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1st Presidential Debate 2012

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This paper will give a brief summary of the first presidential debate which aired on Wednesday, October 3, 2012. The debate was between President Barack Obama and Governor Mitt Romney. I will discuss the performance detailing some of the content, but mainly the presentation given by both candidates. I will include in each, any parts to which I was able to relate. I would therefore like to begin with the opening of the debate.

Both President Obama and Governor Romney looked very distinguished and professional when they took the stage. The president had sported a blue tie, and Governor Romney wore a red one, each representing their respective political parties. They both came onto the stage with an air of confidence such as any president or candidate running for high office is expected to possess. They shook hands each grabbing the other just above the elbow with the opposite arm. I believe this was part of obligatory “presidential” behavior rather than a genuine show of mutual admiration or respect. Both candidates opened predictably with acknowledgements to various people, and then the expected opening joke to lighten the mood, for which they both received corresponding chuckles from the audience. President Obama was first to address the topic of jobs. To establish his knowledge of the topic, he opted to cite his nearly four years in office. He used statistics out of context to assert that under his administration there were “5 million jobs created in the private sector”. What I did not hear the president discuss was his plans for the next four years. Governor Romney then had his two minutes to discuss how his plan differs from the president’s. The governor started off by relating experiences he and his wife had had in different states with people who were out of work or lost their homes. Since the president did not provide a plan, Romney then elaborated on how the past four years had not been as successful as the president claimed. The governor dealt in specifics when he outlined issues he would focus on as president, unlike Obama whose well-worn vague Utopian statements fell flat. His points were easy to follow and I can still, 6 days later, remember what he discussed. After the governor had finished, the moderator then asked the president to respond directly to Governor Romney’s comment about top down government.

The president, instead of defending himself, began detailing his plan, and when he did make any comments about Governor Romney’s plan he would not look at the governor. The president then began to speak on education and how he would like to add 2 million more teachers to the public sector payroll. The numbers Obama cited seemed inflated and as a result made him look desperate. Throughout the debate the president was very reluctant to make eye contact with the governor. I found this to be a sign of disrespect, shame, or perhaps altitude sickness. The president showed a strong sense of weakness and shame as he looked at ground when Governor Romney brought up the inordinate amount of taxpayer dollars given to financial backers and political cronies for losing ventures such as Solyndra. The president’s body language was all wrong. When he began speaking about “Obamacare” he was addressing the American people, in doing so he seemed nervous, shifty, and tense; he did however mention some specifics which were intended to shed light on some aspects of the otherwise fluid and translucent “Obamacare”. Within the same segment he made light of going over his time limit, and gave the moderator an innocent smile. On some topics, such as entitlements, the president drew from personal experience, but mainly he drew from the experiences of his grandparents. This seemed to attest to an overall lack of personal life experience. The president then started talking about the past four years instead of discussing plans for the next four years. Governor Romney gave a more detailed description on the topics of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid; however, this time the president rebutted Romney’s statements, but he still would not directly address the governor. I will now discuss the last segment of the debate highlighting the role of the federal government.

President Obama began this segment. This was to be a topic outlining their respective visions of the role of the federal government. I was very turned off to almost everything that the president said. He was not very articulate; furthermore, he did not sound like a graduate of an Ivy League college, an attorney or, a law professor. The President of the United States should know intimately the document which he was sworn to “protect and defend”… the U.S. Constitution. His vision of the role of the federal government was rather Orwellian and factually contrary to some of the key principles of the constitution. Then within the same segment he attempted to use talking points. He went from point “a” to point “2” without a point “1” or a point “b”. Governor Romney on the other hand gave an explanation of what he thought the role of the federal government should be which was very well presented and consistent with the basic principles of the U.S. Constitution. He showed knowledge of the framer’s writings and their intended meaning. The governor’s words had substance and conviction. As for the closing statements I was not overly impressed with either candidate. After the debate, both candidates had family come up on stage. I thought that the president and the first lady left a bit prematurely. This left Governor Romney dominating the stage.

In closing I do not believe this was the most eventful presidential debate I have ever seen, but according to the polls, it was the most decisive in U.S. history. Governor Romney dominated in both his performance and presentation in all areas of this forum. President Obama’s rhetoric seemed empty after four years of broken promises and blaming Bush. His “do the right thing” ideologies did not hold up under scrutiny and would best be left for Spike Lee to tout. Obama’s performance also showed a marked lack of teleprompters.