

Gabriela Rivas-De Leon

Debate Reaction

### Americans grabble a contentious presidential debate

Douglas Brinkley detested Chris Wallace's moderation during Tuesday's presidential debate. The history professor, historian, and regular commentator at CNN felt that the Fox News anchor failed to enforce the ground rules of the debate and ultimately, aggravated the candidates.

"I think Chris Wallace was the worst moderator I've ever seen," Brinkley said. "You see, in my business when there's a story, you know, you can ask a question in one sentence. He would go on long-winded sentences, eating up time for Chris Wallace."

In comparing Wallace's performance and what he called "a malfeasance of public discourse" from both Trump and Biden, Brinkley stopped short of calling Wallace the worst part about the debate, arguing that Trump's juvenile behavior was a far worse disservice to the American people.

Brinkley feels that even the simple fix of muting a candidate's microphone when he was not speaking would have been enough to alleviate much of the external noise that came from his opponent's incessant interruption.

Professional tennis player and coach Michael Lake thought that Wallace often played favorites.

“I think maybe he was a little bit more lenient to Biden,” Lake said. “Which I think is how everyone is feeling at this point. I don’t really think it’s the moderator’s job to do that.”

Neither Brinkley or Lake saw a candidate wage a clear victory, and each instead saw the faith of the American people fall as public decorum became the night’s clear victim. According to Brinkley, the debate became less about an exchange of different policies and more about two men duking it out, wanting to knock the other out verbally and catch the last word.

“The debate was an embarrassment to democracy,” said Brinkley. “Instead of trying to educate citizens about public policy, it became an insult test with non-stop interruptions.”

Lake echoed a similar sentiment, disappointed that his only two options acted so childlike in front of so many people. He worries the effect of watching the debate will have on the younger generation, accepting such a chaotic discourse as a conventional occurrence in American politics. Lake said he had never heard a candidate tell his opponent to shut up, viewing the comment as a poor political move.

But a Biden appearance without any major faux-pas is a job well done for Brinkley. Although Brinkley thought he lacked the charisma of his opponent, Biden’s emotional appeal to

families who've lost loved ones on the COVID-19 battlefield felt authentic. Biden put himself in a lay man's shoes, pleading directly into the homes of the American people to choose him, to see him as the only one who can pull America back together.

Biden's attention to the climate crisis especially spoke to Lake; feeling that Tuesday was the first night he had heard Biden really promise environmental action on a national stage.

But even these small moments of Biden clarity were no match for the vacuum of noise that was Trump at his finest, his confidence on stage oozing out of his mouth. His performance displayed his penchant for a circus atmosphere; a man lacking morals, said Lake, with who will do anything to win.

He considered Trump's most egregious moment the verbal attack on Biden's family. It was an attack so personal that Lake saw Biden's defense backfire, watching what he felt was an honest man attempting to win at a cheap fight.

"I think that Biden should have walked the high road," Lake said. "But I understand that it's difficult when emotions are running so high. I don't expect anything better from Trump, but I did expect better from Biden."

Trump's failure to also renounce white supremacist groups failed to resonate with either men, although Lake hesitated to call the president outright racist. He sees the president's willingness to align himself with such groups as just another business deal, citing Trump's desire to win as his ultimate motivation.

Brinkley likened the move to the president playing footsie with Nazis, stating that the president, instead of acting like the head of the U.S. government, came out running his mouth like some sort of “backstreet knife fighter.”

According to Lake, the apparent lack of morality displayed on Tuesday confirmed what he already knew; although Biden lacked the assurance sometimes of the steely politician Lake had hoped he’d be, he deserved Lake’s vote. The only thing Biden could do to lose Lake’s vote was to start echoing Trump’s policies himself.

“Biden, although he’s not exactly what I want, he is the direction I want to go in.” Lake said. “I’m 100% going to back him.”