

HOW MCCAIN DEFEATED MCCAIN

By Don Feder

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If someone had told me last year that, come the fall of 2008, I would be praying for John McCain to become the next president of the United States, I would have had three words for him – seek psychiatric help. (McCain is my kind of Republican the way “rap” is my kind of music.)

But, in the last four months of the campaign, that’s exactly what I was doing – praying for a McCain victory -- not because McCain is so good (any resemblance between the Arizona Senator and a conservative is purely coincidental), but because I would have done almost anything to spare my country from the nightmare that is Barack Hussein Obama.

Now that the worst has happened, the blame game begins.

Some will fault the leftist media, which lost any sense of balance and objectivity and practically panted over the Kenyan-American.

Others will point to the huge disparity in fundraising. Obama outspent McCain by nearly three to one. Still, if it was only about money, John Forbes Kerry – who’s married to Ft. Knox – would have won the 2004 campaign. As a friend put it, “McCain failed to raise the money to project the message he didn’t have.”

There are those who will attribute McCain’s defeat to the unpopularity of outgoing President George W. Bush, or the financial meltdown for which Republicans unfairly took the fall, or the fact that only once in the post-war era has a two-term president been succeeded by a member of his party.

It also didn’t help that McCain resembled Methuselah’s grandfather, as presented by Madame Tussauds. We live in an age of image where how you look matters more than what you believe or what you’ve done.

But, in the final analysis, Republicans lost because they nominated their weakest candidate. And McCain lost because he’s McCain.

As a member of Club Capitol Hill, McCain was best known for cooperating with Democrats, reaching across the proverbial aisle to embrace big government halfway. Perhaps he’d spent so much time forging coalitions with the left that he’d forgotten how to fight it – if he ever knew.

For the past two decades, McCain basked in the adoration of the mainstream media. He was their pet Republican. They honored him with the accolade “maverick” – their term of endearment for a Republican who specializes in betraying his own party (as McCain did with Campaign Finance Reform). Then, when the bigger, better deal came along, *The New York Times* et al. decided that the former object of their affection was a Republican after all, and hateful to boot.

Of course the Fourth Estate did everything it could to elect Barack Hussein Obama. (To a large extent, he is their creation.) What else is new?

If the media chose our presidents – if they were omnipotent, as many conservatives believe – why did the GOP win five of the last eight presidential elections? Was the media enamored of Ronald Reagan – infatuated with George W. Bush?

Unquestionably, media bias was worse this year than in any election in memory. But that handicap could have been overcome, had McCain run a real race.

Like Bush Sr. in 1992, McCain was the victim of hubris.

Initially, he thought he could win on experience alone. “Hey, I’m John McCain. I was a war hero. I’ve been in the Senate for 22 years. I’m a reformer. I know how to work with the other party. How can voters possibly choose a four-year veteran of the Senate, with questionable associations, over me?” McCain mused. But they did.

McCain did a poor impression of a conservative.

The ostensible opponent of regulation and champion of the market economy was neither. In September, McCain rushed back to Washington to vote for the \$700-billion bailout package for financial institutions.

In October, he offered socialism lite to rescue improvident borrowers and feckless lenders, proposing that \$300 billion of the \$700 billion bailout be used to buy the loans of people who took out mortgages they couldn’t pay, which would then be written down to affordable levels. The full impact of any losses would be borne by the Treasury (read, the taxpayers).

Soon to follow, bailouts of people who take out car loans they can’t afford. And how about the grads who don’t want to be burdened with student loans? Why should any borrower ever be responsible for his debts?

Other than taxes, which McCain promised to lower for everyone, the principal difference between his economic program and Obama’s was the wrapping.

There were issues McCain couldn’t use and issues McCain wouldn’t use.

Immigration – Americans overwhelmingly favor a crackdown on illegal immigrants -- the carriers of poverty, crime and social fragmentation.

The Democrats are the party of porous borders. Barack Obama did everything to signal his support for alien lawbreakers except giving them backrubs and enchiladas as they cross the Rio Grande.

Republicans could have appealed to middle-class rage over the failure to control our borders – if anyone but Senor Amnesty was the nominee. Along with his buddy, Ted Kennedy, in 2007, McCain was the co-sponsor of a bill to “regularize the status” of roughly 12 million “undocumented workers.” Talk about throwing away a winning issue. BTW, two-thirds of Hispanics voted for Obama.

Marriage – Here, McCain’s record was mixed. He voted against the Federal Marriage Amendment each time it came before the Senate, but said he supported state marriage initiatives.

But it was one of many social issues that McCain resolutely refused to discuss on the campaign trail – notwithstanding that his opponent promised to repeal the Federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which says states don’t have to recognize same-sex unions contracted elsewhere.

On Tuesday, state defense of marriage amendments passed in California by 52% to 48%, in Arizona by 57% to 44%, and in Florida –one of McCain’s big electoral losses – by a landslide vote of 62% to 38%.

Including the three latest, marriage protection amendments have been on the ballot in 31 states, and passed every time.

Alan Sears of Alliance Defense Fund notes that in California, there were 1.5 million more votes for marriage than McCain. Florida’s amendment got 779,000 more votes than the Republican ticket. And in McCain’s home state, the vote for marriage exceeded his total by 25,000. If McCain had increased his Florida vote by roughly 98,000 – in other words, if he’d picked up 12% of the pro-marriage votes he didn’t get -- he would have won the state’s 27 electoral votes.

Think highlighting Obama’s stealth campaign for gay marriage might have helped McCain? McCain didn’t.

Rev. Jeremiah A Wright -- The October 27 issue of *Newsweek* explained McCain’s refusal to discuss Obama’s racist, Marxist pastor: “Many senior advisors, as well as McCain’s running mate, Sarah Palin, believe the campaign should remind voters of Obama’s ties to Wright, whose inflammatory sermons emerged as a problem for the Democratic nominee during the primary. ‘If we were to go with an ad during the final weeks of this campaign showing excerpts of (*Wright’s*) sermons, we would probably

win,' says one senior McCain aide who declined to be named discussing internal debates on tactics. 'But we won't.'"

Imagine the following ad:

Announcer: "Listen to the man who was Barack Obama's pastor for 19 years -- the man whose advice Obama said he valued."

Cut to clips of Wright: "God d*** America." "We (*the U.S. of K.K.K.*) started the AIDS virus." "Racism is how this country was founded and how this country is still run." "White folks' greed runs a world in need." "The United States cannot do terrorism on other people and expect it never to come back on you." "America is still the No. 1 killer in the world."

Announcer: "For 19 years, Obama sat in Wright's church and listened to this. He and his wife gave the church \$26,000 in one year. How can we trust the judgment of a man who associated with an anti-American demagogue for almost two decades? Can we expect courage from a man who was afraid to confront the ravings of his own pastor, until he was forced to do so as a candidate?"

Obama's association with Wright spoke volumes about the type of president he would make. It could have raised serious doubts in the minds of many about the Democrat's competence to lead the nation.

But McCain wouldn't touch the issue, for fear of being called racially insensitive. Ultimately, the Republican standard-bearer chose sensitivity over the presidency.

Said cop-out notwithstanding, the media still painted McCain as the Michelangelo of the smear. In a November 5 editorial, *The New York Times* claimed the Arizonan lost because he "forsook his principles for a campaign built on anger and fear." (In an October 7 editorial, *The Slimes* accused McCain/Palin of entering "the dark territory of race baiting and xenophobia.)

No, what McCain did was to betray his supporters by running a campaign without the brains, heart and guts to win.

Picking Sarah Palin as his running mate was McCain's first and last smart move. Other than that, McCain's campaign was much like the rest of his political career – equivocal, hesitant, passionless and lacking any real focus or genuine commitment to principles.

More than a partisan media, Bush's ratings, the Fannie-Mae fiasco, and Democratic fundraising, John McCain is responsible for the defeat of John McCain.

The next four years will test the mettle of both Republicans and conservatives, who too often follow the GOP over a cliff.

Political exile may be the best thing that's happened to the movement and the party.

Perhaps we'll learn to fight again. Maybe we'll rediscover the value of choosing principle over expediency. Maybe we'll discover that we can't compromise with an enemy which loathes us and despises everything this country used to stand for.

If so, John McCain may have performed his most important service to his country since the Vietnam War.

A version of this commentary previously appeared at GrassTopsUSA.org