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OPINION

A political lesson on hatemongering and slander



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— *Editor's note: Tanya Amador-Daigle is 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.purplestates.tv.*

Last week, the GOP had its convention, Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin became a star and Bill O'Reilly FINALLY got to interview Barack Obama with some tough questions on Fox News.

It was exhausting.

Like the week prior, the media continued to fuel the fire of controversy surrounding the 2008 presidential election simply by unleashing pundits on opposite sides to debate each other. I watched carefully. Some reporting and debating was fair and balanced, some was not. Words like "substance" and "style" were tossed about relentlessly and I got dizzy clicking back and forth with the remote, trying to figure out who was getting a fair shake and who was getting screwed.

Again and again, I kept shouting at the television and coming back to the same question:

How do people keep regurgitating the same garbage week after week that they hear from some talking head, and then go to sleep at night? I mean, doesn't assassinating someone's character denigrate your own integrity? It's like an endless game of telephone, minus the two empty tin cans and a bit of string to connect them.

I know, I sound a bit jaded, but I just spent the last week hearing so many false and hateful things that were on the Internet or TV being repeated like a broken record by the average person on the street. All week, as I went about my business, it was like a scene out of "Desperate Housewives" meets CNN.

And what about those worthless media Web site polls? The media, in a team effort with partisan hacks, tells us week after week who to like, who to hate, who is wasting our money and who is Satan. In other words, they influence us.

Then, they turn around and poll us and expect us to give honest answers, not what they swayed us to think. After they do that, they report on the polls, which in turn manipulates us again, thus setting a vicious cycle into motion which we will defend with extreme passion to the end of time so that no one dare question us. After all, we heard it on CNN, and it has been repeated enough times, so it must be true. Oh, didn't you know? Simple repetition of rhetoric automatically makes it magically true. It's just like carrying a rabbit's foot for good luck.

Am I the only one who feels this way?

If you still have your rose-colored glasses on, here's an example that I'm sure didn't escape you recently:

Last week, after John McCain shocked America by naming Palin his running mate, the haters came out from the rocks under which they live. I know, I know, the hate grenades have been flying back and forth between parties for decades and they always heat up at election time. But, this is on the same scale as the National Enquirer printing stories like "Britney Spears has love child with Michael Moore." Well, OK, I guess that could happen. But really, what are we turning into? The U.K.?

My point is, the campaign to smear Palin is the worst hatefest I've ever seen in politics. One of those salacious smears includes photoshopping a head shot of Palin onto another woman's body, a body that is wearing an American flag bikini and holding a rifle. Perhaps the worst attack is the claim that Palin's new baby is actually the son of her now-pregnant 17-year old daughter. Ouch! As if your teenage daughter getting pregnant isn't enough of a challenge, let's throw on some more. Are people really that mean? Do they really have that much time on their hands?

Let me be clear: If you want to question someone's policies or record, please feel free to do so. In fact, I encourage everyone to do so.

But to the culprits who simply want to spread their lies and disease, I have to say this: GET A LIFE! ■

GUEST OPINION

Candidates victims of own campaigns

BY ROGER E. HERNANDEZ

Back in the winter, after Iowa and New Hampshire but before Super Tuesday, I ventured in a column that Sen. Barack Obama and Sen. John McCain would end up the nominees.

It was about the only thing I got right.

"On Super Tuesday it may not come down to Iraq, or terrorism, or the economy, or immigration," I wrote. "What will matter is whether a big enough chunk of the American electorate decides the most important thing is that those issues be dealt with by a post-partisan president.

"Barack Obama has been called the post-partisan candidate, but Republicans have one too in John McCain.

"It is difficult to picture either of them smearing an opponent, or letting backers do the smear. If supporters outside their campaign tried the kind of swift-boating that blew up Sen. John Kerry's candidacy in 2004, can anybody imagine Obama or McCain failing to react quickly, loudly and insistently to demand the operation stop?"

Turns out, yes, we didn't have to imagine.

As we now know, the same swift-

boating Jerome Corsi who wrote the lies in the 2004 book "Unfit for Command" has followed up with the equally mendacious "Obama Nation."

And as we also know, John McCain dismissed the whole thing with a casual "Gotta keep your sense of humor." Talk about failing to "react quickly, loudly and insistently."

But it's not just the reaction to outside supporters. Once upon a time, both the Obama and McCain campaigns seemed too honorable to roll in the mud, too invested in the idea of post-partisanship to run attack ads, too respectful of the issues before the American public to fall into silliness.

But now we get McCain comparing Obama to Paris Hilton. Childish? Inane? Yes, and sadly, effective.

Obama has not exactly remained above it all, either. His campaign jumped on McCain's gaffe about not knowing how many houses he owns, and inside a couple of hours had its attack spot.

It is all disappointing to American voters who believed that there was some chance that this race for president would be different. After all, we had two men who seemed unafraid to buck the orthodoxies of party discipline.

McCain stood up for immigrants at a time when much of his party was foaming at the mouth, even to the point where his presidential aspirations fell into serious jeopardy.

Obama, for his part, has challenged Democratic orthodoxy in affirmative action, and has talked of his willingness to use American military power in ways that must frighten the knee-jerk anti-war left.

It's that willingness of both men to cross party lines that last winter made voters hopeful both candidates would conduct clean, issue-oriented, post-partisan campaigns. A lot of the votes that Obama and McCain received came from that hope -- and helped both men past rivals who were seen as old-school politicians.

They may owe their victories in primaries to the post-partisan vote. But now they have betrayed the post-partisan electorate. It looks like this presidential race won't be so different after all.

The candidates, kidnapped by their campaigns. ■

— Roger Hernandez is a syndicated columnist and writer-in-residence at New Jersey Institute of Technology. Read his blog at www.rogerhernandez.blogspot.com.