

## The dimming of the torch

Who would have thought that that obstreperous California Democrat Eric Swalwell would fire the opening shot in the war on senior politicians? Certainly not me. In case you weren't watching the Dems' second debate last night, it was a visual not to be forgotten. Ten wildly different candidates all vying for the nation's highest office showed exactly what they're made of and it isn't sugar and spice and everything nice. This story is complicated, and in order to keep things straight, let me go through the two hours at fast forward speed.

The moderators made the perfunctory pitch to the audience to "keep their reactions to a minimum" even though they knew the audience would ignore them. The first debate proved that. It struck me as no accident that MSNBC had undergone an internal 'diversity deep dive' before configuring their questioner panel because they ended up with: a Black man, a White woman, a White man, a Hispanic man and an openly homosexual woman. Almost all the boxes were checked (though there were no Asians and no transgenders) so that they could truly reflect the 'real America' as opposed to the alabaster whiteness of Fox News, for example. Introducing the panel was Brian Williams who managed to get in a dig at candidate Andrew Yang for his attire. This was one of the few times that I empathized with poor Brian W. His statement, "Would it have killed him to wear a tie?" was the first of many generational death knell signals that would sound for 'old-fashioned' propriety and decorum.

While he was introducing his colleagues, they were busy giggling at their desk like teenage girls at a sleepover. Death knell number two, as the irony of their conduct and their admonition to the audience about keeping a lid on it while they were acting goofy was glaring.

The questioning was predictable and so were the answers. We'd all heard them before in other venues, but the forced brevity of a minute for explaining themselves was clearly irritating to them as it was to most of us. They all hit the right politically-expedient tone and all served to position themselves in the protected school crosswalk of Progressivism. There were no "when did you stop beating your wife" questions that would assume guilt. No, these questions were only asked to check a box on national TV.

From that perspective they didn't disappoint. Sanders repeated his socialist talking points on healthcare, the evil 1% and income inequality. Kamala Harris played the hard-core Leftist economist that demanded a retraction of the 'wealthy's tax cut.' John Hickenlooper stood for a more moderate stand on private healthcare insurers but managed to strike a blow for women's 'reproductive rights' (aka abortion). Sanders also threw out what were the most despicable accusations of the night when he said, "Trump is a phony, a pathological liar and a racist."

The moderators got what they wanted... a few juicy sound bites. Kirsten Gillibrand followed on with, 'this isn't a war about capitalism versus socialism; it's about greed.' I don't know if she meant the greed of socialism or the greed of the wealthy. Then Gillibrand took to interrupting everybody, perhaps following the de Blasio example of the evening before. And then we had what I call the 'Berlitz moment' with an exchange in Spanish between questioner Diaz-Balart and Mayor Pete Buttigieg. How do you say 'pandering' in Spanish? Oh, yeah, 'complaciendo.' I'm reminded of something somebody once told me about polyglots of which Pete B. is one, "It's not how many languages you speak, but how much sense you make in any of them." Okay, Pete speaks Spanish. I get it and he probably got some points for doing it on national TV with the 40 million Spanish speakers out there and Telemundo, but what about the 3.4 million Chinese speakers, the 1.7 million Tagalog (also Filipino) speakers and the 1.5 million Vietnamese in the U.S.?

To use a Leftist term, this was blatant ethnic appropriation and unfair to everybody else like the French, Arabic and Korean speakers that account for another 3.5 million people residing in this U.S. and whose language wasn't used to sell the Progressive laundry soap in this U.S. Tower of Babel. But I digress.

Pete said he wanted to give free college to poor students, but Swalwell interrupted (showing his willingness to get in the game without being asked). Then it was Andrew Yang's turn, and he promptly said he would give everybody a \$1000/month, presumably as a way to solve the chronic problem of automation. He then said that he would impose a Value Added Tax that would pay for it. Wait. It was Swalwell again. This time he was criticizing old ideas and channeled Biden from 32 years ago about 'passing the torch' to a new generation. Looking down the line of faces he repeated it, 'pass the torch, pass the torch to a new generation.'

The message wasn't lost on the audience and it was if someone had burst the 'don't go there' bubble and dared to tell the emperor (Biden) that he was naked and his presence was no longer desired...anywhere, and that he could take his little dog of moderate old-timey politics and go back to Kansas. Biden didn't take the bait (or he didn't hear it) and responded with some talking points about a better education for America's youngsters, etc. It was Bernie's turn. He underscored the need to 'take on the big money interests.' The uncomfortable generational challenge moment still hung in the air.

It was at this point that Kami H. broke the tension with, "Americans don't want a food fight; they want to know how to put food on the table!" Then she channeled her inner executioner to castigate Donald Trump...for everything. With every passing second she got sterner and sterner until Lester Holt said everybody in favor of eliminating the private health insurance companies raise your hands. Up shot Bernie Sanders' and Kami Harris'. Everyone else's rested firmly at their sides.

Gillibrand piped up. Competition in healthcare is necessary. Buttigieg countered, 'Medicare for all needs to be explained.' "We cannot be left to the tender mercies of the corporate system." He sounded like he was in a Shakespeare play instead of on a debate stage. At this point, Joe Biden launched into a look back on his personal story of losing his wife and child and then later his grown son. Biden looked and sounded convincing and ended by salvaging his Obama years by saying, "We need to build on Obamacare! Everyone should have an option."

The baton was passed to Sanders who invoked Canada's experience with national healthcare, and he cited statistics that the healthcare companies had been making obscene profits, at which point Marianne Williamson said that we have a 'sicknesscare' problem not a healthcare one. Michael Bennett confessed to having had prostate cancer and it was at this point that I feared everyone was going to lift up their shirts or skirts and show their incision scars. Perish the thought. Fortunately, Bennett reminded everybody (and Bernie too) that Canada has a population of 35 million versus our 300 million plus population and that maybe it was a little easier to administer such a program there?

Sanders said we have to stop greed. Another interruption, this time from Kami H. who spoke of clogged emergency rooms and then blasted the insurance companies. Time for another show of hands. This time it was, 'who was in favor of giving illegal immigrants free healthcare (after the rest of us get it)?' Everybody's hand went up in solidarity. Pete B. said that 'when we're healthier we're all healthier.' My silent response was 'duh.'

Biden's response was, "(illegal) immigrants are good for America; we have to cover everybody." Finally, the big genie was let out of the bottle. It was time to talk about immigration and it was Kami's turn. She had been gathering steam and waiting for this moment, and you could tell. "We need to reauthorize DACA, extend deadlines for deportation of their parents, etc. And then she blamed Donald Trump for everything. She ended with a look that could sink a thousand ships. Hickenlooper said that the world is watching us as we 'kidnap kids' from their parents and that we need to reform ICE along humanitarian lines.

Author Williamson chimed in. 'It was kidnapping and child abuse and a state-sponsored crime.' It was at this juncture that I knew that Williams had been struck off the list for barbecue night at the White House.

Another interruption from our favorite Senator, Kirsten G. "Donald Trump has torn apart our moral fabric and given taxpayer money to for-profit prisons." Hands up everyone; who thinks illegal border crossing should be a civil offense not a crime? Most hands went up, but a few didn't. Mayor Pete called for *God's feelings about separating children*. Since God wasn't invited to participate, the stage was silent for a few seconds. Biden answered instead. "Send money to Central America and reunite these families." Biden's eyes were steely when he was asked about the large numbers of immigrants that were deported during his time in office. "We need to deport criminals not undocumented aliens" was his answer. Sanders said, "Rescind everything and invite the leaders of Central American countries and Mexico to DC for a meeting." Swalwell couldn't contain himself and stated that, "We mustn't let Trump weaponize the Census."

Kami agreed and went back in time to the directive she sent out to 'her' sheriffs in CA about apprehending illegal aliens. Only deport those who have committed a real crime. On trade, Michael Bennett said that Russia was more dangerous to us than China and that our border was a "symbol of nativist hostility." Andrew Yang agreed that Russia was a threat and that the trade war hurts both sides. Buttigieg went all professorial and gave much more information than the audience could digest.

Marianne Williamson said, out of the blue, that Democrats should stand together and give reparations to the descendents of slaves. On the subject of race in America, Kami looked at Biden and said that she didn't believe he was a racist but then began to harangue him for working with other racists. She was in full take-down mode but pulled back and then went soft when she saw Biden tightening up and getting ready to launch a counter-attack. He did and this went back and forth for what seemed like hours. Her blows were glancing but hurt him. It was palpable.

Death knell number three and another knife was plunged into the older generation's pragmatic politics. Harris was gloating inside but remained innocent-looking on the outside. She knew she had hurt Biden. Sanders, feeling his comrade was being unfairly attacked tried to shift the focus to what America stands for. "Diversity. We believe in it." Then he hurried back to the 1% versus the 99%. After a few more general questions about money in politics (get rid of it), bi-partisanship (a few supported it), tax cuts (only for the middle class), the environment (get with it by re-signing the Paris Climate Accord and taxing those evil gas and oil producers), a 'woman's right to choose' (no restrictions on abortion) and gun ownership (confiscate and litigate) and a few more pat answers that served to 'bond' the group together, it was time to wind up...thankfully.

One hour and fifty minutes had passed and I for one was ready for a stiff drink. Everybody acquitted themselves well. No forced errors. It was clear that this is the gang that knows what it wants (power) but not who it wants to wrest it from the Republicans. It knows its issues but isn't in agreement on them as a party. It believes that it can win by force of virtue-signaling, relying on confirmation bias, mobilizing the youth vote and capitalizing on Democrat anger, and they may be right. If they ever do get their act together and find an articulate and charismatic spokesman/woman they might pose a threat to Donald Trump. If not, they will be remembered as the *Don Quixote Class of 2020* and will have a few lances for sale...cheap.

Key words from the debate: 'Love' (a seldom-used word in politics) by Marianne Williamson, 'pathological liar' by Bernie Sanders, and 'pass the torch' (to indicate the end of an era or generation) by Eric Swalwell.

Winner: Kamala Harris for her bulldog toughness and willingness to destroy a colleague, Joe Biden.  
Losers: Everybody else including all the moderate Democrats and the 'Silent Generation' (Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden's generation)

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