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Opinion

R.N.C. Rewrites Trump's Racism - and America's

The Black speakers have a job to do: erase history and cloud reality.

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Republican Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina delivered remarks in Washington, D.C., during the Republican National Convention on Monday. Credit...Pete Marovich for The New York Times

So far the Republican National Convention isn't so much presenting a record of America and an administration as it is inventing one.

The speakers at the event haven't admitted to the pathological pursuit of a white nationalist, white power agenda that has become a signature of Donald Trump's presidency. So what we've heard bears little relation to the fullness of truth and is not the correct distillation of a record.

Instead, we have been feted to a parade of Black and brown faces that have sought to soften or even erase Trump's overt history of racism to falsify an American story into one in which liberals are worse racial offenders than conservatives.

In this inside-out world, Trump has been an exemplar on racial inclusion and his defeat would usher in an era of racial division.

This is the Rip Van Winkle approach to campaigning: Just pretend that people were asleep the entire time you called Mexicans rapists, said Islam hates us, called Haiti and African nations shithole countries, separated migrant children from their parents and locked them in cages, tried to deport the Dreamers and attacked Black Lives Matter.

That is exactly what happened, particularly on the first day of the convention.

Former football player Herschel Walker, a Black man, said:

“It hurt my soul to hear the terrible names that people call Donald. The worst one is racist. I take it out as a personal insult that people would think I’ve had a 37-year friendship with a racist.”

Walker’s personal relationship with Trump is meaningless here. The personal doesn’t negate the pattern. History is full of racist white people, white supremacists, even enslavers, who developed friendships with Black people.

Racism, at its base, lacks logic, so racists constantly have to make exceptions and exemptions. One such exemption is the Exceptional Negro Clause that releases a particular individual, by their merit, from the universality of the racist’s conceptions.

Trump famously frolicked with young, successful Black pop culture figures like rappers and athletes in New York. None of that altered the fact that he was a racist being sued for housing discrimination or demanding the death penalty for the Central Park Five.

Walker went on to say:

“People who think that don’t know what they’re talking about. Growing up in the Deep South, I’ve seen racism up close. I know what it is and it isn’t Donald Trump.”

I too grew up in the Deep South, and I’ve also seen racism. I too know what it is and it is precisely Donald Trump.

Republican Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina, a Black man and the Republican lead on now-stalled police reform, referred to the “deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor,” an innocuous descriptor, rather than calling them killings or making clear that they were carried out by law enforcement officers. Furthermore, he said:

“We live in a world that only wants you to believe in the bad news racially, economically and culturally polarizing news. The truth is, our nation’s arc always bends back toward fairness.”

Scott said that he believes “in the goodness of America, the promise that all men and all women are created equal,” and that “over the past four years, we have made tremendous progress toward that promise.”

In what reality has tremendous progress been made on universal equality under the Trump administration? We have seen the largest racial protests in American history under the Trump administration. Trump has used massive force against these protesters. He has demonized them.

Former United Nations ambassador Nikki Haley, an Indian-American woman, went even broader with her revisionism, saying, “In much of the Democratic Party, it’s now fashionable to say that America is racist. That is a lie. America is not a racist country.” She says this was personal to her as a “brown girl in a Black and white world.”

“Not a racist country?” What precisely does that mean? Was its founding caught up with enslavement? Yes. Were many of the men who signed the Declaration of Independence enslavers? Yes. Were some of our presidents enslavers? Yes. Were many of them white supremacists? Yes. Was lynching allowed, sometimes by law enforcement itself? Yes. Was Jim Crow legal in this country? Yes. Was mass incarceration a thing that the country engaged in? Yes. Are Black people still the recipients of worse treatment than white people on a broad range of metrics? Yes.

Now, is everyone in the country openly, consciously, maliciously racist? No. But, do they have to be? No. Has the country, and does the country, operate in a way that disadvantages Black people and advantages white ones? Absolutely.

These Black and brown people at the Republican convention know this, but they have a job to do: the erasure of racism, the clouding of it so that one way reasons it away.

This show had two audiences: educated suburbanites who don’t want to be labeled racist and to a lesser degree Black men who have been slipping a bit away from Democrats in recent elections.

Charles Blow joined The Times in 1994 and became an Opinion columnist in 2008. He is also a television commentator and writes often about politics, social justice and vulnerable communities.