supporters. That means Trump will likely show an early lead, supported by exit polling. But he must stop the mail ballot counting or he may lose in the end. He will rely on his 6-3 US Supreme Court majority to support Appeals court decisions to stop the voting in select swing or blue states. There is a precedent for this already. It's exactly what the Supreme Court did in 2000 to 'select' George W. Bush as president. It stopped the vote recount in Florida to give Bush the presidency. Only this time it will be multiple states and the original mail in ballot vote counting that may be halted. Protests that erupt will be met with physical police force. That too is being planned. Protestors will be identified as 'Antifa' and 'BLM' militants and repressed. The federal police force created in 2002 for the first time in US history—called the DHS—are the favored instruments. But Trump may call on his radical fascist street

supporters to assist where necessary as well. The more the street level social chaos the more likely the Supreme Court will tend to try to settle the dispute to end the street chaos.

In yesterday's debate, the moderator asked Trump if he would call on his street supporters to not get involved. To this he answered, " the Proud Boys (a widespread neo-fascist group in America today) Stand Back. Stand Down". Immediately the radical right, hearing these words, began to mobilize and prepare for Trump's 'big dog whistle' on November 4.

Trump will not accept the outcome should he lose on November 3. Nor in January 2021. He said "we might not know for months" the final vote count. That means well beyond January 2021. In the meantime, he further noted he's "Counting on the Supreme Court to look at the ballots". Will the SCOTUS review the tens of millions of mail in ballots directly! Trump concluded "This is not going to end well".

For his part, Biden declared to the TV audience "He can't stop you from the outcome of this election". If we get the votes, he's not going to stay in power". But what Biden fails to understand is we may not get all the votes if the mail ballots end of not being counted—as happened in 2000 in Florida thanks to the same Supreme Court that is soon even more in Trump's camp! Biden's pre-debate statement that the US military will 'escort him out of the White House' was wishful thinking as well. The Pentagon generals the next day publicly stated the they would not get involved. So who will 'escort' Trump out? The Democrats have no executive arm; Trump does: the DHS swat teams and most of the police departments in the country that support his election.

And then there's the Proud Boys who may just descend upon Washington D.C. and take up positions around the White House, armed with their AR-15s. Who's going to try to escort Trump out in that scenario?

The foregoing exchange by Trump and Biden on the day of the election and after was undoubtedly the most important exchange of the entire 1st presidential debate. All the rest was irrelevant verbal bombast, appeal to identity politics, and personality clash. Viewers of the debate learned nothing about how America might extract itself from its intensifying multiple crises. What they learned is that a political crisis may be coming, the likes of which haven't been seen in America since 1860.

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