

# CT Opinions

## Quote of the week

“The death of democracy is not likely to be an assassination from ambush. It will be a slow extinction from apathy, indifference, and undernourishment.”

— ROBERT M. HUTCHINS

## NEW PRESIDENT, OLD PRESIDENT

### It's the same life for minority communities

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Opinions Editor

I WAS CONSTANTLY asked when I was younger, “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

Without hesitation, I would respond: “president.”

Even at a young age, I'd admired the power and elegance that had to be held by someone who was running a global superpower. I wanted to be a phenomenal president as I believed every former president had been.

But, I'd yet to comprehend the dangerous consequences of mistakes and apathy in the Oval Office.

Now, more than ever, I am living those dangerous consequences.

The 2020 presidential election was disheartening. It highlighted this nation's obsession with success, rather than human compassion. Both candidates threatened minority Americans through apathy toward civil rights, education, police violence and healthcare.

As we await election results, I want to make one thing clear. Regardless of who sits in that Oval Office, communities of color will still face an unbearable amount of hardships.

I voted last week but even after casting my ballot, I didn't feel an overwhelming sense of pride.

I voted for someone who was more interested in winning than my undeniable right to affordable healthcare. I voted for someone who found more satisfaction in beating his opponent than dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. I had voted for someone who yearned for victory rather than justice.



Illustration by Marisa Stratton

So, with a new presidential term upon us, I wonder what our justice system's fate will look like.

Mass incarceration has been widely discussed in relation to police violence and the Black Lives Matter protests. It is a fact that Black men fill up American prisons at a disproportionate rate. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Black men are incarcerated at a rate nearly six times higher than white men.

For every six Black men sent to prison to rot away, one white man follows. Some might argue that Black people commit more crimes. I won't even dignify such bigotry with a response when the system's inherent racism and oppression is so blatant.

Neither candidate has any interest in restructuring the justice system to provide fair and equal opportunity to all Americans. Let's not forget that if President Donald Trump were to have it his way, the Exonerated Five would be put to death for a crime they did not commit. In 1989, he printed a full-page advertisement calling for the state of New York to adopt the death penalty after five Black and Latino teens

were wrongly accused, and later convicted, of raping a jogger in New York City.

On the other hand, former Vice President Joe Biden would prefer to “lock the S.O.B.s up” in his version of law and order. In a 1994 speech on the U.S. Senate floor, Biden criticized the Democrats' handling of violent crime rates.

“Every time Richard Nixon, when he was running in 1972, would say, ‘Law and order,’ the Democratic match or response was, ‘Law and order with justice’ — whatever that meant,” Biden said. “And I would say, ‘Lock the S.O.B.s up.’”

While we're on the topic of criminal justice reform, neither of these candidates could find it in their oh-so-big hearts to protect children of color from the horrific school-to-prison pipeline.

The pipeline criminalizes young children, particularly children of color, by forcing them into disciplinary action and punishment — more specifically, punishment by law enforcement. It baffles me how this country can subject children to disturbing and dangerous interactions with law enforcement at such a young age and then expect them to get over it with ease.

I have an 8-year-old brother — a Black boy. I could only imagine the trauma if he had an uncivil interaction with the police at his age. Trump nor Biden will protect my brother. Trump is too busy buying libraries at Ivy League schools and then sending his children there. Meanwhile, Biden's running mate, California Sen. Kamala Harris, has a history of imprisoning Black men as the former attorney general of California.

I can find comfort in my brother's safety, seeing how schools are closed due to the pandemic. But, then I remember the dangers of COVID-19, specifically to those with no access to healthcare. Again, I contemplate the state of my welfare.

Access to healthcare is a basic human right that should never be monopolized or politicized. Nobody should have to give an arm and a leg simply because they've broken one. Nobody should worry about the survival of their child because of the expenses of medicine.

Neither candidates value human life and all of its glory. Trump has spent the past four years trying to repeal the only form of affordable healthcare we have. On the other hand, Biden lacks creativity and is simply complacent with the work done during his vice presidency.

Can you see the point? I'm not excited to see who wins this election because it makes no difference to me.

I'm still Black in America. I'm still Muslim in America. I'm still a woman in America. I'm still an immigrant in America. My struggles and fears do not disappear regardless of who steps into that office.



Illustration by Isabelle Roque

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An information war is being waged against the public. Many unknowingly further the reach of misinformation, while others have the insidious intent of deceiving voters across the nation and even here in Virginia.

I'm currently a senior at VCU studying political science and working on two political campaigns. This connects me to networks of people who have direct access to accurate, up-to-date information on the election and other political news.

However, not everyone has access to such privileges. Few people can spend the majority of their time studying, researching and discussing politics. Most people — particularly college students — are more focused on how they are going to pass their classes, find a job after graduation, and take care of themselves and their families.

Despite your civic engagement, all Americans should be aware of misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation is false information spread without the intention to deceive people; disinformation is spread with the intent to deceive.

The 2016 election showcased the extensive nature of disinformation campaigns. Russian operatives flooded people's social media pages with assaults from bots, troll farms and fake Facebook groups.

However, researchers from the Election Integrity Partnership found the majority of disinformation regarding this year's election is being purported by domestic right-wing media groups. These campaigns aim to create public distrust in the legitimacy of the election and to confuse people about voting procedures to suppress turnout.

These disinformation campaigns utilize both mainstream media and social media as platforms to spread their messages. They usually begin in niche Facebook groups, Reddit threads or Discord chats that facilitate conspiracy theories.

So, what do you do when disinformation or misinformation has affected the views of your peers, friends or family members? What do you do when you see a Facebook post or tweet that is misinformative?

It is instinctive to want to share that story with your friends, make fun of those who are sharing it and move on. However, that doesn't address the problem, and it leaves a large portion of the country misinformed.

Here is my guide for college students trying to fight disinformation campaigns:

First, stay informed by reading and listening to a diverse set of resources. You will not recognize disinformation or know that you are falling prey to it if you are not educating yourself.

Second, when you see a problematic or inaccurate post, take a deep breath. It is valid to feel frustrated and angry but do not let your emotions cause you to further misinform the public with a quick response.

Finally, reply to posts that spread disinformation by leading with the correct information. The only way to combat misinformation is with the truth. You can still post your witty takes and give your friends a good laugh in the replies, but remember to always lead with the truth.

We must build our community. If it is safe and feasible, have difficult conversations with your peers, friends and family members. Listen to them, offer them reliable resources and data, and include your perspective. This doesn't all boil down to one election. Growing an informed and engaged populace is a process that must exist beyond elections.

Misinformation and disinformation pose a dire threat to us. It is our duty to stay up to date and informed. Without education, there can be no revolution.