

**Obama dodges taunts as Romney sticks to secrecy**  
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**By Maureen Dowd**

Usually, at this stage of a presidential campaign, Republicans are doing a much better job of sullyng the Democratic candidate as un-American.

Michael Dukakis was accused of having a funny last name and failing to say the Pledge of Allegiance 10 times a day. John Kerry was faulted for acting French and eating Philly cheese steaks with Swiss cheese. Al Gore was into the Earth and earth tones - need we say more?

And the Republican Party has had so much practice over the past four years at skewering Barack Obama as an existentialist socialist apologist for America with a secret foreign birth certificate that it should be like shooting mahi-mahi in a barrel.

The dude used to wear a sarong to do the Sunday *Times* crossword puzzle, for Pete's sake - a look more exotic than Ralph Lauren's Chinese French berets. Yet this week's Republican attacks have been shriekingly shrill. "I wish this President would learn how to be an American," said John Sununu, the former New Hampshire governor. (He later apologised.)

He also went on Fox News to assert that the President "has no idea how the American system functions, and we shouldn't be surprised about that, because he spent his early years in Hawaii smoking something, spent the next set of years in Indonesia, another set of years in Indonesia, and frankly, when he came to the US, he worked as a community organiser, which is a socialised structure."

Rush Limbaugh also weighed in: "I think it can now be said that this man hates this country. He is trying - Barack Obama is trying - to dismantle, brick by brick, the American dream ... He was indoctrinated as a child. His father was a communist. His mother was a leftist. He was sent to prep and Ivy League schools where his contempt for the country was reinforced." As it was for the Bushes and Mitt Romney?

But that nonsense sounds reasonable compared with Michele Bachmann's McCarthyesque charges that the Muslim Brotherhood is infiltrating the US government. She cited Hillary Clinton's trusted aide, Huma Abedin, the Muslim daughter of professors of Indian and Pakistani descent and the wife of former Republican Anthony Weiner, as someone who shouldn't have a security clearance.

It's hard for the haters to get traction when the President and his wife are looking so all-American, smooching for the "kiss cam" at a US versus Brazil basketball game, as daughter Malia looked on.

Campaigning in Pennsylvania, Romney called Obama's course as President "extraordinarily foreign". But it is the Mitt-bot who keeps getting caught doing things that seem strangely outside the norm to most Americans.

Americans have been trained to be wary of Swiss bank accounts and tax shelters in Bermuda and the Cayman Islands. Guys who have those in movies are always shady and greedy.

As Nicholas Shaxson writes in *Vanity Fair*, though Romney left the private-equity firm Bain Capital in 1999, he "has continued to receive large payments from it - in early June he revealed more than \$2 million".

George Romney set the gold standard by releasing 12 years' worth of tax returns. But his son's refusal to release a decent sampling is so suspicious that even some top Republicans have balked. Why would the scion of a political family who always wanted to be president tangle himself in a cat's cradle of tax trickery in the first place?

Romney contended he had "no role" at Bain after 1999 when some of its companies went bankrupt, shipped jobs overseas and fired workers. He remained the firm's chairman, chief executive, president and only stockholder until 2002. Other than that, he had nothing to do with the place.

Aside from his time running the Salt Lake City Olympics, Romney's whole life, from his \$250 million fortune to his tenure at the cultish Bain to his Mormonism, seems as though it's secreted in a hidden shelter.

He's coming across as the privileged kid who grew up at the country club and got special deals because of his dad, but then runs around claiming to be a self-made businessman. That lack of self-awareness is a disturbing trait in a leader.

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