

This Campaign Goes to Eleven



There's a scene in Rob Reiner's classic 1984 mockumentary *This Is Spinal Tap* where Nigel Tufnel, the titular fictional band's slow-witted lead guitarist, played by Christopher Guest, explains to documentarian Marty DiBergi (Reiner) why the knobs on his amp go to 11 instead of the standard 10. "You see, most blokes, you know, will be playing at 10. You're on 10 here, all the way up, all the way up, all the way up, you're on 10 on your guitar. Where can you go from there? Where?" Eleven, of course.

I've thought of that scene while surveying the state of the presidential election recently. During the three weeks from July 2 through July 29 (the most recent period for which there are data), the two presidential campaigns and their allies spent \$71.1 million on television advertising, according to the *Washington Post's* ad tracker. During that period, nearly all of the ads were negative—and it's having an effect. A recent *Wall Street Journal/NBC News* poll showed the negative ratings inching up for both President Obama and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, prompting one of the pollsters, Republican Bill McInturff, to tell NBC that "this is not characteristic ... for July" but rather "these are numbers you usually see in October."

The campaign has already reached an October (month 10 on your calendar, by the way) pitch, so where can we go from here?

To answer that question, we must understand where we are and why.

First consider the Obama team, which spent July mercilessly hammering Rom-

Romney's attack ads have reached levels of duplicity one might expect in October as desperation creeps in.

ney on Bain and taxes. "Makes you wonder if some years he paid any taxes at all," one brutal ad said (a theme since amplified by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid). Why the focus on Romney? Because he's the variable in the 2012 political equation. We've lived with Barack Obama for more than four years—people know him. A recent Pew poll showed 90 percent of voters already feel that they have enough information about Obama to make a decision on whether to vote for him.

The parallels between the 2012 and 2004 elections have been somewhat overdrawn, but on this they are worth noting. "It's very much like '04," Vanderbilt political science professor John Geer recently told *The New Republic's* Alec MacGillis.

"The Bush people did not plan, at least if you believe [George W. Bush strategist] Alex Castellanos, Alex says 'we did not plan to run a super negative campaign. But we found out after a couple of months that we could not move President Bush's numbers, but we could move [John] Kerry's.'" When you can't affect one side of the equation, you focus your effort on the other. That's especially true if Romney has done little to introduce himself to the voters.

What he has done is air his own series of unremittingly negative attacks, which have been remarkable for their startling level of shameless falsity. This is, again, October-level stuff, the kind of duplicity one expects in the final stretch of a campaign as desperation creeps in.

Consider the recent "you didn't build that" attacks. Speaking to a campaign rally in mid-July, Obama made the observation that collective effort through government action—things like public education and bridges and roads—sets the stage for individual entrepreneurs to thrive. "When we succeed, we succeed because of our individual initiative, but also because we do things together," he said. But Republicans have taken one verbal stumble ("If you've got a business—you didn't build that. Somebody else made that happen.")

wildly out of context to suggest Obama was saying that small business owners didn't create their own businesses.

More recently, the GOP has been replaying Obama saying that “we tried our plan—and it worked,” suggesting that he was talking about his economic policies. But he was talking about the Democrats' approach to tax rates, pointing out that the economy thrived under the higher tax regime of Bill Clinton while the Bush tax cuts brought tepid growth.

Then there's the talking point about “President Obama's massive defense cuts.” Said cuts come from looming sequestration triggered by the unsurprising failure of the “super committee” to produce a deficit reduction deal. While it's true that Obama signed the law creating the super committee and sequestration, he could do so only after bipartisan majorities in both chambers voted for it. “I would feel bound by it,” House Speaker John Boehner said in November. “It was part of the agreement.” Now we have Boehner unbound. And while Romney can rightly say he opposed the deal from the start, he prefers to simply ignore the history, take the cuts out of context, and

paint them as part of a nefarious Obaman scheme to strip America of its defenses.

None of this should be surprising. The first commercial Romney ran in this campaign, back in November, featured a clip of Obama saying that “if we keep talking about the economy, we're going to lose”—replaying a moment from the 2008 campaign in which Obama was quoting an aide to John McCain. (“What's sauce for the goose is now sauce for the gander,” Romney said in defending the spot.)

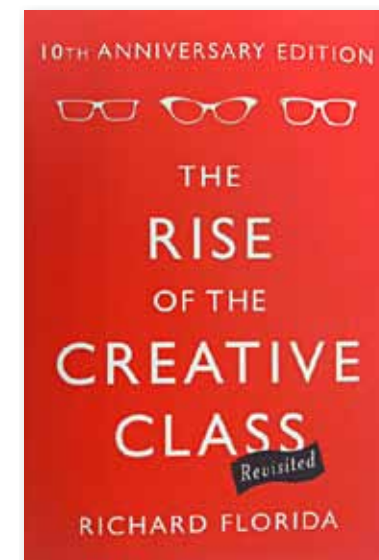
If flat-out lies are the pre-convention norm—10, if you will—where do we go from here? Romney “believes it's time to vet the president,” one adviser told BuzzFeed in mid-July. “He really hasn't been vetted. McCain didn't do it.” Romney will. So excepting a brief, gauzy “meet Mitt” interlude during the Republican convention, expect a campaign that includes everything including the kitchen sink: drugs, socialism ... can Jeremiah Wright be far behind? And while they may not reach the Romneysque levels of whole-cloth fabrication, you can be sure that Team Obama will reply in kind.

This campaign, in other words, is going to 11. ●

Is this the nastiest campaign you've seen? Let us know at editor@usnews.com.

Building the Skills That Count

By Shannon McGovern



Ten years ago, **Richard Florida** published his first book about how creativity was emerging as a common element shaping America's economy, geography, communities, and jobs. Now, in *The Rise of the Creative Class: Revisited*, Florida reveals updated statistics and discusses how the United States has reached a Creative Age that will be the driving force behind its economic recovery. Florida, director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management and founder of the Creative Class Group, recently spoke with *U.S. News* about how creativity has pervaded every aspect of Americans' lives, but has also caused a new kind of class divide. Excerpts:

Why is creativity a valuable resource?

When I began to look at this in some detail a little more than a decade ago, I became convinced that it is the key to economic growth. And over the past decade, what has really surprised me is how creativity has started to infuse everything. I noticed all these younger researchers looking at not only arts and culture, and science and engineering, and the traditional knowledge-based jobs, but they're looking at the transformation of, like, barbershops or butcher shops or distilleries or microbreweries in places all across the country.

Who is the creative class?

Now we have 10 years of research to document it, but what I looked at were occupations, jobs, and the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. So I began to choose jobs based on which of those jobs use a lot of creativity in work. And it's interesting, now we've had new data which

actually enables us to look at the underlying skills in the past 10 years, and the researchers who have looked at that say that there are two key skills that underlay creative work. The first are cognitive or analytical skills—our brain power, our ability to process information to acquire knowledge. But the other one is social skills, and not just the ability to be popular, be a nice person, but the ability to manage teams or manage other people or form a business or manage an entrepreneurial enterprise. And those two skill sets, the cognitive and social skills, are really the ones that distinguish the creative class. About 40 million Americans are members of the creative class.

How has the meaning of the word “creative” expanded or shifted over time?

It was really funny, actually I say this in the preface, when I looked at the term that professionals on LinkedIn most use to define themselves in the past couple years, it was “creative.” I think they would have thought of “creative” in the past as an arts person or maybe a marketing person or a musician or maybe a designer, but you find increasingly people are defining themselves as creative in their work.

They also did a survey of CEOs and they said, what is the skill you most value in your people, and they said their creativity, their ability to solve problems, come up with new solutions, use their brainpower to figure things out.

What is the Creative Age?

We had three great ages in recent his-

“There are the creative class areas and the areas that are falling further behind...dividing by class.”

tory. The first was the modern Agricultural Age, and we made progress in agriculture. Then we shifted from the Agricultural Age to the Industrial Age, and that created the great economic revolution and propelled the United States to dominance. But now over the past three or four decades, we have shifted to the Creative Age. We saw that beginning to happen in 1980. In about 1980 you could see more than 20 million new members of our workforce joined the creative class.

Is American society closer to a full Creative Age than it was when you wrote the first book?

Yes, but it’s more divided. The United States has built a stronger creative economy, more of our people work in the creative economy. Unfortunately, our working class has shrunk as manufacturing jobs were eliminated in the crisis. That’s really the challenge of our future: How do we now expand the creative class, which has, say, 35 percent of our workforce and in some cities and metros nearly half, how do we expand that class to include more people and get past this divide? There are the creative class areas and the places that are falling further behind. Even though they offer lower housing prices and many times attractive living, it seems as though the economic benefits—the concentration of these creative class jobs, the ability to pursue it in your career, all the other things that people want—those are in certain areas more than others, so we have this society that’s dividing by class and by community. That’s really what worries me. I talk in the last chapter of the book about the need to build a new creative compact, a social compact of our time that can extend the Creative Age and creative economy to more Americans, can upgrade those service jobs, can make manufacturing stronger, make sure people have opportunity, make sure that cities are strengthened, but that’s hard. ●

Does the United States need a larger creative economy? Weigh in: editor@usnews.com.



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Answers to Quiz

1. A. Wilson
2. False. Congress has the power to pass tax policy.
3. A. Hoover
4. B. Kennedy
5. True.
6. B. 23 percent
7. True.
8. C. \$2.2 trillion
9. True.

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