

TRUMP TOLD ONE KEY TRUTH AT HIS CONVENTION

CNN had a funny story the other day. It described how five different RNC speakers – it focuses on Natalie Harp (who lied about receiving treatment under the Right to Try Act), Mark and Patricia McCloskey (who threatened protestors with their guns), Abby Johnson (whose story about abortion and spousal voting fell apart), and Mary Ann Mendoza (who got cut after spewing an anti-semitic conspiracy theory) – were so crazy, it suggests the Republicans didn't vet their speakers.

The appearances of several speakers at this week's Republican National Convention have been surrounded by controversy over social media comments and actions from their past, raising questions about whether and how the RNC vetted its speakers before they were placed on national television.

The story is funny, in part, because it left out the bigger name controversial speakers, like Rudy Giuliani, whose conspiracy theories are every bit as baseless as Mendoza's, and who is reportedly under criminal investigation for the circumstances behind them) or Eric Trump, who is currently defying a New York State subpoena on the grounds that testifying truthfully about Trump Organization's accounting irregularities would incriminate him. Which makes the premise even funnier: One controversial speaker is a vetting problem, seven (the number is actually much higher) is an intentional choice.

And yet the press has interpreted Trump's failures to play by norms they believe remain in place as a goof, simply poor execution of a known formula.

A more alarming example comes in this NYT story.

It sums up what it views as the themes the two parties are using, along the way repeating Trump's claimed theme of "law-and-order" five times.

COVID vs. Law and Order

[snip]

the President is hammering a law-and-order message

[snip]

The moves come as the presidential campaign barrels into the critical last 10 weeks. They represent a bet by Mr. Biden that a focus on Covid-19 will prevail over Mr. Trump's "law and order" emphasis and his attempt to portray Mr. Biden as a tool of the "radical left."

[snip]

Aides to Mr. Trump said on Friday that their line of attack would not change. They plan to repeatedly highlight Mr. Trump's familiar "law and order" message, and are blunt in their assessment that they will benefit politically from violence erupting at some protests.

[snip]

Mr. Trump's aides said he enjoyed the frustration and anger he caused by holding a political event on the South Lawn of the White House, shattering conventional norms and raising questions about ethics law violations. He relished the fact that no one could do anything to stop him, said the aides, who spoke anonymously to discuss internal conversations.

Even assuming NYT describes these themes correctly (it doesn't mention "competence," for example), it totally misreads what happened at

the Trump convention. It treats the RNC as a thematically organized event, rather than a raw display of power, power premised on dismantling any logic of themes.

While this extends to every logical claim Trump made at the RNC – from his claim that COVID is a thing of the past and his celebration of immigrants lured to participate in the RNC unwittingly – it was most visible in his claim to care in the least about law and order, the theme reporters claimed to be the central backbone of Trump’s campaign.

This is a man, after all, who has had two campaign managers and five other aides indicted or prosecuted, most in the service of protecting Trump. Two separate legal proceedings in New York State are pursuing financial crimes implicating Trump and his business (as noted, RNC speaker Eric Trump is currently defying subpoenas, claiming that his truthful testimony will implicate himself in crimes). And during his last campaign, Trump was implicated in two more crimes, the hush payments to his former sex partners and the misuse of his Foundation. There are active lawsuits from women credibly accusing Trump of sex crimes. It’s likely the only thing protecting Trump from prosecution for these crimes and obstruction of the Mueller probe is his success at winning another term. Meanwhile, the woman who shattered all prior norms about the Hatch Act, Kellyanne Conway, completed her service to Trump by admitting more violence would help Trump’s campaign.

And yet the NYT treats Trump’s “law and order” theme as a credible political claim.

The only mention from this purported news story that Trump’s convention was a televised crime spree of its own accord came in describing the glee with which Trump’s aides enjoyed watching Trump commit crimes, which the NYT instead describes as “raising questions about ethics law violations,” with impunity.

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frustration and anger he caused by holding a political event on the South Lawn of the White House, shattering conventional norms and raising questions about ethics law violations. He relished the fact that no one could do anything to stop him, said the aides, who spoke anonymously to discuss internal conversations.

This is not (as it would be in a minimally competent story) a fact check, a discussion of how absurd it was that the most criminally implicated President in history was instead running as the “law and order” candidate. It is, instead, an unexamined nugget of the key truth.

Trump’s aides are gleeful that his defiance of the law during a convention where he claimed to be the “law and order” candidate caused so much consternation. They relish the way he could commit crimes in broad daylight without anyone stopping him.

That is, the theme is not “law and order,” as NYT gullibly parroted. Trump’s campaign promise is the complete dismantlement of rule of law, where a candidate whose potential and confirmed crimes are too numerous to track could condemn the crimes and criminalized peaceful speech of his opponents, while failing to condemn murder committed by a supporter, all while claiming this selective enforcement amounted to “law and order.”

The point is not the theme. It’s partly that a small pack of NYT journalists might collectively repeat it as if it’s true, without instead describing the grave danger posed to democracy when a man who has systematically attacked rule of law rebrands that assault as law and order. Trump has successfully recruited those whose business is supposed to be truth-telling, and gotten them to instead reinforce his central lie, that his abuse of the law is something called “law and order.” And it is, more significantly, that while less negligent

journalists were trying to push back on Trump's deluge of lies, he was instead telling the key truth. Trump's campaign message is not whatever theme some horse race journalists discern from ad buys. Rather, it is a promise – with his defiance of rule of law, his abdication of any platform save his own whims, his assault on the sanctity of the election, his incitement of violence – that in a second term Trump will forgo any past pretense he made to be engaged in democracy.

Trump's convention was all designed to perform his utter contempt for democracy itself. And it succeeded, wildly, at telling that one key truth.