

Democrats and Their Media Allies Impugned Biden's Cognitive Fitness. Now They Feign Outrage.

Concerns about the former vice president's cognitive decline came from his supporters, not Trump or Sanders.

-Glenn Greenwald, March 9, 2020



Former Vice President Joe Biden speaks during a campaign rally in Kansas City, Mo., on March 7, 2020.

Photo: Charlie Riedel/AP

It is virtually required in Democratic Party politics to periodically express revulsion about the bigoted political attacks wielded for years against former President Barack Obama: images designed to emphasize his African roots, false claims he was Muslim, the campaign of delegitimacy based in the racist allegation that he was born in Kenya.

But that mandated Party denunciation often obscures the undeniable fact that — while Republicans seized on and drove them — all of those attacks also emanated from within the Party, particularly from the 2008 Hillary Clinton presidential campaign, which employed them to try to sink Obama’s rival presidential candidacy. In February, 2008, Clinton [campaign officials widely circulated](#) a photo of Obama meeting with tribal elders while dressed [in Somali garb](#) on a trip to rural Kenya, an act which Obama’s campaign chief David Plouffe angrily denounced as “the most shameful, offensive fear-mongering we’ve seen from either party in this election.”

The New York Times

Photo of Obama in African garb emerges as Clinton renews attacks


By Michael Powell

Feb. 25, 2008

[f](#) [t](#) [e](#) [r](#) [u](#)

As Senator Barack Obama has risen in the polls and extended his string of primary victories, he has taken rhetorical mortar shots from all sides in the political war. They continued unabated on Monday.

A flap erupted when some Internet sites on Monday posted a photo of Obama in Somalian garb, including a white turban. When the Obama campaign charged that Clinton aides had leaked the photo - taken during a 2006 trip to Africa - the Clinton campaign manager, Maggie Williams, tried to turn the matter back at the Obama team, even though her camp has not denied any role in distributing the photo.



In December, 2007, the Clinton campaign — weeks before the Iowa caucus — was [forced to “request”](#) one of its volunteer county coordinators leave the campaign when it was revealed that the official, along with numerous other Clinton supporters, were forwarding and posting emails claiming Obama was Muslim and sent by “madrassas” to infiltrate the U.S. on behalf of radical Islam.

When Donald Trump, in 2011, began pushing the “birtherism” attacks against Obama into the mainstream, Politico’s Ben Smith and Byron Tau [wrote an article](#) entitled “Birtherism: Where it all began,” and explained: “The answer lies in Democratic, not Republican politics, and in the bitter, exhausting spring of 2008.” While the blatantly false theory that Obama was not U.S.-born first originated on fringe right-wing sites and [not from Democrats](#), Politico documented that it was during the 2008 Democratic primary, not the General Election, when the repellent theory first gained traction as a result of Clinton supporters spreading it:

Then, as Obama marched toward the presidency, a new suggestion emerged: That he was not eligible to serve. (See: [Birther debate alive across U.S.](#))

That theory first emerged in the spring of 2008, as Clinton supporters circulated an anonymous email questioning Obama’s citizenship.

“Barack Obama’s mother was living in Kenya with his Arab-African father late in her pregnancy. She was not allowed to travel by plane then, so Barack Obama was born there and his

mother then took him to Hawaii to register his birth,” asserted one chain email that surfaced on the urban legend site Snopes.com in April 2008.

All of that was consistent with a very deliberate and carefully crafted strategy from the Clinton campaign of depicting Obama as an exotic, foreign, non-American Other. In early 2007, the Clinton family’s long-time chief political strategist Mark Penn [wrote a now-notorious memo](#) proclaiming Obama “unelectable except perhaps against Attila the Hun,” and decreed: “I cannot imagine America electing a president during a time of war who is not at his center fundamentally American in his thinking and in his values,” and directing that Obama be targeted for his “lack of American roots.”

In other words, the very attacks that Democrats with virtual unanimity today vilify as disgusting, racist smears were ones that emanated from their own party — either from the Clinton campaign itself (maliciously spreading the photo of Obama in Kenya in traditional Somalian clothing and suggesting he is Muslim) or from various Clinton supporters (falsely claiming he was not eligible to run for office).

And now they are doing the exact same thing when it comes to plainly valid questions concerning Joe Biden’s cognitive fitness: expressing revulsion and scorn at the mere mention of these questions and declaring the topic off-limits to all decent people *even though establishment Democrats were the ones who first spread insinuations and even explicit accusations about Biden’s cognitive decline when they thought doing so could help them defeat him and/or because it genuinely concerned them regarding his ability to defeat Trump.*

Prior to Joe Biden’s [massive victory](#) in the South Carolina primary and his even-more impressive Super Tuesday showing, many viewed his candidacy as all but dead. A fourth-place finish in Iowa was followed up by a fifth-place finish in New Hampshire, causing the [corporate donors on which he centrally relies to flee](#) and his political obituaries to be widely written.

But since then, he has consolidated his status as Democratic front-runner and, as is customary, he is receiving far greater attention than previously, particularly on the question most on the minds of Democratic voters: his “electability” against Trump. And one of the [towering questions in that regard](#) is his cognitive fitness: it is visible to the naked eye that the 77-year-old six-term Senator and two-term Vice President is in serious cognitive decline.

That is a grave matter not just because the establishment wing of the Democratic Party wants to put him in charge of the world’s most dangerous nuclear arsenal, a large chunk of the planet’s health, and the welfare of hundreds of millions of people, but also because it directly pertains to whether he can sustain the rigors and spotlight of a General Election against the incumbent President. And multiple incidents over the past couple weeks — from Biden’s [forgetting](#) the words of the most iconic and memorized passage of the Declaration of Independence to [confusing his wife for his sister](#) to spouting sentences that make no sense — have only intensified those worries.

But, as the Democratic establishment has united with creepy speed and obedience behind Biden in order to stop the Sanders candidacy, those who now raise these concerns instantly come under

a withering assault of insults and attacks from Democratic Party operatives along with their crucial media allies: thinly disguised pro-Biden reporters who continue to insist on wearing the unconvincing and fraudulent costume of neutrality. They are invoking the [classic Orwellian formulation](#) from the novel *1984*: “The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command.”

CNN’s Democratic Party consultant Karen Finney [condemned the discussion](#) of Biden’s cognitive capabilities as “truly a disgusting low blow,” demanding that former Democratic presidential candidates Julian Castro and Cory Booker — both of whom themselves had commented upon Biden’s cognitive failures (on camera!) — announce (falsely) that their prior comments about Biden had been distorted. Castro’s Communication’s Director, Sawyer Hackett, dutifully [accused those](#) who were raising these concerns of “push[ing] Trump messaging about Biden”; he also denied that Castro (or Booker) had ever themselves questioned Biden’s cognitive competence, warning those who are raising the issue: “don’t try to throw Julián and Cory in front of you when you do.”

Meanwhile, Politico and CNN reporter Ryan Lizza, more devoted to defending Biden than even DNC functionaries, spent all weekend [conspiratorially insinuating](#) that journalists who were raising concerns over Biden’s cognitive fitness were part of a joint “coordinated” attack from the Sanders and Trump campaigns. Lizza and others like him [promoted various outraged articles](#) from Democratic Party-loyal sites expressing all kinds of indignation — after four years of open season of musing casually about Trump’s dementia — that anyone would even dare discuss Biden’s cognitive fitness to occupy the most powerful political position in the world. They all insisted that this was some sort of very recent invention on the part of the Sanders and Trump world to stop the Biden juggernaut: a last-minute act of desperation from the Far Right and the Far Left as Biden ascends to his rightful place in the Oval Office.

The problem with all of this? Aside from the fact that Biden’s cognitive decline is visible to the naked eye and it is incredibly reckless and repressive to demand that it be suppressed, these concerns were first raised not by Trump operatives nor by Sanders supporters, nor were they first raised within the last several weeks. Quite the opposite is true: they were raised repeatedly over the last year *principally by Democratic Party officials and their most loyal allies in the media.*

One of the earliest mainstream figures to raise serious questions about Biden’s cognitive decline was MSNBC’s Andrea Mitchell immediately before the June, 2019 presidential debate. The long-time reporter, not exactly known as a Trump sympathizer to put that mildly, went on air amidst a series of rambling, incoherent Biden appearances and said: “the question is, does he still have his stuff? How sharp is he?,” prompting Chris Matthews to immediately understand her point and reply: “You know you’re answering the question with the question.”

It's not just the other candidates who think Biden's age/fitness are fair game. Here's MSNBC's Andrea Mitchell wondering if Biden is in possession of his full mental acuity. "How sharp is he?" pic.twitter.com/C5IYNXAZ6U

— Caleb Howe (@CalebHowe) [June 28, 2019](#)

One of the most explicit and direct attacks on Biden's cognitive fitness to run for President and to serve came from Democratic Senator Cory Booker (now a Biden endorser). After a CNN presidential debate in September — in which Biden had [bizarrely rambled](#) about how the key to solving the problems in African-American communities was having parents play “the record player” for their children, and during which Castro had pointedly accused Biden of having forgotten what he had said just moments earlier — Booker unflinchingly suggested Biden lacked the ability to endure the rigours of the campaign (the full Booker interview is [here](#)):

One of the exchanges Booker had referenced — where Castro accused Biden of forgetting what he said just moments earlier — elicited a very intense reaction from the audience because, contrary to the attempts of Castro's consultant to re-write history now that they need jobs and favors from Biden, who they expect to be in control of the party, both Booker and the audience knew *exactly* what Castro was suggesting about Biden. It was the same thing that numerous Democrats and MSNBC analysts were saying: that Biden is suffering from serious cognitive decline that would make it very difficult to stand up to Trump let alone to govern as President:

Lmao. Watch the video. Listen to the hoots from the audience. Then meditate upon how much less charitable and kind Mr. Trump is compared to Mr. Castro and tell me that isn't a HUGE liability. pic.twitter.com/CRKJ4zdF6b

— Wet-Bigfoots???? Flying-Bigfoot? (@platzmania) [March 8, 2020](#)

Even more explicit than Castro and Booker was Democratic Congressman Tim Ryan. Prior to the New Hampshire primary, the 9-term Congressman from Ohio and then-presidential-candidate not only made clear that he believes Biden is suffering from cognitive decline but also admitted that members of the Democratic Party establishment routinely discuss this in secret:

Rep. Tim Ryan on Biden's cognitive decline. He said this 6 months ago.

“There's sometimes a lack of clarity, and I think that's what I'm hearing on the ground.

I think that's what a lot of people are thinking, and we can't afford that at this point.”pic.twitter.com/ArNzMmTbn1

— Samuel D. Finkelstein II (@CANCEL_SAM) [March 7, 2020](#)

Before Biden became the consensus establishment choice three weeks ago — and Democratic operatives thus tried to impose a ban on speaking ill of him while deceitfully pretending they and their clients never did so for fear that it could cost them future consulting or political gigs within the Biden-controlled Party — it was commonly and routinely acknowledged, even on DNC propaganda outlets such as MSNBC, that Biden's cognitive decline was an open secret among Democratic Party officials who believed it posed a serious threat to his ability to campaign, let alone beat Trump, let alone govern as President.

Just watch for yourself and remember this as they now try to convince you that this is just some recently manufactured smear by Sanders and Trump supporters; *they* are the ones who have been raising this, with good reason, for more than a year:

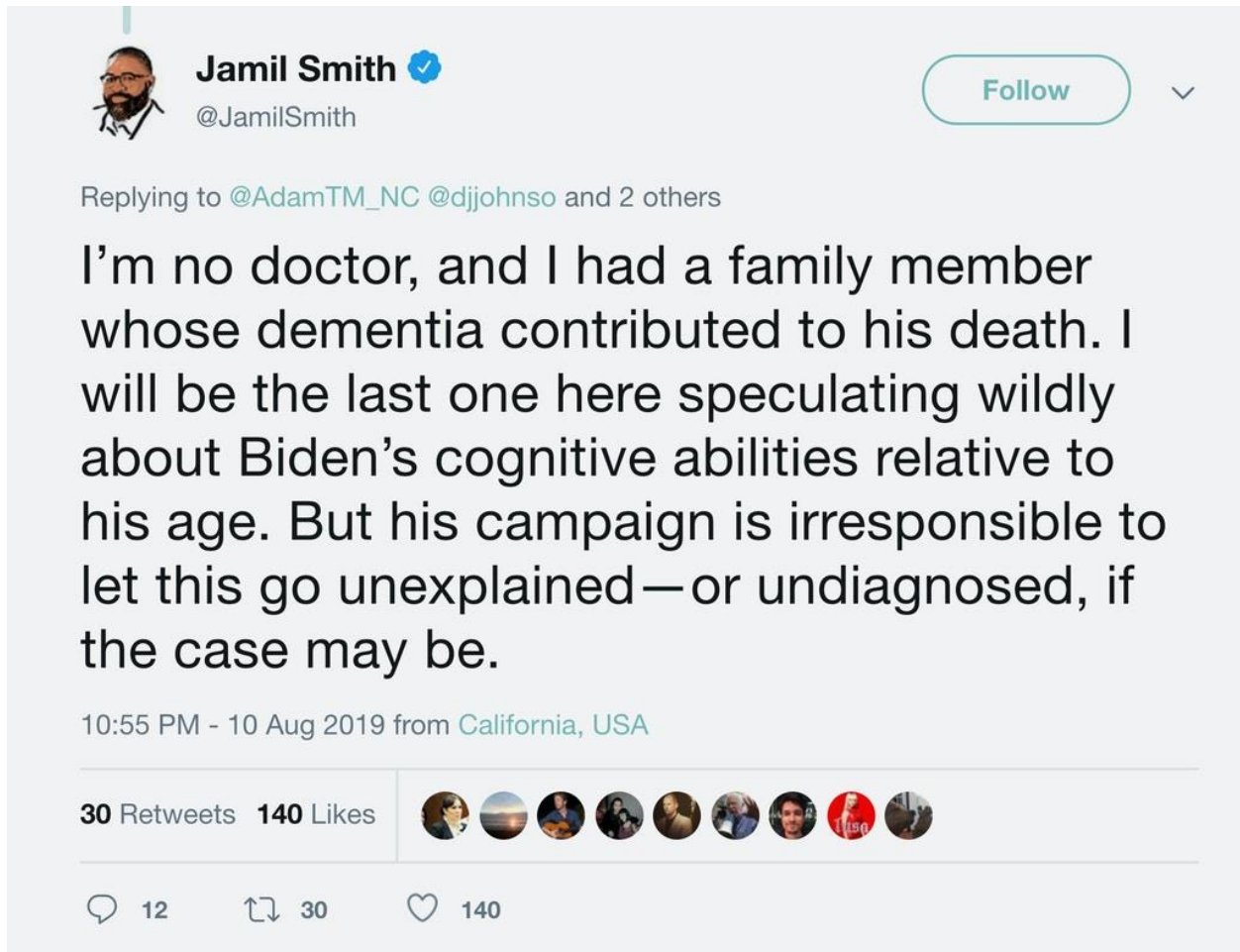
Pundits & insiders have been aware of Biden's cognitive decline for months. This was in Nov.

"There are growing concerns among Dems, in terms of whether he's up for this.

A lot of his sentences don't make sense. He's having trouble completing thoughts." pic.twitter.com/q5BtzCKdN2

— Samuel D. Finkelstein II (@CANCEL_SAM) [March 8, 2020](#)

Here's one of the most popular pundits among Democrats, Rolling Stone's Jamil Smith, raising the issue delicately but clearly after Biden, for at least the second time, falsely claimed that he was Vice President during the Parkland school shootings:



A now-deleted tweet from Jamil Smith.

Screenshot: The Intercept

In September — more than six months ago — the playwright Dylan Brody, a devoted hater of Donald Trump and a fan of both Biden and the Democratic Party, said what any honest person was seeing:

I have long standing fondness and respect for Joe Biden, but a good way to prove ourselves the better choice as a party might be to break with political tradition and pull support from a high-polling legacy politician when he shows signs of cognitive deterioration.

— Dylan Brody (@dylanbrody) [September 1, 2019](#)

Numerous liberals, including my colleague Mehdi Hasan and others, were warning in the fall of last year that Biden’s cognitive decline was clear and would be used against him as a potent weapon:

Democrats - this is your future if you nominate the ludicrous gaffe machine Joe Biden as your presidential nominee! A future in which Trump (Trump!) mocks your nominee’s mental fitness and even attacks him from the left over racism and criminal justice. FFS.

<https://t.co/luGgNAWseL>

— Mehdi Hasan (@mehdirhasan) [August 10, 2019](#)

After the early Fall, 2019, debates, discussions of Biden’s visibly faltering brain were commonplace even on MSNBC:

Morning Joe on Biden’s “disturbing” debate performance last summer.

“I think the one *really* big question from last night, was Joe Biden.

Not his policy positions... Not his past... But whether his time is up.”

<pic.twitter.com/lvxxFD6pXH>

— Samuel D. Finkelstein II (@CANCEL_SAM) [March 8, 2020](#)

[The list](#) of prominent political and media figures raising these concerns throughout 2019 is long and diverse. That this is some recently manufactured script — “coordinated” by the Sanders and Trump campaigns to smear Biden — is so laughably and provably false that pro-Biden reporters should be ashamed to show their faces as they claim it. But centrists — as they’ve proven since Trump’s presidency began — casually arrogate unto themselves the right to disseminate the most unhinged conspiracies without the need for any evidence and without the slightest regard for whether they are true.

Whatever else is true, there are large numbers of people who have long been watching Joe Biden who have been admitting that they see his cognitive decline and that it deeply worries them about his ability to beat Trump. That includes, indeed has been led by, Democratic politicians,

operatives and pundit-journalists now supporting him while feigning outrage over this discussion (that *they* started) and pretending that it's all some morally reprehensible fabrication recently churned out by his enemies.

Some are motivated by desperation to push Biden to the Oval Office and will sacrifice the truth, their integrity and their dignity to do it; others are power-flatterers who now see Biden as the new King of their royal court on which their wealth and access depends and so are re-writing their own history to delete what they said about him. Regardless of motive, it's clear where these valid concerns about Biden's cognitive decline originated: from within Biden's own partisan establishment circles. The video and textual evidence is undeniable. When you hear them spin this lie, just confront them with this evidence. Most importantly, do everything possible to make sure voters see it before they pass the point of no return. Voting in democracy is valuable only when it is informed, not the by-product of elite deceit and propaganda.