

Echo Chamber US Politics: The “All About Trump” Democratic National Convention

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*It was hard to stomach. The usual suspects, the usual scripts tatty from overuse. The 2020 Democratic National Convention was a prolonged display of avoidance, evasion and theatrical amnesia. There were moments of formality masquerading as promise: **Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez** [nominating Senator Bernie Sanders](#) for presidential candidate. But it was not to be. The decision had long been made in advance: the Democrats wanted Joe Biden, and so did Ocasio-Cortez. “If you were confused no worries!” [she tweeted](#). “Convention rules require roll call & nominations for every candidate that passes the delegate threshold.” She had been asked to second the nomination for Sanders.*

Few previous conventions could have been so heavily fussed with a non-attendee. The only thing that mattered was President Donald J. Trump. It was, in fact, the most devotional display of rage to an absent figure imaginable. There was little in the way of substantive promise for change; there was everything in the way of seeking restoration instead of resolution, the Democratic Bourbon Return that will do nothing to deal with the trauma patient that is the US Republic.

Hillary Clinton got into the [grievance register](#), playing her slightly deranged they-took-it-from-me look despite claiming an initial readiness to owe Trump “an open mind and the chance to lead.” There had been little improvement from 2016, no contemplative licking of wounds, merely platitudes that the Biden-Harris combination would see the rainbow of togetherness break over disturbed US skies. Crucial to her was voting, and voting en masse. “Remember: Joe and Kamala can still win 3 million more votes and still lose. Take. It. From. Me. We need numbers so overwhelming Trump can’t sneak or steal is way to victory.” That’s the Clinton we have all come to know.

Barack Obama, [delivering his address](#) from Philadelphia, took the teacher’s tone to a pupil who had ceased to pay attention in class.

“I did hope, for the sake of our country, that Donald Trump might show some interest in taking the job seriously; that he might come to feel the weight of the office and discover some reverence for the democracy that had been placed in his care.”

This entrustment had led to catastrophe: 170,000 Americans dead, millions of jobs lost, a reputation tarnished “and our democratic institutions threatened like never before.” Trump had deployed the US military as “political props” against peaceful protesters; attacked the press as the enemy. For his part, Obama mourning the flaying of the Constitution and democracy can only go so far. His administration had an appetite for prosecutions against

whistleblowers – or at the very least [for not stopping them](#). He [sidestepped](#) Congress in 2011 in ordering unilateral air-strikes on Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi. He was responsible for the dubious practice of murderous drone strikes, even against US nationals.

In December, 2016, **Conor Friedersdorf**, in teasing out the implications of Obama’s lethal drone policy, [argued](#) that he had “set dangerous precedents”. He had excluded the policy from the courts; he had affirmed the primacy of the state in such matters and cratered much foreign real estate on the way. “Thanks to Obama’s actions, Donald Trump will be inaugurated into an office that presumes the authority to secretly order the extrajudicial killings of American citizens.”

As was the chosen formula for the Convention, what mattered about Biden was not being Trump. Biden the empathiser, the decent, the believer in all, as opposed to Trump, supposedly none of those. “When he talks with someone who’s lost his job,” reflected Obama, “Joe remembers the night his father sat him down to say he’d lost his.” Not exactly thick on vision or policy and certainly not reflective on his own role in bringing Trump to power in the first place.

Kamala Harris served up the prosecutorial brief on [accepting the nomination](#) for Vice President. It was cut and dried for the chorus and the converts. Her multi-ethnic background got an airing. There was mention of structural racism. There was an odd suggestion that coronavirus, despite lacking eyes, “knows exactly how we see each other – and how we treat each other.” There was no intention, let alone effort, to convince any swaying voters. “I know a predator when I see one.” Debra J. Saunders of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* was polite in [her assessment](#): Harris was doing her job as her campaign wanted it done. “But the campaign is clueless. And the usually sharp Harris seemed so as well.” Again, the Clinton trap: surely, the choice for candidate is obvious, is it not? Only a lunatic would vote for the other fella.

Biden’s [speech](#) tried to avoid the mammoth elephant in the convention zoom room, but it proved impossible. Trump remained a satanic centrepiece, as he had for the entire convention. “If this president is re-elected we know what will happen.” Biden tried focusing on personality, not ideas, apart from promising a “national strategy” against the coronavirus. Emotion, not thought, mattered. He knew loss. “I know that deep black hole that opens up in your chest ... I know how mean and cruel and unfair life can be sometimes.” To cope, you find purpose.

The incumbent, however, remained the lingering spectre at the gloomy feast. “The current President has cloaked America in darkness for much too long. Too much anger. Too much fear. Too much division.” Remove the cloak, he implored. “I will be an ally of the light, not of the darkness. It’s time for us, for We the People, to come together.”

The Democratic National Convention left the republic as it started. The US remains bitterly divided, its fault lines of rage and desperation sundering. Trump’s [counter](#) was as predictable as it was obtuse, suggesting that the chaotic ruined republic would not heal under a Biden presidency. The Democrats “spent four straight days attacking America as racist and a horrible country that must be redeemed.” The incumbent is the president of lawless disorder, and he is staking a claim that the only recipe to lingering illness is to take another dose of poison. Biden’s preference is for a different, distracting potion: drink it, forget and hope that someone puts Humpty Dumpty together again.

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