



## DEATH RACE 2012

GQ ON POLITICS

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### Demolishing Mitt Romney (Well, His House)

By *Howie Kahn*



A week after Mitt Romney's childhood home was demolished in June 2010, I stood next to the scrap pile. An excavator scooped up the refuse, loaded it into a many-wheeled truck and off went the house, in fractured pieces, to the landfill. Two days later, I visited the site again and it was merely a hole in the ground surrounded by a protective plastic fence. One city official, an executive in the buildings department who showed me the site as an example of civic efficiency, told me she thought Romney might file an injunction to delay the demolition. She told me she thought there was a chance he'd try and get the property tagged as a historic landmark.

After all, two governors-to-be had lived in the 5,500-square-foot residence at 1860 Balmoral. George Romney went on to be governor of Michigan from 1963 to 1969, a period that included rioting in Detroit, in 1967, that forever changed life in the city. A couple years later, Richard Nixon, who defeated George Romney in the 1968 Republican primaries, appointed him Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Flash forward and HUD money, in the form of millions of dollars worth of Neighborhood Stabilization Project grants, is doing a lot of heavy lifting in Detroit, financing the demolition of thousands of abandoned and foreclosed homes, nearly every one of which has a far smaller footprint than the place Mitt spent years zero to six.

The man who tore down Romney's house didn't think much of it. Mike Farrow and his crew were wrecking dozens of structures that summer—part of an initiative to level thousands—and it's a wrecker's prerogative to think about the job, or the drink after the job, or whether there'll be a job next month, or when the money for the job might finally roll in from the city, the county, the state. Mike Farrow wasn't sitting in the cab of his demolition machine thinking about Mitt Romney at all. Not for the hour it took to reduce the house to nothing, not in the years after, not really much at all until today.

In the summer of 2010, Mitt Romney was both an ex-governor and a failed presidential candidate like his dad. He wasn't exactly making waves in Detroit. (Obama, by the way, was at a GM plant in Hamtramck doing this.) It's not like Farrow should or would have foreseen anything. It's not like he should have been pushing Romney's old roof into his basement with a steel claw while contemplating whatever feelings come along with destroying some possible part of presidential history.

Still, I was curious if that one wreck took on any revisionist meaning for Farrow. "Not really," he told me last week on the phone. "I was just doing the job. Working. I guess looking back now, it's kind of neat." I pointed out to Farrow that depending on the results of the election that it could be he and not Barack Obama to hold the last victory over Mitt Romney by a black man. "I'm gonna give that a spin," he said, laughing loudly. "The last black man to beat Romney. I like the way that sounds."

*Read Howie Kahn's GQ feature, from May 2011, about the men who are demolishing the abandoned, godforsaken homes of Detroit—all 70,000 of them—and paving the way for one last shot at the future.*

Photo: Howie Kahn

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