

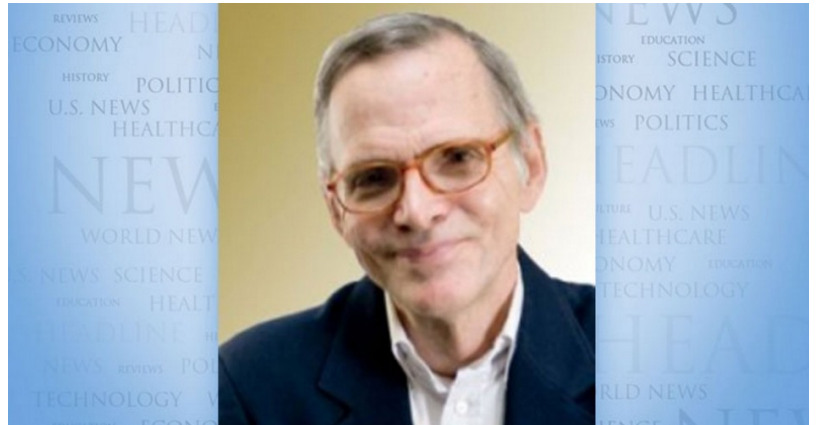


Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on November 9, 2012

## It Was “Deja-Dewey” All Over Again

In assessing the Republican meltdown of November 6, let us not blame the candidate at the top of the ticket. No, we mustn't blame the candidate, not when there are so many other explanations readily at hand. Explanations such as:

The hurricanes did it. Yes, there were two hurricanes that got in the way of a Republican victory. There was Hurricane What'sitsname at the end of August that, just like '08, forced the Republicans to cancel the opening day of the party's national convention. Bad luck, it seems. You can hardly blame Romney or the Republicans for what insurance companies like to call an “act of God.” (Then again, one might wonder what the Republicans had done to make God mad.) Surely one more night for America to watch “rah rah” Republicans cheering, howling, and waving their little flags for Romney might have inspired more people to go out and vote for the great man.



The compressed schedule of the remaining three days left prime-time viewers deprived of the inspiring oratory of Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida, and even knocked out of prime-time viewing a biographical video of Romney. Or so it was reported, anyway. I don't know how long the video was, but if it had been highlights of Mitt taking firm stands for those conservative Republican principles he had lately been espousing, I would think it could be shown in hardly any time at all — much less time, anyway, that what was squandered on Clint Eastwood's awkward and amateurish impersonation of Clint Eastwood.

Then there was Hurricane Sandy in the week before the election. That blocked Romney's momentum, forcing the challenger to cancel campaign appearances, while Obama could be seen visiting disaster areas, looking and acting presidential. And there was New Jersey Governor Chris Christie heaping praise on Obama just before the election, lauding the president for his leadership, his compassion, concern, yadda, yadda, yadda. And yes, that's the same Chris Christie who, as keynote speaker at the convention, hardly mentioned Mitt Romney in a speech laden with praise of Gov. Christie. Surely, it was Christie's “betrayal” that cost Republicans the election. But no, no, wait a minute, it was ...

Akin and Mourdoch. GOP Senate candidates Todd Akin in Missouri and Richard Mourdoch in Indiana had to open their big mouths to say they believe that pre-born babies, even those conceived by rape, have a right to live. That gave the Obama campaign an opening to talk about “reproductive freedom” and other “women's issues” and got the campaign off Mitt's message on the economy and onto those troublesome social issues for which the Republicans like to take strong stands, so long as they don't



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have to talk about them. By honestly answering questions put to them and stating what they truly believed, Akin and Mourdoch placed principles ahead of expediency and really messed things up for Mitt and the party strategists, who understand and appreciate the importance of having candidates unencumbered by candor. Then again maybe it was Mitt's ...

Primary opponents. Mitt's message — whatever it was — had to compete with Herman Cain's "9-9-9," Ron Paul's warnings about the Federal Reserve, and Newt's nutty ideas about colonizing the moon. Viewers tuning into any of the primary debates had to strain to learn and remember what positions on which issues Gov. Romney was taking on that particular evening. It led to much confusion.

And, of course, all those negative ads his primary opponents ran against him tarnished Mitt's bright image long before the general election campaign began. The Obama campaign needed only to recycle some of the things his fellow Republicans had been saying about Romney before adding a few charges of their own. Surely, a Republican candidate shouldn't have to weather a storm of negative ads from within the GOP "big tent" before going out to battle the Democrats.

Well, let's see now. Have I left anything out? Perhaps, if we're not going to blame the candidate, we should blame the voters. It was Republican primary voters, after all, who chose a candidate for president with no core convictions, no coherent campaign strategy and an attitude toward foreign policy that would likely get our nation involved in still more Middle East wars. And Romney proposed increasing military spending by a couple trillion dollars over the next decade, even though our current military spending is roughly equivalent to that of all the other nations of the world combined. Surely an astute businessman such as Romney must have noticed that we are now over \$16 trillion in debt. Admiral Mike Mullen, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said the greatest threat to our nation's security is the national debt. The terrorists with whom we are at war have not done, and likely cannot equal, the amount of damage we are doing to ourselves.

That includes, most importantly, damage to our God-given liberties, guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. Did we once hear Gov. Romney speak up for any of them? Did he ever oppose the broad surveillance powers given the government in the Patriot Act? He expressed his support for the provisions of the National Defense Authorization Act that cede to the president the power to lock up terror suspects, including U.S. citizens, indefinitely, without charge and without trial. The president himself claims, and has exercised, the "right" to target U.S. citizens overseas for assassination. Ever hear Romney object to that? Is there any immoral and unconstitutional extension of executive power to which he would object? Joe Sobran's assessment of Bob Dole in 1996 applies equally to Mitt Romney in 2012: "He has no more concept of conservative governance than a fish has of life in the forest."

So perhaps GOP primary voters are as much to blame as Romney for holding the Constitution and its guarantees of liberty in such low regard. My own experience leads me to believe that there is no surer or quicker way to make oneself unpopular than to attend a Republican gathering and speak up for the Bill of Rights.

Republican primary voters are capable of springing an upset here and there. This year Santorum outpolled Romney in a few states and Gingrich trounced him in South Carolina. But for the most part, party loyalists seem to see it as their duty every four years to go to polls and rubber-stamp their approval of a pre-anointed frontrunner. Romney had the telegenic good looks, the money, the early endorsements, and the media attention. He was the one with the best chance to beat Obama, said the smart people, the party pragmatists who are always eager to rise above principle and who think of convictions, if at all, as something common people get for motor vehicle violations. How many times



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must their alleged pragmatism fall flat on its keister before people realize the truth of the witticism, “The trouble with pragmatism is that it doesn’t work.”

There is truth, too, in the adage, “You can’t beat something with nothing.” Offering nothing, or close to nothing, in the way of real conviction, Romney gave voters little reason to choose him over “the devil they know” in the White House. Aside from a fleeting reference to possibly defunding the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and a promise to eliminate funding for Planned Parenthood, did he ever suggest eliminating any of the thousand or more federal programs for which there is no constitutional warrant? He would trim a bit around the edges, perhaps, and adopt the spending plan of his running mate, Paul Ryan, which would bring us at last to a balanced budget — in 28 years.

To wage a campaign against ObamaCare, Republicans chose the father of the nearly identical Romneycare in Massachusetts. To drive out an incumbent plagued by a woeful economy and an unsettling foreign policy, they nominated a taller Tom Dewey. In one sense, I’ll admit, the comparison is a bit unfair. Romney never did have a big lead in the polls to squander, as Dewey did against Truman. But he did squander that surge in the polls that followed his performance in the first debate. He won that contest on style more than substance, but by forcefully taking the fight to a seemingly bored and indifferent Obama, he pulled even with or slightly ahead of the president in the polls. So what did he do? He adopted a softer, less confrontational approach soon after, especially in the third and final debate, when he expressed so much “me too” agreement with the president that he might have been playing Tweedledum to Obama’s Tweedledee. A less confrontational approach, with a generous showering of happy platitudes and genial generalities, was supposed to be reassuring to independent voters and especially to women. And why not?



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