

## **Joe Biden's Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Event As Message and Metaphor**

by Wendell Griffen

U.S. President Joe Biden's successful campaign for the presidency in 2020 was taken from near intensive care desperation thanks to Black voters in South Carolina and the endorsement of South Carolina Congressman James Clyburn. South Carolina is the first Democratic Party state primary in 2024. The head of the Democratic National Committee is Jaime Harrison, a Black man Biden selected for that position in 2021. That history made Biden's January 8 campaign appearance in Charleston, South Carolina understandable.

The site of Biden's blatant campaign appearance, Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church, is understandable also. Biden spoke from the same pulpit that former President Barack Obama stood behind to deliver the eulogy for Reverend Clementa Pinckney in 2015 after a white supremacist, Dylan Roof, murdered Reverend Pinckney and 8 other members of the church during a mid-week evening prayer meeting.

Biden's appearance and remarks were, however, unfortunate. He was not there to comfort the bereaved. He was there to command the attention of his audience, and use them as props for an appeal to Black voters - and the rest of the nation - for his reelection campaign. Biden delivered a campaign speech, nothing else. That was not merely an unfortunate venue. It was blatantly inappropriate.

In that sense, Biden's appearance, speech, and reactions to it were metaphorical.

It is telling about Biden's hypocrisy that he went to a Black church to decry white supremacy. Black people do not need Joe Biden or any other white politician to tell them about the evils of white supremacy. Biden hasn't talked about white supremacy to white congregations.

Anywhere.

Check his record.

Name a white congregation that invited him to do so. Too late. You can't. It hasn't happened.

Biden is not credible in 2024 about white supremacy. He has been the most loud, proud, and powerful supporter among current world leaders for the State of Israel, with its apartheid policies, multi-generational bigotry against Palestinians, land theft, settler colonialism, and genocidal conduct in East Jerusalem, the occupied West Bank, and Gaza. Note: Barack Obama was also during his presidency.

The same is true of white congregations, in South Carolina and elsewhere in the United States.

Israel and the United States supported the racist policies of the South African apartheid regime. Joe Biden supported Israel. So have white churchgoers in South Carolina, and elsewhere in the United States.

Israel opposed Palestinian independence and attempted to gain full recognition as a nation. Biden supported Israel.

Black people and the rest of the world know that 23,000 Palestinians have been murdered by Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) since October 7, 2023. Biden supports Israel.

Palestinians have been bombed to death while huddling in mosques, hospitals, schools, humanitarian refugee camps, and churches, the same way Black children were bombed to death and maimed by white supremacists while attending church in Birmingham, Alabama. Biden supports Israel.

Palestinians have been murdered by Israeli snipers like Medgar Evers and Martin Luther King Jr. were killed. Biden supports Israel.

Biden's administration has funded, outfitted, counseled, and cheered Israeli violence against Palestinians. Yet Biden had the gall to travel to South Carolina, stand in the pulpit of a Black church, and talk about the evil of white supremacy to a predominantly Black audience as if he is not complicit in the genocide of Palestinians by the Israeli government.

Biden's appearance and speech was hypocritical, unpersuasive, and culturally incompetent. It was also in keeping with his career-long fecklessness about U.S. support for white supremacy in the U.S. and across the world throughout its history.

It would be easy to stop analyzing the January 8 appearance at this point. But Biden's appearance at Mother Emanuel also was a vivid spectacle of Black clergy whose commitment to the empire has disabled their capacity for prophetic discernment and activism. When protesters interrupted Biden's campaign speech by calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, Black clergy did not affirm their message.

Instead, they joined the crowd of Biden supporters who chanted "Four more years."

Black clergy volunteered to stand and applaud Biden, the most formidable enabler of Israeli war crimes, apartheid, and other violence against Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.

They did so a week before the holiday commemorating the prophetic life, ministry, and courage of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who condemned the U.S. war in Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

And they did so on the first Sunday after the Epiphany, when followers of Jesus commemorated the visit of magi to the toddler Jesus, and a murderous ruler named Herod ordered the massacre of children in and near Bethlehem.

Watch the video. Notice the response of the assembled clergy when protesters called for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Did it remind you of MLK?

John Lewis?

Gardner Taylor?

Harriet Tubman?

Fannie Lou Hamer?

James Cone?

Jeremiah Wright Jr.?

Frederick Douglass?

James Baldwin?

Malcolm X?

Angela Davis?

Harry Belafonte?

Did it remind you of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Hershel, William Sloan Coffin, Coretta Scott King, or Dorothy Day?

Imagine Dr. King inviting Lyndon Johnson to make a campaign speech at Ebenezer Baptist Church in 1967, when the Johnson administration was killing people in Vietnam.

I dare you to find that thought comforting, let alone inspiring.

It would certainly not have been prophetic had King done so. Rather, it would have made King a cheerleader for U.S. militarism, racism, and capitalism, not its most prophetic critic.

A sad spectacle occurred at Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church on January 8. The world was treated to a vivid display of political, cultural, humanitarian, and prophetic incompetence. As I watched and replayed the footage of Biden's appearance, I remembered these words from the prophet Jeremiah.

"The harvest is passed; the summer has ended. And we are not saved."