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# OPINION

## Presidential Election 2.0 is Not Good Enough

It's déjà vu all over again

BY OSCAR H. BLAYTON

The defeat of the Democratic presidential candidate in 2016 was crushing, and many reasons have been given for why Hillary Clinton's bid for the White House went down in flames. Some people blame her failure to visit key states often enough. Others blame a lack of enthusiasm on the part of African American voters. And then there were the Russians, among many other things.

But four years after their humiliating defeat, many Democrats seem to be leaning towards agreeing that what they did in 2016 is good enough for 2020.

Enter Joe Biden, stage right, with a broad toothy grin and promises of moderation and electability.

The reaction of many African Americans to Joe Biden's appearance on the political horizon is a huge yawn of boredom. What many white politicians and policymakers in the Democratic Party do not realize is that African Americans understand that Donald Trump is not the sole problem we face today. He is merely the symptom, not the disease. And the disease has festered for centuries, mutating from one epoch to another – through slavery, Reconstruction, the civil rights movement, down to today. It is not enough to just beat Trump.

Conservative and moderate Democrats stuck their heads in the sand after November 2016 and ignored the white supremacy dynamics that were in play during the election. They resolutely proclaimed that Trump rode into office on economic anxieties. Black folk have much more economic anxiety than whites but we did not vote for Trump. Trump rode into office on anxieties over the loss of white supremacy.

In 2008, what voters of color saw in Barack Obama was a step towards social justice and racial equality. What they saw in Hillary Clinton in 2016 was a privileged white woman who had once equated youth of color with animals and called them "superpredators."

Now Democrats are asking for a "do over" in 2020, serving up a moderate-to-conservative Democrat trailing a foul-smelling political history that we ignore at our own peril. If we unpack Joe Biden's political history, we find the following:

School Busing – In 1974, as a



junior U.S. senator from Delaware, Biden promised his white constituents that he would oppose desegregating schools by busing students. In the 1970s, it was clear that many school districts were segregated along racial lines because housing patterns were likewise segregated, and busing students was the most logical solution to achieve school integration. Biden did not care about the social injustice of segregated schools. He only wanted to satisfy his racially bigoted white constituents. Because of politicians like him, school districts today are more segregated than they were in the 1970s. This is an argument backed by data. The National Center for Education Statistics' data show that the percentage of African American students attending majority white schools is down to 23 percent from a high of 44 percent in the 1980s. The current situation is equivalent to the integration level in 1969.

The Hyde Amendment – The original Hyde Amendment, passed in 1976, barred the use of federal funds to pay for an abortion except to save the life of the woman or if the pregnancy arose from incest or rape. Biden voted for its adoption and has staunchly supported that law until recently, when he began his current presidential campaign. He insists that his decision to flip on this issue was not due to politics, but he has expressed no other reason that makes sense.

Anita Hill – When Clarence Thomas was nominated to the U.S.

Supreme Court in 1991, Biden was the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. His aggressive questioning of Anita Hill, an African American law professor who accused Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment, appeared to many Americans to be inappropriate and hostile. Hill told the Huffington Post Live that Biden did a disservice to the American public when he refused to call other witnesses who could have corroborated Hill's characterization of Thomas' behavior as sexually inappropriate. And she asserted that this failure got in the way of bringing to the public a better understanding of sexual harassment. It took Biden almost 18 years to offer an apology to Anita Hill after acknowledging that his actions during the Thomas hearings were "wrong." But this 2019 apology was so weak and disingenuous; Anita Hill refused to accept it.

The 1994 Crime Bill – Biden does not deny that he was the architect of the 1994 Crime Bill. But what he does deny, in the face of facts to the contrary, is that it led to mass incarceration in America. And the weight of that outcome was borne mostly by people of color. Attempting to execute a complicated two-step shuffle, Biden denies that the bill led to mass incarceration while at the same time trying to distance himself from responsibility for the impact of the bill. But his maneuvers have been met by sharp criticism from several other Democratic presidential candidates who believe he should accept responsibility for fostering such bad policy.

The road to Donald Trump was paved with politicians like Biden, their big grins and folksy sayings masking an indifference to the suffering of people of color. You can find them at every level of government, professing not to be racist, but tolerating racism in local, state and federal policies. Politicians like these ask us to forget and forgive while they provide us with nothing but empty promises and disappointment. But there must be some accountability for politicians like Biden because, while he is not the first of his kind, unless people of conscious act, he will not be the last.

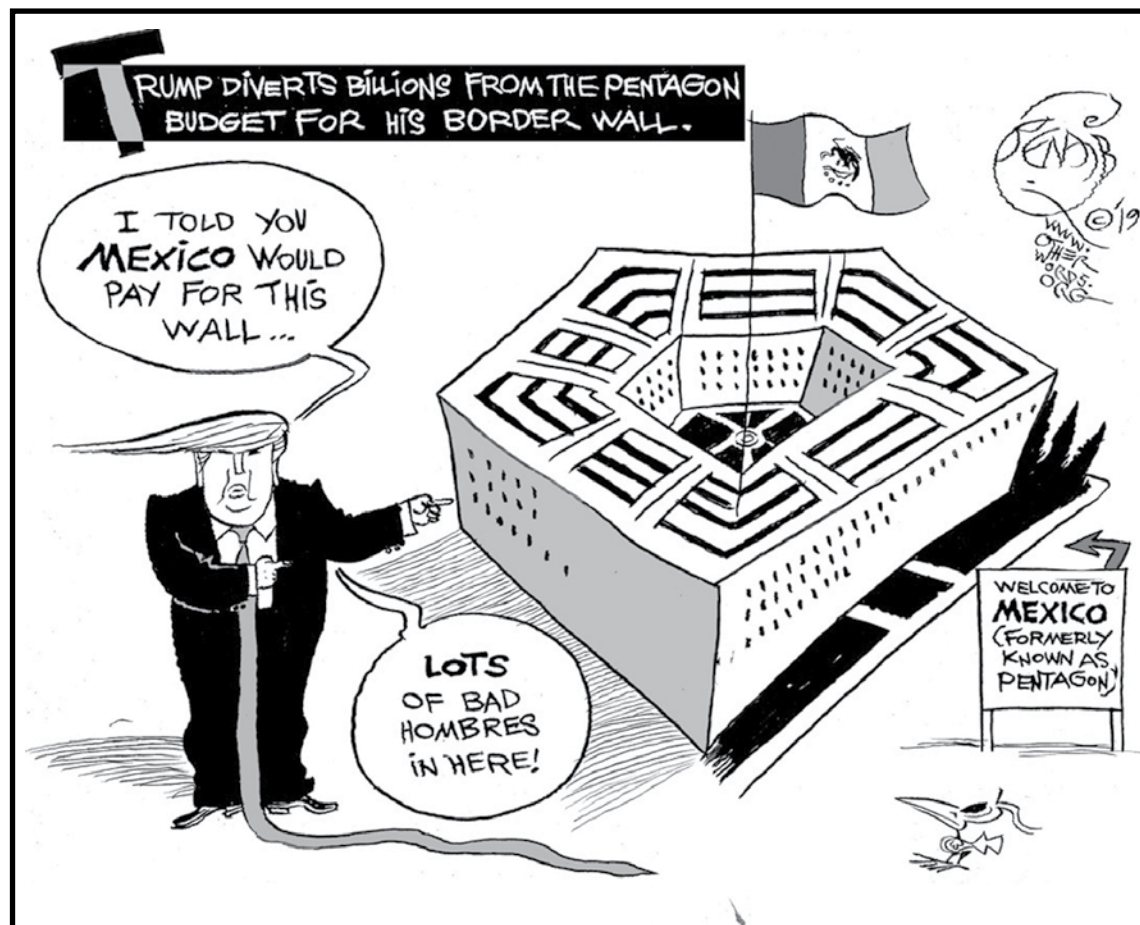
One way to bar the doors to elected office against politicians who shrug off their past trespasses and look to escape responsibility for causing human suffering is to borrow the three strikes rule from Biden's 1994 Crime Bill.

According to the Department of Justice's Criminal Resource Manual, the three strikes law was created to take violent criminals off the streets by giving them enhanced punishments. Since Biden wrote a bill that supported the idea that a three strikes rule would bring an end to bad behavior, perhaps that concept should be applied to him.

Opposition to school busing – strike one. The Hyde Amendment – strike two. Anita Hill's treatment – strike three. And for good measure: The 1994 Crime Bill – strike four.

Joe, you're out, go home.

Oscar H. Blayton is a former Marine Corps combat pilot and human rights activist who practices law in Virginia.



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