

ONE TRUTH THE GOP DID TELL: THEY WANT YOU TO WORK FOR YOURSELF

Amid a flood of lies being uttered at the Republican National Convention this week, there is one truth the GOP has told.

They want you to work for yourself.

The Republican obsession with working for yourself stems from a campaign strategy—to recruit a parade of people—many of them whose businesses suck at the government teat—to “refute” an Obama quote they’re taking out of context, “You didn’t build that”

Here’s how Paul Ryan claimed credit to building a business (he didn’t mention it was made possible by Social Security survivor benefits.

My Mom started a small business, and I’ve seen what it takes. Mom was 50 when my Dad died. She got on a bus every weekday for years, and rode 40 miles each morning to Madison. She earned a new degree and learned new skills to start her small business. It wasn’t just a new livelihood. It was a new life. And it transformed my Mom from a widow in grief to a small businesswoman whose happiness wasn’t just in the past. Her work gave her hope. It made our family proud. And to this day, my Mom is my role model.

But the most absurd case came from Senator, former NH Attorney General, prosecutor, and before that private practice lawyer Kelly Ayotte, who instead of talking about her considerable and impressive professional experience, focused on shoveling snow. (This served the other apparent convention strategy to

have all women, save Condi Rice, to define themselves first and foremost as wife and/or mother.)

My husband Joe – who was on track to be a commercial pilot – instead served our great country flying combat missions in Iraq.

When he returned home from the war – he found himself in the same position as so many Americans – he needed a job.

So he started a family business – a landscaping and snowplowing company.

And when I say he – I mean we – because I spent many a sleepless night shoveling snow. And I'm proud of the fact that in addition to being a United States Senator – I'm also pretty good with a snow plow!

Now, Ayotte's husband Joe Daley's story could have served any of several narratives. His military service itself. The declining opportunities for airline pilots, an industry repeatedly bailed out by government. The difficult job market for veterans. But instead it became a story about an Attorney making \$174,000 a year for her day job in public service plowing snow.

But it's not just Ayotte's admirable career in public service that gets short shrift here. While many of the speakers talked about how many employees their small business supported, no one I saw—save Condi Rice, who rightly celebrated her success rising from segregated Birmingham to become Secretary of State—talked about the honor of working **as** an employee, whether as a public servant or in the private sector.

That points to several larger trend that fits well with the real thrust of the policies Mitt and Ryan would implement. First, the Bain-like stripping of real employment relationships in exchange for transient, insecure contracts. The

denial of responsibility anytime a contractor makes a mistake. And perhaps most importantly, a tax system that values wealth creation over work.

The RNC is all about these American Dream stories, and a few of them are actually what they appear to be, stories about entrepreneurs building something of their own with little help from the government. But this is about the value of working hard to own things, not work itself.

N!**@R HA HA

[youtube]mf-bKEDTug8[/youtube]

Everybody's been talking—and celebrating—Chris Matthews for calling out Reince Priebus on the way the GOP has been playing the race card, both with its welfare reform ad campaign and with Romney's joke about Obama's birth certificate. (Tom Edsall's piece on racism has also gotten a lot of attention this morning.)

Yeah, it's a rare and welcome occurrence.

But the focus on Matthews has distracted from the response.

Mika Brzezinski: Because he's an awkward joker.

Joe Scarborough: Because he misfired badly on a joke.

Tom Brokaw: I think it was a demonstration of his awkward sense of humor.

Reince Priebus: You know what? We've gotten to a place in politics that any moment of levity is totally frowned upon by guys like you just so that you can push your brand. You know what? Good for you. It's a moment of levity. Everybody gets it.

Every other participant in this panel turned on Matthews because he refused to overlook the racist presumption of the joke. “Everybody gets it.” Mitt’s problem, these pundits argue, was not in nodding to the racist ravings of a significant portion of the right, but instead in his poor delivery, his awkward sense of humor. And then Priebus upped the ante, arguing that politicians should be **allowed** to make these kinds of jokes, and if they’re not it must be just self-promotion of the guy calling them out.

This is where the game the pundits have made of presidential elections gets exposed most starkly. It’s a tragedy it’s a game in the first place. It’s never about how ending Medicare will result in spiking senior poverty; it’s never about how increasing tax cuts for the super-rich will continue to strip our country.

But here we have three pundits and the head of a major party assuming—even demanding—that candidates be allowed to make racist jokes with no censure.

WHERE MITT WAS BORN AND RAISED: “PUBLIC NUISANCE,” “BLIGHT”

Mitt Romney just made a totally dickish comment at a campaign event in Commerce, MI:

No one’s ever asked to see my birth certificate. They know that this is the place where we were born and raised.

Here’s what you need to know about “where Mitt was born and raised.” It was razed, two years ago, after having been declared a “public nuisance” and “blight.”

Granted, the house was no longer owned by his family. Nevertheless, I can think of no better symbol for Mitt than the way Detroit's glorious past has been destroyed after vulture capitalists like him outsourced the area's jobs and then allowed the city to fall into ruin.

Remember, when Mitt said, "let Detroit go bankrupt," he was also condemning "where he was born and raised."

DEAR JOHNS: REMEMBER THE GOVERNMENT DOESN'T DESTROY INCIDENTALLY COLLECTED INTELLIGENCE

The Republican party-goers in Tampa will be surveilled by drones.

This will mark the first time unmanned aerial vehicles will patrol the skies over a national convention, according to an engineer with a Naples company that builds and will operate the drones.

The vehicle, called an Aether Aero, is an eight-bladed vertical takeoff platform that will provide intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance to government agencies, according to Curt Winter, an engineer with United Drones.

Presumably they're being deployed to defend against the "anarchists" the government has already leaked pose a threat to the Convention. Or perhaps they—and United Drones' unmanned ground vehicles, the Wraiths—will be there just

to get delegates all hot and bothered to approve more drone spending.

But the surveillance from the drones will be shared with unnamed government agencies. While that's probably DHS, the gentlemen delegates publicly soliciting the services of sex workers—or just wandering the streets obviously cheating on their wives—should be warned that the Air Force, at least, permits the “incidental” collection of intelligence on US persons, so long as it isn't targeted against that US person intentionally. And while they're not supposed to be able to retrieve that “incidentally” collected intelligence by searching on a US person's name, that doesn't mean images “incidentally” collected in Tampa will remain in Tampa.

I'd really hate if any of you war-mongers subsequently had your careers ruined because of out-of-control surveillance capturing you while you're partying.

MITT GETS SQUEAMISH ABOUT TITHING

Some weeks ago, I suggested one of what I suspect are several reasons why Mitt won't release his taxes had to do with his Mormon tithe.

Add in the practice—which even an outsider like me saw when I lived in UT and worked for a predominantly Mormon company in the 1990s—of gossip about tithing, notably whether Mormon colleagues tithed pre- or post-tax. That's another reason why Reid may have a better sense of what Mitt's tax practices look like than DC pundits might guess on face value.

Finally, though, there's this. If one of the reasons Mitt is hiding his tax returns does have to do with under-tithing (as the returns Mitt released may suggest), and not just his business practices and tax shelters, remember that both CO (2.15%) and especially NV (over 5%) have larger Mormon populations than average. Nate Silver considers NV the state with the biggest return on investment per voter (CO is 6th). These are lean Democratic states that Mitt might need to win if Obama's attacks on Bain outsourcing continue to turn the race in the manufacturing swing states (though if Mitt doesn't win FL and VA, it may be moot anyway). Driving down the Mormon enthusiasm for Mitt might be one way to boost Obama's chances.

In an interview with Parade Magazine (as reported by the Salt Lake City Tribune), Mitt now says tithing is one of the reasons (he calls it a "downside") he won't release his tax returns.

Mitt Romney says in a new interview that one of the reasons he's distressed about disclosing his tax returns is that everyone sees how much money he and his wife, Ann, have donated to the LDS Church, and that's a number he wants to keep private.

"Our church doesn't publish how much people have given," Romney tells Parade magazine in an edition due out Sunday. "This is done entirely privately. One of the downsides of releasing one's financial information is that this is now all public, but we had never intended our contributions to be known. It's a very personal thing between ourselves and our commitment to our God and to our church."

Oh no you don't, Mitt Romney!

Mitt has repeatedly dodged how low his 13% tax rate is by demanding that people add in his charitable donations, most of which (his partial tax return release so far reveals) consists of donations to his church.

At his news conference, Romney suggested that his charitable contributions should also be taken into account. "Every year, I've paid at least 13 percent, and if you add, in addition, the amount that goes to charity, why the number gets well above 20 percent," Romney said.

...As if 20% is an appropriate tax plus charity for a man worth over a quarter billion in the first place!

But Mitt is basically asking to have it both ways; to plead privacy because his charitable giving is between him and the Mormon Church, but at the same time to ask that we consider that charitable giving in the sum of what he has given back to society. Taxes are a public debt. Mitt wants to count his tithe among his public debt (meaning Mitt wants to count, among other things, the millions his Church has spent on denying equality to gays as a public good). But now he wants to point to his tithe to excuse why we can't know how much he has paid in his public debt.

Too much time as a Private Equity looter has fried Mitt's brain about what is public and what is private.

MEMO TO THE CLUELESS NEPOTISTICALLY SELF

UNAWARE FLEXIBLE BAG OF MOSTLY WATER KNOWN AS LUKE RUSSERT

Has there ever been a more self unaware little ball of unworthy entitled Beltway nepotism than Luke Russert? I ask that as an honest question, because it is quite possible the answer is no. The story of Luke, son of Tim, is mostly public record.

Let's take a look at the latest from L'il Luke, humbly entitled:

Luke Russert: Like Me, Paul Ryan Is
Driven By Personal Loss

Well, golly, you just know it is going to be an intellectual and cognitively aware barnburner piece from that, no?

Of course it is, because that is the searing literary talent of the one and only Luke Russert; progeny of the Wonder of Whiteboard, Tim Russert. Let us inspect Luke's Hemmingwayesque prose:

I peppered the congressman with questions about the health care law and budget priorities for an interview a colleague would use on Nightly News. When we were done, we exchanged pleasantries and he got up to leave. After about 15 seconds, he came back in the room and asked me, "How old was your dad when he passed from heart disease?" I told him, "58." He said, "Mine was 55. My grandfather and great-grandfather both died from heart issues in their 50s, too." He then asked me if I was into fitness and inquired about my workout regimen. He told me to run more and that I needed to work up a sweat at

least five days a week. We both joked about how preventative fish oil supplements had a bad aftertaste.

Oh, what personal pathos these two poor sons have seen. Luke, son of Tim, product of St. Alban's Academy in Washington DC, was left with a mother who worked for Vanity Fair, an estate and mansion on Nantucket Island fit for a king and a sinecure at NBC.

Bootstraps baby, bootstraps.

And L'il Luke's brother in hardscrabble upbringing, Paul Ryan? This common man of the people was born the son of a respected lawyer in a Wisconsin town known as Janesville and:

Mr. Ryan, the youngest of Paul M. and Betty Ryan's four children, was born in 1970 and grew up in Janesville's historic Courthouse Hill neighborhood...

Like Luke Russert's traumatic childhood, Paul Ryan suffered such various hardships as being voted Prom King and "Biggest Brown-Noser" in high school.

Oh, the pain they must have suffered, the poor dears.

The smooth stylings of Luke Russert's searing reportage continue:

Much has been written about Ryan's notorious P90X workouts and physical discipline. At one point he was a personal trainer in Washington to help pay the bills. Aside from the obvious health benefits, from many personal conversations I've had with him since that day in Baltimore, I believe Ryan keeps himself so physically fit in order to downplay the anxious feeling all children of heart disease victims have – the dreadful thought you could be next.

I can attest that this feeling spurs you

to accomplish as much as possible because the idea that you're on earth for a limited time is imprinted in your mind daily. Ryan was elected to the House at 28, was Chairman of the House Budget Committee at 40 and now is his party's presumptive nominee for vice president at age 42. He's already accomplished in 42 years what most politicians would hope to do in a lifetime.

Yes, what bloody hell these two tortured souls must have faced. Previous to reading the poignant words of Luke Russert about the woe and tribulations he and Paul Ryan (who has effectively never been out of government employ) commonly faced in life, I used to occasionally think maybe my life could have been better somehow. If, you know, only....

I used to think there was a lot of suffering in the world. At least until I read Luke Russert and Paul Ryan's common brotherhood of upbringing hurt. But, relatively, in light of all the real suffering Russert and Ryan went through to be where they are today, I was one of the luckiest guys on the face of the earth.

For all the downtrodden out there, just be glad you have not suffered the "personal loss" of Luke Russert and Paul Ryan. We can all learn something from these bottom to the top, self reliant, American success stories of will and perseverance.

Well, or better, we can call out these two smarmy, self serving, holier than thou, nepotistic fucking pricks for what they really are. One represents the death spiral of American journalism, and the other the grim reaper for the morals and social safety net our fathers, mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers fought, died and worked so hard to insure. Yeah, those really are the stakes.

So, you might think ~~Tiny Tim~~, er Luke's, tale of

two forlorn, down on their luck, dandy
pimpernels is over. Oh, no, there is a moving
coda from Boy Wonder Russert:

So while Ryan is no doubt inspired by
his faith, family, party and desire to
shape the country in the ways he sees as
best for the future, it should not be
lost where much of his drive comes from
– personal loss.

Personal loss. Yes. Of course. Like Russert and
Ryan have some lock on fucking personal loss.

Please. Just get the fuck out, you simpering
weenie naif. We all suffer personal loss, it is
not yours to carry as a mantle of significance.
We all have lost, or will lose, mothers,
fathers, sisters, brothers and friends. What
grandiose hubris you project with your
sniveling, self serving tripe on behalf of
yourself and Paul Ryan.

Get over yourself you candy ass punk; neither
you, Ryan, me, not likely many, if any, of those
actually able to read this article, are
suffering the worst life has to offer. We are
all fortunate sons and daughters, and you should
just shut the fuck up.

If only the foregoing palpably, cloying, asinine
bullshit were but the worst of the situation.
But, sadly, it is not. No, the deeper problem is
that this is the gilded hollow future of
journalism. At a time when print media, beat
writers and old school journalism is dying like
the plague has set in, this, L'il Luke Russert,
is the harbinger of what's to come. How can you
tell? Well, because the "senior talent" NBC
ensconced in the hallowed throne of L'il Luke's
father is the hollow and shallow dipstick known
as Dancin Dave Gregory.

The suck up, Beltway Stockholmed Gregory is
enough to make you puke, but he is par for the
course for television networks that care more
about scamming and plundering their viewers than
playing to their common intelligence. NBC

bastardized and cocked up the the London2012 Olympics big time; but that was just annoyance in sporting entertainment. It may have been craven, but it does not hold a candle to the intellectual and informational fraud they pull on their viewers via their news and political reportage every hour of every day.

L'il Luke Russert, and his suck up wet kiss to his soul mate in personal loss Paul Ryan, is but a symptom of the disease. It is a race to the bottom of the barrel, and with wet behind the ears, nepotistically installed, inbred Shetland ponies like Luke Russert, NBC and NBCNews.com are leading the field.

[Flexible Ugly Bag of Mostly Water]

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GOOD THING THE DEMOCRATS FORCED THAT VOTE ON THE RYAN PLAN

Most of what I have to say about Mitt Romney's pick of Paul Ryan I said on Virtually Speaking Sunday. I think the Ryan pick will hurt Mitt, and I think it opens up an opportunity for progressives to even box Obama in.

But I am enjoying the response from Republicans, who almost immediately started bad-mouthing the pick. First there was the BuzzFeed story—less than 48 hours after the pick!—describing how the political pros in Mitt's staff opposed the pick. And now Politico describes the opinions of some three dozen Republican operatives, all of whom except Mary Matalin are queasy about the choice. (The Hill has a similar story.)

In more than three dozen interviews with Republican strategists and campaign operatives – old hands and rising next-generation conservatives alike – the most common reactions to Ryan ranged from gnawing apprehension to hair-on-fire anger that Romney has practically ceded the election.

It is not that the public professions of excitement about the Ryan selection are totally insincere. It is that many of the most optimistic Republican operatives will privately acknowledge that their views are being shaped more by fingers-crossed hope than by a hard-headed appraisal of what's most likely to happen.

And the more pessimistic strategists don't even feign good cheer: They think the Ryan pick is a disaster for the GOP. Many of these people don't care that much about Romney – they always felt he faced an improbable path to victory – but are worried that Ryan's vocal views about overhauling Medicare will be a millstone for other GOP candidates in critical House and Senate races.

One big reason the operatives don't like this choice is it makes their job—getting down-ticket Republicans elected—harder.

And that's just what it does to the Romney-Ryan ticket. Forget how it plays in close House and Senate races.

"Very not helpful down ballot – very," said one top Republican consultant.

"This is the day the music died," one Republican operative involved in 2012 races said after the rollout. The operative said that every House candidate now is racing to get ahead of this issue.

And what Politico doesn't dwell on—but what Crooks & Liars noted the other day—is that it's already too late for most of the Republicans running for reelection to separate themselves from Ryan's signature policy. Because they already voted for it.

Even as Mitt Romney was introducing Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan as his running mate, his campaign was preparing a defense of the House Budget Chairman's draconian Medicare proposals. With good reason. After all, in April 2011 the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office forecast that Ryan's scheme to convert today's guaranteed Medicare insurance program into an underfunded voucher system would dramatically shift the health care costs onto America's seniors. And in February 2010, Ryan acknowledged his privatization plan for millions of future elderly constituted rationing.

But it's not just Team Romney that should be concerned about being caught red-handed with the proverbial gun pointed at the wildly popular program. Last year, 235 House Republicans and 40 GOP Senators—98 percent of all Republicans in Congress—voted for Paul Ryan's budget and its blueprint to rationing Medicare.

What's particularly remarkable about the Politico piece is that, in spite of widely expressed admiration for Ryan, just about all the anonymous sources admit that people hate his plan. The plan their bosses have already voted for.

I don't think any of the geniuses in DC—whether Republican or Democratic—planned for this. I don't think they intended to turn Mitt Romney into the poster child for the elites who have been looting our country. I don't think Mitt realized that by picking Ryan, he would make the

problem worse, not better.

But this election has now crystalized into a referendum on the austerity, oligarchy, and looting the Republicans (and more recently, the Democrats too) have been gradually introducing into our country.

Obama may still screw up the election. The economy may recrash, the drought may bring a price spike that makes people desperate enough to vote for Mitt, or there may be an October surprise.

And I'm sure Obama didn't want to be running this election, pointing out how unpopular and disastrous are Ryan's policies—policies which are not that different from some of his own.

But that seems to be where we're heading. A referendum, from the top of the ticket on down, on the unpopular elitist policies that both parties in DC have been pushing for the last decade or so.

IF MITT HAD HAD HIS WAY, SAN DIEGO WOULD HAVE HAD TO LAY OFF ANOTHER TEACHER SO HE COULD SEND MORE \$\$ OVERSEAS

Had
Mitt
Romney
gotten
his
way

	Value, \$M	Percent loss	Savings \$
Purchase Price	12.24		
Initial Assessment	12.24		
Initial Request	6.8	44.4%	74,800
Amended Request, 2009	8.9	27.3%	
Reassessment, 2009	11.4	6.9%	9,618
Reassessment, 2010	10	18.3%	24,355
Reassessment, 2011	8.7	28.9%	37,692
Reassessment, 2012	8.7	28.9%	37,692
Total Savings			109,357

when

he asked to have his La Jolla home tax assessment lowered in the wake of the financial crash, San Diego County would have lost enough money to hire a teacher, at a time when the district has been laying off teachers and deferring raises.

At least that's my rough calculation based on the numbers included in this LAT article describing Mitt's efforts to have his home reassessed the year after he purchased it in 2008.

As the LAT describes it, Mitt submitted one proposed reassessment, claiming their home on the beach in La Jolla had lost almost 45% of its value. After that didn't work, they got a lawyer to submit a new appeal; he came up with a more modest claim that the house had lost 27% of its value in the first year, or 39% over two years. San Diego County responded by assessing the home had lost 7% of its value. And only after two more years of declining home prices did the county agree with Mitt's lawyers amended appeal of a 27-29% loss.

All told, \$250 million Mitt has saved \$109,357 on his property taxes.

But I want to look at Mitt's original claim—that his house had lost almost 45% of its value in less than a year. That claim was higher even than the property decline all the houses in his zip code experienced in the **two years** after he bought the house.

Working for the Romneys, Streb concluded that the entire 92037 ZIP Code had suffered a 41% decline in average sales prices between the first six months of 2008 and the six months preceding his appraisal in October 2010. He settled on a value of \$7.5 million for the Romney home.

Had Mitt's outrageous claim been successful, he would have saved something like \$75,000 a year.

This amounts to Mitt, buying a pricey home at a time when any half-witted being knew home values were crashing, turning around almost immediately and asking for a discount for buying at a time of falling values. But for a county struggling with the effects of banksters ruining the wealth of its much more average residents, it amounts to a real churlishness about the common good.

The LAT ends by justifying Mitt's efforts to save what amount to a few pennies on property taxes.

"I would think it's foolish not to request a decline in value if you are entitled," said Paul Habibi, who teaches real estate finance and development in the UCLA Anderson Graduate School of Management. "That's like saying a rich man should not bend over to pick up a hundred dollar bill."

Or you could look it another way. Most rich men, standing over a hundred dollar bill next to a poor kid, would let the kid take the bill. Not Mitt. He's gonna hire a lawyer to elbow the kid away from the cash so he can pocket it himself.

WHEN ONE MORMON GOSSIPS ABOUT ANOTHER MORMON NOT PAYING HIS TAXES

For the record, I think Mitt has multiple reasons to hide his tax returns. I think it's largely about what his returns would say about his business practices, it's partly about his tax shelters, and, one way or another, it's about his relative loyalty to his church and his country.

But here's a thought.

Harry Reid, Mormon, and Senator from Nevada, is the one leading the charge to return attention to Mitt's tax returns.

He attributes his claim that Mitt paid no taxes for ten years to someone who invested with Bain. Now he may know his purported Bain-related source because he travels the halls of power. But Bain has very close cultural ties to the Mormon Church—according to some, improperly so. Moreover, because Mitt and other Bain execs have given so much to the Mormon Church in the form of Bain stocks, high ranking Mormon insiders may have a better idea of what Bain Capital actually does—and how Mitt valued his holdings before he gave them to the Church—than most others.

So Reid may be calling out Mitt not just as a former boxer, but as someone who shares a very wealth-based and close knit faith with Mitt.

Add in the practice—which even an outsider like me saw when I lived in UT and worked for a predominantly Mormon company in the 1990s—of gossip about tithing, notably whether Mormon colleagues tithed pre- or post-tax. That's another reason why Reid may have a better sense of what Mitt's tax practices look like than DC pundits might guess on face value.

Finally, though, there's this. If one of the reasons Mitt is hiding his tax returns does have to do with under-tithing (as the returns Mitt released may suggest), and not just his business practices and tax shelters, remember that both CO (2.15%) and especially NV (over 5%) have larger Mormon populations than average. Nate Silver considers NV the state with the biggest return on investment per voter (CO is 6th). These are lean Democratic states that Mitt might need to win if Obama's attacks on Bain outsourcing continue to turn the race in the manufacturing swing states (though if Mitt doesn't win FL and VA, it may be moot anyway). Driving down the Mormon enthusiasm for Mitt might be one way to boost Obama's chances.

This is obviously all speculation, as all discussions about Mitt's taxes are. But this comment, stated by one Mormon about another, could have different connotations among Mormon listeners than non-Mormon ones.

A month or so ago, [Harry Reid] said, a person who had invested with Bain Capital called his office.

"Harry, he didn't pay any taxes for 10 years," Reid recounted the person as saying.

"He didn't pay taxes for 10 years! Now, do I know that that's true? Well, I'm not certain," said Reid. "But obviously he can't release those tax returns. How would it look?"

This sounds like the kind of gossip even I would hear in UT. Was Mitt's source talking taxes? Or tithes?

HAS MITT BEEN READING "WHY NATIONS FAIL"?

Mitt Romney's latest overseas outrage is asserting that Palestinians are so much poorer than Israelis because of their culture.

"As you come here and you see the GDP per capita, for instance, in Israel which is about \$21,000 dollars, and compare that with the GDP 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," the Republican presidential candidate told about 40

wealthy donors who breakfasted around a U-shaped table at the luxurious King David Hotel.

[snip]

Romney, seated next to billionaire casino owner Sheldon Adelson at the head of the table, told donors at his fundraiser that he had read books and relied on his own business experience to understand why the difference is so great.

“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,” Romney said, citing an innovative business climate, the Jewish history of thriving in difficult circumstances and the “hand of providence.”

While some outraged responses have focused on Mitt’s ignorance of the true extent of Palestinian poverty and others have decried Mitt’s racism, all I could think is that Mitt is voicing a misreading (but not an extreme one) of the latest fad book among policy elites of both parties: Daren Acemoglu and James Robinson’s *Why Nations Fail*.

Why Nations Fail purports to explain why some areas are rich and some poor (it adopts economic success as its measure of success and failure with no questioning of whether that’s the correct measure) by pointing to what it deems the relative extractive characteristic of a particular state. In states where the elite share the wealth via relatively open political systems, wealth grows. In states where the elites keep the wealth to themselves with the help of political repression, wealth stagnates.

The reason I think Mitt’s comment comes from having read or been briefed on *Why Nations Fail* (aside from his comment attributing the opinion,

in part, to books he has read) is because his comment basically repeats the book's key gimmick: the authors compare Nogales, Mexico with Nogales, AZ, North and South Korea, and South and North America and with each claim the wealthier of the geographically contiguous pair is wealthy because of its relative freedom. Mitt is making the same comparison—explaining why people in contiguous geographic areas have dramatically different outcomes.

In both the book's gimmick and what I suspect is Mitt's appropriation of it, there's something missing. *Why Nations Fail* claims that everyone in Nogales, AZ enjoys great political rights; it doesn't consider the important economic role played in the Southwest by undocumented workers who enjoy no political rights. Nor does it consider the way the drug war strips money and viable economic growth out of the rest of Latin America. Similarly, while the book admits that the US has provided a lot of aid to South Korea since the Korean war—not to mention paid for its defense—it doesn't consider how important that outside relationship has been in determining South Korea's path since the war. And somewhere in the discussion of how the US evolved in a less extractive fashion than Latin America—which includes a discussion of genocide in Latin American—the authors state something to the effect of “the Native Americans [in the US] were sidelined” (I listened to the book, so I can't give you the exact quote). “Sidelined” (if that's the word the authors used) is the politically correct—and almost unremarked term—for extraction that democrats later go on to whitewash.

And all that's before you get to the inter-state power dynamics that lie behind the success or failure of a lot of smaller client states, which itself tends to tolerate a lot of extraction the authors barely mentioned.

Now, if Mitt got his little theory from *Why Nations Fail*, it is a misreading of the book, though not a big one. Mitt attributed the

difference to culture, not politics. But in a policy world where people uncritically say Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East (ignoring Iran and Turkey, but also ignoring that Arabs in Israel—to say nothing of the occupied territories—don't enjoy the same rights as other Israelis), Mitt really is just replicating *Why Nations Fail*'s gimmick, pointing to democracy and innovation as a way to ignore the oppression that democratic regimes exert over others and instead celebrate that difference.

In which case, if I'm right, the whole flap should focus not just on the comment itself, but on what it says about Mitt's cognitive ability (his slight misreading of the book), but also the policy elites' fetishization of a book that engages in the same kind of whitewashing, to serve virtually the same end, a sort of blind self-congratulation.

Update: NYT's Michael Barbaro, who has read Romney's *No Apology*, says he cites David Landes' *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* in the book. IIRC, *Why Nations Fail* bills itself as a critique of Landes (though perhaps more his earlier technological determinism).