Dreadful Debate

by

*Eyes Right*

**Greenville, ME –** During university studies at the U.S. Naval Academy, I spent my final three years on our debate team. During the prior 15 years we had been close to laughingstock material at tournaments throughout the East Coast. However, in the year in which I first joined, we had the good fortune of also having a new coach. In addition to being intelligent, he was very savvy. Although, like myself, he had zero debate experience, he quickly mastered the format and the politics of intercollegiate debate. In our first tournament that fall of 1962 (it was not a top tournament), we finished first among 110 other colleges. By the end of the school year, our team was not only highly respected, but feared by opponents. In our next year, we finished 3rd in the nation in the NCAA tournament.

I mention all of this to establish some debate creds as an observer of Presidential debates. Both held so far this year have been terrible – at least from a debater’s perspective. The first one, Biden vs Trump, could be most charitably called, to use a boxing term, a TKO (technical knockout). Once Biden started stumbling and mumbling, I was looking for Biden’s handlers to throw in the proverbial white towel. Biden was obviously ill and/or simply confused. Trump did not have to do much to emerge victorious. Within a few weeks, power brokers in the Democratic Party staged a soft coup and ousted Biden in favor of his vice-president, Kamala Harris.

Harris quickly gained momentum and energized Democrats who had been despondent over Biden’s chances. By last week, she was ahead in many polls heading into the much-ballyhooed debate with Trump.

The debate was pretty much a disaster for Trump. He looked old and uninterested. He foolishly choked on tantalizing bait thrown his way by Harris (e.g., getting into arguments over the size of the crowds at his rallies) and failed until the final minutes of the debate to go after Harris on the performance of the Biden-Harris administration over the past 3 ½ years. Essentially, his time during the debate can be summarized as a series of missed opportunities.

Harris was slicker, but essentially the smiling deliverer of a series of platitudes and promises. Other than repeating lines from her political stump speech, she offered little other than the old saw of a “fresh beginning.” She was never pressed by Trump or the moderators with follow-up questions requiring a substantive answer.

I mention the moderators, David Muir and Linsey Davis from ABC, who were obviously totally in the tank for Harris (especially Ms. Davis). Both chose only to issue comments as “fact checks” only for statements made by Trump. Ms. Davis appeared to be nearly swooning when addressing Harris. Obviously, it is difficult to imagine a totally impartial moderator – they are humans who have political feelings just as the rest of us. Some past moderators have been successful in subjugating these beliefs while conducting Presidential debates, but the ABC team appeared not to even try.

Trump now appears to be vetoing any further debates which have been proposed by Harris. So, the only remaining debate will take place in a few weeks at the beginning of October after many Americans will have already cast early ballots. Nonetheless, it will be refreshing if the two men in this Vice-Presidential debate, Walz and Vance, will actually debate. Each should be given the opportunity to challenge the answers of the other with no “fact-checking” by moderators. And, hopefully, there will be substantive and meaningful questions posed by the CBS moderators, Norah O’Donnell and Margaret Brennan. It will be interesting to see if these two ladies can contain their bias and provoke a good debate of issues. I am not optimisitic.

I might explain why I am opposed to moderator “fact-checking.” It has to do with shades. Most political statements are neither totally white nor black. In the Harris-Trump debate, both candidates frequently labeled statements by their opponents to be “lies.” “Truth” in politics is often subjective due to caveats, conditions, and perspective. Leave the crews in “spin rooms” and subsequent opinion shows to provide their (biased) analysis.

As a former debater, I would relish the opportunity to debate any of these politicians – but only with the caveat that no matter the outcome, I will not have to take their job.

I thought you might like to know.

E-R