

Opinion — The Nation Deserves Better Than That Debate. Or Does It?

Could **Trump** Temper His Loutishness? Could Biden Sustain Semi-Acuity For 90 Minutes? No, And No.

By George F Will, Columnist *The Washington Post*
28 June 2024 (@ 1300 Hrs EDT)

Jaundiced Voters Have Defined Adequacy So Far Down That They Surely Were Not Expecting Thursday Evening To Feature Witty Badinage, Or Even A Few Stray Facts About The Nation's Condition Or Policies For Improving It. Rather, Such Voters Wondered: Would **Donald Trump** Temper His Loutishness? Could President Biden Sustain Semi-Acuity For 90 Minutes? Their Questions Were Answered: No, And No.

Trump, Who Is Never As Jolly As Father Christmas, Was As Constantly Cranky As Usual. His Fleeting Moments Of Semisobriety Perhaps Only Seemed To Be Such Because They Contrasted With His Adversary's Struggles. Biden Mostly Resembled Someone Who Has Forgotten Not Where The Car Keys Are **But What They Are For**.

Perhaps The Nation Is By Now In A Torpor, Resigned To The Spectacle Of, As The Phrase Goes, Two Bald Men Fighting Over A Comb. Perhaps, However, Thursday Night — The Campaign's Nadir (So Far) — Was For The Best. The Democratic Party Might Yet A Give Thought To The National Interest. Persisting With Biden's Candidacy, Which Is As Sad As It Is Scary, Rather Than Nominating A Plausible Four-Year President, Would Rank As ***The Most Reckless — And Cruel — Act Ever By A U.S. Party.***

Trump, Who Is At Most A One-Trick Pony, Adopted The Prudent Strategy Of Ignoring The Moderator's Questions, Lest He Need To Know Something. What Did He Think About Jan. 6, 2021? "On Jan. 6, We Had A Great Border." Perhaps He Remembered Ralph Waldo Emerson's Axiom: When Skating On Thin Ice, Safety Comes From Speed.

Biden Reached Into The Almost Empty Shelves Of Progressivism's Pantry Of Ideas For His Solution To All Domestic Problems. Social Security Impending Insolvency — A \$23 Trillion Cash Shortfall Over Three Decades? Tax The Rich. The Manhattan Institute's Brian Ride Says: *Abolishing* The Cap On Income Taxed For Social Security (\$168,000) Would Supply Only About Half The Shortfall. And This Would Divert "Nearly All Available Upper-Income Tax Increases To Pay For Benefits For Baby Boomers."

Biden, Who Has At Most A One-Track Mind, Yet Again Insinuated That The Political And Judicial Institutions Of America's Democracy Would Crumble Like Papier-Mâché Under The Onslaught Of A Reelected Trump. But Three Days Before Thursday's Debate, Biden Was Yet Again Found To Have Shredded A Constitutional Norm.

Two Obama-Appointed Federal Judges On Two Courts Said Another Of Biden's Student Debt-Forgiveness Plans Exceeds Statutory Authority. Since 2023, Biden Has Been Giving Trump A Tutorial On Anti-Constitutional Grandiosity In The Presidency: Ignoring The Constitution's Appropriations Clause (Congress Controls Spending), Biden Has Tried To Shower \$400 Billion In Loan Forgiveness On The Debt-Owing Minority Of The Minority Of Americans Who Are College Graduates.

Biden Has Bragged That The Supreme Court's Attempt To Thwart His Executive Highhandedness "Didn't Stop Me." Yet He Will Not Stop Pretending That His Insouciant Disregard Of Legality, Unlike Trump's, Is Virtuous.

Biden And Trump Are Two Peas In A Pod — Trump Is *Perhaps The Marginally Worse Pea* — In Embracing The Nation's Bipartisan Consensus That Favors Permanent Fiscal Incontinence. The Invaluable Committee For A Responsible Federal Budget (Wouldn't It Be Fun If Congress Had Such A Committee?) Says Trump Approved \$4.8 Trillion In New 10-Year Federal Borrowing (Excluding Pandemic Relief Spending), Whereas Biden In His First Three Years And Five Months Approved \$2.2 Trillion (Excluding Pandemic Relief).

The Slender Reed On Which Biden's Reelection Hopes Now Lean Is That 129 Post-Debate Days Of Continuing Economic News Will Percolate Into The Consciousness Of Voters Whose Minds Snapped Shut Against Him In 2022, When Inflation Peaked At 9.1 Percent. And Trump Might Pick A Reassuring Running Mate, Improving The Odds That Occasionally There Will Be An Adult In Or Near The Oval Office.

Thursday Evening Passed Without A Trace Of The Ameliorative Spirit For Which An Exhausted American Majority Surely Yearns. Such A Spirit Appeared In A Semi-Presidential 1858 Debate (Both Participants Were To Be Presidential Candidates Two Years Later). In Ottawa, Ill., In The First Lincoln-Douglas Debate — The Nation-Fracturing Issue Was Slavery — Abraham Lincoln, With Nine Spare Words, Showed How To At Least Try To Ease Social Frictions By Foregoing The Pleasure Of Self-Congratulation.

He Said Of Southerners: "They Are Just What We Would Be In Their Situation." Thursday Night Gave Today's Embarrassed Nation No Comparable Balm Of Magnanimity About Anything. The Nation Deserves Better.

Or Does It? The Most Depressing Of Many Gloomy Thoughts Is That For 90 Excruciating Minutes We Saw What, Today, A Truly Representative American Government Looks Like.

###