

---

## THE EMPATHY OF UNITED STATES PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN, THE SOUL OF AMERICA, AND HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY: PART 2

ELLIOT BENJAMIN, Ph.D.

Capella University

### ABSTRACT

The first part of this essay series was initially written in March 2021 when Joe Biden had been the United States president for 2 months and was published in April 2021 (Benjamin, 2021a). It is now July 2021, 4 months later, Biden has been president for nearly 6 months, has signed a bill addressing hate crimes against Asian-Americans, has paid tribute to and commemorated the victims of the 1921 Tulsa, Oklahoma massacre of over 300 Black citizens 100 years ago, has given a significant speech at the 2021 NATO conference, and has turned the corner on the coronavirus pandemic. However, Biden has also taken a number of actions that have been concerning and disappointing to progressives. Consequently, this article serves as a continuation and update of the first part of this essay series.

**Keywords:** Empathy, Hate Crimes, Humanistic Psychology

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the first part of this essay series, I summed up the pros and cons of Joe Biden's first 2 months of his presidency, in regard to his quality of empathy and consequently his relationship to humanistic psychology (Rogers, 1961; Schneider et al, 2015), as follows:

All things considered, in my view Biden in his first 2 months as president has been a much needed respite and redemption from the horrific ordeal of the long 4 Trump years. . . . however, it is also the case that some of Biden's recent decisions and actions have been a source of concern and disapproval from minorities and progressives, inclusive of his bombing in Syria (though he spared the lives of a woman and two children by deciding against bombing a second Syrian target), opening up a closed immigration border facility, and acceptance of the Senate parliamentary decision to reject the \$15 minimum wage inclusion in the Senate Stimulus package. . . . The capitol insurrection did not come out of anywhere, as its seeds have been with us for hundreds of years. . . . However, at the same time, I agree with Biden that we as a country should strive toward our "better angels" and it is exactly with this in mind that I am so thankful that we now have a US president who exemplifies such a high degree of empathy. . . . In conclusion, although the legitimacy of the phrase "the soul of America" is debatable, clearly Joe Biden has exemplified the personal quality of empathy in virtually all of his undertakings, both personal and professional/political, throughout his life. It is no small matter that we now have a president of the United States who is known far and wide as being genuine, caring human being, especially in such stark contrast with the former US president. And it is

exactly Joe Biden's exemplary modelling of empathy that is part and parcel of the basic foundations of Humanistic Psychology, (Benjamin, 2021a, pp. 33, 35-36)

For the second part of this essay series, I believe it is instructive to take a look at how Biden's aforementioned impressive quality of empathy is holding up as both U.S. and world events have grown more complicated and more challenging.

### **Biden's Empathy Amidst Various Challenges Home and Abroad**

In the 4 months that have elapsed since I wrote the first part of this essay series (Benjamin, 2021a), Biden has signed a bill addressing hate crimes against Asian-Americans, participated in the 2021 NATO conference, visited Tulsa, Oklahoma and commemorated the victims of the 1921 racial massacre that took place there 100 years ago, and has turned the corner on the coronavirus pandemic. As I described in the first part of this essay series and above, there are certain aspects of Biden's presidency that progressives have not been happy about. In addition to what I described, more recently this includes their perception of Biden's initial placating of Israel in regard to the intensive violence that took place between Israel and Palestinian Hamas militants, not openly opposing Israel's planned evictions of Palestinian families, and his plans to continue the tremendous amount of military aid that the United States gives to Israel (Wolf, 2021). However, it is also the case that Biden responded to these alarms effectively, as he conveyed in no uncertain terms his support for a ceasefire in a call to the Israeli prime minister, and a day later a ceasefire was agreed upon (Macias & Wilie, 2021). But Biden's continued support of Israel is part of a larger picture of his enormous military focus and commitment, as described in the following statement in a June 2, 2021 e-mail sent out by the progressive WIN WITHOUT WAR movement [1]:

He's [Biden] proposed raising the Pentagon's budget to spend more than Trump. He's pushing through an unprecedented multi-billion-dollar arms sale to the architects of the war in Yemen. He's rejecting a return to the Open Skies Treaty, a critical pact designed to reduce the risk of accidental war with Russia. And he's set to rubber-stamp one BILLION dollars in more—free--missiles and guided bombs for Israel. . . . While President Biden's domestic agenda has at times been ambitious, his foreign policy is a whole lot of same-same status-quo thinking that time and again prioritizes authoritarian regimes and corrupt contractors ahead of human rights and families. We're not denying the positive and profound decisions President Biden has taken so far: withdrawing U.S. troops from Afghanistan and re-entering the Paris Climate Agreement. But these wins were teed up by years and years of grassroots activism, thought-leadership, and congressional advocacy. It's a level of commitment and energy that we've got to sustain. (Italics, capitals, and bold font as used by author)

This is by no means a surprise to me, as it reinforces that Biden has been a longtime political Democratic centrist, who is still very much a centrist when it comes to foreign policy. Biden's decision to bomb Iran-backed military targets in both Syria and Iraq, which included killing a number of militia fighters, is concerning to me, as it is to other progressives (Al Jazeera, 2021; Starr, 2021; Wadhams & Sink, 2021). Furthermore, progressives are disappointed that Biden's May 2021 budget request does not call for any overall reductions in the budgets for the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or Customs and Border

Protection (CBP) agencies and actually asks for additional funds for CBP (Ortiz, 2021). And progressives are especially disappointed that Biden is supportive of the Line Three Pipeline and has dropped his plan to establish a Civilian Climate Corps in order to compromise with Republicans to pass a bipartisan infrastructure package (Lefty Coaster, 2021a, 2021b). However, all things considered, on the domestic front, I think that Biden's empathy has been continuously shining through, and I believe that his recent Tulsa visit and speech exemplify this. Biden talked about the hate that still exists in America and made a connection with the 2017. Charlottesville white supremacist neo-nazi Unite the Right rally that was a prime motivation for him to run for president. Furthermore, I think it also adds nuance to what I described in the first part of this essay series (Benjamin, 2021a) about Biden believing in "the soul of America" as a sacred benevolent force of goodness." To illustrate this, here are some relevant excerpts from Biden's speech [2]:

"For much too long, the history of what took place here was told in silence, cloaked in darkness," he said. "But just because history is silent, it doesn't mean that it did not take place." Biden portrayed the effort to come to grips with that spasm of racist killing, and what it revealed about the bigotry and hatred in American life, as critical to a process of healing and rebuilding that is still underway in the country more broadly. . . . "We do ourselves no favors by pretending none of this ever happened." Biden said. He added, "I come here to help fill the silence because, in silence, wounds deepen. And painful as it is, only in remembrance do wounds heal." (Pager & Linsky, 2021, pp. 1-2)

And this more nuanced version of how Biden perceives the "soul of America" goes hand in hand with him doing what he feels able to do to help all Americans exercise their right to vote, which I see as an important political avenue to express his inspiring degree of empathy:

Biden announced that he was tapping Vice President Harris to marshal an effort against the increasing array of Republican-led state laws that restrict voting in various ways, a campaign Biden was condemned as "un-American." "This sacred right is under assault with incredible intensity like I've never seen." . . . Biden said he would "fight with every tool at my disposal" to get the [voting rights] law passed. He added that "the current assault is not just an echo of distant history—in 2020, we faced restrictive laws, lawsuits, and threats of intimidation, voter purges, and more." (Pager & Linsky, 2021, pp. 1-2)

However, it is also the case that progressives are becoming increasingly disillusioned with Biden not making the HR1/SR1 voting rights bill a high enough priority, especially after the motion to debate the bill got defeated in the Senate by the filibuster (Jaffe, 2021):

"The president has been on the side-lines. He has issued nothing on the scale of his public advocacy for recovery for COVID relief, for roads and bridges." . . . White House advisers see infrastructure as the larger political winner for Biden because it's widely popular among voters of both parties, a White House official said. Passing a major infrastructure bill is seen within the White House as going further towards helping Democrats win in the 2022 midterms and beyond than taking on a massive voting overhaul that had a slim chance of passage without a debate over filibuster

rules. . . . Embracing filibuster changes, in particular, risks undermining Biden's profile as a bipartisan dealmaker and could poison the delicate negotiations around infrastructure, where the White House insists it still sees an opportunity for bipartisan compromise. (pp. 3-4)

The effects of all the hundreds of voter suppression laws in many states that are in the process of being passed, some of them having already been passed, are of tremendous concern to progressives, including myself, in regard to Republicans regaining control of Congress in 2022 and the presidency in 2024 (Benjamin, 2021b; McCarter, 2021):

However much voters might love the infrastructure bill is moot if they can't cast a ballot. . . . That's what Biden and his advisers need to understand, embrace and act upon. . . . Without Congress, nothing Biden proposes in the last two years of this term will happen. . . . Biden's entire agenda—not to mention the foundations of our democracy—is in grave jeopardy. He needs to see that. Everyone around him needs to see that. They need to see that restoring free and fair elections is as existential for the nation as COVID-19 relief was. They need to make filibuster reform a top priority. (McCarter, 2021, p. 4)

However, Biden has indicated that he will take some concrete actions in regard to the dangers of many states passing a multitude of voting restrictions, as he recently said that "he'll travel the country to warn Americans that their ballots may go uncounted if Republican state legislatures' efforts to restrict voting rights are successful" (Jacobs, 2021, p. 1). But for an alternative perspective on the dangers of all these states passing voting restrictions, it has been argued that all the voting restrictions that states have passed and are planning on passing are much less impactful than people tend to think, and may have much less of a detrimental effect on Democratic voting than is generally believed to be the case (Beckwith et al., 2021).

In regard to the international political aspects of Biden's empathy as it relates to his fight against hate, his recent NATO conference participation featured his following remark at a press conference:

We have to root out corruption that siphons off our strength, guard against those who would stoke hatred and division for political gain as phony populism, invest in strengthening institutions that underpin and safeguard our cherished democratic values. (AKALib, 2021, p. 4)

And in regard to the domestic political aspects of Biden's empathy as it relates to his fight against hate, he has focused his combating hate in particular in regard to the rise in hate crimes against Asian-Americans:

All of this hate hides in plain sight. . . . Too often it is met with silence—silence by the media, silence by our politics and silence by our history. . . . My message to all those of you who are hurting are, we see you. . . . We are committed to stopping the hatred and the bias. . . . Of all the good that the law can do, we have to change our hearts. . . . We have to change the hearts of the American people. I mean this from the bottom of my heart. Hate can be given no safe harbor in America. (Edmondson & Tankersley, 2021, pp. 1-2)

And of course, it is very significant how Biden has turned the corner on the coronavirus pandemic, as life has gradually been approaching back to normal for many millions of Americans (Coleman & Sullivan, 2021). I shudder to think of what things would be like now if Trump were still president and we did not have the tremendous surge of vaccinations against the virus that Biden has spearheaded. Although there are disturbing predictions of a very possible surge in Covid-19 cases within the next few months (Nedelman & Kounang, 2021), I believe that Biden's very effective actions that have made significant headway toward defeating the pandemic speak highly to the well-publicized quality of his empathy that I have thus far described in this essay series.

## CONCLUSION

As we navigate through Biden's first 6 months as President of the United States, while a number of aspects of both his foreign and domestic policies are discouraging for progressives, I think that his rhetoric and policies regarding empathy and combating hate continue to be on proud display for all to see. And I believe that my perspective about Biden's empathy is crucially important in the current United States political environment, as in the midst of hundreds of voting restriction laws in the process of being passed in the states, a number of political commentators have warned us about the dangers of the United States betraying democracy and soon becoming a fascist authoritarian country if these dangers are not overcome (Dyer, 2021; Haque, 2021; Lott, 2021). And in this regard, I think it is exceedingly dangerous and ill-foreboding that in the first Supreme Court challenge to these voting restriction laws, in the state of Arizona, the Supreme Court upheld the right of Arizona to pass these voting restrictions laws (de Vogue et al., 2021). But I am thankful that President Biden has demonstrated that he is on the side of fighting for democracy, and taken as a whole, I believe that the first nearly 6 months of Joe Biden's presidency is a worthy tribute to both his quality of empathy and to the basic premise of genuinely caring about people, which is the hallmark of humanistic psychology.

## Notes

- 1) See the WIN WITHOUT WAR website at [info@winwithoutwar.org](mailto:info@winwithoutwar.org)
- 2) For the full video of Biden's Tulsa speech see [file:///C:/Users/Elliot%20Benjamin/Documents/biden%20tulsa%20speech--WATCH %20Biden%20marks%20Tulsa%20race%20massacre%20in%20emotional,%20graphic%20speech%20 %20PBS%20NewsHour.html](file:///C:/Users/Elliot%20Benjamin/Documents/biden%20tulsa%20speech--WATCH%20Biden%20marks%20Tulsa%20race%20massacre%20in%20emotional,%20graphic%20speech%20%20PBS%20NewsHour.html)

## REFERENCES

- Al Jazeera (2021). *First US military action under Biden draws criticism*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/26/unconstitutional-us-airstrikes-on-syria-draw-strong-criticism>
- AKALib. (2021). *At NATO, Biden calls out trump's phony populism and the diminished republican part*. Retrieved from <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2021/6/14/2035285/-At-NATO-Biden-calls-out-trump-s-phony-populism-and-the-diminished-republican-party>

- Beckwith, R. T., McCartney, A., & Rojanasakul, M. (2021). *Republicans fall short in voting-rights crackdown while adding hassle at polls*. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2021-voting-laws/>
- Benjamin, E. (2021a). The empathy of United States President Joe Biden, the soul of America, and humanistic psychology. *Self & Society: An International Journal for Humanistic Psychology*, 49(1), 31-37
- Benjamin, E. (2021b). *Giving power to U.S. Centrist Democratic senators: Bipartisan wisdom or folly?* Retrieved from [www.integralworld.net/benjamin125.html](http://www.integralworld.net/benjamin125.html)
- Coleman, J., & Sullivan, P. (2021). *The US reaching a turning point in pandemic amid vaccination concerns*. Retrieved from <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/552980-us-reaching-turning-point-in-pandemic-amid-vaccination-concerns>
- Dyer, G. (2021). *The fascists really are coming (in the US)*. Retrieved from <https://bangordailynews.com/2021/06/28/opinion/contributors/the-fascists-really-are-coming-in-the-us/>
- Edmondson, C., & Tankersley, J. (2021). *Biden signs bills addressing hate crimes against Asian-Americans*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/20/us/politics/biden-asian-hate-crimes-bill.html>
- Haque, U. (2021). *The second coming of American fascism: American democracy's under authoritarian assault—and it's more lethal than ever*. Retrieved from <https://eand.co/the-second-coming-of-american-fascism-d24d89e26013>
- Jaffe, A. (2021). *Biden faces growing pressure from the leftover voting bill*. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-voting-rights-bills-voting-government-and-politics-1437f58f83a17f207e931b586955c650>
- Lefty Coaster (2021a). *Sunrise movement use chains to block WH gates as Biden guts Green infrastructure to satisfy GOP*. Retrieved from <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2021/6/30/2037797/-Sunrise-Movement-use-chains-to-block-WH-gates-as-Biden-guts-Green-Infrastructure-to-satisfy-GOP>
- Lefty Coaster (2021b). *Biden admin. stiff's Tribes backs up Trump approval of Line Three Pipeline for important Tar Sands*. Retrieved from <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2021/6/24/2036872/-Biden-Admin-stiffs-Tribes-backs-up-Trump-approval-of-Line-Three-Pipeline-for-importing-Tar-Sands>
- Lott, J. (2021). *100+ democracy experts issue dire warnings about threats to voting rights in the US*. Retrieved from <https://truthout.org/articles/100-democracy-scholars-issue-dire-warning-about-threats-to-voting-rights-in-us/>
- Macias, A., & Wilie, C. (2021). *Israel and Hamas agree to cease-fire over the Gaza conflict*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/05/20/israel-and-hamas-agree-to-cease-fire-over-gaza-conflict-reports-say.html>

- McCarter, J. (2021). *Republicans have the permanent majority in reach. Breaking the filibuster is the only way to stop them.* Retrieved from <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2021/6/23/2036684/-It-s-time-for-Biden-to-use-his-bully-pulpit-to-fight-the-filibuster>
- Nedelman, M., & Kounang, N. (2021). *What the Delta variant could mean for Covid-19 in the United States.* Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/22/health/covid-variant-delta-gamma/index.html>
- Ortiz, G. (2021). *President Biden's first budget request fails to slash funding for ICE and CBP.* Retrieved from <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2021/6/8/2034201/-President-Biden-s-first-budget-request-fails-to-slash-funding-for-ICE-and-CBP>
- Pager, T., & Linsky, A. (2021). *Biden announces Harris will lead a push for voting protections in response to states' recent ballot restrictions at the Tulsa event.* Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/ahead-of-tulsa-trip-biden-to-unveil-new-plans-to-reduce-black-white-wealth-gap/2021/05/31/b80c9c4e-c269-11eb-8c18-fd53a628b992\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/ahead-of-tulsa-trip-biden-to-unveil-new-plans-to-reduce-black-white-wealth-gap/2021/05/31/b80c9c4e-c269-11eb-8c18-fd53a628b992_story.html)
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On Becoming a person.* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Schneider, K. J., Pierson, J. F., & Bugental, J. F. T. (eds.) (2015). *The handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd Ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Starr, B. (2021). *Biden orders airstrikes against facilities used by Iran-backed militia groups.* Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/27/politics/us-airstrikes-iran-backed-militia-groups/index.html>
- Vogue, A., Schouten, F., & Duster, C. (2021). *Supreme Court says Arkizona limits don't violate Voting Rights Act.* Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/01/politics/voting-rights-act-supreme-court-ruling/index.html>
- Wadhams, N., & Sink, J. (2021). *Biden defends strikes on Iran-backed militias, rebuts critics.* Retrieved from <https://www.yahoo.com/now/u-hits-iran-backed-militias-232642824.html>
- Wolf, Z. b. (2021). *Biden faces an angry rift in his own party over the Israel-Palestinian conflict.* Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/16/politics/biden-israel-progressive-democrats/index.html>