

Dem debates 1.0

I don't mind telling you that watching the first round of Democratic Party candidates go at each other last night was painful. In a way it reminded me of the Republican debates of 2016 when 16 of the GOP's best were knocked down one by one like beanbags at a county fair by then candidate, Donald J. Trump.

Hosted by MSNBC and its never shy and retiring band of hatchet men and women posing as journalists, the event venue was packed with younger Democrat-leaning voters from Miami. Unlike other debates hosted by Fox and some of the mainstream media outlets, the MSNBCers reveled in the hoots and hollers of their audience and made no attempt to quiet them down. More like a pep rally for the most extreme political talking points on the planet than anything substantive, this debate was like speed dating without the payoff.

With ten candidates to deal with and so many issues to cover it could have been nothing less. I almost felt sorry for them, and had I been a Democrat I would have, but it was their own doing. I don't envy any of the candidates' handlers, either. They hadn't much in the way of options. Bill de Blasio obviously got the message to 'interrupt often' and 'forcefully' as he did at every turn and challenged his opponents to get real and man up and be real Democrats. He succeeded at becoming a burr under everyone's saddle. 'The only Latino on the stage' Julian Castro took de Blasio's baton and proceeded to single out Robert F. (just call me 'Beto') O'Rourke and pummel him with it for not saying he would reverse a law enabling the arrest of illegal immigrants.

Trying to beat him back, O'Rourke kept talking, but so did Castro. No moderator stepped in to separate them. The final straw was Castro's comment, 'you haven't done your homework,' and Beto's face took on the look of a deer in the headlights just before it's smashed to smithereens by a pickup truck. There was another dust-up on America's role in international conflicts, specifically, Afghanistan, between Tulsi Gabbard and Tim Ryan. Ryan came away with a bloody nose and Gabbard looked very pleased with herself. (Incidentally, several media outlets crowned Gabbard the winner of the debate.)

Predictably, Amy Klobuchar captured the middle ground early on, but she was challenged by former CEO and now Congressman John Delaney. Sounding like John Kasich in the 2016 debates, Delaney tried to push the bus out of the ideological rut it was in over to the more moderate middle of the road but just couldn't get traction amid the barrage of far-lefty remarks by Lizzie Warren, Cory Booker and Bill de Blasio. Washington State's Governor, Jay Inslee, raised the environmental flag at every opportunity and was conspicuous by his statement that climate change was America's number one, two and three issue.

It was clear to me that MSNBC had already anointed Elizabeth Warren as the evening's presumptive winner, as they went to her with every third question. *In real terms, however, Cory Booker walked away with the most talk time of all ten.* Though the old, "I was born in a log cabin and into a world of extreme poverty" line was missing from the candidates' personal stories, several of them like Warren, Castro and Klobuchar stressed their modest upbringings. It would have been disingenuous in the very least for several of the others to have tried that ploy since many were born into upper middle class families of privilege like Booker and O'Rourke, for example.

My biggest takeaway from this two-hour two-step was the simple fact that the Democrats have moved so far left that they are literally off the traditional values radar. It was down with capitalists, down with the oil barons, down with the pharmaceutical companies and down with the insurance industry. It was up with a 'Green New Deal,' up with abortion rights for transgender women (I still don't understand that one), up with taxes on the rich fat cats, and Medicare for all, etc.

The bottom line must be that all ten were trying their best to court the radical elements of the younger voting public, and if the issues that were raised and the comments that were made about them resonate with this demographic and stimulate a mass youth voter voting wave in 2020 then the popular vote numbers could be even higher for the Dems in 2020 than they were in 2016.

If that happens, some more electoral votes could move the Dems' way. That's why it's incumbent upon the Republicans to start telling the true story about how America got powerful and prosperous. If they don't, we're all in trouble. Darwin's law of natural selection won't save us because there's another law - a Gumpism - that's even more powerful... "stupid is as stupid does." Maybe Julian Castro and Beto O'Rourke can work "estupido es como estupido lo hace" into their stump speeches. It does have a certain ring to it.

Stephan Helgesen is a former career U.S. diplomat who lived and worked in thirty different countries for over 25 years. He is now a political analyst and strategist and author of ten books and over 1,000 articles on politics, the economy and social trends. He can be reached at: stephan@stephanhelgesen.com