

The Delusional Mr. Romney

Exclusive: Mitt Romney told supporters behind closed doors that he's disadvantaged because he was born to a rich white family, that he'd have a better chance to win if his dad were a Mexican. It's getting hard to decide if Romney is simply a country-club racist or delusional, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Mitt Romney has taken some heat for comments made at a Republican fundraiser disparaging "47 percent" of the American people as leaches who get government benefits and "believe that they are victims." But perhaps even more troubling was his claim that he would be better off politically if his father were Mexican.

The comment suggests that the GOP presidential nominee has no idea the challenges faced in the United States by immigrants and people of color, compared to the advantages that he enjoyed being the son of a wealthy white auto executive who also had a successful career in politics, becoming governor of Michigan.

Given Mitt Romney's limited intellect and his clumsy people skills, the odds are that he never would have made it very far in America if he had not been born into a family of prominence and privilege.

Yet, in Romney's mind, he's the victim here, the beleaguered white guy from a rich family; the kid who attended a pricey prep school and Harvard University; the business executive who was set up by wealthy friends with tens of millions of dollars to succeed in private equity. Romney was born on third base with a silver spoon in his mouth and convinced himself that he had not only hit a triple but had taught himself to be a world-class silversmith.

But now he finds himself struggling in the presidential race against an African-American with the middle name Hussein who grew up a semi-orphan – with an absentee father from Kenya and a single mom who later remarried and moved to Indonesia – raised mostly by his aging grandparents in Hawaii, and who required scholarships to get an education.

So, naturally, it is Mitt Romney who deserves our pity. In the recently released video of Romney's comments at a closed fundraiser last May, Romney is heard lamenting that he would have a better chance to win the White House if his dad were Mexican.

"My dad, as you probably know was the governor of Michigan and was the head of a

car company,” Romney said. “But he was born in Mexico, and, uh, had he been born of, uh, Mexican parents, I’d have a better shot at winning this.”

This self-pitying comment the New York Times characterized the remark as “joking” recalls another clunker told by Romney last month poking fun at President Barack Obama for being the target of right-wing “birther” conspiracies challenging the Hawaii state records showing that Obama was born in Hawaii.

Speaking in his native Michigan and standing alongside his wife Ann, Romney said, “Now I love being home in this place where Ann and I were raised, where both of us were born. Ann was born in Henry Ford Hospital. I was born in Harper Hospital. No one’s ever asked to see my birth certificate. They know that this is the place that we were born and raised.”

After the “punch line,” Romney paused to take in the appreciative laughter and applause from his predominantly white audience. U.S. media pundits were quick to reassure the American people that despite the tasteless “joke” referencing the racist lie that Barack Obama was born in Kenya the Republican presidential candidate was surely no racist.

But Romney is rapidly building a record as one of those clueless rich white guys who thinks of himself as a self-made winner while portraying people with darker skin and less money as pathetic losers and parasites. His vice presidential running mate Paul Ryan is known as the devotee of Ayn Rand but Romney also seems to have internalized her philosophy of selfishness, which divides society into productive supermen and useless moochers.

Now, Romney has taken his country-club racism a step further, suggesting that being a person of color whose parents emigrated from a poor country is actually an advantage that gives you a leg-up on someone like him.

No Apology

Yet, while wishing to be a Mexican-American for its presumed political advantages, Romney disparaged Mexicans in his book, *No Apology*, which delves into academic theories about their alleged cultural inferiority. Describing his thoughts as he traveled the world, he wrote:

“I wondered how such vast differences could exist between countries that were literally next door to each other. How could Americans be so rich and Mexicans so poor? How could Israelis have created a highly developed, technology-based economy while their Palestinian neighbors had not yet even begun to move to an industrial economy?”

Romney praised the writings of Harvard professor David Landes, who in *Wealth and*

Poverty of Nations said “culture makes all the difference.”

Romney added that “What people believe, value, strive for, and sacrifice for profoundly shape the nature of their society and affect its prosperity and security. So while America’s abundant natural resources certainly facilitated its ascent, it is America’s culture that enabled the nation to become and remain the most powerful and beneficent country in the history of humankind.”

Then, Romney cited some cultural aspects possessed by such countries that prosper contrasted with those that don’t including a strong work ethic, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, cooperation, commitment to education, faith in God, devotion to family, patriotism, honor, trust in the law, and respect for life.

“There are cultures where life is cheap, but thankfully, ours is not one of them,” Romney wrote.

Romney reprised some of these thoughts during his gaffe-filled foreign trip in late July. He offended Palestinians and even some Israelis with a similar condescension toward Arabs living in Gaza and the West Bank. Pandering to an audience of Jewish-Americans in Jerusalem, Romney contrasted Israel’s prosperity against the poverty in the Palestinian territories.

Again citing Landes’s book, Romney asserted that “culture makes all the difference. And as I come here and I look out over this city and consider the accomplishments of the people of this nation, I recognize the power of at least culture and a few other things,” an apparent reference to divine intervention on Israel’s behalf.

“As you come here and you see the G.D.P. per capita, for instance, in Israel, which is about \$21,000 and compare that with the G.D.P. per capita just across the areas managed by the Palestinian Authority, which is more like \$10,000 per capita, you notice such a dramatically stark difference in economic vitality.”

Romney misstated how big a discrepancy there was between what the average Israeli makes versus the average Palestinian. He put the difference at about 2 to 1, when it is more like 20 to 1. According to the World Bank, Israel’s per capita G.D.P. actually is \$31,282, compared to a Palestinian per capita G.D.P. of around \$1,600.

But Romney’s larger point was that Israel’s relative economic success, versus the Palestinians’ economic struggles, could be traced to Israel’s cultural superiority, not to the long-term Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories that has denied those inhabitants a reasonable chance to build a modern economy.

Saeb Erekat, a top aide to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, told The Associated Press that Romney's comment was "a racist statement" and ignorant of the facts.

"This man doesn't realize that the Palestinian economy cannot reach its potential because there is an Israeli occupation," Erekat said. "It seems to me this man lacks information, knowledge, vision and understanding of this region and its people."

Romney's campaign denied that his remark was intended to slight the Palestinians. But there's no doubt that when you say that one nation thrives because of its superior culture that means that another one fails because of its deficient culture. For the Palestinians, that assessment is particularly offensive since much of their poverty relates directly to the harsh conditions from decades of Israeli occupation, including barriers to outside trade.

But the new disclosures from the video, which was initially leaked to Mother Jones magazine, reveal Romney as not just a person who looks down at Mexicans for their cultural deficiencies but who also thinks that their ethnicity gives them some unfair advantage over him.

In Romney's delusional world, Mexicans are simultaneously inferior and privileged, while being born a white male into a rich and prominent American family makes you the victim.

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.

The Mystery of Neocon Influence

The neocons despite the disastrous Iraq War and other harm they have caused remain influential in Official Washington, given time on talk shows and space on op-ed pages to expound on their latest dreams of American intervention in the Middle East. But ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar asks, why are they still listened to?

By Paul R. Pillar

Recent attempts by adversaries of President Barack Obama to blame him for yet another undesirable circumstance, in this case, popular outrage in the Middle East over an anti-Islam video, remind us of one of the oddest aspects of discourse in the United States about foreign and security policy: that the same people who not too many years ago inflicted on us the Iraq War are still part of that discourse.

They get air time and column space, and evidently at least somebody seems to be listening to them.

One mistake should not condemn someone to silence, but we are not talking about just any old mistake. The Iraq War was one of the biggest and costliest blunders in the history of U.S. foreign relations. The human and material costs, including an ultimate fiscal and economic toll in the multiple trillions in addition to the political and diplomatic damage, have been immense.

Moreover, promotion of that war demonstrated a fundamental misunderstanding of fault lines in the Middle East, political culture in the region, the nature of political change there, the roots of enmity and security threats toward the United States, and the limitations of U.S. power and especially military power.

There is no reason anyone should pay one iota of attention to what the promoters of that war have to say today on anything related to those subjects. And yet those are the very sorts of subjects, often with particular reference to countries such as Iran, Syria and Libya, on which neocon promoters of the Iraq War expound today.

In some other political system, anyone who had been involved in an official capacity in promoting that war might, after resigning in disgrace, retire from public affairs to tend a garden, write fiction, or make money in private business. But somehow that has not happened with many of the people concerned in this instance.

Probably one reason it has not has to do with the evolution of the larger U.S. political system and especially of the Republican Party. The near-extinction of moderate Republicans has been reflected not only in positions on domestic policy but also in neoconservatism having become the dominant default ideology of Republican foreign policy. This sort of attachment to one of the two major political parties has sustained the neoconservatives, who based on their record are the ones who should have gone extinct.

The attachment to a major party has further effects. It means neoconservatism is viewed not as a fringe but as part of the mainstream. It means those (especially those with significant money) who favor Republican victories (for

whatever reason, even if foreign policy has little to do with it) have reason to help sustain neoconservative voices.

Moreover, in the dumbed-down, sound-bite world of partisan politics, some favorite neocon themes, assert American power, propagate American values, etc., sound appealing.

The success the war-promoters had, with an energetic sales campaign amid a post-9/11 political milieu, in getting many Republicans and Democrats alike to go along with their project has lessened the inclination to call the neocons fully to account. Those who went along at the time do not want to be reminded of that.

There has consequently been a blurring of the distinction between the promoters and mere followers. When Paul Wolfowitz was on Fox News the other day to join in criticizing the Obama administration for its “apologetic posture” toward the Muslim world, the host introduced him as “one of the people who believed that we needed to go to war with Iraq,” as if he had been just another congressman who voted for the war resolution.

He instead was perhaps the most fervid promoter of the war in the Bush administration, showing no compunction about whatever it took, including fabricating a supposed alliance between the Iraqi regime and al-Qaeda, to muster support for the neocons’ long-sought invasion.

The way the war was manned, with the all-volunteer military, and financed (or rather, not financed) has obscured the costs and thereby further muted any demand to call the neocons to account. All the posturing these days about the deficit makes it easy to forget how much this completely unfunded and expensive war of choice contributed to ballooning of the deficit during the Bush administration.

The political costs of the war within the Middle East, such as the exacerbation of sectarian tensions and expansion of Iranian influence, also are not the sorts of things that by their nature will hit the average American squarely in the eyes as what the neocons had wrought, even though they are very much that.

Then there are the conscious efforts to get Americans to forget about certain recent past experiences including the Iraq War. The war is one of two big things, the origin of the Great Recession being the other, that have led George W. Bush’s own party to regard him during the current election campaign as He Who Must Not Be Named.

An appropriate response to any expounding by neoconservatives today about policy in the Middle East is to issue reminders, loudly and often, about their recent

record there.

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