

Whiners Never Win: Lessons Learned from Candidates' Reactions to Negative Attacks in the 2004 Presidential Campaign

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ABSTRACT: *This article looks at the 2004 presidential campaigns of George W. Bush and John Kerry to understand better how candidates and their campaigns should attack each other and react to being attacked. These campaigns are examined because Bush and Kerry faced aggressive attacks over their backgrounds, and each reacted differently to these charges, contributing to Bush's reelection. Although occurring on a smaller stage, attacks and charges take place in races throughout the United States every election season. At whatever level these elections occur, lessons can be learned from the experiences and efforts of Bush and Kerry in 2004.*

Although the phrase "Image is everything" may not be entirely applicable to political campaigns, the public image that different candidates have is nevertheless important and often makes the difference between winning and losing. Consequently, campaigns spend tremendous time, energy, and money trying to establish the image of their candidate, highlighting his or her credentials, accomplishments, traits, values, policy beliefs, and what the candidate would do if elected. In addition, many campaigns also try to shape the image of their opponent by raising questions about the opponent's experience, personal life, beliefs, qualifications, values, or past misdeeds. Indeed, candidates want to influence how the public perceives them and their opponents. Great effort is made in constructing the political landscape by which the public makes that judgment.

In the middle of a heated political campaign, debate often surfaces in the media about the effects of negative campaigning, alleging the public does not want negative campaigns. Among political scientists the question revolves around the effects of negative campaigning on voter turnout and how people feel toward the political system (e.g., Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Finkel & Geer, 1998; Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Lau, Sigelman, Heldman, & Babbit, 1999; Wattemberg & Brians, 1999; Goldstein & Freedman, 2002). Despite the arguments among pundits and political scientists on what negative campaigning does to the electorate, among campaign professionals the question is whether it helps their candidate win. To this question comes a resounding, "Yes!" As long as this answer remains the same, negative campaigning will continue to be prevalent.

Because negative campaigning is an integral part of campaigns and may affect who wins and who loses, candidates need to know how best to respond to personal attacks; the way a candidate responds is important because a candidate's image is not only affected by what his opponent says about him but also how he responds to such attacks. Should the candidate fire back with his own salvos or take the high ground? If candidates are going to respond, how should they do so? How aggressive should candidates be in their own defense?

Answers to these questions are difficult but essential to candidates and their campaigns. To understand better how to attack and respond to attacks this article examines the 2004 presidential campaign between John Kerry and George W. Bush. This campaign is examined for a number of reasons. First, it was one of the most negative campaigns in recent presidential campaign history. The charges that were hurled back and forth were highly personal, ranging from allegations of President Bush going AWOL from the National Guard to Senator Kerry fabricating his heroic deeds in Vietnam. Another reason is that Bush and Kerry and their campaigns offer a contrast in how they responded to these attacks, which made a difference in the campaign and perhaps even in the election outcome.

After examining the attacks on Bush's National Guard service and Kerry's Vietnam service and how both candidates and their campaigns leveled criticisms and responded to being attacked, the article draws conclusions about the most effective ways to deal with negative campaigning. These lessons can be applied to gubernatorial, congressional, and other election campaigns and provide a better understanding of negative campaigning overall.

Bush and the National Guard Controversy

Rumors and questions about Bush's National Guard service circulated for many years, particularly around election time. To his opponents, Bush had never satisfactorily answered questions about whether he had received preferential treatment in getting into the National Guard, and, once in, whether he had actually fulfilled his National Guard commitment. The Democrats decided to raise these questions early and often in 2004 hoping that it would keep the focus on Kerry's military record and the contrast between his and Bush's service during the Vietnam War. They also wanted to warn the Republicans that they would vigorously fight back if Republicans portrayed Kerry and the Democrats as soft on defense (Seelye, 2004; Bumiller & Halbinger, 2004).

Although initially Kerry and the other Democratic presidential candidates refrained from attacking Bush's Guard service, other Democrats were more than willing to do so (Romano, 2004). Max Cleland, a former United States senator from Georgia who had lost reelection in 2002 and had served in Vietnam where he lost three limbs, appeared with Kerry at a campaign rally in South Carolina shortly before the state's primary, saying, "We need somebody who has felt the sting of battle, not someone who didn't even complete his tour stateside in the Guard" (Healy, 2004a). Terry McAuliffe, chair of the Democratic National Committee, said, "I look forward to that debate when John Kerry, a war hero with a chest full of medals, is standing next to George Bush, a man who was AWOL in the Alabama National Guard. George Bush never served in our military in our country. He didn't show up when he should have showed up" (Page, 2004).

Kerry did not attack Bush's National Guard service directly at this time but wisely left the issue hanging out for public consumption, saying that Bush's military record was "a question that I think remains open. It's not up to me to talk about them or to question them at this point. I don't even know what the facts are. But I think it's up to the president and the military to answer those questions" (Healy, 2004b).

How to react to attacks is a question all campaigns confront at some point, and different advisors and candidates have different opinions and strategy on what to do. This was the case with the Bush campaign. There was initial disagreement within the Bush campaign on whether it should counter these charges. Some in the Bush campaign feared that responding to the attacks would only draw more attention to the charges. Others, however, argued

the accusations, if left unanswered, would be accepted by the public and contribute to defining the campaign.

The Republicans, as was the norm throughout the campaign, decided to fire back quickly. Ed Gillespie, chair of the Republican National Committee, responded to McAuliffe's statement, calling it "despicable" and "an affront to all those who serve honorably in the National Guard" (Page, 2004). "President Bush served honorably in the National Guard. He was never AWOL. To make an accusation like that on national television with no basis in fact is despicable" (Seelye, 2004).

Two days later, in a carefully planned initiative, the Bush campaign, the White House, and the Republican Party forcefully defended Bush's service in the National Guard and attacked Democrats for bringing up the questions in the first place. Scott McClellan, White House press secretary, in a televised briefing, said it was "a shame that this issue was brought up four years ago during the campaign, and it is a shame that it is being brought up again. The president fulfilled his duties. The president was honorably discharged. I think it is sad to see some stoop to this level, especially so early in an election year." McClellan's briefing was followed by a statement issued by Marc Racicot, Bush's campaign chairman, who said that Kerry was "supporting a slanderous attack. By embracing this line of attack, Senator Kerry has made clear that he will accept and promote character assassination, innuendo and falsehood even when he doesn't have all the facts." Gillespie said on CNN that McAuliffe "has become the John Wilkes Booth of presidential character assassination." The RNC also released a transcript from John McCain's appearance on the "Imus in the Morning" radio program, in which McCain said, "I know that President Bush has a record of honorable service during the Vietnam War in the National Guard, where he also went through pilot training and flew a rather difficult airplane to fly, and did well" (Allen, 2004).

Even though the Bush campaign made a concerted effort to attack these allegations and aggressively defended Bush, Bush, setting a pattern he followed throughout the campaign, did not respond directly to the charges. Instead, he had others do that. Over the days and weeks ahead Republicans continued defending Bush's Guard service and criticizing the Democrats' motives and efforts. Laura Bush, for example, said in an AP interview, "I think it's a political, you know, witch hunt, actually, on the part of the Democrats. He knows he served honorably. He knows that he showed up the whole time." In an ABC interview she said, speaking of McAuliffe, "I don't think it's really fair to lie . . . he made it up" (DeFrank, 2004).

The Bush campaign's response to this issue in February was a precursor for what the campaign would do throughout the campaign in similar situations. The National Guard story hit the campaign again, this time much stronger, in September and dominated campaign coverage for several days. Democrats, some 527 groups, and other outside groups had been questioning whether Bush fulfilled his National Guard commitment and whether he received preferential treatment in even getting into the Guard. These charges reached their apex when CBS' "60 Minutes," using documents CBS had recently obtained, aired a story charging that Bush had not fulfilled his National Guard service. The documents showed that Bush's commander in the Texas Air National Guard grounded Bush when he missed a medical examination and that he did not meet performance reviews. In addition, former Texas lieutenant governor Ben Barnes was interviewed on "60 Minutes" and said he helped Bush get into the National Guard (Rainey, 2004).

The Bush campaign did not respond by disputing the specific charges leveled in the "60 Minutes" report but instead continued the mantra they had repeated throughout the year: "If the president had not fulfilled his commitment he would not have been honorably discharged" (Rainey, 2004). The Republicans tried to shift the focus by increasing their attacks on Kerry's antiwar protests, including his testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the early 1970s about wartime atrocities committed by American troops in Vietnam (VandeHei & Edsall, 2004), and by accusing the Democrats of being behind the National Guard stories. The day after the "60 Minutes" story, for example, McClellan said, "You absolutely are seeing a coordinated attack by John Kerry and his surrogates. The polls show Senator Kerry falling behind, and it's the same old recycled attacks that we've seen every time the president has been up for election" (Keen, 2004).

President Bush let surrogates address his guard service and the "60 Minutes" story, while he continued to talk about what he wanted to talk about. On September 14, for example, he spoke at the National Guard Association's national convention and did not talk about his own Guard service except to say he was one of 19 presidents to serve in the National Guard and that, "I am proud to be one of them" (Nichols, 2004).

The latest twist in the Guard story changed the dynamics of the campaign and provided a brief reprieve for Kerry. The increased attention to Bush's Guard service shifted the focus from Kerry's Vietnam service and antiwar activities and issues the Bush campaign wanted to

talk about. After weeks of attacks and allegations about Kerry's military and antiwar activities, the Democrats clearly relished the turn of events, and it seemed to reinvigorate Kerry supporters (VandeHei & Edsall, 2004).

Unfortunately for the Democrats, almost as soon as the "60 Minutes" story aired, many experts questioned the veracity of the documents that "60 Minutes" had used as the basis of the story. Several days after the story ran and under a constant barrage of criticism, CBS admitted it had made mistakes. Although Terry McAuliffe and others promised to continue to attack Bush's Guard service and argued that official records and other news accounts provided enough evidence to show that Bush had been dishonest about his service in the National Guard, all attacks on Bush's National Guard service were in some ways discredited when the documents that "60 Minutes" had used were proved to be forgeries. Although Democrats continued to attack Bush's Guard service, after the CBS story, stories about Bush's Guard service lacked credibility and lost traction with the public.

Attacks on Kerry's Vietnam Service and Antiwar Activities

In April, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times* ran stories on the 33rd anniversary of a weeklong antiwar demonstration that Kerry helped organize as part of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. As part of the demonstration, Kerry, according to his campaign website, "threw away his ribbons and the medals of two veterans who could not attend the event." With the attention that this anniversary caused, Republicans saw an opportunity to focus attention on Kerry's antiwar activities and point out Kerry's inconsistencies in recounting his antiwar actions, such as whether he threw away his medals or someone else's medals and whether he threw away medals or ribbons. Karen Hughes, a key Bush advisor, Dick Cheney, and House Republicans were among those who raised questions about Kerry's protest and throwing away his or someone else's ribbons or medals. Hughes, for example, on CNN's "Late Edition" said, "Now I can understand if, out of conscience, you take a principled stand, and you would decide that you were so opposed to this that you would actually throw your medals. But to pretend to do so – I think that's very revealing" (VandeHei & Allen, 2004).

Although Republicans wanted to use this as an example of Kerry's inconsistencies and his tendency to say different things to please different people, the Republi-

cans were taking a chance by attacking Kerry on this issue because it was giving attention to Kerry's Vietnam service and heroism, a stark contrast with their own candidate. Indeed, David Wade, a Kerry spokesman, said, "We love this fight. We won't be lectured about his honorable service and noble opposition to a war gone wrong from Republican hacks working for a man who can't prove he showed up to do his duty. If they want to compare what the two men were doing in 1971, we will win that character test any day" (VandeHei & Allen, 2004).

When stories about whether or not Kerry had thrown away medals or ribbons and whose he threw away became a campaign issue, initially the Kerry campaign reacted to this controversy the same way the Bush campaign did in such situations, with spokesmen responding quickly and directly to the attack allowing the candidate to stay above the fray. Yet that strategy did not last long. After being "described by aides as fuming" about Republican attacks on his antiwar protests and his service in Vietnam, Kerry responded even stronger than his spokesman had and aggressively attacked Bush. On ABC's "Good Morning America" Kerry said, "This comes from a president who can't even show or prove that he showed up for duty in the National Guard. And I'm not going to stand for it" (VandeHei & Allen, 2004). He concluded the interview thanking Charlie Gibson, the one conducting the interview, "for doing the [dirty] work of the RNC" (Thomas, 2004, p. 56).

Later in the day Kerry said, "I did obviously fight in Vietnam, and I was wounded there, and I served there and was very proud of my service. To have these people, all of whom made a different choice, attack me for it is obviously disturbing" (Nagourney & Wilgoren, 2004).

Kerry told NBC, "When they start questioning what I did or didn't do 35 years ago, or said, on a personal level, I'm going to fight back. If George Bush wants to ask me questions about that through his surrogates, he owes America an explanation about whether or not he showed up for duty in the National Guard. Prove it" (Nagourney & Wilgoren, 2004).

The next day Kerry's campaign escalated its attack on Bush's and Cheney's military service, providing reporters a four-page handout headlined, "Key Unanswered Questions: Bush's Record in the National Guard." That afternoon Kerry said, "I think a lot of veterans are going to be very angry at a president who can't account for his own service in the National Guard – and a vice president who got every deferment in the world and decided he had better things to do – criticizing somebody who fought

for their country and served. I think it's inappropriate" (Wilgoren, 2004a).

Kerry, unlike Bush, was very much involved in publicly defending himself and used the opportunity to attack Bush's Guard service. As Jill Lawrence in *USA Today* wrote, "John Kerry often talks about the lesson he learned from Michael Dukakis, Al Gore and Max Cleland: fight back or lose. The Democratic presidential candidate is following that advice this week by repeatedly raising questions about President Bush's service in the Air National Guard" (Lawrence, 2004).

Perhaps it was a lesson he learned too well, however, or perhaps he learned the wrong lesson. Although Kerry's aides said this debate played to his advantage, it may have instead worked to Bush's. Instead of focusing on the message that had been planned, Kerry and his campaign were sidetracked to respond to Republican allegations. As Jodi Wilgoren (2004a) wrote in the *New York Times*, the "back-and-forth on decades-old military experience overshadowed for a second day the 'Jobs First' bus tour that Mr. Kerry had intended as the kickoff of his general election campaign."

The difference between Bush's and Kerry's responses throughout the campaign were stark and none more so than during this dustup. While Kerry responded to the charges and brought up questions about Bush's Guard service, Bush never allowed himself to be dragged into the debate. It was an issue that Bush purposely avoided in public. For example, in a speech in Minnesota on April 26, the same day Kerry responded so strongly on ABC, NBC, and other outlets, Bush never mentioned Kerry by name nor addressed any of Kerry's charges about Bush's Guard service. Instead, using the tack he used throughout the campaign, Bush purposely stayed above the fray, while having Cheney and other surrogates defend Bush and attack Kerry (Nagourney & Wilgoren, 2004). Kerry's direct involvement in publicly defending himself and also attacking Bush also portended how Kerry would respond to more serious challenges to his record.

Swift Boat Veterans for Truth and Kerry

Swift Boat Veterans for Truth first registered in the campaign, although only briefly, early in May when the group held a news conference where it criticized Kerry's service record and his antiwar comments and activities after he returned from Vietnam. The Kerry campaign immediately responded. David Wade said the statements were "a false, lying smear campaign against a decorated combat

veteran.” “This is the ugly face of the Bush attack machine questioning John Kerry’s patriotism” (Farhi, 2004).

The group did not surface in the mainstream media again until early August when it made a small media buy in three swing states (Ohio, West Virginia, and Wisconsin). The commercial accused Kerry of lying about his war record and betraying fellow soldiers with his antiwar activities. Both the Kerry campaign and the Bush campaign reacted. Steve Schmidt, a Bush campaign spokesman, distanced the Bush campaign from the ads, saying, “The Bush-Cheney campaign has never and will never question John Kerry’s service during Vietnam. The election will not be about the past, it will be about the future.” For its part, the Kerry campaign passed out an 18-page packet tying the group’s financial backers to Republicans and had two of Kerry’s crewmates and a man whose life he saved in Vietnam hold a conference call in which they defended Kerry’s service (Wilgoren, 2004b).

Back in February the Bush campaign had struggled over the best way to react to the National Guard controversy; some in the campaign wanted to aggressively defend the president, while others did not want to dignify the story with a response and in the process bring more attention to the story. This time it was the Kerry campaign that debated over the best way to respond. Bob Shrum, a top Kerry adviser, and Mary Beth Cahill, Kerry’s campaign manager, both wanted to ignore the ads. They believed the ads’ only impact would be on the Republicans who were going to vote for Bush anyway and would not be a factor with undecided voters. They felt that undecided voters did not like negative campaigning, and they feared that Kerry would turn off these voters if he were to strike back. Others in the campaign disagreed, including Mark Mellman, Kerry’s pollster, who saw the ads eroding Kerry’s support in the polls (Thomas, 2004). Many Democrats outside the campaign also criticized Kerry and his campaign for not reacting forcefully enough against these ads and thought Kerry should be stronger in defending himself. Kerry was itching to fight back but was discouraged by his staff from doing so (Thomas, 2004).

For many days the Kerry campaign tried to pressure the Bush campaign to condemn the Swift Boat ads, but the Bush campaign refused. Instead the Bush campaign complemented Kerry’s Vietnam service and criticized all 527s (Rutenberg, 2004a). The Bush campaign continued to do this even after MoveOn.org, on August 16, aired a commercial attacking Bush’s National Guard service and calling on him to take the Swift Boat commercials off the air. Again Bush did not get involved in the fray, but his campaign of course did. Steve Schmidt, a Bush

campaign spokesman, criticized MoveOn.org, defended Bush’s service in the National Guard, and denounced all commercials by 527 groups but again did not specifically denounce the Swift Boat ads (Kurtz, 2004).

The next day Kerry ratcheted up the pressure on Bush to repudiate the Swift Boat ads. Kerry denounced the MoveOn.org ad and called on Bush to do the same with the Swift Boat ads. The Bush campaign responded like it had done before, saying it had no connections to the Swift Boat group and refused to condemn it. Steve Schmidt said, “The campaign has not questioned and will not question John Kerry’s service in Vietnam. The president made clear on national television that he honors John Kerry’s service in Vietnam.” Schmidt also pointed out that on the same day that Kerry repudiated the MoveOn.org commercial, his campaign held a news conference repeating the charge made in the commercial that Bush was able to get into the Guard because of family connections (Rutenberg, 2004b). Schmidt said, “John Kerry condemns the ad on one hand and then his campaign’s surrogates go out and echo the baseless charges that appear in the ad. It’s typical John Kerry: Say one thing, do another” (Simon, 2004).

Finally, to the pleasure of Kerry supporters, Kerry came out swinging August 19: “More than 30 years ago, I learned an important lesson. When you’re under attack, the best thing to do is turn your boat into the attack. Thirty years ago, official Navy reports documented my service in Vietnam and awarded me the Silver Star, the Bronze Star and three Purple Hearts. Thirty years ago, this was the plain truth. It still is. And I still carry the shrapnel in my leg from a wound in Vietnam.” “Of course, the president keeps telling people he would never question my service to our country. Instead, he watches as a Republican-funded attack group does just that. Well, if he wants to have a debate about our service in Vietnam, here is my answer: Bring it on” (Romano & VandeHei, 2004).

Kerry’s strong reaction not only illustrated how deeply the Swift Boat ads had cut away from his poll numbers, but also how personally he took the Swift Boat attacks. The way the Kerry campaign responded to the Swift Boat commercials, however, provided an opportunity for the Bush campaign to criticize Kerry’s hypocrisy in wanting Bush to pull the Swift Boat ads, even though 527 groups had been attacking Bush for months. The Bush campaign also tried to portray Bush as a reformer who wanted all 527 ads eliminated, not just the ones Bush did not like. McClellan said, “There have been a lot of false, negative charges made against the president by these shadowy groups. So if [Kerry] would join us, we

could get rid of all of this unregulated soft money activity” (Healy, 2004c).

McClellan and the Bush campaign continued this line of attack the next day, saying the Swift Boat ad was “another example of the problems with these shadowy groups that are funded by unregulated soft money. And that’s why the president has spoken out against [this] kind of advertising.” He also responded to charges by the Kerry campaign that the Bush campaign was behind the Swift Boat ads, “Senator Kerry, you know, appears to have lost his cool, and now he’s just launching into false and baseless attacks against the president. The Kerry campaign has fueled these very kinds of attacks against the president” (La Ganga, Gold, & Braun, 2004).

Throughout this controversy the Bush campaign consistently complimented Kerry’s Vietnam service and called for the end of all 527s but never specifically condemned the Swift Boat ads. Bush, for example, said, “I think Senator Kerry served admirably, and he ought to be proud of his record.” Asked by reporters whether he would condemn the ad Bush said, “That means that ad and every other ad. I’m denouncing all the stuff” (Romano & Milbank, 2004). A few days later Bush mentioned Senator John McCain was joining him in a lawsuit to stop 527s. “Five twenty-sevens – I think these ought to be outlawed. I think they should have been outlawed a year ago. We have billionaires writing checks, large checks, to influence the outcome of the election.” Bush also expressed sympathy for Kerry being attacked by the Swift Boat ads and in the process pointed out Kerry’s hypocrisy in wanting Bush to repudiate the Swift Boat ads, “I understand how Senator Kerry feels – I’ve been attacked by 527’s too” (Sanger & Bumiller, 2004).

Discussion

We can learn many lessons from how the Bush and Kerry campaigns handled attacks. First of all, not all negative attacks are equal. Both the context of the situation and how the candidates respond to the attacks affect the success of negative campaigning. The charges about Bush receiving favoritism in getting into the National Guard and then not fulfilling his duties once he was in the Guard were potentially just as explosive as the Swift Boat ads. Yet, although the attacks and questions about Bush’s Guard service at times dominated news about the campaign, there are several reasons why it did not enjoy the same traction or have the same effect as the Swift Boat ads. One reason is that Bush had never talked about his National Guard service

or made it a lynch pin in describing his career or making a case for why voters should vote for him. What he may or may not have done 30 years before was not critical except to those who already despised Bush. Relatedly, the stories were not new, and with Bush having served a term as president, Bush was a known quantity. How relevant was a story that happened 30 years before given people’s experience with Bush the previous four years? Moreover, Bush was not the first presidential candidate to have Vietnam troubles. Following the 1992, 1996, and 2000 presidential campaigns, the public was numb to what candidates may or may not have done during the Vietnam War. If Clinton, an alleged draft dodger, could be elected and re-elected, then Bush’s service in the National Guard would not be an important factor in the election.

The National Guard stories also did not have much effect on voters because of the way Bush and his campaign reacted to the allegations. Bush was not himself defensive nor did he allow his campaign to get off message. In fact, Bush did not respond directly to attacks but allowed surrogates to defend him and criticize Kerry. Rather than be distracted from his message like Kerry was wont to do, Bush doggedly stayed on message and did not allow the Democrats to knock him off. Kerry, on the other hand, was too easily influenced by what the Republicans were doing. Kerry took attacks on his Vietnam record personally and wanted to respond personally.

There is little doubt that the Swift Boat ads were an instrumental part of the 2004 campaign. They were effective at dominating the news media’s coverage of the campaign, knocking Kerry off his message, and were a great boon to the Bush cause at a critical time in the campaign. They were effective in large measure, however, because of how Kerry ran his campaign and how he reacted to the Swift Boat ads.

Unlike Bush, Kerry’s image was not as well defined for most of the public when the Swift Boat ads were released. Whereas the American public had almost four years of Bush as president and had a good idea of who he was, for much of the public, Kerry’s image was still being formulated. Moreover, much of Kerry’s campaign had centered on his service and heroics in Vietnam: “Kerry didn’t want to talk about the war. And yet he seemed to talk about it all the time, constantly reminding voters that he (unlike most other politicians, including George W. Bush) had fought for his country” (Thomas, 2004, p. 2). Early in the campaign he decided to hang his hat on his Vietnam experience in order to burnish his foreign policy credentials as well as make a comparison between himself and Bush. As a result, when attacks were made

questioning his valor and his accounts of what went on in Vietnam, the potential for damage was much greater than it was with Bush's National Guard service because they went to the heart of the Kerry campaign.

Kerry also reacted very differently to attacks from how Bush reacted, and his response proved detrimental to his campaign. Although Kerry at times tried not to personally get bogged down in charges and counter charges and allowed others in the campaign to take care of it, Kerry nevertheless frequently injected himself into the maelstrom. Whereas Bush stayed above the turmoil and allowed others to defend him and to levy personal attacks against Kerry, Kerry made himself out to be a victim of the "Republican smear machine" and appealed to Bush to call off the dogs.

Such an attack on an opponent's methods is not necessarily a bad move if the candidate and his campaign are unsullied by having made personal, negative attacks. If so, the candidate can complain about his opponent's campaign tactics and, if seen as being above the fray of such negative campaigning, may be able to succeed in arraying public opinion and the press against his opponent and his opponent's tactics. However, even if a politician's hands are clean of negative campaigning, it may not be worthwhile to criticize his opponent's tactics because the public assumes all politicians are pretty much the same and expect that both campaigns are doing it. And the public is frequently right. Candidates are usually knee deep, if not higher, in mud by the time they begin whining about what their opponent is doing. Thus the charges change from being accurate depictions of his opponent's tactics to complaining about something of which both candidates are guilty. This was the case with Kerry. Kerry ap-

peared hypocritical complaining that the Swift Boat ads had crossed the line when his campaign and 527 groups supportive of his candidacy had engaged in much of the same tactics for most of the year.

Kerry also did not personally respond well to the attacks. He whined too much about what Republicans were saying about him and was often too defensive and sensitive to the attacks against him. He made a mistake that many novice candidates make by taking attacks personally and overreacting to them. Novice candidates are not used to having their character, their business practices, and their personal beliefs in public with the ferocity that often characterizes campaigns. Yet Kerry was not a political neophyte running for office for the first time nor should he have been surprised that Republicans and anti-Kerry groups would aggressively attack him. But he seemed to be. The problem with whining is that it is not a likeable characteristic in children, and neither is it a likeable characteristic in candidates for office, especially those participating in the rough and tumble environment of presidential politics. Not only does whining not look presidential, but it is also a likely sign that things are not going well in the campaign, the candidate is on the defensive, and he is losing ground in the polls. Thus, for a variety of reasons, the candidate who whines the most is the one who is going to lose.

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