

When it comes to Joe Biden, New York Times abandons “Believe women”

By David Walsh
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Former Vice President Joe Biden, the leading candidate for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination in 2020, has been accused by a former staffer of sexually assaulting her. Tara Reade alleges the incident occurred in 1993 when Biden was a Senator from Delaware. There were no witnesses, Reade never filed a complaint and the statute of limitations for such an offense, if it occurred, has long since expired.

Reade told *Newsweek* that she went public with her claims in late March, according to the magazine, “to ensure that ‘powerful men’ are held to account.”

The reluctance of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* to report Reade’s allegations—neither covered the story until a few days ago—reveals, first of all, their rank hypocrisy.

Since the October 2017 launch of the #MeToo campaign, the *Times* and the *Post* have operated with great recklessness and sensationalism as relay stations for the transmission of sexual abuse complaints that have destroyed dozens of reputations, careers and lives. Each newspaper has eagerly passed on anonymous and unsubstantiated claims, revealed in the “takedown” of “powerful men” and poo-hooped the implications of their actions for such elementary principles as “presumption of innocence” and “due process.”

In regard to protests against McCarthyite denunciations, *Times* columnist Roxane Gay, for example, complained in October 2017 about “a lot of hand-wringing about libel and the ethics of anonymous disclosure.”

One year later, the *Times* gloried, in a headline, about the fact that “#MeToo Brought Down 201 Powerful Men. Nearly Half of Their Replacements Are Women.” The article breathlessly began: “They had often gotten away with it for years, and for those they harassed, it seemed as if the perpetrators would never pay any consequences.” The word “allegedly” appears nowhere.

Earlier this year, in its shameful editorial celebrating the conviction of producer-“monster” Harvey Weinstein, the *Times* crowed about prosecutors in the case having been able “to break through a barrier common to many assault cases, a lack of physical or other corroborating evidence. And they also overcame another, even more fundamental barrier: basic mistrust of women alleging sexual assault.” In other words, the authorities and the media, including the *Times*, stampeded a jury into convicting Weinstein, despite a mass of evidence raising reasonable doubt.

In regard to Reade’s claims, however, the *Times* and the *Post* have both discovered the value of scrupulous and even sluggish investigations and permitted themselves the liberty of expressing skepticism about an accuser’s account. (All of a sudden, for example, in a reference to Reade’s recent filing of a complaint with

Washington, D.C. police in regard to the alleged 1993 incident, the *Times* recalls that “Filing a false police report may be punishable by a fine and imprisonment.” When has the newspaper ever brought that up before in its coverage of allegations of sexual harassment or abuse?)

In an interview published by the *Times* April 13, its executive editor Dean Baquet resorted to sophistry to explain the newspaper’s tardy coverage of the Biden-Reade story. Baquet asserted that “what *The New York Times* could offer and should try to offer was the reporting to help people understand what to make of a fairly serious allegation against a guy who had been a vice president of the United States and was knocking on the door of being his party’s nominee.”

In other words, Biden deserved special treatment. As he received from the editors even after the April 12 piece was published, one of the latter’s sentences originally read, “The *Times* found no pattern of sexual misconduct by Mr. Biden, beyond the hugs, kisses and touching that women previously said made them uncomfortable.” As amended, the sentence simply read, “The *Times* found no pattern of sexual misconduct by Mr. Biden.”

Asked about the deletion, Baquet referred to pressure from the former Vice President’s forces, indicating that “the [Biden] campaign thought that the phrasing was awkward and made it look like there were other instances in which he had been accused of sexual misconduct. And that’s not what the sentence was intended to say.”

Baquet can twist and turn as much as he likes, but everyone not a child knows the *Times*’ “main obligation” was not as he suggested, “to get a really sensitive story as close to right as we could,” but to protect Biden’s reputation for political reasons.

The ease and speed, moreover, with which the watchword of “Believe women” has been abandoned in the present case—because it cuts across the plans of important sections of the ruling elite in regard to Biden and the 2020 elections—sheds light on the false and cynical character of the #MeToo campaign and its function as a subservient and reactionary adjunct to the Democratic Party.

The sexual harassment witch-hunt was initiated, along with the anti-Russia hysteria, in the aftermath of the 2016 election. The Democrats and their “left” orbit needed to distract attention from their electoral fiasco, regroup and galvanize their shocked and demoralized middle class supporters and direct them along right-wing, identity politics lines. This was never about the rights and conditions of working women.

Now, in addition to the *Times* and the *Post*, many of the same forces that for two and a half years have passed on dozens of unproven, often scurrilous claims of sexual wrongdoing have suddenly discovered the value of “due process” and the need to maintain the “presumption of

innocence.” Their proximity to the Democratic Party and the Biden campaign explains their newfound (and unconvincing) concern for elementary legal rights.

The Time’s Up Legal Defense Fund, an offshoot of the #MeToo campaign, turned down Reade’s request for funding in January on the questionable grounds that Biden “was a candidate for federal office, and assisting a case against him could jeopardize the organization’s nonprofit status,” according to the *Intercept*.

The CEO of Time’s Up is Tina Tchen, a prominent Chicago lawyer and one of the biggest fundraisers for Barack Obama and Biden, his running mate in the 2008 presidential campaign. Tchen subsequently served as the Obama-Biden administration’s Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement from 2009 to 2011 and later as Obama’s assistant, Chief of Staff to First Lady Michelle Obama and Executive Director of the White House Council on Women and Girls.

Speaking for many, actress Alyssa Milano, whose October 15, 2017 message launched the #MeToo slogan, recently explained why she was keeping mum about the charges against Biden. On a radio program, Milano commented, “I just don’t feel comfortable throwing away a decent man that I’ve known for 15 years in this time of complete chaos without there being a thorough investigation.”

On Twitter, Milano observed, “#BelieveWomen does not mean everyone gets to accuse anyone of anything and that’s that.” The actress added, “I believe, along with many others in this space, that accusations need to be investigated with due process for the accused.”

Contrary to the protestations of Milano and others, the #MeToo campaign has taken dead aim against due process and the presumption of innocence since its launch. “Throwing away decent men” without conducting a “thorough investigation” and “accusing anyone of anything” have been among its guiding principles.

Biden’s own record on these issues is utterly poisonous. For opportunistic political reasons, this corporate-sponsored windbag has made “violence against women” one of his pet causes. He was the co-sponsor, along with Senator Orrin Hatch, Utah Republican, of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994, a measure that did absolutely nothing to prevent violence against women, but helped build up the state apparatus and further fueled the “law and order” hysteria.

Under Obama, Biden truly came into his own as the benevolent defender of womankind.

In April 2011, Biden and Education Secretary Arne Duncan announced the release of a “Dear Colleague Letter” on student-on-student sexual harassment and sexual violence. As Emily Yoffe explained on *Politico*, the letter “laid out new directives for how campuses were to root out and punish sexual assault. It was the beginning of a concerted effort that radically remade how students could interact sexually, with severe penalties for those who violated increasingly expansive codes of conduct. The accused were to be judged under the lowest standards of evidence, the definitions of misconduct were widely broadened, third-party reports could trigger an investigation even if the alleged victim did not think there had been a violation, and more.”

Along the same lines, in January 2014, Obama named Biden a co-chair of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. The Vice President, as part of the government’s “It’s On Us” campaign, delivered sanctimonious addresses on campuses around the country, stigmatizing male college students as essentially bestial and defending the weakening of the rights of the accused in cases of sexual harassment allegations.

In June 2016, Biden intervened in the case of Stanford University

student Brock Turner, penning a politically transparent “open letter” to the victim in the case and coming out openly against the presumption of innocence. In his wretched message, the Vice President wrote: “We will speak to change the culture on our college campuses—a culture that continues to ask the wrong questions: What were you wearing? Why were you there? What did you say? How much did you drink? Instead of asking: Why did he think he had license to rape?” What if “he” did not rape anyone? That did not seem to be a possibility.

Most damningly, at the time of the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings into Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh in September 2018, the *Washington Post* cited Biden as suggesting that when a woman “comes forward in the glaring lights of focus” to make an allegation of sexual abuse, “you’ve got to start off with the presumption that at least the essence of what she’s talking about is real, whether or not she forgets facts, whether or not it’s been made worse or better over time.”

We have no way of knowing whether Reade’s claim is true. Even if it is, the incident in question would be the least of the crimes committed by Biden, a leading official in an administration responsible, directly or indirectly, for the deaths of hundreds of thousands in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere, including large numbers of women and children.

The Obama-Biden administration made drone assassination a key element in its foreign policy, and even declared the right to assassinate American citizens, exercising this “right” to murder Anwar al-Awlaki in 2011. Obama and Biden also bolstered the repressive apparatus of the state, expanding government surveillance programs and funneling billions of dollars in military hardware to local police forces. In 2010, Biden termed Julian Assange a “high tech terrorist,” urging on the state persecution of the WikiLeaks co-founder.

In any event, as the present controversy graphically demonstrates, no matter what the reality of Biden’s record, this warmonger and enemy of the working class has the *New York Times* and the rest to come to his aid.

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