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# OPINION

## Political candidates dodge bullets



— *Editor's note: Tanya Amador-Daigle will be reporting for Florida Weekly on the national primaries until the presidential candidates are chosen this summer. She has a unique perspective on the primaries and the process for choosing a candidate, having traveled the country reporting on primaries and caucuses for the Purple States project. To learn more about Purple States go to [www.purplestaes.tv](http://www.purplestaes.tv).*

Is anyone else enjoying political season as much as I am? With all these new scandals, I haven't had to buy the National Enquirer lately. Seriously, it's kind of sick how Americans, myself included, find it so riveting. I know the mud slinging has become a staple of our election process, but isn't it distracting us from the REAL issues?

As Hillary was recently attacked for stretching the truth about narrowly escaping sniper fire on a goodwill trip to Bosnia in 1996, I have been mulling over the subject of political smearing. As I began researching the subject, I kept finding Web sites completely dedicated to destroying, or exposing, depending on which way you look at it, the character of some of the candidates. I actually stumbled upon one page that had gone through the entire alphabet and labeled each of the Clinton scandals beginning with a letter in the alphabet. For example "W is for Whitewater" and "M is for Monica." I have to say that this political dynamic duo has enough skeletons to fill a cemetery.

But, how true are these accusations? Does it matter? Are these scandals that important? Trying to decipher whether or not accusations are true is like trying to decipher Egyptian Hieroglyphics. Only experts who have all the facts and tools can truly do it effectively. What I'm wondering is: How important are these slanderous stories and how do they impact who we decide to vote for?

In the case of Barack Obama and Tony Rezko (Rezko is currently facing federal charges of attempted extortion, money laundering, and fraud), I don't really know for sure. I don't know with absolute certainty if Obama did anything willfully

wrong in his personal real estate dealings in 2005 with Rezko while the entrepreneur was under grand jury investigation. Obama acknowledges that he made a "boneheaded mistake" and admits that it made him look shady although he denies any wrongdoing. Okay, maybe Obama simply demonstrated poor timing and lousy judgment. I can concede that he might have just been a little naïve and so maybe this story isn't so important.

In contrast to that situation there is the matter of Obama's relationship with Reverend Wright, or "Reverend Wrong" as I like to call him. I do think that the company a candidate keeps, particularly someone who may be guiding and mentoring them, deserves a closer look. Obama has "vehemently" disagreed with Wright's hateful statements and said he never personally heard Wright make any degrading assertions. Really? How do you know someone so closely for 20 years and not know what he or she stands for? Do we really believe that Obama had no idea? What did he think about the fact that Wright went to meet with Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi with Louis Farrakhan in 1984? And Obama, did you have to bring your Nana into this? In case anyone hasn't noticed, the Senator has mentioned on several occasions that his grandmother sometimes made racial remarks. It's no wonder the press can't stop talking about it. It's much more interesting than watching Britney being carted off to the loony bin. That aside, in my opinion, the Reverend Wright story "IS" significant. The Rezko situation shows that Obama may just be inexperienced; the Wright story may demonstrate that he is being less than forthright with the American public.

I also believe the integrity of John McCain should be examined. The Senator's character was recently questioned when a female lobbyist, 40 year old Vicki Iseman, was seen at his side on too many occasions. In fact, it happened enough times to make those close to him concerned about his reputation. When it was revealed to the press that McCain had written letters to government regulators on Iseman's behalf, some of his aides were anxious that even the appearance of a close relationship between the two would hurt the political identity that they had helped him build.

Furthermore, the media attention that the story received when the New York Times broke it dredged up an old scandal.

McCain has said that he learned a valuable lesson from the Keating Five scandal over a decade ago. In this case, the Senator was one of five senators who was investigated for his role in the attendance of meetings between federal banking regulators and Lincoln Savings and Loan to discuss the investigation of the bank's practices. Ever since that episode, McCain has portrayed himself as a chastened man that learned his lesson; whether or not he truly did remains to be seen.

Another nuance of political scandal involves the people who actually sling the mud. If the saying, "people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones" ever applied to anyone firmly it would be the Clintons. It baffles me how Hill and Bill can tell lie after lie, against records that show the truth and then accuse others of the same crimes, and then get away with it again and again. Hillary Clinton is always bragging about her experience; darn right, experience in lying and covering up. She should have a degree in it. We could add the program into all of our universities and call it a Bachelors in Public Lying and Covering Up. Bill could write the curriculum and do some lechering, I mean lecturing. But seriously, it's just so brazen how the Clintons point fingers at their opponents when they must know that they are cut from the same cloth. It's hypocrisy at it's best and shamefully we can't get enough of it.

The shame of the game is that political infighting and popularity instead of common sense and values have become the name of the game. We have become a divided nation both in politics and in private life. Sadly, as our children imitate the loose behaviors of the celebrities they see in Hollywood. We are at the same time emulating the actions of our politicians. This is demonstrated to me everyday through rhetoric in certain media outlets and especially on blogger's Web sites. The divisiveness of our politicians, egged on by some irresponsible news groups is dividing our nation and rejecting unity. So what do we do? Maybe we should stop giving these candidates the platforms in which to destroy each other and the integrity of this country. I think we can start by adjusting the way we view information and make sure we have all the facts before we assign blame. Perhaps it shouldn't always be a competition between parties to win just for the sake of winning. I know it's not quite as interesting but if we need entertainment, there's always Britney. ■

## MOMENTS IN TIME

- On April 2, 1917, Jeannette Pickering Rankin, the first woman ever elected to Congress, takes her seat in the U.S. Capitol as a representative from Montana. The same day, President Wilson urged a declaration of war against Germany. Rankin was one of only 50 representatives who voted against the declaration.

- On April 3, 1956, Elvis sings his first RCA recording, "Heartbreak Hotel," on NBC's "Milton Berle Show." By April 21, the song had become Elvis' first No. 1 single.

- On April 4, 1812, President James Madison fires an economic salvo at the British government and enacts a 90-day embargo on trade with England. The embargo did little to forestall war: The British refused to cease

harassing American ships, prompting Madison to lead America into the War of 1812.

- On April 5, 1931, Fox Film Corp. drops John Wayne from its roster of actors. Wayne had played bit parts, but failed to impress the studio. In 1939, Wayne finally had his breakthrough in "Stagecoach." Wayne went on to play in dozens of movies, including "True Grit," for which he won an Oscar in 1969.

- On April 6, 1970, Sam Sheppard, a doctor convicted of murdering his pregnant wife in a trial that caused a media frenzy in the 1950s, dies of liver failure. After a decade in prison, Sheppard was found "not guilty" in a second trial in 1966. The "Fugitive" television series and movie were

rumored to have been loosely inspired by the story.

- On April 7, 1776, Navy Captain John Barry, commander of the American warship Lexington, makes the first American naval capture of a British vessel when he takes command of the British warship HMS Edward off the coast of Virginia.

- On April 8, 1990, director David Lynch's surreal series, "Twin Peaks," premieres. The show, with its bizarre characters and baffling story line, became an instant cult hit. Kyle MacLachlan starred as Dale Cooper, an FBI agent assigned to visit a small town in the Pacific Northwest to try to unravel the mystery of the murder of resident Laura Palmer. ■