

# THE UNLEARNED LESSONS OF OBAMA'S GUNS, GOD, AND RELIGION COMMENTS

It will take some time to understand everything that went into Tuesday's Hillary loss. But one of the most striking things we can see in actual results is that in the Midwest, Trump ran up the score in rural areas that Obama had won in 2008, counterbalancing Hillary's ability to win in key exurbs. Not incidentally, this is the same thing Bernie was able to do in the primaries: win big in places with small populations.

That got me thinking of this, a key moment in the 2008 election – when Obama was caught on tape suggesting forgotten rural voters often cling to their guns, god, and religion.

Here's how it is: in a lot of these communities in big industrial states like Ohio and Pennsylvania, people have been beaten down so long, and they feel so betrayed by government, and when they hear a pitch that is premised on not being cynical about government, then a part of them just doesn't buy it. And when it's delivered by – it's true that when it's delivered by a 46-year-old black man named Barack Obama (laughter), then that adds another layer of skepticism (laughter).

But – so the questions you're most likely to get about me, 'Well, what is this guy going to do for me? What's the concrete thing?' What they wanna hear is – so, we'll give you talking points about what we're proposing – close tax loopholes, roll back, you know, the tax cuts for the top 1 percent. Obama's gonna give tax breaks to middle-class folks and we're gonna provide health

care for every American. So we'll go down a series of talking points.

But the truth is, is that, our challenge is to get people persuaded that we can make progress when there's not evidence of that in their daily lives. You go into some of these small towns in Pennsylvania, and like a lot of small towns in the Midwest, the jobs have been gone now for 25 years and nothing's replaced them. And they fell through the Clinton administration, and the Bush administration, and each successive administration has said that somehow these communities are gonna regenerate and they have not. So it's not surprising then that they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations.

Um, now these are in some communities, you know. I think what you'll find is, is that people of every background – there are gonna be a mix of people, you can go in the toughest neighborhoods, you know working-class lunch-pail folks, you'll find Obama enthusiasts. And you can go into places where you think I'd be very strong and people will just be skeptical. The important thing is that you show up and you're doing what you're doing.

Hillary pounced on the comments, accusing Obama of being tone deaf about rural issues. But over the course of the year, Obama worked to win the votes of these people.

Eight years later, this very same disheartened voters, who remain cynical that the government can do anything for them, voted for a billionaire grifter who thinks wages are too high.

That's a bad enough story. It's bad enough that giving people access to (too expensive and complicated) health insurance didn't provide needed relief.

But then Hillary missed the importance of these same rural areas, because the algorithm that did all the campaign's thinking underestimated it and so Hillary made few or no campaign stops there.

So where did Ada go wrong?

About some things, she was apparently right. Aides say Pennsylvania was pegged as an extremely important state early on, which explains why Clinton was such a frequent visitor and chose to hold her penultimate rally in Philadelphia on Monday night.

But it appears that the importance of other states Clinton would lose – including Michigan and Wisconsin – never became fully apparent or that it was too late once it did.

Clinton made several visits to Michigan during the general election, but it wasn't until the final days that she, Obama and her husband made such a concerted effort.

As for Wisconsin: Clinton didn't make any appearances there at all.

Like much of the political establishment Ada appeared to underestimate the power of rural voters in Rust Belt states.

Trump, partly out of desperation, did see these voters.

Hillary failed Obama's challenge – convincing people that we can make progress when there's little evidence of it. That said, I think in the White House, Obama failed that challenge as well.

