

Romney World's Freedom from Fact

Exclusive: The Republican National Convention offered a look into one alternate future for America, a place where the ultimate liberty is to be fact-free. Mitt Romney's campaign set sail confidently toward that future trusting that a plurality of Americans who will vote (or be allowed to vote) is onboard, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Perhaps it was inevitable when you combine the Republican "do-anything-to-win" strategies, honed from the days of Richard Nixon, with the Right's vast media machine, built over the past several decades, that America would have a campaign like the one waged by Mitt Romney and a GOP convention like the one just completed in Tampa.

In a speech to the 1988 Republican National Convention, President Ronald Reagan blundered in quoting John Adams's famous remark that "facts are stubborn things," except that it came out of Reagan's mouth as "facts are stupid things." Reagan's mangled quote would have fit nicely at the GOP convention 24 years later.

Today's Republicans appear to have decided that facts are also irrelevant things. While it's true that all campaigns spin the truth somewhat and pounce on clumsy remarks from rivals, the Romney campaign has not only ventured outside the traditional boundaries but has set up a permanent settlement there.

The GOP convention had the feel of a cult meeting in which everyone agrees on the same false premises. Speaker after speaker reprised President Barack Obama's out-of-context quote "you didn't build that" accompanied by endless Republican signage and t-shirts. Everyone with a brain knew that Obama's "that" wasn't a reference to a person's business but to the roads, bridges and infrastructure indeed, the American system of public-private cooperation dating back to the Founding that help businesses succeed.

But the speakers and the delegates had to act as if they believed the lie that has become a centerpiece of Mitt Romney's campaign, that Obama meant that no businessman actually built a business. Similarly, everyone had to believe that Obama had eliminated the work requirements in welfare reform though they also had to know that his administration had simply responded to a bipartisan appeal from state governors to give them greater flexibility in implementing the work-requirement law.

Indeed, looking in at the Republican convention was like peering into a bizarre alternate reality where all the people accept lies as truth. Acceptance of the fabrications seemed something of a prerequisite to be in the cult. Anyone who would dare to point out the “you-didn’t-build-that” distortion or expose the lie about gutting welfare reform would have been identified as a heretic.

So, speaker after speaker repeated the lies and delegate upon delegate cheered the lies. There was almost a pride and defiance in the lying and the cheering, as if the Republicans were in a full-throated rebellion against what one of George W. Bush’s aide’s once derided as the “reality-based community.”

An Anti-Reality Coalition

What may be qualitatively different now is the quantitative acceptance of this contempt for reality by so many Americans. This “anti-reality” coalition, which has grown steadily over the past several decades, may now be close to a plurality, at least among those Americans who are likely to vote (or be allowed to vote) in November.

That also appears to be the calculation of the Romney campaign whose strategists sense that the United States has reached and possibly gone past a tipping point into a political world contemptuous of empiricism and science. Their confidence is buttressed by the growing American distrust toward settled matters of science, from evolution to climate change.

It’s there, too, in the racist conspiracy theory about Obama’s birthplace, an ugly and baseless suspicion that Romney revived with a “joke” just before the convention when he told a crowd in Michigan that “no one’s ever asked to see my birth certificate.”

Though mainstream pundits were quick to make excuses for Romney NBC’s Tom Brokaw, for instance, insisted that it was just a clumsy joke Romney’s “birther” reference coincided with his strategists explaining how they were trying to bolster Romney’s lead among white, working-class men.

For Romney to offer a wink that he shares the doubts of millions of “birthers” that Obama isn’t “a real American” fits neatly with his campaign’s broader strategy, which also includes bogus claims that virtually non-existent voter fraud justifies strict (and often arbitrary) voter ID laws that everyone knows are designed to suppress the votes of black, Hispanics and the poor to give white votes greater weight.

Shutting Up Truth-Tellers

While Fox News, Rush Limbaugh and the rest of the powerful right-wing media

predictably support this inverse reality of Romney World, the timid mainstream press mostly shields Romney from the obvious and distasteful conclusion that his presidential campaign has evolved into a foul brew of blatant lies, race-baiting and Jim Crow-style voter suppression.

In the name of “balance,” the “centrist” press often flips over backward. For example, the New York Times’ TV critic Alessandra Stanley took to task the liberal commentators at MSNBC for using tough language in assessing dishonest claims by Romney and other Republicans. Stanley went so far as to suggest that the MSNBC crew should be muzzled.

“You can agree with everything that Rachel Maddow or Ed Schultz say on MSNBC and still oppose their right to say it,” Stanley wrote in Friday’s editions. “Especially when they and their hyped-up panelists shout that Republican claims are ‘lies,’ or Chris Matthews says that Republicans view welfare recipients as ‘looters.’”

In an earlier America, you might have expected the New York Times to phrase that opening sentence differently, i.e. “you can disagree with everything said by Maddow and Schultz and still support their right to say it.” Now, journalists using accurate, albeit harsh, language is an excuse to shut them up.

Stanley further dismissed MSNBC’s reporting on the Republican convention as “counterprogramming, not coverage,” adding that “all that arch sarcasm and partisan brio may rev up the cable channel’s fans, but it constrains and stains NBC News, its corporate sibling.” In other words, she’s wants the execs at NBC’s HQ to crack down.

Yet, what is a journalist supposed to do when one political party or one candidate decouples almost entirely from the real world? Presumably, the Times’ TV critic would have journalists simply nod their heads and pass on lies as truth, all in the name of some twisted notion of “objectivity” which denies the existence of objective fact.

However, even some of the Times’ reporters were chafing under the endless lies and distortions coming out of the Republican convention. In a “Check Point” column, Michael Cooper cited a litany of fact-bending moments in vice presidential nominee Paul Ryan’s acceptance speech on Wednesday and Romney’s on Thursday.

“The two speeches peppered with statements that were incorrect or incomplete seemed to signal the arrival of a new kind of presidential campaign, one in which concerns about fact-checking have been largely set aside,” Cooper wrote.

Among the misleading statements in the speeches, Cooper noted that Ryan omitted

that he helped kill the deficit-reduction recommendations that he blamed Obama for not enacting; that he sought the same \$716 billion savings from Medicare that he faulted Obama for seeking; and that he shared the blame for the political impasse that led to last year's U.S. credit downgrade while pointing the finger at Obama.

Cooper's article also cited many false or misleading claims in Romney's speech, such as assertions that Obama's policies had "not helped create jobs"; that the President had gone on an "apology tour" for America; and that Obama's Medicare cuts would "hurt today's seniors" although such claims have been repeatedly debunked.

Revisionist History

But the speeches by Romney and Ryan were even more divorced from reality than those specifics would indicate. More broadly, they presented a revisionist history of the last three-plus years during which Republicans supposedly had united behind President Obama to solve America's economic crisis.

For instance, Romney said, "Four years ago, I know that many Americans felt a fresh excitement about the possibilities of a new president. That president was not the choice of our party but Americans always come together after elections. We are a good and generous people who are united by so much more than what divides us.

"When that hard-fought election was over, when the yard signs came down and the television commercials finally came off the air, Americans were eager to go back to work, to live our lives the way Americans always have optimistic and positive and confident in the future. That very optimism is uniquely American."

But what Romney omitted was that even as the yard signs were coming down and the TV ads were ending, the Republican partisanship was just getting started. Despite the fact that the nation was facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression after eight years of a Republican presidency the Republicans marched in virtual lockstep to block or frustrate Obama's programs to fix the economy and to get Americans back to work.

Indeed, the two acceptance speeches could be viewed as the culmination of the Republican strategy to sabotage Obama's presidency from its very first moments. Ignoring the painful hangover from George W. Bush's Republican reckless policies, Romney and Ryan instead blamed Obama for almost everything that has gone wrong, including Ryan faulting Obama for the shutdown of a General Motors plant in Wisconsin which ceased assembly-line production before Obama was sworn in.

For his part, Romney asserted in a syrupy voice, "I wish President Obama had succeeded because I want America to succeed. But his promises gave way to disappointment and division. This isn't something we have to accept.

"Now is the moment when we CAN do something. With your help we will do something. Now is the moment when we can stand up and say, 'I'm an American. I make my destiny. And we deserve better! My children deserve better! My family deserves better. My country deserves better!'"

Hostage-Takers Win

Essentially, the Romney-Ryan ticket is asking the American people to comply with the take-the-economy-hostage strategy that the Republicans began in 2009 when they deployed the Senate filibuster, the Right's media power and every other available means to prevent Obama from carrying out his policies. Then, to reclaim power, the Republicans relied on the pain and impatience of the American people.

"America has been patient," Romney said. "Americans have supported this president in good faith. But today, the time has come to turn the page. Today the time has come for us to put the disappointments of the last four years behind us. To put aside the divisiveness and the recriminations. To forget about what might have been and to look ahead to what can be."

However, Romney, like Ryan, offered only generalities about how a return to Republican governance would help the broader American public. Romney simply painted the picture of a glorious future of plentiful jobs, energy independence, lower taxes and lower deficits if he is elected and only more suffering if Obama wins a second term.

"To the majority of Americans who now believe that the future will not be better than the past, I can guarantee you this: if Barack Obama is re-elected, you will be right," Romney said.

The Republican nominee also inserted a mocking reference to the threat of global warming and suggested that Americans should place their short-term well-being ahead of the long-term viability of the planet. Romney said, "President Obama promised to begin to slow the rise of the oceans and heal the planet. MY promise (pause) is to help you and your family."

Romney also vowed to return to a more muscular foreign policy, like the one pursued by the neocons during George W. Bush's presidency.

"Every American is less secure today because [Obama] has failed to slow Iran's nuclear threat," Romney said. "President Obama has thrown allies like Israel

under the bus, even as he has relaxed sanctions on Castro's Cuba. He abandoned our friends in Poland by walking away from our missile defense commitments, but is eager to give Russia's President Putin the flexibility he desires, after the election. Under my administration, our friends will see more loyalty, and Mr. Putin will see a little less flexibility and more backbone."

In many ways, Mitt Romney's World resembles George W. Bush's World. Both are fantasylands where the many challenges facing the American people can be solved with more tax cuts tilted to the rich; with more deregulation regardless of the damage to the environment and to the financial system; with more military bluster directed against adversaries everywhere, and with more demands for a national unity that was systematically denied to President Obama.

Like Bush's World, Romney's World also is a place where reality is demonized, where loyal Americans are separated from disloyal ones based on whether they embrace fiction as fact. It is a place where ignorance is celebrated and bigotry is okay.

While having similarities to previous Republican worldviews that brought the GOP to power from Ronald Reagan's voodoo economics in 1980 to George H.W. Bush's "flag factory" and "Willie Horton" campaign in 1988 to George W. Bush's "restore honor and decency" approach in 2000 Romney's campaign style has the look of a refined model made possible by the decades-long expansion of the right-wing media that has conditioned Americans to Orwellian absurdities.

In Romney's World, the happy citizens will enjoy the ultimate in liberty; they will be fact-free.

To read more of Robert Parry's writings, you can now order his last two books, *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, at the discount price of only \$16 for both. For details on the special offer, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

GOP's Fact-Challenged Convention

Even by the measure of modern U.S. political events, the Republican National

Convention was fact-challenged. Again and again, Republicans reprised their favorite canards and distortions, including the claim that President Obama has eliminated the work requirement in welfare, writes William Boardman.

By William Boardman

Some people don't believe in such a thing as objective truth. Other people don't care what's true or not true. And then there's the rest of us, trying to figure out what's real in the modern media maelstrom. Take Tuesday night at the Republican National Convention, just a snapshot, the truth problem in a microcosm, before, during, and after Rick Santorum spoke.

Rachel Maddow was anchoring the coverage on MSNBC, Maddow is avowedly liberal, but even more avowedly committed to getting facts right. She habitually asks her guests if she got her facts right in stories they are knowledgeable about, something few other newspeople do so consistently. And she is scrupulous in making corrections when she gets something wrong.

In other words, Maddow is a reporter with real integrity and here she is with her assortment of MSNBC talking heads getting ready to listen to former Senator and presidential candidate Rick Santorum, and she predicts that he will lie. (Journalists often do have the benefit of getting prepared texts of major speeches.)

Maddow predicts that Santorum will specifically lie about the waivers that five governors (including two Republicans) asked the Obama administration to consider in relation to the federal welfare rules on work for those receiving welfare.

When the administration agreed to consider waivers, it made clear it would grant a waiver to the law's work requirements only on the condition that more welfare recipients find jobs than under current rules. To date, the Obama administration has granted no waivers. And the two Republican governors who joined in the original request, Brian Sandoval of Nevada and Gary Herbert of Utah, are backing away from their initial position.

In 2005, during George W. Bush's administration, Gov. Mitt Romney of Massachusetts joined 28 other governors who wrote a letter to Congress seeking broader waiver authority from the law than the Obama administration has agreed to consider. And Gov. Romney also supported a program that provided free automobiles to welfare recipients.

But since early August, presidential candidate Mitt Romney has been running ads claiming that President Obama is eliminating work as a welfare requirement with a racially tinged explanation suggesting that Obama is pandering to his base.

One Romney ad in early August claimed that: “On July 12, President Obama quietly ended the work requirement, gutting welfare reform. One of the most respected newspapers in the country called it ‘nuts’. Under Obama’s plan, you wouldn’t have to work and you wouldn’t have to train for a job. They just send you your welfare check. And welfare to work goes back to being plain old welfare.”

Romney’s claims have been widely criticized and debunked as false by fact-checking organizations including CNN, the New York Times, Daily Kos, ABC News, the Christian Science Monitor, the Los Angeles Times, and others. PolitiFact called Romney’s claims “pants on fire” bogus, the Washington Post gave Romney four “Pinocchios” for maximum falsity, and the Annenberg Public Policy Center agreed. Even Republican Newt Gingrich said there was “no proof” to support Romney’s claims.

The Romney campaign responded through pollster Neil Newhouse who said matter-of-factly, “We’re not going to let our campaign be dictated by fact-checkers.”

In this context, Maddow made her prediction that Santorum, who has had several dramatic engagements of his own with untruth, would end up lying in his speech about Obama and welfare reform.

Sure enough, Santorum lied when he said, “This summer [Obama] showed us once again he believes in government handouts and dependency by waiving the work requirement for welfare. I helped write the welfare reform bill; we made the law crystal clear – no president can waive the work requirement. But as with his refusal to enforce our immigration laws, President Obama rules like he is above the law.”

When the MSNBC panel returned after the speech, one of its members, Chris Matthews, commented respectfully on Santorum’s speech and remarked that Santorum hadn’t even mentioned welfare. Moments later Maddow gently and gracefully corrected him and Matthews admitted he’d missed the comments.

The next day, on The Maddow Blog featured Kansas Republican Gov. Sam Brownback reluctantly acknowledging that the Romney campaign’s claims about work and welfare are false.

And the ads are still running.

William Boardman lives in Vermont, where he has produced political satire for public radio and served as a lay judge.
