

CHARACTER ASSASSINATIONS: HATE MESSAGES IN ELECTION 2008 COMMERCIAL PARAPHERNALIA

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INTRODUCTION

As everyone knows, each U.S. president and vice-president up until now has been a White man. The election of Barack Obama to the Presidency, as well as the historic primary campaign of Hillary Clinton and the Republican vice-presidential candidacy of Sarah Palin, aroused many hopes, but also many fears, resentments and prejudices revolving around race, sex, gender, class, and religion. The issue of age also took on relevance as John McCain was the oldest candidate ever to run for a first term in office.

Every presidential election brings with it a glut of official and unofficial promotional and anti-promotional paraphernalia. And every presidential election also brings with it a glut of smears—distortions, epithets, and stereotypes to discredit and besmirch candidates.¹ The historic circumstances of the 2008 election ensured that the range, and bite, of the slurs would deepen. At the same time, new media (blogs, e-mail, YouTube, Internet vendors) allowed amateurs to get into the business of smearing. It also enabled their invective to achieve an unprecedented range and influence.²

In March 2008, I first heard of a commercial item that genuinely shocked me. This was a t-shirt reading: “I wish Hillary had married

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Author and Editor Note: Due to the end of the political campaign season and the ephemeral nature of these issues, some of the images and slogans in this essay may no longer be available on the websites.

1. See PAUL F. BOLLER, *PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS: FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON TO GEORGE W. BUSH* (2004).

2. Ken Silverstein also noted this process of infiltration: “This outpouring of amateur bile—a new phenomenon in American politics, thanks to YouTube—has been immensely useful to the Republican machine in attacking Obama. G.O.P. surrogates and operatives can sift through a vast quantity of viral takedowns, forwarding along the ones most likely to energize the party faithful and generate fears about Obama among the broader electorate. The dominant themes are pushed upward by conservative activists, bloggers, websites, and talk radio, percolate further through cable TV and the punditry, and ultimately enter the mainstream conversation and become part of the broader campaign narrative.” Ken Silverstein, *Useful Amateurs: How the Smearing of Barack Obama Got Crowd-Sourced*, *HARPER’S MAGAZINE*, Nov. 2008, at 51.

O.J.”³ Multiple incendiary meanings are bundled into this one-liner. It wishes Hillary Clinton battered and murdered, while implicitly sideswiping her then rival, Barack Obama, by invoking the stereotype that equates Black men (now including previously liked and trusted Black men)⁴ with brutes who menace White womanhood and Whites in general. This t-shirt inspired me to collect similar commercial items associated with the 2008 campaign, specifically those based in racism, misogyny, religious and class prejudice, homophobia, and ageism.

As the campaign unfolded, I gathered almost two hundred artifacts—buttons, stickers, hats, dolls, and posters—and organized these into an exhibit, “Political Circus,”⁵ which first showed at Florida Atlantic University, September 5 through November 1, 2008. My purpose was to document these for the historical record, to categorize and interpret this material culture of hate (frequently conjoined with humor),⁶ and, simultaneously, to show that the vicious sentiments in these fringe items were being adopted, often in coded forms, into mainstream rhetoric and imagery. I organized the items into thematic groups, wrote an interpretive text for each category,⁷ and then set off each grouping with pertinent, and often equally outrageous, quotes from journalists, elected officials, pundits, and candidates.

Hate messages against Barack Obama did not determine the outcome of the election, but prejudices, racist and otherwise, obviously remain strong among a portion of the populace. Many lies have been spread (e.g. Barack Obama is a Muslim), many heinous stereotypes re-animated and reinvented (e.g. African Americans are like unto apes, to be a Muslim is to be Osama Bin Laden, powerful women castrate men). Many names have been called (*bitch, punk*), and many symbolic threats made (“Beat Hillary”).⁸ I do not have the space here to discuss the full range of these hate messages. But I can delineate some of the inter-related and mutually reinforcing smear techniques as well as the themes

3. bell hooks, Keynote Address at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte: Southeast Women’s Studies Association 2008 Conference (April 4, 2008); see also Right Wing Mike, CafePress, <http://www.cafepress.com/rightwingmike.197732653> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

4. See MICHAEL ERIC DYSON, BETWEEN GOD AND GANGSTA RAP: BEARING WITNESS TO BLACK CULTURE 30 (1996) (“If this could happen to O.J.—the spotless embodiment of domesticated black masculinity—it could happen to any black man. Translation: no black male can really be trusted?”).

5. This exhibit is now available as a traveling one. For information please contact Rod Faulds, Director, University Galleries, wfaulds@fau.edu, or Jane Caputi, jcaputi@fau.edu.

6. I am not suggesting that all commercial paraphernalia reflect hate messages. Many items use humor and caricature but do not rely upon negative stereotypes and prejudices. Some take honorific tropes and figures from Black popular culture (for example, Martin Luther King) and associate them with Obama. Jake Austen, *Dreaming XXL*, HARPER’S MAGAZINE, Nov. 2008, at 59.

7. Sika Dagbovie, Assistant Professor of English, Florida Atlantic University, contributed to the sections of “Untrustworthy Mulattos” and “Racist Slurs and Stereotypes.” I purchased all the items for the Political Circus exhibit from April 6 to September 25, 2008. Materials on Sarah Palin were added after the opening.

8. RightWingStuff, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/rightwingstuff/1530835> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

involving intersecting⁹ social meanings of race, sex, age, gender, religion and sexuality. In all of these prejudicial smears, of course, the attack is directed not just at the individual named, but also at the entire group whom the candidate represents.

“Otherization”

A t-shirt, released during the primary campaigns, reads: “WELCOME TO THE FREAK SHOW.”¹⁰ On one side is a grimacing, shifty-eyed and shadowy Barack Obama; on the other is a crazed-looking and wildly laughing Hillary Clinton. These depictions, along with the label *freak*, are intended to evoke fear, unease, and ridicule, to brand both candidates as outsiders or “others.”¹¹

In a memoir, *Exile and Pride*, Eli Clare discusses the “ugly and de-meaning labels used to batter and bait marginalized peoples,” including the term *freak*. Clare traces some of the enduring negativity of that term to the history of the “freak show,” a voyeuristic power-over kind of ritual that “both fed upon and gave fuel to imperialism, domestic racist politics, and the cultural beliefs about wild savages and white superiority.”¹²

The historic freak show symbolically designated one group as “other” and “deviant.” At the same time, it constructed and reinforced a “norm.” For centuries, powerful White men (usually Northern European, Christian, educated, well-off and nominally heterosexual) have designated themselves as that norm¹³ projecting their “own experience as representative of humanity as such.”¹⁴ That definition is then promulgated and enforced through institutions including science, education, media representations, politics, religion, and medicine. With exceptions due to factors like lightness of skin tone, wealth and family connections, “others” are socially marginalized and “stamped with an essence,”¹⁵ deemed, one way or another, to be inferior, irrational, unintelligent, uncivilized, frightening or deficient. While the “freak” is made the object of voyeurism and negative stereotyping, the norm is so taken for granted that it becomes almost invisible.¹⁶ This is reflected in the dearth of caricatures of Joe Biden based on any such “stamped” identity. John McCain, on

9. See, e.g., Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, 43 STAN. L. REV. 1241, 1242-43 (1991).

10. Conservative T-Shirts.com, <http://www.conservative-t-shirts.com/conservative-t-shirts/anti-democrat-t-shirts-freak-show.html> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

11. See generally Stephen Harold Riggins, *The Rhetoric of Othering*, in THE LANGUAGE AND POLITICS OF EXCLUSION: OTHERS IN DISCOURSE 3-7 (Stephen Harold Riggins ed., 1997).

12. ELI CLARE, EXILE AND PRIDE: DISABILITY, QUEERNESS, AND LIBERATION 84 (1999).

13. See STEPHEN JAY GOULD, THE MISMEASURE OF MAN 31-35 (1981).

14. Iris Marion Young, *Five Faces of Oppression*, in THEORIZING FEMINISMS 12 (Elizabeth Hackett & Sally Haslanger eds., 2006).

15. *Id.* at 12.

16. See RUTH FRANKENBERG, WHITE WOMEN, RACE MATTERS: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF WHITENESS 1 (1993); WHAT WHITE LOOKS LIKE: AFRICAN-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS ON THE WHITENESS QUESTION (George Yancy ed., Routledge 2004).

the other hand, was ridiculed, and often viciously, not as a White man, but on account of his greater age. For example, one button shows the name *McCain*, with the second “C” replaced by figure in a wheelchair that is instantly recognizable as the icon indicating handicapped parking.¹⁷

Hierarchies (as well as demonization and negative stereotyping) derive from the “othering” process. These hierarchies are openly supported by a number of the 2008 commercial items, proffering such slogans as: “Dicks before Chicks,”¹⁸ “Vote Mac Not Black,”¹⁹ and “Bros Before Hos.”²⁰

Alien/nation

“They’re Here!” screams the tag line. This anti-Obama refrigerator magnet caricatures Barack Obama as a green-skinned extraterrestrial—the antithesis, it suggests, of a red-blooded, and presumably White-skinned, “real American.”

The United States is a nation consisting of its original people, immigrants from all over the globe, the descendents of conquerors and conquered, masters and those they enslaved. Stereotypic racist and ethnocentric thinking bypasses this history and identifies the only “real Americans” as politically conservative and Christian Whites, often from the more rural areas. Barack Obama is of mixed heritage, the child of an African father and a White woman from Kansas. He was born in Hawaii and is a natural-born U.S. citizen—something opponents dispute, all the way up to the Supreme Court.²¹ Obama’s successful life story is the stuff of the “American Dream,” but his opponents cast him, as well as Michelle Obama (a “traditional” African American), as an outsider—alien, strange, exotic, elitist, un- and even anti-American.

This theme, particularly the latter, preoccupies many of the commercial items. “Defend America, Defeat Obama,” reads one button.²² Another distorts one of Obama’s slogans by having him seem to proclaim: “Yes We Can Destroy America.”²³ Pro-McCain items succinctly

17. McCain—McWheelchair, CafePress.com, <http://buttons.cafepress.com/item/mcwheelchair-mini-button/268234119> (unavailable as of Feb. 22, 2009).

18. Politiclothes, CafePress.com, http://www.cafepress.com/politiclothes/s_dicks-chicks?design=26238938 (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

19. Political t-shirts, Zazzle.com, http://www.zazzle.com/vote_mac_not_black_button-145360585819513569 (last visited Jan. 22, 2009).

20. Everybody Shirts, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/everybodyshirts/5021726> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

21. Posting of Kate Phillips to The Caucus, <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/12/08/supreme-court-rejects-appeal-over-obamas-citizenship/> (Dec. 8, 2008, 11:29 EST).

22. Conservative Gear, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/conservativegea/5639305> (last visited Jan. 22, 2009).

23. Image on file with *Denver University Law Review*. See also Jim Sanders, *From shirts to coins, Obama’s picture sells big*, SACRAMENTO BEE, Jan. 18, 2009, at 1A, available at http://www.sacbee.com/ourregion/story/1552819.html?mi_rss=Our%2520Region.

deem John McCain to be an “Americaner.”²⁴ Implying much the same, the first television ad for McCain hails him as “The American President Americans have been waiting for.”²⁵ In several of her stump speeches Sarah Palin extended the association, warning “This is not a man [Barack Obama] who sees America like you and I see America” and flattering her supporters as residents of the “real America.”²⁶

Segregationist and exclusionary rhetoric also was directed against Michelle Obama. One magnet bunches together the names of four former first ladies including Martha Washington and Jacqueline Kennedy and then isolates and capitalizes the name “MICHELLE OBAMA.” The tag line pointedly asks (and implicitly answers): “Which One Doesn’t Belong?”²⁷

Again invoking O.J. Simpson, a bumper sticker reads: “Obama loves America like O.J. loved Nicole.”²⁸ The above was posted on the website of a Pemberton, New Jersey, Republican Club. The Philadelphia Inquirer reported that the club’s Webmaster, Ed Kuck, said that he had seen the slogan on an Internet site and put it on the page as a “joke.”²⁹ Bonds are forged between those who “joke” and those who laugh. Meanwhile, others wince. Post-election, the attacks continue; there now is a bumper sticker that avows: “President O.J. Will Be Exposed.”³⁰

Demonization

Feminist theologian Mary Daly argues that because the well-known icon of ultimate good for Western religions, “God,” is represented as a father (and, classically, a White man), this functions to authorize male leadership and dominion in all spheres of earthly life.³¹ Historically, father-god or patriarchal religions replaced ones that centered on prominent female and earth-based deities. They did so, in part, by demonizing these divinities, transforming their previously sacred attributes (for example, darkness, femaleness or bi-sexuality, ambivalence, gender variance, potent sexuality and associations with serpents, the horned moon

24. McCain: Older, Wiser, Americaner, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/americaner> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

25. *Service to America: 624787* (Foxhole Productions broadcast Mar. 27, 2008), available at <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/2008/service-to-america-624787>.

26. Lyndsey Layton, *Palin Apologizes for Real America Comments*, WASH. POST, Oct. 22, 2008, at A04; Posting of Mike Murray to First Read, <http://firstread.msnbc.msn.com/archive/2008/10/04/1492729.aspx> (Oct. 4, 2008, 16:53 EST).

27. Right Wing Mike, CafePress.com, <http://magnets.cafepress.com/item/michelle-obama-doesnt-belong-rectangle-magnet/277835892> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

28. Xuberalles, Zazzle.com, http://www.zazzle.com/obama_loves_america_print-228236290816138845 (last visited Jan. 22, 2009).

29. Cynthia Burton, *GOP Club Accused of Racism for Obama Web Banner*, PHILA. INQUIRER, Jul. 9, 2008, at B01.

30. Politically Exposed, CafePress.com <http://bumperstickers.cafepress.com/item/president-oj-will-also-be-exposed-sticker-bumpe/337651932> (last visited Jan. 29, 2009).

31. See generally MARY DALY, *BEYOND GOD THE FATHER: TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION* (1973).

and animals) into horrific ones. The deities themselves were recast as devils, witches, and monsters.³² One of the most basic ways to smear a candidate is to link her or him with such an archetype.

Demonization can be accomplished quite economically by drawing horns on someone's head, attaching the numbers 666 to them, or branding them the "Antichrist." One greeting card darkens Obama, gives him the requisite fangs and horns, stamps him with the numbers "666" and distorts the shape of his face. More creative types make up new words like *Obamageddon* to adorn their paraphernalia.³³ Another new-word website, www.hellaryno.com, features a range of Hillary vilification items. One pictures her with horns, wearing a slinky fire-engine-red evil-Queen kind of dress and standing in the midst of flames—and all against a backdrop of the U.S. Presidential seal! Such stratagems were not confined to the Internet. The *Chris Matthews Show* featured a graphic showing Clinton's face atop the words "She Devil?" and then manipulating the image to give her horns.³⁴

Innumerable commercial items denounce Barack Obama as "The Antichrist." A Web research firm, Hitwise, found that of the roughly one thousand Internet searches related to Obama, the seventh most common was "Obama Antichrist."³⁵ Some critics argued that a McCain campaign ad, "The One," used coded words and images to send this frightening message to the faithful.³⁶ Among the (fewer) demonized projections of McCain and Palin, one stands out. Palin is reddened and topped with horns. McCain is whitened, cast as a preternaturally pale vampire.³⁷ Whiteness too can be an underlying trope of monstrosity, signifying ghosts and the undead as well as the terrors of white supremacy.³⁸

Rush Limbaugh first popularized the demonizing slur *feminazi*.³⁹ Right wing literature and paraphernalia continue to deride Hillary Clinton in this way.⁴⁰ One 2008 button, "Heil Hitlery," shows Clinton with

32. GLORIA ANZALDÚA, *BORDERLANDS/LA FRONTERA: THE NEW MESTIZA* 27-28 (1987); JEFFREY BURTON RUSSELL, *THE DEVIL: PERCEPTIONS OF EVIL FROM ANTIQUITY TO PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY* 126 (1977).

33. See, e.g., *Piss Off the Left*, CafePress.com, <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/item/ready-for-obamageddon-kids-dark-tshirt/235743290> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009); *Piss Off the Left*, CafePress, <http://journals.cafepress.com/item/obamageddon-journal/274841920> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

34. *County Fair*, <http://mediamatters.org/items/200711190004> (Nov. 19, 2007, 16:07 EST).

35. See generally Amy Sullivan, *An Antichrist Obama in McCain Ad?*, TIME, Aug. 8, 2008, available at <http://www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,1830590,00.html>.

36. *Id.*

37. Accompanying the visual images are the following words: McCain/Palin in '08: Now That's Just Scary. CafePress.com, <http://shop.cafepress.com/design/30185520> (last visited Mar. 6, 2009).

38. See generally BELL HOOKS, *BLACK LOOKS: RACE AND REPRESENTATION* 165, 165-178 (1992) (taken from chapter in book called *Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination*).

39. Limbaugh credited his friend Tom Hazlett, a professor of law and economics at University of California at Davis, with coining the term. RUSH LIMBAUGH, *THE WAY THINGS OUGHT TO BE* 193 (1992).

40. KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON, *BEYOND THE DOUBLE BIND: WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP* 41 (1995).

the characteristic mustache giving a fascist salute.⁴¹ Others target Obama with similar smears, for example by sneering: “Hitler Gave Great Speeches Too.”⁴² Meanwhile, pundit Ann Coulter openly linked Obama to Hitler in a Fox News rant.⁴³ In my locality, the McCain Party campaign headquarters in Pompano Beach, Florida, displayed a poster claiming to find correspondences between Barack Hussein Obama and Adolf Hitler, Karl Marx, Fidel Castro, and Benito Mussolini.⁴⁴

Archetypes of witches and “she-monsters,” registering fears of female power, long have been projected onto Hillary Clinton.⁴⁵ In many artifacts from campaign 2008 Clinton is pictured as a witch, while throughout the mainstream media as well as the blogosphere her laugh is caricatured as a “cackle.”⁴⁶ *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd archly describes Hillary Clinton as wielding an “evil eye” that “emasculates” and drains Obama.⁴⁷ This characterization reinforces the sexist canard that whenever there is a potent woman there is an impotent man, and, moreover, that whenever a woman works power, she works evil. Does Dowd know that she is resurrecting accusations perfected during the European Witch Craze and the Inquisition? Christian enforcers deemed Jews to be wielders of the “evil eye”⁴⁸ and the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the 1482 witch-hunting handbook, characterized witches as evil women who used their magical powers to steal the “male member” of those they victimized.⁴⁹ Of course, the real victims were the masses of Jews and women who were legally tortured and executed by both church and state.

41. The House Divided, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/thehousedivided.73330667> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

42. See, e.g., The Truth Store, CafePress.com, <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/item/great-speakers-light-tshirt/291837035> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

43. “With one association after another that is beyond the pale with Barack Obama, I feel like we are talking to the Germans after Hitler comes to power saying, ‘Oh, well, I didn’t know. I had no idea he was going to be like this.’” *Hannity & Colmes* (FOX News television broadcast Oct. 30, 2008) (transcript available at <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,445556,00.html>).

44. Posting of Anthony Man to Broward Politics, <http://weblogs.sun-sentinel.com/news/politics/broward/blog/republicans/> (Oct. 16, 2008, 21:17 EST).

45. ROBIN TOLMACH LAKOFF, *THE LANGUAGE WAR* 187 (2000).

46. Hendrik Hertzberg sums up:

Sean Hannity [of Fox News] played an audio clip seven times and described the candidate’s laughter as ‘frightening.’ Bill O’Reilly [Fox News, Sept 24, 2007] trotted out a Fox News ‘body-language expert’ to pronounce the laughter ‘evil’ . . . [T]he right-wing blogs bloomed like a staph infection. ‘Shrillary’s’ laugh is ‘chilling.’ It’s ‘fakey fake fake.’ It’s a ‘hideous hyena mating call.’ It’s ‘a signal to launch her flying monkeys.’

Hendrik Hertzberg, *Brouhahaha*, *NEW YORKER*, Oct. 15, 2007, at 33.

47. Maureen Dowd, *Is She a Trojan Rabbit?*, *N.Y. TIMES*, May 11, 2008, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/11/opinion/11dowd.html>.

48. Leonard W. Moss & Stephen C. Cappannari, *Mal’ occhio, Ayin ha ra, Oculus fascinus, Judentick: The Evil Eye Hovers Above*, in *THE EVIL EYE* 8 (Clarence Maloney ed., 1976).

49. HEINRICH KRAMER & JAMES SPRENGER, *THE MALLEUS MALEFICARUM* (Montague Summers trans., Dover Publ’ns 1971) (1928).

One of Barack Obama's supporters, Samantha Power, notoriously proclaimed: "She [Hillary Clinton] is a monster."⁵⁰ Many of the commercial items agree. One identifies Clinton with the snake-haired (Goddess turned monster) Medusa.⁵¹ Others rely on more generic serpent/dragonish monsters—and all with the fangs and claws that suggest the archetypal castrating *vagina dentata*.⁵²

One postcard pictures Clinton as a fire-breathing "Godzillary."⁵³ Curiously, a *New York Times* op-ed writer obliquely compared the primary battle between Obama and Clinton to the classic monster-movie mix-up "*King Kong vs. Godzilla*."⁵⁴ This reference drags in more dreadful history, this time regarding the characteristic dehumanization of African Americans.

Dehumanization

A common and self-serving belief is that animals are a "lower" order of beings than humans and that humans can treat them any way we deem fit. A racist tradition, which was used to justify slavery and inflicted much of nineteenth-century science, has continued to associate Blacks with apes (including, of course, in the *King Kong* films).⁵⁵ This stereotypic association is intended to bolster beliefs that Blacks are unevolved, lazy, aggressive, hypersexual, unintelligent, dangerous, and unfit to lead.

One study published in early 2008 found that imagery explicitly depicting Blacks as apelike had largely disappeared in the United States, although it demonstrated that metaphoric "connections between African-Americans and apes are still being made" in ways that endorse violence against Black men suspected of crimes.⁵⁶ Apparently, however, the situation of a Black man running successfully for president catalyzed the reintroduction of explicit reproductions of this stereotype.

The most notorious was a t-shirt produced by a White man, Mike Norman, owner of a Marietta, Georgia, bar. It showed the Curious George character from the well-known series of children's books, peel-

50. Gerri Peev, 'Hillary Clinton's a monster': Obama aide blurts out attack in Scotsman interview, THE SCOTSMAN, Mar. 7, 2008, available at <http://thescotsman.scotsman.com/latestnews/Inside-US-poll-battle-as.3854371.jp>.

51. Funny Anti-Obama Gift Shop, CafePress.com, <http://buttons.cafepress.com/item/hillary-medusa-bitch-35-button/182024003> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

52. BARBARA G. WALKER, THE WOMEN'S ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MYTHS AND SECRETS 1034 (1983).

53. LizDexic, Zazzle.com, http://www.zazzle.com/godzillary_queen_of_the_monsters_postcard-239911655140277769 (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

54. Allan Gurganus, Op-Ed., *Carolina, Out of Its Mind*, N.Y. TIMES, May 1, 2008, at §A, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/01/opinion/01gurganus.html>.

55. JAMES SNEAD, WHITE SCREENS/BLACK IMAGES: HOLLYWOOD FROM THE DARK SIDE 7 (Colin MacCabe & Cornel West eds.) (1994).

56. Phillip Atiba Goff et al., *Not Yet Human: Implicit Knowledge, Historical Dehumanization, and Contemporary Consequences*, 94.2 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 292, 304 (2008).

ing a banana. “Obama in ‘08” was printed beneath. When this shirt received national scrutiny, Norman, typically, denied any offensive or racist intent.⁵⁷ Whether or not one finds this credible, it is important to recognize that it is a structural given that much racist and otherwise oppressive behavior is unconscious. Even when overt forms of tyranny and bondage are absent, oppression continues as its causes and conceptual justifications are “embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols.”⁵⁸ Common justifications for offences are: “I didn’t mean that,” or “I was only joking.” Some makers of racist items go one step further, claiming the critics have it wrong and that their item actually “transcends” bias.

That last rationale emerged in the debate over the Obama monkey plush toy.⁵⁹ Responding to criticism, the makers first yanked but then reinstated the “toy,” defending it as “affectionate” and intending to “tran-

57. Errin Haines, *Obama/Curious George T-Shirt Draws Protests*, WASH. POST, May 15, 2008, at 8, available at <http://tinyurl.com/c8j8jw>. I wonder if this shirt was a deliberate reply to a viral anti-George W. Bush e-mail distributed years earlier. It showed a number of different apes making faces juxtaposed to pictures of Bush with a similar expression. In the center was a picture of Curious George’s face, also next to a similar seeming mien of then-President Bush. While this “joke” reverses the historic association by placing a privileged White man in the “ape” continuum, it did not really undo the historically unjust stereotype. The underlying “joke” is that George Bush is so incompetent he can even be stereotypically demeaned in ways previously reserved for Black men.

58. As Iris Marion Young details, new left social movements of the 1960s and 1970s shifted the concept of oppression. In its new usage, oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society Oppression in this sense is structural, rather than the result of a few people’s choices. Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules In this extended structural sense oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms—in short, the normal processes of everyday life.

Young, *supra* note 14, at 12.

59. Thesock Obama Co, LLC, <http://thesockobama.com> (last visited Jan. 22, 2009). This product received much criticism. See *‘Racist’ Obama Sock-Puppet Monkey Yanked: Company Nixes Production, Apologizes for Controversial Toy*, WORLDNETDAILY, June 17, 2008, <http://www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=67324>. At first, the makers withdrew the toy and apologized but later recanted, denied any racist intent, and continued to market the toy under a new company name, Sock Politicians. See Sheena McFarland, *Creators of The Sock Obama Seek New Company to Produce Doll*, SALT LAKE TRIB., June 18, 2008. They, apparently, also added a McCain monkey, which took the form of a white gorilla (although the only white gorillas are albinos). (Although, following the 2009 Presidential Inauguration, the white monkey has been repackaged as a Biden Monkey.) See Sock Politicians.com, <http://sockpoliticians.com> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009) (McCain screenshot on file with *Denver University Law Review*). Not only color, but also the copy describing the two toys, distinguishes them. The copy for the Obama monkey snidely reads: He “proudly displays his campaign pin on his suit jacket.” SockPoliticians.com, *The Original Obama Monkey*, <http://www.sockpoliticians.com/products/obama-monkey/> (last visited Jan. 22, 2009). The copy for the McCain monkey reads: He “displays his love for American on his lapel with an American flag.” SockPoliticians.com, *The Original McCain Monkey*, <http://www.sockpoliticians.com/products/mccain-monkey/> (unavailable as of Mar. 9, 2009) (McCain screenshot on file with *Denver University Law Review*). These statements repeat the right-wing smearing of Obama as elitist and unpatriotic.

scend still existing racial biases.”⁶⁰ Another item invoking the ape association mimicked what *The New York Times* calls “the prominent ‘Hope’ image of the presidential candidate” by Shepard Fairey with its “flag-hued” colors.⁶¹ The anti-Obama caricature replicates the iconic image and the colors, but distorts Obama’s features to make him look like an ape. It changes the word to “Dope.”⁶²

An entrenched sexist tradition depicts women as “consumable bodies,” stereotypically as domesticated animals consumed as meat.⁶³ One sticker puts Hillary Clinton’s face on a cow and cautions against “Mad Cow Disease.”⁶⁴ Another offers a “Hillary Meal Deal,” showing Clinton’s “cackling” face on an “HRC” fried chicken bucket. The words: “2 fat thighs, 2 small breasts, and a bunch of left wings” mocks her as both bodily and politically undesirable. The price “\$6.66,” throws demonization into the mix.⁶⁵ Significantly, Sarah Palin came to be known as the one who shoots and eats the animal (notably, the moose). She also affirmatively associated herself with animals as power totems—the barracuda and the pitbull—predators, not prey.

Violence

Systematic violence is a core aspect of oppression. Political philosopher Iris Marion Young explains: “Members of some groups live with the knowledge that they must fear random, unprovoked attacks on their persons or property, which have no motive but to damage, humiliate, or destroy the person.”⁶⁶

Along with physical forms, violence also can be verbal, psychological and emotional. One abusive decorative tile sneers: “Obama Is My Slave.”⁶⁷ Forms of psychological violence include this kind of derogation as well as name-calling, intimidation and transmitting of threats.⁶⁸ All of these types of violence are ways of enforcing social control. Specifically, they establish domination, thwart resistance, and break the

60. Dan Amira, *Makers of Racist Obama Monkey Would Like to Transcend Racial Bias*, NEW YORK MAGAZINE, http://nymag.com/daily/intel/2008/06/the_makers_of_a_racist_obama_t.html (last visited Mar. 6, 2009).

61. Brian Stelter, *Time Cover Sure Looks a Lot Like a Campaign Image*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 22, 2008, at B4. See also BarackObama.com: Artists for Obama, http://store.barackobama.com/Artists_for_Obama_s/1018.htm (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

62. RightLeaning, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/rightleaning/5560388> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

63. CAROL J. ADAMS, *THE PORNOGRAPHY OF MEAT* (2003); CAROL J. ADAMS, *THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF MEAT: A FEMINIST-VEGETARIAN CRITICAL THEORY* (2d ed. 2000).

64. Funny Anti-Obama Gift Shop, CafePress.com, <http://bumperstickers.cafepress.com/item/antihillary-stop-mad-cow-08-sticker-bumper/111992554> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

65. RightWingStuff, CafePress.com, <http://bumperstickers.cafepress.com/item/hillary-meal-deal-sticker-oval/128519660> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

66. Young, *supra* note 14, at 13.

67. BigFatGear, CafePress.com, <http://homedecor.cafepress.com/item/obama-is-my-slave-tile-coaster/285821249> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

68. PATRICIA EVANS, *THE VERBALLY ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP* (1996).

spirit. Again, the target of these kinds of attacks directed at political figures is the entire group the candidate represents.

Name calling shows up in commercial items that hurl derogatory words, and usually ones that carry prejudices based in race, gender, sexuality, age, class, and religion. These include: *nigger*, *bimbo*, *uppity*, *redneck*, *idiot*, *stupid*, *cunt*, *punk*, *boy*, and *butt monkey*. All of these can be found in the commercial items targeting specific candidates.

One anti-Obama item snidely urges: “Use the “*N-Word*”—*Never*.”⁶⁹ Of course, everyone knows which “n-word” actually is being invoked. Other items summon this same epithet, but more obliquely. For example, one button reads: “Come to the dark side, vote for Obama.”⁷⁰ Another queries: “If Obama is President . . . will we still call it the White House?”⁷¹ This one achieved national notoriety when it was found being sold at the Texas State Republican Convention in June of 2008.⁷² Obama was literally called a *boy* by Kentucky congressman, Geoff Davis,⁷³ as he was by a number of commercial items.⁷⁴

Ubiquitously, Hillary Clinton was mocked (and pictured as) a *bitch*. Pundits like Glenn Beck and Christopher Hitchens had no problem using the word in describing her.⁷⁵ The slur *cunt*, though, remains the “mother” of all sexist denigrations.⁷⁶ Roger Stone, a Republican strategist founded an anti-Clinton group he boldly named C.U.N.T. (“Citizens United Not Timid”).⁷⁷ A like-minded t-shirt testily declaims: “Word Association: When you say Hillary, I think C.U.N.T. How’s that for free speech.”⁷⁸

Hilary Clinton’s primary campaign had sparked a desire for a strong female and feminist-leaning candidate and John McCain cynically chose

69. OBAMA_NEVER, www.cafepress.com (unavailable as of Mar. 9, 2009).

70. MEGA-CELEBRATIONS, www.cafepress.com (unavailable as of Mar. 9, 2009).

71. Posting of Ali Frick to Think Progress, <http://thinkprogress.org/2008/06/17/gop-convention-button-asks-if-obama-is-presidentwill-we-still-call-it-the-white-house/> (June 17, 2008, 12:56 EST).

72. *Id.*

73. Davis said, “I’m going to tell you something. That boy’s finger does not need to be on the button.” Posting of Kate Phillips to The Caucus, <http://tinyurl.com/cl6vo4> (Apr. 14, 2008, 17:19 EST) (The Caucus is “The Politics and Government Blog” at the N.Y. Times website).

74. One, for example, showed Obama’s face and read: “It’s like asking the paperboy to manage the newspaper.” CafePress.com, <http://bumperstickers.cafepress.com/item/obama-lacks-experience-bumper-sticker/211721474> (last visited Mar. 6, 2009).

75. Tim Russert & Christopher Hutchins, *The Tim Russert Show* (MSNBC television broadcast Apr. 5, 2008), available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUXiHw6R67E&feature=e-related> (material located at 7 minutes 22 seconds into the video clip).

76. For further discussion, see Jane Caputi, *Cuntspeak: Words from the Heart of Darkness, in NOT FOR SALE: FEMINISTS RESISTING PROSTITUTION AND PORNOGRAPHY* 362-85 (Christine Stark & Rebecca Whisnant eds., 2004).

77. Jason Linkins, *MSNBC Hosts Founder of Anti-Hillary Group ‘C.U.N.T.’*, THE HUFFINGTON POST, Feb. 19, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/02/19/msnbc-hosts-founder-of-an_n_87356.html.

78. Hillary_, www.cafe-press.com (unavailable as of Mar. 6, 2009).

Alaska Governor Sarah Palin as his running-mate. As McCain later explained, that pick was “a direct counterpoint to the liberal feminist agenda for America.”⁷⁹ Palin was born into a lower class family and did not receive an elite education. She was a vibrant speechmaker, but lacked knowledge and experience nationally and internationally. The commercial paraphernalia, like much of the mainstream chatter, took much pleasure in calling her “Just Palin Stupid,” and, adding sexist specificity, a *bimbo*.⁸⁰ People who wisely refused to believe that Barack Obama was a Muslim nonetheless readily swallowed the lie (spread by disgruntled McCain aids post election) that Palin did not know that Africa was a continent.⁸¹ Class-based prejudices clearly color the ways that Palin has been ridiculed as “stupid” and her accent mocked. Joanna Kadi persuasively argues that the word *stupid* is not really “a mere description of how well someone thinks, *stupid* has become a cultural concept with a particular code and set of signifiers that describe working-class people as the middle and upper classes perceive and construct us.”⁸² Progressive middle and upper class people seeking coalition with those from rural and working classes need to discover, and disavow, their prejudicial attitudes, and respect different class styles and values as well as a wide range of intelligences. Otherwise, they will continue to be at irreconcilable odds with those who find that Palin speaks for them—even while disagreeing with some of her policies.

Intimidation is a crucial component of verbal abuse, including threats of torture. One button demands “Waterboard Barack Obama,”⁸³ and another “Pillory Hillary” (showing the bloodied candidate ensnared in that device).⁸⁴ Many also threaten Hillary Clinton with overt sexual and sexist violence, “Hillary Clinton can suck my conservative dick,” as well as murder, “Wanna See Hillary Run, Throw Rocks at Her.”⁸⁵ Again, some of these kinds of violent sexist threats were reiterated in the mainstream. In a discussion with Keith Olbermann on MSNBC about how Clinton needed to drop out of the Democratic race, *Newsweek’s*

79. “As a cold political calculation, I could not be more pleased. She has excited and energized our base. She is a direct counterpoint to the liberal feminist agenda for America.” John McCain, *FOX News Sunday with Chris Wallace* (FOX News television broadcast Oct. 19, 2008) (transcript available at <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,440632,00.html>).

80. Just Palin Stupid, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/justpalinstupid> (last visited Jan. 22, 2009); Politiclothes.com, CafePress.com, <http://politiclothes.com> (search “Palin Bimbo”) (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

81. Bill O’Reilly & Carl Cameron, *The O’Reilly Factor* (FOX News television broadcast Nov. 5, 2008), available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Whj_bu4YhE.

82. Joanna Kadi, *Stupidity Deconstructed*, in *THEORIZING FEMINISMS*, *supra* note 14, at 40-50.

83. Jason Linkins, *Sacramento GOP Removes “Waterboard Obama” Graphic From Website*, THE HUFFINGTON POST, Oct. 15, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/10/15/sacramento-gop-removes-wa_n_134841.html?page=4.

84. Pillory Hillary Clinton Online Shirts Buttons More, CafePress.com, <http://buttons.cafepress.com/item/pillory-hillary-2008-button/19409836> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

85. Funny Anti-Obama Gift Shop, CafePress.com, http://www.cafepress.com/hillaryscareme/s_throw-rocks?design=15878719 (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

Howard Fineman suggested that someone in the party needed to step in and “stop this thing,” to which Olbermann replied, “Right. Somebody who can take her into a room and only he comes out.”⁸⁶

Another outrageous pictorial threat was disseminated against Michelle Obama on a progressive website, www.dailykos.com, illustrating an article criticizing the Republican’s “southern strategy.” It showed Michelle Obama in a slinky red dress, which her KKK attackers had pulled off her shoulders so that she could be branded before being lynched. (The Daily Kos withdrew this after protest.)⁸⁷ Similarly, some months earlier, the conservative Bill O’Reilly, on Fox News, had no trouble verbally disseminating a similar image: “I don’t want to go on a lynching party against Michelle Obama unless there’s evidence, hard facts, that say this is how the woman really feels. If that’s how she really feels—that America is a bad country or a flawed nation, whatever—then that’s legit. We’ll track it down.”⁸⁸ One way or another, it seems that lynching still occupies a contiguous space of sexual fantasy and hate violence against African Americans.

Mind/Body Splitting

Western culture separates the mind from the body and then elevates the mind over the body. Dominant groups are associated with the mind, while exploited and marginalized groups are associated with the body and with nature.⁸⁹

Throughout history, Kathleen Hall Jamieson writes, “women have been identified as bodies not minds, wombs not brains.”⁹⁰ Numerous anti-Clinton stickers and buttons brand her as womb, not brain, for example by warning against electing a president subject to PMS and hot flashes. One labeled Hillary Clinton not just a *cunt* but, more euphemistically, “the vajority choice.”⁹¹ Correspondingly, on MSNBC in October

86. *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* (MSNBC television broadcast April 23, 2008), quoted in Rachel Sklar, *Keith Olbermann’s Idea for Beating Hillary: Literally Beating Hillary*, THE HUFFINGTON POST, April 25, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/04/25/keith-olbermanns-idea-for_n_98557.html.

87. Posting of One Citizen to Daily Kos, <http://dailykos.com> (May 19, 2008, 11:04:25 PDT), available at Little Green Footballs, http://littlegreenfootballs.com/article/30012_Daily_Kos_The_New_Improved_Southern_Strategy (May 19, 2008, 11:25:14 PDT).

88. *The Radio Factor* (Westwood One radio broadcast Feb. 19, 2008), available at County Fair, <http://mediamatters.org/items/200802200001> (Feb. 20, 2009, 12:20 EDT).

89. See SUSAN GRIFFIN, PORNOGRAPHY AND SILENCE: CULTURE’S REVENGE AGAINST NATURE 161-63 (1981).

90. JAMIESON, *supra* note 40, at 53.

91. SwagDog.com, Vajority Choice T-Shirt, <http://www.swagdog.com/store/pc/viewPrd.asp?idcategory=0&idproduct=78117> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009). The copy at the site selling this reads: “Vajority Choice T-Shirt Get it? Boys have a penis and girls have a vagina. And we’re pretty sure Hillary is a girl.” *Id.*

of 2007, Cliff May, President of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, designated Clinton “a Vaginal-American.”⁹²

The body, particularly stigmatized body parts—genitals, skin colors and hair textures—has become the foundation for a wide range of insults and epithets. All bodies can be demeaned in this way, but cultural “others” are more vulnerable because they are branded with stereotypes which “confine them to a nature which is often attached in some way to their bodies.”⁹³ “Others” are said not only to lack intelligence and reason, but to manifest a glut of dirtiness, smelliness, and sexuality. Several anti-Obama items identify him with his initials, claiming “B.O. stinks.”⁹⁴ Others pictured him as “Fro-Bama!” with big hair.⁹⁵ Several played to the stereotypic fear of (and concomitant desire for) the mythic Black hyper-phallus⁹⁶—which implies, of course, the diminutive Black mind. One t-shirt, sold during the time of the Iowa primary, shows an extended brown measuring tape and advises viewers to “Vote for the Candidate with the Largest Caucuses.”⁹⁷ An overtly anti-Obama t-shirt pictures him inside of a white condom, his brown face showing through the otherwise opaque material. It reads: “Don’t Let Obama Screw America.”⁹⁸ Identifying anyone (individual or group, female or male) as purely sexual body is a keystone of patriarchal, slave-master, and pornographic thinking. This t-shirt further suggests that although Obama may be bi-racial, he is fundamentally Black (and hence all body and no mind). But, still, he is a man and potentially able to use his penis to dominate or “screw.” The message here is that White men had better make sure that they are the ones perceived as doing all the thinking. At the same time, they had better ensure that they are the ones doing the “screwing” and not the ones “getting screwed.”

Pornification

Any number of items read simply “Fuck Obama,” “Fuck McCain” or “Fuck Hillary.” Republican partisans can purchase an item depicting an Elephant “fucking” a donkey, while Democrats can buy one with the roles reversed.⁹⁹ One particularly nasty t-shirt, intended to affront both

92. Tucker (MSNBC television broadcast Oct. 15, 2008), available at County Fair, <http://mediamatters.org/items/200710160010> (Oct. 26, 2007, 18:22 EDT).

93. Young, *supra* note 14, at 12.

94. All Right Gear, CafePress.com, <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/item/bo-stinks-dark-tshirt/136087783> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

95. Tshirtalerts, CafePress.com, <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/item/frobama/323032566> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

96. See generally CALVIN C. HERNTON, *SEX AND RACISM IN AMERICA* (1988).

97. Tshirtsobama, Zazzle.com, http://www.zazzle.com/vote_for_the_candidate_shirt-235546495586162373 (last visited Jan. 22, 2009).

98. Anti-Obama Light T-Shirt, Elkslayer, www.CafePress.com (t-shirt no longer available, purchased by author on July 6, 2008).

99. BigDogma Online Store, CafePress.com, <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/item/donkey-love-white-tshirt/63915659> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009); That’s Rich!, CafePress.com, <http://t->

candidates, was issued after it became clear that Obama was going to win the nomination. It shows Obama's grinning face on a dog who is "screwing" a similarly grinning Clinton-faced dog. The copy sneers: "Face It Bitch: You're Fu***d."¹⁰⁰

The slang word *screw*, like *fuck*, means not only to penetrate sexually but also to denigrate and violate. What is the underlying social meaning of this conflation? Legal feminist theorist Catharine MacKinnon argues that, in sexist cultures, sexuality is socially constructed as a relation of domination and subordination, a process that produces genders that seem to "naturally" embody these desires and expressions.¹⁰¹ In "kinky" variations, women dominate and men submit but the basic hierarchical dynamic remains. Pornography, in this way of understanding, is the institutionalized commercial expression of sexualized domination. Its harms include dehumanization, psychic assault and humiliation, as well as violation and inferiority presented as humor and entertainment¹⁰²—harms related to those generated by the "everyday pornography" discussed here.¹⁰³

Male candidates are pornified by the implicit requirement that they be tall (signifying dominance) and conventionally masculine. Privilege protects most White male candidates from more blatant pornification, but the Black candidate, Barack Obama, as already noted, was identified graphically with his penis.

Female candidates (as well as men who are being treated like women) are openly pornified, by both left and right, by being inappropriately sexualized, equated with their sex organs, judged on their attractiveness, and by having stereotypic fantasies projected onto them, including extremely vicious ones. In one, a man stands and urinates onto an image of Clinton with an open mouth.¹⁰⁴

Sarah Palin is ubiquitously figured, by both her supporters and detractors as a sex object. She is a "babe" or a "hottie" if liked, a "bimbo"

shirts.cafepress.com/item/political-screwing-womens-long-sleeve-tshirt/173117115 (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

100. Obama Hillary Bitch Fitted T-Shirt, CafePress.com (t-shirt no longer available, purchased by author on June 16, 2008).

101. MacKinnon's ideas on pornography appear in many of her writings. See CATHARINE A. MACKINNON, ARE WOMEN HUMAN? AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUES 112-20 (2006); CATHARINE A. MACKINNON, FEMINISM UNMODIFIED: DISCOURSES ON LIFE AND LAW 127-206 (1987); CATHARINE A. MACKINNON, TOWARD A FEMINIST THEORY OF THE STATE 195-215 (1989).

102. See JOHN STOLTENBERG, REFUSING TO BE A MAN: ESSAYS ON SEX AND JUSTICE 113-24 (rev. ed., Routledge 2000).

103. See JANE CAPUTI, GODDESSES AND MONSTERS: WOMEN, MYTH, POWER AND POPULAR CULTURE 74-118 (2004); DVD: The Pornography of Everyday Life (Berkeley Media 2007) (on file with author).

104. Aaron's Case, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/aaronscase/424512> (last visited Feb. 23, 2009).

or “dominatrix” if not. She was regaled as “MILF”¹⁰⁵ (“Mother I’d Like to Fuck”) or “VPILF”¹⁰⁶ (“Vice President I’d Like to Fuck”), and visually mocked as someone who had gotten the nomination because she had sexually serviced John McCain.¹⁰⁷ Conversely, she was a whip-wielding mistress who would “spank” America¹⁰⁸ and walk all over McCain with her high heels. Turning women into pornography, overtly as in the *Hustler* production, *Who’s Nailing Sarah Palin*,¹⁰⁹ or in more everyday forms, is a fundamental means of identifying women with the body and with sexuality in a culture that degrades both.

In her discussion of the vilification of Hillary Clinton, Robin Lakoff cites Pierre Saint-Armand, who argues that the hatred directed against Hillary Clinton in the early 1990s “was reproduced in the very same language as the discourse of infamy that sent Queen Marie Antoinette to the guillotine.” He further identifies three aspects of this process: “(1) the demonization and cloning of the woman’s influence; (2) the accessibility of the woman’s genitalia as the very organ of influence; (3) a seizing of the woman’s body by way of sexual appropriation.”¹¹⁰

By election 2008, all of these modes of character assassination still were being directed against Hillary Clinton. But perhaps due to her widespread identification with feminism as well as her age, she simultaneously was scorned as utterly undesirable. One decorative tile reads: “Hillary Clinton Causes Erectile Dysfunction.”¹¹¹ “Even Bill Doesn’t Want Me” is her supposed lament on one button.¹¹² Another antagonistic t-shirt dubs Clinton the “Anti-Porn,”¹¹³ suggesting that she is most dreadful because what *Newsweek* called her “female power”¹¹⁴ effectively deflates (sexist male) desire.

105. Obama T-shirts, McCain T-shirts, Palin T-shirts, CafePress.com, <http://buttons.cafepress.com/item/sarah-palin-milf-225-button-10-pack/314607971> (last visited Feb. 23, 2009).

106. Sardonic’s Shirt Shack, CafePress.com, <http://bumperstickers.cafepress.com/item/vpifl-sarah-palin-sticker-bumper/302375630> (last visited Feb. 23, 2009).

107. Bound By Fate, CafePress.com, <http://magnets.cafepress.com/item/so-thats-how-she-won-the-nomination/303146893> (last visited Feb. 23, 2009).

108. Rchmcurry, Zazzle.com, http://www.zazzle.com/sarah_palin_for_vice_president_shirt-235897366992908218 (last visited Feb. 23, 2009).

109. Hustler.com, Who’s Nailin’ Paylin?, <http://hustler.com/> (follow I AGREE, ENTER SARAH PALIN PARODY) (last visited Feb. 23, 2009).

110. Pierre Saint-Armond, *Terrorizing Marie Antoinette*, 20 *CRITICAL INQUIRY* 379, 379 (Jennifer Curtis Gage trans.) (1994), *quoted in* ROBIN TOLMACH LAKOFF, *THE LANGUAGE WAR* 192 (2000).

111. Right Wing Mike, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/rightwingmike/4512193> (last visited Feb. 23, 2009).

112. Jest Designs, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/jestdesigns.96839451> (last visited Feb. 23, 2009).

113. Brian Weeks, Zazzle.com, http://www.zazzle.com/hillary_theanti_porn_shirt-235881006213169400 (last visited Feb. 23, 2009).

114. The phrase “female power” was featured under a picture of the candidate on the table of contents on page three in the March 17, 2008 edition of *Newsweek* magazine.

Stereotyping (Racist)

One t-shirt shows a caricature of Barack Obama with a “Mr. T” hairdo, Hollywood “jungle savage” style clothes and earrings, and wearing a pendant with the symbol of Islam. He glares menacingly, jabs his finger in your face, and demands: “Gimme Yo Change.”¹¹⁵

Stereotypes (or what Patricia Hill Collins calls “controlling images”)¹¹⁶ are crude generalizations and distortions, which “so permeate the society that they are not noticed as contestable.”¹¹⁷ They purport to represent the uniformity of a group, but within the range of negative stereotypes applied to any group there are endless contradictions. The entire catalogue of demeaning and contradictory stereotypes of African-Americans¹¹⁸ has been applied to Barack Obama. These include the thug, the shiftless watermelon-loving, rib-eating wastrel,¹¹⁹ the “pimp,” the “gangster,” the “snob”¹²⁰ or “uppity” one who does not keep to assigned “place,” the coon,¹²¹ the raging ranter who plays “the race card”¹²² as an excuse or diversion, and the violator of racist taboo who associates with White women.¹²³ Michelle Obama is typed as the “angry harridan” who cuts down her man.¹²⁴ Fox News also took the liberty of branding her (a Princeton and Harvard-educated lawyer who has been married to

115. RightWingStuff, CafePress.com, <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/item/gimme-yo-change-fitted-tshirt/243578526> (last visited Feb. 23, 2009).

116. PATRICIA HILL COLLINS, *BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT: KNOWLEDGE, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE POLITICS OF EMPOWERMENT* 69 (Routledge 2000) (1990).

117. Young, *supra* note 14, at 12.

118. See generally JAN NEDERVEEN PIETERSE, *WHITE ON BLACK: IMAGES OF AFRICA AND BLACKS IN WESTERN POPULAR CULTURE* (Yale U. Press 1992) (1990).

119. Michelle DeArmond reports that the October 2008 newsletter by the Chaffey Community Republican Women Federated said that if Obama were elected his image would appear on food stamps instead of dollar bills like other presidents. The statement is followed by an illustration of “Obama Bucks”—a phony \$10 bill featuring Obama’s face on a donkey’s body, labeled “United States Food Stamps,” and surrounded by a watermelon, ribs and a bucket of fried chicken. The group’s president, Diane Fedele, said she simply wanted to deride a comment Obama made over the summer about how as an African-American he “doesn’t look like all those other presidents on the dollar bills.” Fedele said she got the illustration in a number of chain e-mails and decided to reprint it for her members. Michelle DeArmond, *Inland GOP mailing depicts Obama's face on food stamp*, THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE, Oct. 16, 2008, available at http://www.pe.com/localnews/inland/stories/PE_News_Local_S_buck16.3d67d4a.html.

120. Veer to the Right, CafePress.com, <http://magnets.cafepress.com/item/barack-obama-is-a-snob-magnet/253808830> (last visited Feb. 23, 2008).

121. See David Pilgrim, *The Coon Caricature*, JIM CROW MUSEUM OF RACIST MEMORABILIA, Oct., 2000, www.ferris.edu/news/jimcrow/coon. One sticker reads “Empty Suit,” and shows Obama as a ridiculous and diminutive figure trying to occupy a man’s suit. *Emptysuit_tees*, CafePress.com, <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/item/white-tshirt/314082010> (last visited Feb. 23, 2008).

122. TITILLATING TEES, CafePress.com, <http://art.cafepress.com/item/quotbarack-obama-race-cardquot-poster/289456070> (last visited Feb. 23, 2008).

123. One greeting card shows Obama gloating: “White Chicks Dig Me.” *OBAMA CHICKS*, CafePress.com, <http://cards.cafepress.com/item/white-chicks-greeting-card/290365314> (last visited Feb. 23, 2008).

124. Mychal Massie, *Michelle Obama: Angry black harridan*, WORLDNETDAILY, Feb. 26, 2008, <http://www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?pageId=57312>.

Barack Obama since 1992) “Obama’s baby mama.”¹²⁵ The message is that no matter how “respectable,” any Black woman can be smacked back down to stereotypic ignominy. This swipe intends to disgrace not only Michelle Obama, but also poor, single mothers deemed “illegitimate” by a sexual double standard grounded in unjust systems of race and class as well as sex and gender.

Barack Obama also was labeled with the stereotype of the “untrustworthy” and “unstable” mulatto. One button reads: “Psychobama needs a shrink’s office, not the oval office. Don’t let this hater of his own whiteness set race relations back 100 years!”¹²⁶ The linguistic origin of the word *mulatto* is the Latin word *mulus*, meaning *mule*, “an animal produced from ‘unnatural mating.’” Racist nineteenth-century science classified “mulattos” as unnatural and White culture deemed mulattos to be psychologically unstable and inferior to “pure” Whites, although superior to “pure” Blacks. Negative popular culture stereotypes of mixed-race people were that they were unstable as well as immoral, criminal, sneaky and deceitful, and untrustworthy.¹²⁷

Racism, like sexism and other forms of oppressions, is based in binary thinking.¹²⁸ Different groups are understood as fixed and always apart, not simply different, but inherently opposed. Binary thinking presupposes that one group will always dominate another and that if there were leaders from the group historically disadvantaged, they would automatically and always favor their own group and discriminate against, if not destroy, the other.¹²⁹ Racist binary thinking is reflected in numerous items that suggest that Barack and Michelle Obama disdain everyday White Americans, will not represent them, and will, in fact, discriminate against them. These sentiments inform one t-shirt showing

125. Megyn Kelly & Michelle Malkin, *America’s Election HQ* (FOX News television broadcast June 11, 2008), available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvZEZL2LmA8>.

126. RightLeaning, Cafepress.com, <http://buttons.cafepress.com/item/psychobama-35-button/242291758> (last visited Feb. 23, 2008).

127. Thanks to Sika Dagbovie for her contribution to this section to the exhibit and also for providing these references. See generally JOHN G. MENCKE, *MULATTOES AND RACE MIXTURE: AMERICAN ATTITUDES AND IMAGES 1865-1918* (1979); JOEL WILLIAMSON, *NEW PEOPLE: MISCEGENATION AND MULATTOES IN THE UNITED STATES* (1995).

128. COLLINS, *supra* note 116, at 70-72.

129. Consider the binary thinking in Geraldine Ferraro’s letter to the *Boston Globe*:

Since March, when I was accused of being racist for a statement I made about the influence of blacks on Obama’s historic campaign, people have been stopping me to express a common sentiment: If you’re white you can’t open your mouth without being accused of being racist. They see Obama’s playing the race card throughout the campaign and no one calling him for it as frightening. They’re not upset with Obama because he’s black; they’re upset because they don’t expect to be treated fairly because they’re white. It’s not racism that is driving them, it’s racial resentment. And that is enforced because they don’t believe he understands them and their problems. That when he said in South Carolina after his victory “Our Time Has Come” they believe he is telling them that their time has passed.

Geraldine A. Ferraro, Op-Ed., *Healing the Wounds of Democrats’ Sexism*, BOSTON GLOBE, May 30, 2008, at A15.

an angry and crazed looking Barack Obama directing “White Ladies to the Back of the Bus,”¹³⁰ as well as the claim that the only reason White people support Barack Obama is a sense of misplaced “guilt.”¹³¹

Stereotyping (Sexist)

Aristotle and other philosophers as well as theologians and scientists in the Western tradition insisted that the ideal and true form of all beings is the male and that the female is a defect. They saw women as biologically inferior to men, characterized by a lack of what are held to be the finest and most human qualities and an excess of what were supposedly the most “animalistic” and disreputable qualities, particularly irrationality and hyper-emotionalism.¹³² Female politicians regularly are portrayed as inherently scary, “cracked,” and out of control. One t-shirt has Hillary Clinton proclaiming: “I’m a crazy White bitch, vote for me.”¹³³ One button shows Sarah Palin’s face and proclaims “Bat Shit Crazy.”¹³⁴ Another depicts Clinton’s face over a mushroom cloud. Its copy reads: “Yeah, that’s what we need. An angry woman with nuclear weapons.”¹³⁵ Such derisive imagery was more than matched by mainstream characterizations. For example, on February 26, 2008, Jim Cafferty on CNN quipped: “Which Hillary Clinton’s going to show up? . . . [She] resemble[es] someone with multiple personality disorder”¹³⁶

Traditional sexist gender roles confine women to the private sphere, where they are expected to submit to the authority of husbands and fathers. Both Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Robin Tolmach Lakoff have written specifically about the abuse heaped upon Hillary Clinton and other female leaders who are maligned as violators of patriarchal demands for female modesty, seclusion, restraint and silence.¹³⁷ Right-wing items criticizing Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama chastise them for not being properly silent and submissive. These include slogans like: “Shut Up Hillary;”¹³⁸ “Hey Barack, We’ll Lay Off Your Wife When She

130. Barack Hussein Obama — No White Guilt, CafePress.com, <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/item/white-ladies-go-to-the-back-o-yellow-tshirt/281277438> (last visited Feb. 23, 2008).

131. Everybody Shirts, CafePress.com, <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/mens-clothing/design/25954657> (last visited Feb. 23, 2008).

132. NANCY TUANA, *THE LESS NOBLE SEX: SCIENTIFIC, RELIGIOUS, AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTIONS OF WOMAN’S NATURE* 18-19 (1993).

133. Hillary Bitch Dark T-Shirt, NoHillary, CafePress.com, purchased April 18, 2008.

134. Fuck Election 08!, www.CafePress.com, <http://shop.cafepress.com/design/30539666> (last visited Feb. 30, 2009).

135. HellaryNo.com, Angry Woman with Nuclear Weapons, http://www.hellaryno.com/t-shirts/black-t-shirts/angry-woman-with-nuclear-weapons-black/prod_17.html (last visited Feb. 23, 2008).

136. Cafferty File, <http://caffertyfile.blogs.cnn.com/2008/02/26/best-debate-strategy-for-clinton/> (Feb. 26, 2008 5:58 P.M. EST).

137. See JAMIESON, *supra* note 40, at 38; LAKOFF, *supra* note 45, at 169.

138. Shut Up Hillary!, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/shutuphillary/> (last visited Feb. 23, 2008).

Shuts Up,”¹³⁹ as well as “Get Back in the Kitchen, Hillary”¹⁴⁰ and, playing off an incident where she was heckled in New Hampshire, “Iron My Shirt.”¹⁴¹ I did not find material of this ilk directed at Sarah Palin. Ironically, as Katha Pollitt observes, “Palin’s presence on the Republican ticket forced family-values conservatives to give public support to working mothers, equal marriages, pregnant teens and their much-maligned parents. Talk-show frothers, Christian zealots and professional antifeminists . . . insisted that a mother of five, including a ‘special-needs’ newborn, could perfectly well manage governing a state . . . No one said she belonged at home.”¹⁴²

Still, the anxiety generated in some men (and some women) around female leadership was indelibly expressed by one of the more notorious items from election 2008—the Hillary Clinton Nutcracker.¹⁴³ Again we are in the realm of binary thinking. Sexist binary thinking holds that men and women are opposites, that equality between women and men is impossible and that if women become powerful, they will inevitably drain, weaken, and castrate men. Thus, the thinking goes, a strong woman like Hillary Clinton necessarily emasculates the men around her, and the only reason that any man would support her is because he is already “castrated.” These views were openly expressed in the mainstream media, including by Chris Matthews and Tucker Carlson (both on MSNBC) as well as Maureen Dowd.¹⁴⁴

I previously noted the associations of the *vagina dentata* with Clinton. Another of these associations can be found in a dehumanizing depiction of Clinton, one showing her as a “political pit bull” with a vicious expression and bared teeth.¹⁴⁵ This was months before Sarah Palin described herself at the Republican convention as a “pit bull” with “lipstick.”¹⁴⁶ Of course, by putting “lipstick” on her “pit bull,” Palin symbolically assured apprehensive voters that she intended no castration, but instead promised to “kiss up.”

139. Audacity of Hype, CafePress.com, <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/item/lay-off-kids-light-tshirt/266638863> (last visited Feb. 23, 2008).

140. Poppys Political Tshirts, CafePress.com, <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/item/fitted-tshirt/26766884> (last visited Feb. 23, 2008).

141. RightWingStuff, CafePress.com, <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/item/iron-my-shirt-hillary-dark-tshirt/215009133> (last visited Feb. 23, 2008).

142. Katha Pollitt, *Sayonara Sarah*, THE NATION, Nov. 24, 2008, available at <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20081124/pollitt>.

143. The Official Site of America’s Fun Couple Hillary Nutcracker and Corkscrew Bill, <http://www.hillarynutcracker.com> (last visited Jan. 23, 2008).

144. For example, Chris Matthews fumed: “[A]ren’t you appalled at the willingness of these people [prominent men who support Hillary Clinton] to become castratos in the chorus . . . ?” *Hardball with Chris Matthews* (MSNBC television broadcast Dec. 17, 2007) (transcript available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/22311746/>).

145. Funny Anti-Obama Gift Shop, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/hillaryscareme/1204910> (last visited Feb. 24, 2008).

146. Governor Sarah Palin, Speech at the 2008 Republican National Convention (Sept. 3, 2008) (transcript available at <http://tinyurl.com/6crrac>).

The gun, for many Americans the ultimate fetish and phallic symbol, is regularly associated with Palin, by both her fans and adversaries. The former regale her as a “pistol packin’ mama[],”¹⁴⁷ the latter denigrate her as a gun-happy “redneck.” All tend to sexualize the firearm, for example by showing her in a bikini, or even seemingly naked, while brandishing one.¹⁴⁸ This iconography also signifies that Palin (a White, Christian, and Republican woman) is loyal to traditional values and to the state and, in Freudian terms, wouldn’t dream of castrating a man since she already has the phallus. The same meaning would not hold if a Black, urbane leader like Barack Obama, or his wife Michelle, were pictured with guns. Preexisting racist/sexist stereotypes ensure that this would, instead, be a sign of terror and terrorism, as it was in Barry Blitt’s failed satire, the *New Yorker* cover showing Barack Obama in Muslim garb and Michelle Obama with an “Angela Davis afro,” military-like clothes, and a big gun.¹⁴⁹

Gender and Gay Baiting

One of Thomas Jefferson’s paid hacks, James Callender, smeared his rival, President John Adams, as having a “hideous hermaphroditical character, which has neither the force of a man, nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman.”¹⁵⁰ Casting doubt on a candidate’s “normalcy” regarding sexuality and gender has long been a feature of American politics.¹⁵¹ “Real men” are supposedly adamant heterosexuals who use force, refuse to negotiate, epitomize success, spurn all that is associated with women (emotions, clothes, and so on), are in full charge of their families, and are aggressive—economically, politically, and militarily. Modes of smearing male candidates include likening them to women, particularly by name-calling, by picturing them in a dress, by stripping them, by suggesting that they are gay, or by implying that they cannot control their wives and children. One button mocked: “Hey, Obama! Can’t You Control Yo’ Mamma?”¹⁵²

147. BIGNUMPTEES, CafePress.com, <http://shop.cafepress.com/design/30240281> (last visited Feb. 24, 2009).

148. Sarah Palin Bikini, CafePress.com, <http://shop.cafepress.com/design/30212642> (last visited Feb. 24, 2009).

149. Barry Blitt, *The Politics of Fear*, NEW YORKER, July 21, 2008. For a political critique of the racialized imagery of Angela Davis’s hair see a video by Coco Fusco, a.k.a. Mrs. George Gilbert (2004).

150. Paul Vitello, *How to Erase that Smear...*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 16, 2008, at WK3, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/17/weekinreview/17vitello.html>.

151. In 2004, Arnold Schwarzenegger and others branded Democrats “girlie men.” Harold Meyerson, *Going Over to the Girlie Men*, WASH. POST, Sept. 6, 2006, at A15. In 2008, Don Imus smeared both candidates: “But they’re both sissy boys or sissy girls, or whatever And [Barack Obama’s] almost a bigger pussy than [Hillary Clinton] is.” Imus: Obama “Almost A Bigger Pussy” Than Hillary, THE HUFFINGTON POST, Apr. 17, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/04/17/imus-obama-almost-a-bigge_n_97308.html.

152. Arnold’s Ideas 16, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/arnoldsideas16> (last visited Feb. 24, 2009).

The same type of gender-baiting can be directed at select women. In a pattern that goes back over the last two decades, Hillary Clinton has been pictured as a secret man. No matter that in one vicious image she is turned into a urinal, in another she is shown standing at a urinal and looking back to wink at the viewers. "She's not what she seems!" is the punch line.¹⁵³ I found no equivalent images of Sarah Palin.

Using the same strategy of gender mortification, numerous items picture Bill Clinton in a pink dress and calling him the "First Lady."¹⁵⁴ Barack Obama also was feminized. One button shows him with earrings and makeup and dubs him a "homegirl."¹⁵⁵ The satirical magazine, *Radar*, spoofed a famous *Vanity Fair* cover, which featured a fully clothed White man, fashion designer Tom Ford, with two naked White actresses arrayed around him, one seated and the other prone. *Radar's* remodel showed a clothed Rudy Giuliani, with Clinton and Obama put in the place of the naked White women. Racist preconceptions joined with misogynist ones to make it seem "funniest" when it was the Black Democrat put down with the already put down women.¹⁵⁶

Gender norms, coupled with misogyny, produce the taboo on homosexuality.¹⁵⁷ Men are supposed to be total opposites of, and superior to women. Thus, the worst thing a man can be is anything like a woman. When a man takes on what is seen to be the subordinated role, and place, of the woman, for example, by being receptive sexually, he loses respect.¹⁵⁸ Verbal attacks against the 2008 candidates include homophobic terms like "punk" for Obama¹⁵⁹ and "Bush's butt monkey" for McCain.¹⁶⁰

153. RightWingStuff, CafePress.com, <http://clothing.cafepress.com/item/shes-not-what-she-seems-hooded-sweatshirt/83023807> (last visited Feb. 24, 2009).

154. Bill-for-First-Lady, CafePress.com, <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/item/bring-bill-back-jr-jersey-tshirt/29748384> (last visited Feb. 24, 2009).

155. Ismyhomegirl, Zazzle.com, http://www.zazzle.com/barack_obama_is_my_homegirl_print-228170046979074046 (last visited Feb. 24, 2009).

156. RADAR, Nov. 2008, available at http://www.radaronline.com/from-the-magazine/2007/10/2008_campaign_hillary_clinton_rudy_giuliani_barack_obama_mit.php.

157. Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Misogyny and Homophobia: The Unexplored Connections*, in *MAKING THE CONNECTIONS: ESSAYS IN FEMINIST SOCIAL ETHICS* 135-51 (Carol S. Robb ed., 1985).

158. JAMES GILLIGAN, *PREVENTING VIOLENCE* 56-57 (2001).

159. The slogan reads: "Hillary's a Bitch, McCain's Insane, Obama's a Punk." billyst-shirts.com and www.cafepress.com. The slang word *punk* is defined in these ways: "A petty hoodlum; one who thinks he wants to be a hoodlum but lacks real toughness and experience. . . . [derog.] A catamite; the young male companion of a sodomite. *Prison, maritime and tramp use.*" *DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN SLANG* 411 (Harold Wentworth & Stuart Berg Flexner eds., 1967).

In an online dictionary, *punk* is defined as follows: "Originally, jail lingo for a subservient, cuckolded inmate indebted to another for protection and in return obliged to perform favors both of a sexual nature and otherwise. . . . [A] tramp's young homosexual companion. In other words, a rent boy with no ethics." joeneckbone & Dr Pinch, UrbanDictionary.com, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?page=2&term=punk> (last visited Jan. 24, 2009).

160. Extremely Smart, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/extremelysmart/4995678> (last visited Feb. 24, 2009).

One t-shirt calls Hillary Clinton a “Lezident”¹⁶¹ while another item taunts: “Hillary Stinks, Just Ask Her Girlfriend.”¹⁶² Lesbophobic aspersions against Clinton date back to the 1990s. Lesbian sexuality does not accommodate male needs, and lesbians often live independently from men. Therefore, fearful and resentful men label autonomous and powerful women as lesbians, whether or not they are lesbians. Again, I found no such similar slurs against Sarah Palin. Her relative youth, attractiveness, status as a married mother of five, and, most of all, the perception that she was loyal to male values, rendered these types of gender and sexuality baiting moot in her case.

Islamophobia

Barack Obama is a practicing Christian, but a false rumor insists that he is a Muslim and a disloyal American.¹⁶³ Behind this charge are stereotypic assumptions and distortions, including that to be a patriotic American one must have a European name and a particular religious orientation, that all Muslims are un-American or anti-American, that all Muslims support terrorism, and that hostility against Muslims because they are Muslims is normal and acceptable.

Innumerable commercial items suggest that Obama is a “Closet Muslim,”¹⁶⁴ someone whose candidacy is supported by Islamist terrorists and who is virtually indistinguishable from Osama Bin Laden. These distortions made their way into the mainstream through “joking” on FOX News,¹⁶⁵ as well as the widespread incorporation of this distortion into Republican rhetoric and displays.¹⁶⁶

For example, South Carolina State Senator Kevin Bryant posted a picture of a t-shirt showing images of Barack Obama and Osama Bin

161. Sumbitch Tees, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/sumbitch/5073418> (last visited Feb. 24, 2009).

162. Source no longer available on Internet.

163. Farhad Manjoo, *Rumor's Reasons*, N.Y. TIMES, March 16, 2008, at MM.

164. See, e.g., RV Threads, CafePress.com, <http://shop.cafepress.com/design/29377409> (last visited Feb. 24, 2009).

165. This exchange took place on May 25, 2008 on FOX News:

Liz Trotta: “And now we have [a statement from Hillary Clinton about Robert Kennedy being assassinated in the month of June] what some are reading as a suggestion that somebody knock off Os – Osama – um, uh – Obama. Well, both, if we could.”

Eric Shawn: “Talk about how you really feel.”

Quoted in Patrick Martin, *The politics of provocation: Clinton, Obama and the American media*, GLOBAL RESEARCH, May 28, 2008, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=9106>.

166. The Chairman of the Republican Party in Virginia, Jeffrey M. Frederick, addressed volunteers at a campaign rally by linking Senator Barack Obama and Osama bin Laden: “Both have friends that bombed the Pentagon. That is scary.” When criticized, Mr. Frederick said he was just quoting Rush Limbaugh. Julie Bosman, *REMARKS; A Rally Cry Echoes Online*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 14, 2008, available at <http://tinyurl.com/deav3r>.

Also, the Sacramento Republican Party’s web site posted numerous anti-Obama stickers, including ones reading “Waterboard Barack Obama” and others comparing him to bin Laden. *Local Calif. GOP compares Obama to Osama bin Laden*, FOXNEWS, Oct. 15, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/wires/2008Oct15/0,4670,GOPObamaImages,00.html>.

Laden and stating that the only difference between them was “a little B.S.”¹⁶⁷ On July 21, 2008, MSNBC criticized Bryant for this, and requested an interview. Bryant declined but sent a written statement, which read in part, “This satirical picture is meant to cause Americans to pause and review Sen. Obama’s questionable positions of foreign policy.”¹⁶⁸ Genuine satire employs ridicule or irony to lampoon; to be effective, it must include some clear dissonance to ensure that the picture, text, or film is understood as satire and not a simple replication of what it is critiquing.¹⁶⁹ The t-shirt Bryant displayed is not satire. It is an artifact directly reflecting and promulgating a distortion. Bryant’s posting extends and legitimizes the reach of that smear.

Character Assassination

bell hooks argues that negative stereotypes serve as a kind of “murder weapon.”¹⁷⁰ Character assassination is certainly the intent of the stereotypes and smears discussed here.

As a verb, *smear* means, in part, “to overspread with something unctuous, viscous or adhesive . . . BESMIRCH, SULLY.”¹⁷¹ It is important to remember that in politics *smear* is not really a metaphor. The stereotypes and lies discussed here are intended to besmirch the targeted individuals with lingering negative associations and emotions. In an interview with Bill Moyers on December 7, 2007, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania described the underlying strategy of visual vilifications: “[T]he people who are producing these products are trying to attach to a candidate what scholars call negative affect”—troubling emotions like fear, discomfort, hate, and humiliation.¹⁷² Viewers then associate these emotions with the candidate, even if they don’t necessarily know much about them. Conversely, promotional messages attach positive affects to candidates by associating them with affirmative stereotypes and presenting them smiling and surrounded by loved ones.

There are no smiles or loved ones in a representative button that depicts Michelle Obama’s mien distorted with hate and rage. The universal slash sign for “no” is plastered across her face and the text reads: “Mi-

167. See Sen. Kevin Bryant: blog from the backbench, <http://kevinbryant.com/2008/07/22/sen-barack-obama/> (Jul. 22, 2008).

168. This letter was read on MSNBC by David Schuster, who reported this story, July 21, 2009.

169. Lee Siegel, *We’re Not Laughing at You, or With You*, N.Y. TIMES, July 20, 2008, at WK.

170. HOOKS, *supra* note 38, at 7.

171. WEBSTER’S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY UNABRIDGED 1250 (Philip Babcock Gove et al. eds., 1993).

172. *Bill Moyers Journal* (PBS television broadcast Dec. 7, 2007), available at <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/12072007/profile.html>.

chelle Obama Hates U.S.”¹⁷³ Actually, of course, the producer of this button wants to make “us” hate Michelle Obama.

In his essay on Internet video smears against Barack Obama, Ken Silverstein profiles Jason Mitchell, the producer of some of the most disturbing materials. Mitchell, a self-described “Christian supremacist” prefers to go by the moniker “Molotov” as a symbol for what he does.¹⁷⁴

Of course, a firebomb isn’t really the most apt metaphor for the effects of smears using stereotypes and lies. The aim of these distortions is not simply to burn something down and then flame out. Rather, stereotyping smears are more like toxic waste that lingers and continues to emit harmful effects¹⁷⁵—and all the more poisonously if remaining unnoticed and unchallenged.

Advice to politicians on how to deal with smears is pretty simple: Never ignore them; always fight them.¹⁷⁶ That advice is just as pertinent for everyone working for social justice.

173. Michelle Obama Hates America Gear, CafePress.com, <http://www.cafepress.com/michellehatesus.278583501> (last visited Feb. 22, 2009).

174. Ken Silverstein, *Useful Amateurs: How the Smearing of Barack Obama Got Crowd-Sourced*, HARPER’S MAGAZINE, Nov. 2008, at 50.

175. Many hate incidents have already been directly traced to the election. Jesse Washington, *Presidential Election Spurs Hundreds of Race Threats, Crimes*, THE HUFFINGTON POST, Nov. 15, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/11/15/presidential-election-spu_n_144095.html.

176. Vitello, *supra* note 150, at WK3. The Obama campaign officially took this approach with an official website, www.fightthesmears.com.

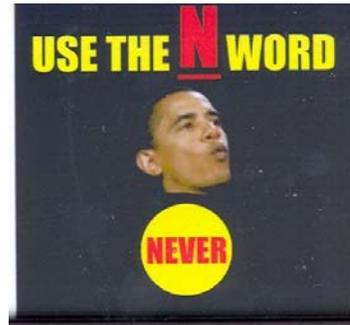
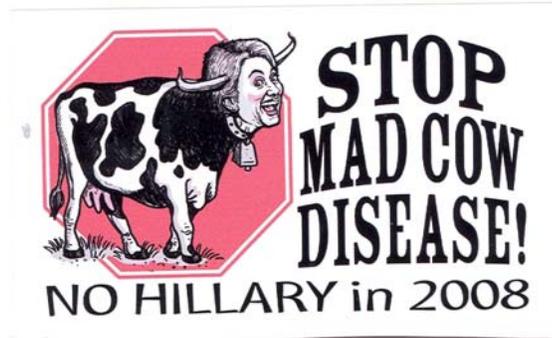
APPENDIX



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CHARACTER ASSASSINATIONS

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CHARACTER ASSASSINATIONS

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