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Cover Story

The Denver Presidential Debate: Obama vs. the Empty Corporate Suit Who Would Kill Big Bird The Color of Law By David A. Love, JD BC Executive Editor

Let me start off by saying that the Obama-Romney matchup in Denver was the worst presidential debate I've ever seen. I started off believing that we have to save the popcorn for Biden v. Ryan next week, and I'll stick with that assertion.

In order to assess the debate, it is necessary to separate the style from the substance of the event. With regard to style, the moderator, Jim Lehrer, did a poor job providing structure, and added little to the debate. Better to have no moderator at all than a poor one.

Governor Mitt Romney was more assertive and hyper than his opponent, perhaps even overdone - reflecting a candidate who has been killed in the polls due to a number of factors, including his lack of personal appeal and the unacceptability of Republican policies. Romney was more animated than Obama, but not unlike a slick used car salesman trying to sell you a lemon, or in this case trickle-down Reaganomics.

Meanwhile, the president was more subdued, passive and professorial, perhaps too distant, and did not challenge Romney as he could have. Perhaps this was because Obama did not want to be seen as the "angry black man," or maybe because his handlers told him to stay cool and ride the wave of high favorability and not rock the boat.

And with that said, now on to substance. Romney gave a better performance because he was acting - he lied through the whole thing, and otherwise he provided few specifics, as Obama pointed out. I suspect that if the media are worth their salt, they will make Romney account for the stories he concocted. The governor dealt with criticism of his economic policy - particularly the \$5 trillion price tag of tax cuts and military spending increases - by changing his policy. Meanwhile, Romney rewrote history by ignoring GOP obstructionism, and characterizing Obama as someone who refused to work in a bipartisan fashion on healthcare reform. The president did not challenge Romney on this point too much, or much of anything for that matter. And he certainly did not pin down his opponent on his videotaped remarks to donors, where Romney essentially wrote off 47 percent of the electorate.

Ultimately, the candidates provided substantive differences in philosophy regarding the role of government in the lives of people. Obama made a strong case for an active government role, citing the Transcontinental Railroad, the land grant colleges and the National Academy of Sciences. He embraced the Obamacare label as his own, defended Social Security, talked about how he eliminated the middleman in federal student loans, and railed against corporate welfare. Moreover, he shared a vision of economic patriotism.

In sharp contrast, Romney shared a future for the nation in which federal responsibility for caring for the poor is left to the states, under the assumption that the states do a better job of those things. Regulation is an encumbrance, and investment in green jobs is a folly in Romney's opinion. The elderly are given coupons for healthcare they will be unable to afford, kids borrow from their parents to pay for college, and Obamacare and PBS are eliminated.

For a debate on domestic issues, the evening is more notable for what was NOT discussed - for example, fighting the scourge of poverty, women's reproductive rights, labor rights, a jobs program and dealing with the nation's crumbling infrastructure. Obama chose not to challenge his rival on key issues that implicate Republican extremism.

There was no word from the president on the GOP platform, their racist views on immigration, their plans to gut the social welfare state, the Jim Crow stance towards voter ID. No mention of the homophobia coming from the Republicans, or the push to ban abortion, including in cases of rape or incest, or where the life of the mother is in danger. Not a word about Romney's offshore tax havens. No effort to debunk

the governor's self-proclaimed reputation as a job creator, when the facts point to his propensity for picking at the carcasses of companies, like the vulture capitalist he is.

Next week is bound to be far more entertaining, when Vice President Biden will presumably take Paul Ryan to the woodshed, where he will proceed to open a can of whoopass on him, and deservedly so. Plus, the next presidential debate will assume a town hall format, which is bound to favor Obama and remind the public that they don't like Romney.

So America's first black president went toe to toe with the whitest man in America. In the end, there isn't much to see here, and I call it a draw. Romney had an edge on style, but will have to explain himself for manufacturing his own set of facts. This debate did nothing to alter his image as an empty suit who will say and do anything to get elected, and a corporate tool who believes in nothing in particular except winning and being rich, and making the rich richer.

Just to be safe, Obama must beware of low information voters who don't know any better, and have been in a coma throughout this election season. He must come back the next time around caffeinated, hungry and ready with his A game. And he needs to attack Romney like one of his campaign ads. Obama had to play Jackie Robinson in 2008, but this is 2012 and he has a term under his belt. Sometimes black men have to get angry, especially if they're fighting for something they believe in, like their job.

BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor and Columnist, David A. Love, JD, is the Executive Director of [Witness to Innocence](#), a national nonprofit organization that empowers exonerated death row prisoners and their family members to become effective leaders in the movement to abolish the death penalty. He is, is a graduate of Harvard College and the University of Pennsylvania Law School. and a contributor to [The Huffington Post](#), [the Grio](#), [The Progressive Media Project](#), [McClatchy-Tribune News Service](#), [In These Times](#) and [Philadelphia Independent Media Center](#). He also blogs at [davidalove.com](#), [NewsOne](#), [Daily Kos](#), and [Open Salon](#). Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Love.



