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Opinion

Trump Is a Racist. Period.

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From left: Paul Ryan, the speaker of the House, Senator John Cornyn and Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader, listening to President Trump earlier this month. Credit Eric Thayer for The New York Times

I find nothing more useless than debating the existence of racism, particularly when you are surrounded by evidence of its existence. It feels to me like a way to keep you fighting against the water until you drown.

The debates themselves, I believe, render a simple concept impossibly complex, making the very meaning of “racism” frustratingly murky.

So, let’s strip that away here. Let’s be honest and forthright.

Racism is simply the belief that race is an inherent and determining factor in a person’s or a people’s character and capabilities, rendering some inferior and others superior. These beliefs are racial prejudices.

The history of America is one in which white people used racism and white supremacy to develop a racial caste system that advantaged them and disadvantaged others.

Understanding this, it is not a stretch to understand that Donald Trump's words and deeds over the course of his life have demonstrated a pattern of expressing racial prejudices that demean people who are black and brown and that play to the racial hostilities of other white people.

It is not a stretch to say that Trump is racist. It's not a stretch to say that he is a white supremacist. It's not a stretch to say that Trump is a bigot.

Those are just facts, supported by the proof of the words that keep coming directly from him. And, when he is called out for his racism, his response is never to ameliorate his rhetoric, but to double down on it.

I know of no point during his entire life where he has apologized for, repented of, or sought absolution for any of his racist actions or comments.

Instead, he either denies, deflects or amps up the attack.

Trump is a racist. We can put that baby to bed.

"Racism" and "racist" are simply words that have definitions, and Trump comfortably and unambiguously meets those definitions.

We have unfortunately moved away from the simple definition of racism, to the point where the only people to whom the appellation can be safely applied are the vocal, violent racial archetypes.

Racism doesn't require hatred, constant expression, or even conscious awareness. We want racism to be fringe rather than foundational. But, wishing isn't an effective method of eradication.

We have to face this thing, stare it down and fight it back.

The simple acknowledgment that Trump is a racist is the easy part. The harder, more substantive part is this: What are we going to do about it?

First and foremost, although Trump is not the first president to be a racist, we must make him the last. If by some miracle he should serve out his first term, he mustn't be allowed a second. Voters of good conscience must swarm the polls in 2020.

But before that, those voters must do so later this year, to rid the House and the Senate of as many of Trump's defenders, apologists and accomplices as possible. Should the time come where impeachment is inevitable, there must be enough votes in the House and Senate to ensure it.

We have to stop thinking that we can somehow separate what racists believe from how they will behave. We must stop believing that any of Trump's actions are clear of the venom coursing through his convictions. Everything he does is an articulation of who he is and what he believes. Therefore, all policies he supports, positions he takes and appointments he makes are suspect.

And finally, we have to stop giving a pass to the people — whether elected official or average voter — who support and defend his racism. If you defend racism you are part

of the racism. It doesn't matter how much you say that you're an egalitarian, how much you say that you are race blind, how much you say that you are only interested in people's policies and not their racist polemics.

As the brilliant James Baldwin once put it: "I can't believe what you say, because I see what you do." When I see that in poll after poll a portion of Trump's base continues to support his behavior, including on race, I can only conclude that there is no real daylight between Trump and his base. They are part of his racism.

When I see the extraordinary hypocrisy of elected officials who either remain silent in the wake of Trump's continued racist outbursts or who obliquely condemn him, only to in short order return to defending and praising him and supporting his agenda, I see that there is no real daylight between Trump and them either. They too are part of his racism.

When you see it this way, you understand the enormity and the profundity of what we are facing. There were enough Americans who were willing to accept Trump's racism to elect him. There are enough people in Washington willing to accept Trump's racism to defend him. Not only is Trump racist, the entire architecture of his support is suffused with that racism. Racism is a fundamental component of the Trump presidency.