

DIVERSITY PANIC; FOR SOME DEMS, HISTORIC DIVERSITY IS NOT ENOUGH

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Body

Stop me if you've heard this one before. An Asian guy, two black guys, three white women (one of whom spent much of her life claiming to be Native American), a Pacific Islander woman, a gay guy, a Hispanic guy, two elderly Caucasian Jews (one a billionaire, the other a socialist), a self-styled Irishman and a few nondescript white guys walk into a bar, and the bartender yells, "Get the hell out! We value diversity here!"

I didn't say it was a good joke, but it's kind of funny all the same, because some folks in the press and the Democratic Party are freaking out over the shrinking diversity of the Democratic field.

The diversity panic was set off by the withdrawal of California Sen. Kamala Harris on Dec. 3. In the words of Chicago Tribune columnist Clarence Page, "The famously inclusive party wasn't looking very inclusive anymore."

The real issue is that not many people of color qualified for the Dec. 19 debate in Los Angeles. As New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, an African American, complained, "There are more billionaires than black people who've made the December debate stage - that's a problem."

It's debatable whether it's a problem for anyone other Mr. Booker himself, which is why he's been raising this alarm vociferously. So has former HUD Secretary Julian Castro, who is of Mexican descent.

"What we're staring at is a DNC debate stage with no people of color on it," Mr. Castro complained. "That does not reflect the diversity of our party or our country. We need to do better than that."

Since Mr. Castro made his remarks, Andrew Yang, a Chinese American entrepreneur whose parents immigrated from Taiwan, has qualified for the debate.

Perhaps a broader perspective would help. All of the first 43 presidents were white men. About half were Episcopalian or Presbyterian, most of the rest belonged to other prominent denominations, and three were Christians of no formal affiliation. Then, in 2008, Barack Obama became the first African American president, winning two terms. In 2016, Hillary Clinton became the Democrats' first female nominee.

Given these facts, it's hard for me to see a diversity crisis. The top four candidates right now are Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders, Pete Buttigieg and Elizabeth Warren. Mr. Biden would be only the second Catholic president. Mr. Sanders

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would be the first Jewish president and the first socialist one. Mr. Buttigieg would be the first openly gay (and youngest) president. Ms. Warren would be the first female president.

What a devastating blow to diversity!

It got dumber. Partisan supporters of various candidates weaponized the whiteness of white candidates. I think that's gross, but there's at least an internal logic for, say, Booker, Castro or Yang supporters to play that game. But supporters of white candidates attacked other white candidates for their whiteness.

The Twitter hashtag #PrimariesSoWhite started trending. A Warren supporter tweeted "#PrimariesSoWhite because Joe Biden kept a very strong plurality of black support that eliminated the paths for Cory Booker and Kamala Harris."

Huh. Did Mr. Biden force black voters to support him? Did he refuse to tell them to back a black candidate? Are those black people at fault for liking Mr. Biden? If those black voters swung their support to the equally white Ms. Warren, would she suddenly be at fault?

Lots of Democrats are talking about the "structural racism" of the primary system. But none of the nonwhite candidates complained about the rules at the beginning. Is it only structurally racist if Democratic voters support white candidates? Are the black voters who prefer Mr. Biden to Ms. Harris or Mr. Booker complicit in this racism? If Mr. Buttigieg bombed out, would we hear about the structural homophobia of the Democratic Party?

No doubt many of these activists are sincere in their beliefs. But some are just grabbing the most convenient weapon they can to tear down other candidates or get more oxygen for their candidates.

The bigger problem for these activists - and for the journalists who hype them - is that they don't speak for most Democrats. In April, a Monmouth poll found that 87% of likely Democratic voters don't think the race of the nominee matters.

In the historical sweep of America's struggle with racism, that should be cheered as unequivocally great news. But these are strange times.

Jonah Goldberg is a columnist for Tribune Content Agency.

Graphic

PHOTO: The New York Times: From left, Mayor Pete Buttigieg of South Bend, Ind., Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., former Vice President Joe Biden and Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., take the stage before the start of the Democratic presidential debate in Atlanta on Nov. 20.

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