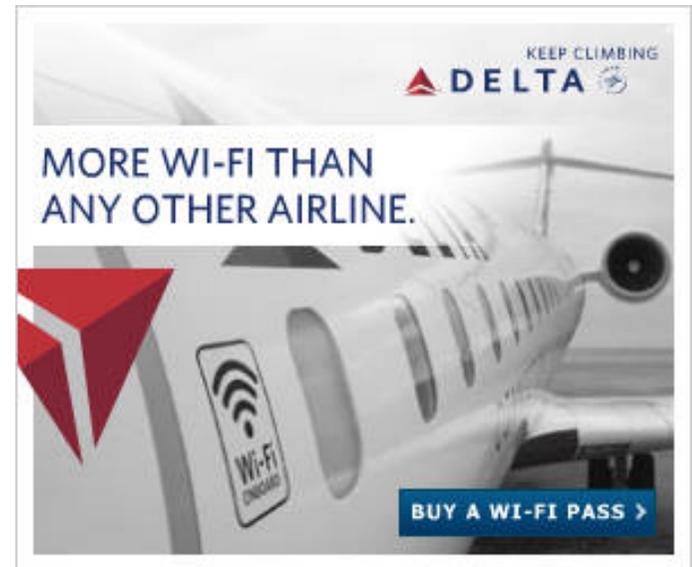




President Barack Obama: whatever happened to hope?

For many American voters Barack Obama has lost his air of can-do heroism



EDITOR'S CHOICE »

The Telegraph

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By **Andrew Marr**

7:00AM GMT 04 Nov 2012

 189 Comments

So Sandy arrived right in the last act, smashing and thrashing, killing and ripping. Has this latest tempestuous eruption, following the storms Beryl, Florence, Joyce and Nadine, been the deus ex machina — or the deus ex Atlantic — to settle one of America's most extraordinary and bitterly fought presidential elections?

It won **Barack Obama** a gold-plated endorsement from one of America's most popular Republicans, the New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg, who fears that climate change is to blame; and an embrace from another admired Republican governor, Chris Christie of New Jersey.

But will the Sandy Effect really sway votes in swing states thousands of miles away? Obama has not had a good campaign. His hugs and his rousing words after the hurricane were one thing, but his low-energy, stumbling performance in the first presidential debate left supporters aghast and Mitt Romney's team suddenly emboldened.

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IN US ELECTION



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It has been a savage campaign, and for good reason. America's culture wars have never been angrier. The country remains mired in debt — \$16 trillion, up \$6 trillion under Obama — of which \$1.4 trillion is owned by America's new existential rival, China. The US Treasury says that the legal debt ceiling will be hit by the end of the year.

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Jobs have been exported in huge numbers. The middle classes have been getting poorer for years. Only the super-rich have experienced a rise in real incomes.

As a passionate admirer of the US, I have to admit that to visitors, America no longer feels quite like the future. There are the potholed roads, tired-looking airports and malls, and what seems from a British perspective a strange dearth of wi-fi. Natural disasters aside, this is beginning to feel like a nation needing a lick of paint.

I went with a film crew from President Obama's home base of Chicago, through Washington and New York, talking to people who knew him and to some of his sharper critics. We carried with us a simple question: whatever happened to hope? How could someone so gifted as a



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speechmaker, with such a tailwind of popular enthusiasm behind him, fall so far in public esteem?

This isn't a partisan question. It is being asked by Democrats, still smarting from their terrible 2010 Congressional mid-term drubbing, as well as by Republicans. Yes, some of the anti-Obama rhetoric has been grotesquely over-the-top — all the stuff about him being a secret Muslim, and not really American-born at all. But middle-of-the-road, once pro-Obama people are puzzled too.

Artur Davis, a black former Congressman from Alabama who was one of the co-chairs of Obama's 2008 campaign, later switched to the Republicans and spoke for Mitt Romney at their convention this year.

He thought Obama had "made the best first impression of anybody in American politics for perhaps 40 years" but was, from the first, too vague: "He did a very good job painting a picture of politics without necessarily filling in the canvas with a lot of policies." We in Britain have had a little experience of that, too.

Part of the answer goes back to the consequences of the banking crisis when Obama was first elected. Talking to Austan Goolsbee, the Chicago economist at Obama's side during the 2008 campaign and the first period in office, you get a vivid picture of the near panic as atrocious figures poured in. It wasn't simply Wall Street in trouble. There was a pervasive sense that US capitalism was facing a crisis at least as big as that of the Great Depression.

At one point, after another terrifying round-table of economic briefings, Goolsbee said to President-elect Obama that he thought no president since Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 or perhaps Lincoln in 1861 had faced such a grim background briefing. Obama looked at him and said, "Goolsbee, that's not even my worst briefing this week." By pouring money in, a giant financial boost, many believe that Obama saved America from economic collapse. But there are plenty of others who question whether it was the right boost, or produced the right effect.

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Republicans, of course, argue that he should have slashed taxes further, and cut back the state.

Nothing has divided the US as deeply as the so-called “Obamacare” changes to health funding. What seems from a European perspective a civilised amelioration of injustice in the hugely expensive US health market, feels to millions of Americans like a socialist big-state intrusion into their personal affairs.

We spoke to people on all sides — Chicago Republicans who felt that an inexperienced President “in over his head” had been so obsessed with his healthcare mission that he had taken his eye off the economy, and Democrats baffled by the fury that such a moderate change had brought.

Two things at least became clear. The first was that both sides were no longer hearing each other — Democratic America and Republican America increasingly live apart both geographically and mentally, tuned into different media giving them a different view of the world.

Perhaps there is nothing much that Obama could have done about that. But the second conclusion, shared on almost all sides, is that he proved a very poor persuader in his own case. The first presidential debate rammed that home. Good at soaring speeches; less good at looking voters in the eye and winning them over on the detail. Pulpit, yes. Bear pit, no.

After a storming speech at the Democrats’ national convention, Bill Clinton has been criss-crossing the country showing how it’s done — so much so that a rueful Obama describes him as “the Secretary for Explaining Stuff”.

Obama has never been a very convincing glad-hander. All those who mocked Clinton’s cheesy gregariousness are being forced to reconsider. Jodi Kantor, one of Obama’s biographers, told me that although the President is formidably intelligent, he may over-rely on it: “He is an extremely solitary man. He is the most introverted president we have

seen in the United States for decades. Barack Obama sits alone in his presidential study, up in the White House, for hours at night, writing and thinking and looking at memos and processing.” Such self-certainty has allowed him personally to authorise the drone strikes that have killed so many — to the dismay of his liberal supporters — and to authorise the killing of Bin Laden, still his most popular act in office.

But it also led Obama into his early bout of over-promising — the announced closure of Guantánamo Bay, which later proved impossible because of political hostility to a new site on US soil, and the belief that just by being elected he could bring a new era of trust and peace between America and the Muslim world.

But if this were only a story of personality, and traditional divisions between Right and Left, it would be a less momentous election.

The truth is that America faces huge challenges to modernise its economy, dealing with debt, joblessness, infrastructure and inequality. It is impossible to avoid a sense of almost existential insecurity, very dark shadows in the still-bright American dream.

That will mean harder choices by far than either Obama or Mitt Romney have articulated in the campaign.

The economist Jeffrey Sachs blames Obama for the lack of real change being offered to a country that, for all its dynamism and talent, is not in good shape. He goes back to the original stimulus. “Starting from a \$1 trillion deficit at that point, the Government was proposing to raise it to about \$1.5 trillion and I thought, that’s rather shocking. What’s the plan?”

Obama came in at a tough time and has faced a divided country, uneasy about its role and future. Republicans in Congress never cut him much slack and after the 2010 mid-term elections he was hamstrung. Then again, he hasn’t proved good at winning arguments or reaching across the divide.

This has caused a rethink among Democratic strategists. Cornell

Belcher, the black pollster who helped to create Obama's 2008 movement and is a strategist for the current campaign, complains that "there is an unprecedented level of disrespect for this president. And they know it's because he doesn't look like any other president we've ever had". Is this about race, I asked him. "Yes, but also about culture — about a group of people who are uncomfortable with the changes happening in America."

This drove Obama to lean on his core vote and indulge in attack ads on Romney of a kind he abjured four years ago. They don't seem to have had the lethal effect his strategists hoped for. Another Democratic pollster, Anna Greenberg, feels that middle-of-the-road voters simply don't regard Obama as the miracle-worker he once seemed: "People like him but they don't love him the way they loved him in 2008. He's a human being now."

He is hardly the first leader to over-promise, then under-deliver. I met plenty of people still illuminated by the half-light of "hope", who still think that in a second term Obama will bring real change. He remains a symbol of America's great ability continually to reinvent itself.

But charisma can't get bills through Congress, or win the big arguments. It's fine to believe in revivalist rhetoric and miracles; less fine if you choose to worship a politician.

'Obama: What Happened to Hope? With Andrew Marr' is on BBC Two tonight at 7.30pm

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clarafromashford
11/05/2012 08:15 PM

The BBC is obviously biased against Obama and Andrew Marr is simply still suffering from exhaustion hence this short sighted report full of incorrect observations and doctored to support the BBC's biased views. Since the Conservatives came into power, BBC reporters have all joined a new Conservative/Republican/Monarchy bandwagon. Any politician that does not espouse conservative, monetarist views is viewed as a failure. Fortunately, most ordinary people are not fooled by the biased reporting of the BBC. The majority of Americans will do the right thing for their country and will return Obama to the White House in spite of the BBC's efforts to dissuade them from doing so.

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Enrique
11/04/2012 05:19 PM

Obama is a divider not a uniter. He pits one community against the other. Please, America, send this punk packing on Tuesday!

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toyotatundra
11/04/2012 07:51 PM

Your boy Bush-wack did more to divide the congress than anyone else. At least the President attempted to work with the repugnants but all ever got was no, no no, even on ideas that they suggested. So don't go speaking about dividing...America, don't let that punk Romney in...

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Guest
11/04/2012 06:35 PM

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Rifleman1853

11/04/2012 06:58 PM

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I don't know (or care) where you come from, HG, but in this country we have a tradition of free speech. If you're from the US, I think you'll find it enshrined in your Constitution, too.

If your delicate sensibilities are so easily offended, go back to your playpen.



toyotatundra

11/04/2012 07:49 PM

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Exactly rifleman and HG was expressing his "free speech" just like you are.



Richard Saunders

11/04/2012 03:42 PM

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Factually, this piece has a couple mistakes.

Bloomberg isn't a Republican.

And Governor Christie isn't universally popular.

The truth about Obama is that he was always an empty suit.

He was good at flowery rhetoric and he is a handsome charismatic man.

But that is about it.

We could have gotten that from any slob off the street. We could have elected the actor who played President David Palmer from 24 and still got the same result.

He had no legislative or private sector accomplishments to his name before he became president.

Barack Obama is an affirmative action president who would have never gotten to where he is if he wasn't black and if he wasn't put into power by the white liberal

racist media, who thought it was about time to install a darker face in the White House.

The reason why Barack Obama is a failure as a president is because he never paid his dues as a politician.

I have a feeling he would have been better off serving 2 terms as governor of Illinois and getting some executive experience.

Instead, we got a man who wouldn't even be qualified at managing a Starbucks with his flimsy resume.

Lesson to countries everywhere: Don't install people into a powerful office who are woefully unqualified ethnic minorities because you feel guilty about the crimes of your ancestors.



interestedobserver2

11/04/2012 02:27 PM

A couple of thoughts. Your reporter notes that America is looking a little shabby and run-down these days -- but fails to make the logical connection between cause and effect. If we are looking that way, it might be because no one has tried to solve our economic problems and get capital and industry moving again. As an observation that perhaps may be considered somewhat hyperbolic, socialist countries typically look kind of shabby and run-down too -- anyone remember East Germany?

Your reporter's thoughts on Mr. Obama's governing style do strike me as right on target though. You can't govern in America if you effectively disenfranchise half the population. President Obama's refusal to work with Republicans ("We won -- get over it.") has consistently hamstrung him in every major initiative he has undertaken; this in a country whose controlling document, the Constitution, was expressly crafted to force compromise and consensus if people want to make things happen. Our Congressional Representatives and Senators are there precisely to make sure that the people who don't feel the President is necessarily the best choice for the job are still represented at the table when laws and policies are promulgated, but this President has effectively chosen to attempt to "rule" by fiat instead of lead through compromise. Can anyone really be surprised at the depth of frustration and distrust that many of us feel over his term in office? He hasn't run an "Imperial Presidency" so much as he has a "Royal" one in which he is the King and the sole and only arbiter of our fates. While I have the greatest

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respect for Great Britain and your Constitutional Monarchy, I would remind your readers that we went to a great deal of trouble to disassociate ourselves from the very form of "Royal" leadership that Mr. Obama has attempted to institute. I rather suspect you might all feel the same if the Queen suddenly dissolved Parliament and decided to actively rule.

Finally, your reporter notes that there is much divisiveness in American politics these days. Speaking as an American, I must say that this more represents a return to the American norm, as opposed to something new in U.S. political history. The long truce between the two parties imposed by the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War, and the need to stand unified in the face of truly existential "outside" threats is finally passing as the unreconstructed "Cold Warriors" retire and die. Americans are instead returning to the sort of full-contact politics that has existed in this country since it's earliest days. If you doubt me, take a look at the campaign of 1800, or any of Andrew Jackson's campaigns, or the campaign against Taft; I could go on. The bottom line is, don't worry about Democracy in America based on the tone of what passes for political discourse over here; we aren't back to the election of 1860 quite yet.



Rifleman1853

11/04/2012 06:53 PM

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"As an observation that perhaps may be considered somewhat hyperbolic, socialist countries typically look kind of shabby and run-down too -- anyone remember East Germany?" (InterestedObserver2)

Yes, indeed. I got to see a bit of East Berlin (near Checkpoint Charlie) just after German reunification, but before it got sorted out. It looked like it hadn't been touched since the 1930s - and there were still bullet holes in the walls from when the Russians took the city.

The contrast between that street and what had been West Berlin told me all I needed to know about why the USSR collapsed.

I've also seen the same look about companies which are in decline; everything getting older and shabbier, and, when things go wrong or break down, they are just patched up, or ignored.

"President Obama's refusal to work with Republicans ("We won -- get over it.") has consistently hamstrung him in every major initiative he has undertaken; this in a country who's controlling document, *the*

Constitution, was expressly crafted to force compromise and consensus if people want to make things happen." (IO2)

I've found, when I've talked to other English people about the US political system, that they really don't understand that aspect of the Constitution. To a lot of people over here, it seems very chaotic and counter-productive, and I have to explain to them that it was *designed* to be as it is, so as to make it as difficult as possible for any one group or faction to gain total control. The people who wrote the Constitution showed remarkable insight into human nature, and remarkable foresight into a future they could hardly imagine.

"Our Congressional Representatives and Senators are there precisely to make sure that the people who don't feel the President is necessarily the best choice for the job are still represented at the table when laws and policies are promulgated . . ." (IO2)

In theory, we have the same idea in Britain, which is why the leader of the largest opposition party is officially called "Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition". That isn't a courtesy title; it's a job description - yet both Labour and Conservative parties have made a sick joke of it. In practise, the exchanges in the House of Commons frequently sound more like an argument in the playground of a primary school than any form of reasoned debate, and the opposition (Labour or Conservative) seems far more interested in scoring cheap political points than, as you say, representing the views of people who didn't vote for the incumbent party.

"While I have the greatest respect for Great Britain and your Constitutional Monarchy, I would remind your readers that we went to a great deal of trouble to disassociate ourselves from the very form of "Royal" leadership that Mr. Obama has attempted to institute. I rather suspect you might all feel the same if the Queen suddenly dissolved Parliament and decided to actively rule." (IO2)

Very much so - it's why so many of us are so strongly opposed to our being run by the EU. To paraphrase your country's rallying call from the 1770s, "No taxation, or legislation, or regulation, without representation!"

Unfortunately, thanks to utter betrayal of the electorate by ALL the old parties, that is what we now have - which is why Labour, Conservative and the Liberal Democrat parties having been losing members by the tens of thousands, and votes by the millions, for decades. The only party which has been gaining both, for at least ten years, is the United

Kingdom Independence Party. Yes, it's tiny. Yes, it has no MPs in parliament. But it's the only one which is growing.

(short pause whilst all the knockers, ranters, and abusers blow a fuse!)

Regardless of their froth, bluster, half truths and downright lies, what I've written in the paragraph above is a fact. And, regardless of all the tough talk from Cameron as to how he will "fight Britain's corner", the reality is that Nigel Farage has been one of a tiny handful of people representing disenfranchised British voters in the EU puppet parliament (which has as much control over the EU Commission as did the old Russian parliament over the Politburo).

If you haven't seen our Nige laying into the EU, look him up on YouTube - and you'll see that "full-body contact politics" isn't confined to the western side of the pond!

And best wishes to you all, over there, for Tuesday's vote.

(Edited by author 6 days ago)



interestedobserver2
11/04/2012 09:33 PM

-:) I was stationed in West Berlin with the U.S. Berlin Brigade from 1985-88. It was kind of funny; whenever one crossed the border at Checkpoint Charlie, it was almost like walking into a black and white noir movie from the 1950's, complete with discarded papers blowing down an alley...and guys in trenchcoats following you....

Thanks for the tip about the UK Independence Party -- I'll start looking for news of them in the future.

I think the biggest problem Mr. Obama has is the perception by roughly half of the American electorate that he is indeed making regulations, raising taxes, and creating laws (in direct contravention of the stated desires of Congress) without paying any attention whatsoever to our duly elected representatives or our will in the matter. The disgraceful process by which the Affordable Care Act was forced through Congress ("We have to pass it in order to see what's in it.") is a perfect example of a

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modern "Stamp Act," and it's already come home to roost to some extent with the 2010 mid-terms.



Rifleman1853

11/04/2012 11:05 PM

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"The disgraceful process by which the Affordable Care Act was forced through Congress ("We have to pass it in order to see what's in it.") is a perfect example of a modern "Stamp Act," and it's already come home to roost to some extent with the 2010 mid-terms." (IO2)

I agree - that's the trouble with chickens; sooner or later, they *always* come home to roost.



lekker12

11/04/2012 11:10 AM

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What DID happen to hope?

Look at the posts on this thread. There are 2 types of people. One who post logic and another that post abuse.

Probably matches the US campaign.



joelbanks

11/04/2012 01:49 PM

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If it is not a trouble for you, please identify the posts which you analyse as "abuse."



finsburyparkermk2

11/04/2012 10:10 AM

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President Barack Obama: whatever happened to hope?

.....It Died in Despair!

G. Peasemould.



crosscop

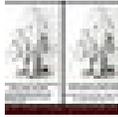
11/04/2012 09:20 AM

Has Obama managed to campaign in all 57 states this time?

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Weyland

11/04/2012 09:11 AM

BBC are so excited that Hurricane Sandy might help Obama back in White house - They have hundreds of their reporters & presenters there to celebrate his re election

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lekker12

11/04/2012 11:11 AM

The BBC is infiltrated with the same type as has infiltrated the Democrats.

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hdgdggd

11/04/2012 09:08 AM

It is very simple. A good talker does not necessarily make a decent President of America.

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LithomanII

11/04/2012 08:59 AM

Years from now people will wonder, "what were Americans thinking when they voted for Obama"? He had zero experience as a leader. A crooked politician from

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the corrupt Chicago democrat machine. Why did Americans elect such a big zero?

He read the teleprompter well. He's not George Bush. Plus the mainstream media hyped the empty shirt to no end without looking too closely at his baggage. His campaign slogan was hope and change. In stead of hope he lead the nation to despair. Instead of change he delivered stagnation. Obama..... a testament to the power of the leftist media.



finsburyparkermk2
11/04/2012 10:12 AM

Replying to LithomanII

"What were Americans thinking when they voted for Obama"?

That's the problem,.....They weren't 'Thinking'!

They were 'Mesmerised'!

G. Peasemould.

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lekker12
11/04/2012 11:12 AM

Also, Obama only won with a 2% majority 52 vs 48%. Hardly a landslide.

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interestedobserver2
11/04/2012 02:31 PM

Erm...that would make it a 4% majority, wouldn't it?

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Chongalulu
11/04/2012 08:44 AM

Recommended by 4 people

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Core culture if having the govt. heavily involved is the biggest issue. Actually, conservatives do live with the left but, as Clint Eastward said, it is in their character not to go hotdogging around, telling everyone else what to do, say, eat, or buy. The left have dominated the culture but the internet has changed their power structure, especially after watching CNN and Candy Crawley's staged president debate. Insulting to the American people to pretend any longer. Leave the acting to Hollywood, Candy.



mpav

11/04/2012 08:41 AM

I'm in Manhattan and among my contacts see no enthusiasm for Obama even among those who voted for him in '08. Some of those folks are just staying home. I'll be surprised if BHO wins. Incompetence has come home to roost. Plus his "Voting is the best revenge" comment shames the office. He speaks like a Chicago thug style pol.



Rifleman1853

11/04/2012 10:25 PM

MPAV - well, he is a 'Chicago thug style pol', isn't he? Eloquence and a sharp suit might hide what's inside - but they don't change it.

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