

America Decides The Last Four Years Never Happened

☒ “This will be the most important election in our lifetime.”

We hear that phrase over and over again every four years when it comes time to vote for our president. Most people who've uttered those words probably believed them to be absolutely true at the time. Hindsight, however, has suggested that such mindsets are sometimes overly dramatic.

After all, George W. Bush won re-election in 2004 primarily because the electorate feared putting a seemingly anti-war liberal like John Kerry in the White House during the height of the *War on Terror*. Despite the campaign rhetoric, however, we found out starting in 2009 that there's really only one significant difference between the two political parties when it comes to dealing with terrorists abroad: Media crucifixion if you're a Republican president, and media praise if you're a Democratic president.

I wish I could convince myself that one day I'll be able to look back on the election night results from 2012 and think the same thing. I wish that I could convince myself that Obama's continued stewardship of the economy won't be as devastating for the future of this country as I've been fearing for four years. I wish I could believe, as I watched my children eat breakfast this morning, that they'll have the same kind of opportunities and promising future that Ronald Reagan paved out for me when I was their age.

Unfortunately, I can't ignore the reality. Economic numbers don't lie. We've gotten a taste of the vision President Obama has for this country. We know what is in store for us. This year *really was* different. Our country *really was* at a crucial tipping point. Our economic outlook *really is* an unmitigated disaster.

Americans had an extremely important decision to make: We, as a country, could either keep our foot on the gas pedal and drive right on off the fiscal cliff, or we could slam on the brakes and hope that we skidded to a stop before we reached the edge of that cliff.

The problem is that too many Americans, in the end, didn't even realize the car they were in was moving. They were much more enamored with the shiny ornament along its hood.

For the last four years, national polls told us that the most important issue to voters was the economy. Mitt Romney bet his entire candidacy on that premise, and the strategy made sense. After all, Obama's first term in office gave us the worst economic recovery since World War 2. It gave us chronically high unemployment and anemic economic growth. It gave us record gas prices. It saddled our children with so much debt that they'll be carrying it around with them for the rest of their lives. It gave us exceedingly expensive healthcare, and one in six Americans living in poverty. It gave us a record number of Americans on food stamps. The list goes on and on.

It seemed like a winning environment for the Republican candidate. What Mitt Romney deeply underestimated, however, is how easily Americans are distracted.

While Romney was laying out his strong, serious case for real economic recovery, jobs, and getting our fiscal house in order, President Obama was dishing out an emotionally-charged *divide and conquer* strategy. He took a hammer to the electorate, pulled out the shattered pieces that belonged in key voting demographics, and pitted them against the rest. He stoked envy through class warfare. He demagogued immigration reform with fears of racism. He demagogued Medicare reform to scare old people. He and his party made up phony controversies like the *War on Women*. Perhaps most importantly, he built resentment by portraying Mitt Romney not as an ideological foe or political opponent, but as a monster – a man responsible

for a woman's cancer-death; a greedy man responsible for ruining the lives of countless plant workers; a man who wants to take away women's rights; a man that voters needed to seek "revenge" against.

In the end, the economy was marginalized as background static, barely audible above the loud roar of a deeply divided, emotional electorate.

And when an election comes down to emotion rather than a referendum, it goes back to the basics. It becomes *just another election*. Red states stay red, blue states stay blue, and the presidency is decided by the usual handful of swing-states.

It was the most important election of our lifetime, but a good portion of the electorate sure didn't act like it. In fact, overall turnout was actually down significantly from four years ago.

While part of the problem has clearly been that most people simply don't understand just how disastrous things look for our country's long-term viability (and the media can be thanked for that), they weren't oblivious the president's poor handling of the economy. Poll after poll showed that a significant majority of voters believed Mitt Romney was better suited than Barack Obama to fix the economy (the number one issue, according to them). Yet the majority voted for Obama.

Many conservatives believe that the welfare-state is to blame. They believe that the number of Americans dependent on government, and looking for a handout, is what tipped the scales in favor of Obama. While I recognize that government dependency is certainly a serious concern, I don't think it's what ultimately made the difference in the election.

It's the division that made the difference. It's the demagoguery that made the difference. It's the distraction that made the difference.

I saw it working with people I know personally – people who I thought should know better. They wholeheartedly bought into the shiny pieces of foil thrown their way by the president and the media. I know women who actually believed that, if elected, Mitt Romney was going to take away their birth control pills. I know people who honestly believed that Mitt Romney was a racist.

It would have been humorous if the fate of the country wasn't at stake.

The trash that the president shoveled made a lot of people forget that the last four years ever happened. So much so that Obama was successfully able to run as a challenger and not a sitting president (with the media's help), thus escaping much of the accountability for the current state of the country. He played the Bush card for four straight years and it ended up remaining a winning hand. And of course, he's always had his glowing personality to charm the electorate into forgiving him.

So where are we at, now that President Obama has been re-elected?

Obama will most certainly interpret his victory, as narrow as it was, as a mandate. Sure, he'll talk about bipartisanship and reaching across the aisle again for a few weeks, but it won't lead anywhere. Re-election was a permission-slip for him to proceed with the same destructive policies he's been burying the country under for the past four years. Like in 2010, the 'sleeping giant' will be awoken once again. We'll see a resurgence of the Tea Party or a similar movement, probably around the time Obamacare is fully implemented. There will be loud public unrest in response to our freedoms being stripped away and our wealth disappearing. The president's approval ratings will tank again, and the division will continue. It will largely be a repeat of the first four years, only with much more borrowed money on the line.

The most disheartening thing about Obama's re-election is the reality that we invited this upon ourselves. We didn't know the real Obama in 2008. He was the cult of personality. He was the guy with the million dollar smile. But we know him now. And by rewarding miserable failure with another four years in office, we've wagered American exceptionalism, American solvency, and the American dream on a guy who has proven that he doesn't believe in any of those things.

As Reverend Jeremiah Wright famously said, "Our chickens have come home to roost."

An Open Letter to Some Friends ...

Someone I've known for a while now – my wife, Nancy – has written a letter to some of her friends, the ones who voted for Barack Obama the last time around but may be having second thoughts now. She showed it to me and (with her blessings) I decided to share it with all of you. If you like it, copy it and send it around to *your* friends who may be on the fence.

Bernie Goldberg



Hello friends,

Although I didn't vote for Barack Obama four years ago, like so many Americans I felt pride in our country– and joy in the historic significance of the election. Unlike some I wasn't rooting for him to fail; instead I wanted our President to unite us and get our country back on track.

But those four years came and went. We're now saddled with some very sad and scary facts: We spent nearly a trillion dollars on a stimulus program that was supposed to bring our unemployment down to below 8 percent. It didn't. Millions of Americans are still out of work and suffering. Millions more are worried about the jobs they have, and worried about their children's future. And President Obama has added a staggering \$5 trillion to our national debt. We now borrow 42 cent on every dollar we spend!

Most sadly, the person I thought would bring this country together—the one who ran on Hope and Change, the one who told us There are no Red States or Blue States, just the United States — is now pitting Americans against each other, drumming up a phony war on women and waging shameless class warfare, turning Americans against each other based on how much money they have in the bank.

I readily acknowledge that Barack Obama inherited a tough economy, but he's had four years in office and hasn't fixed it. We're stagnating at best and spiraling down at worst. Many economists fear another recession.

For the first time in my adult life I'm scared. Do I think a Romney win would be a panacea and our problems would disappear overnight? No. But I do believe he knows how to make America work, how to get this economy humming again, how to create jobs and help small businesses thrive, and most importantly, how to create a sense of pride and hope.

I remember Barack Obama's own words several years ago. He told a reporter that if he wasn't able to turn the economy around in three years, "then there's going to be a one-term proposition." I'm taking him at his word.

I understand that many of you would like to support the president again this time. You like him. You like his family. That makes sense. But we are living in difficult times. And I

don't think we can afford to vote for the guy we'd rather have coffee or a beer with. I'm truly sorry to say this, but he's a nice guy who's in over his head.

Let me ask you this one simple question: Why should we think that if Mr. Obama wins, the next four years will be any different than the last four?

Thanks for reading my short letter. All I ask is that you consider what I said here.

Nancy Solomon