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MARC AND MATTHEW KANTROWITZ: Nastiest presidential campaign ever? Not even close

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When it comes to mudslinging campaigns, everything old is new again.

By R. Marc and Matthew Kantrowitz

SCROLL THROUGH THE PHOTOS TO SEE SOME OF THE WORST INSULTS TO THESE CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENT.

With people commenting that the current presidential race is the foulest in history, Donald Trump has never, up to this point at least, characterized any of his past opponents as a “hideous hermaphroditical character [who] has neither the force and firmness of a man, nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman.” The man on whose behalf these words came to be uttered is enshrined on Mount Rushmore. Yes, a Thomas Jefferson supporter coined this phrase in attacking his opponent John Adams, who responded in kind, predicting that the election of Jefferson would result in houses being burned, females being accosted and “children writhing on pikes.” That the heated election centered around immigration, presidential war powers and the first amendment shows how little we have moved, both in terms of substance and insult.

Not to be outdone, thirty years later Andrew Jackson was called a dictator and far too stupid to serve as president by those who supported the ever bland John Quincy Adams. The Jackson-Adams race involved Jackson's personality, temperament and scandals, including slave trading, Indian massacres and dueling. Adams' opponents had to contend with conspiracy theories, one being that when Adams was ambassador to Russia he supposedly sold an American servant girl to the tsar. Both sides utilized the loving memory of recently deceased president Thomas Jefferson, reminiscent of all sixteen Republican challengers trying to grab this year onto the mantle of Ronald Reagan's legacy. Presidential elections are not for the faint of heart, neither today nor ever in our nation's history. For those who believe things have gotten more vile, nothing could be further from the truth. Abe Lincoln was a giant ape with "an ungainly mass of legs and arms [and possessing] a hatchet face." Meanwhile, his diminutive opponent, Stephen "Little Giant" Douglas, stood "about five feet nothing in height and about the same in diameter the other way," a pudgy ball who talked loudly and incessantly about himself and others. And "Little" Marco Rubio thought he was being unfairly maligned!

In the Tilden-Hayes fight of 1876, Republicans supporting Hayes invoked memories of the Civil War, chanting "Not every Democrat was a rebel, but every rebel was a Democrat." Meanwhile, the Democrats in the South relied on violent tactics by the KKK and other groups to suppress the black vote. Even after all that, it took a congressional electoral commission to sort out who won. The commission awarded three disputed states to Hayes, handing him the election by one electoral vote. The process makes Bush v. Gore in 2000 look positively well-organized and civil.

As many Republicans this year hoped for a miracle at the convention and since to knock Donald Trump off the ticket, they should heed the 1912 election where a furious Teddy Roosevelt felt his former vice president, William H. Taft, had abandoned their legacy. Roosevelt campaigned across the nation, calling Taft a "fathead...with the brains of a guinea pig." Taft's people countered with accusations that Roosevelt's supporters were "radicals" and "neurotics." At the convention, when Taft was nominated despite winning fewer primaries, Teddy led his troops out the door, handing the election to Woodrow Wilson and the Democrats for the first time in sixteen years.

Everything old is new again. With the Republican frontrunners unable to overcome their flaws in the primaries, the door opened for a brash New York businessman who swept into the nomination, a man whose rhetoric was so fiery that he faced ridicule and heckling at every campaign stop. The party elders firmly believed however that they could handle this . . . Wendell Willkie fellow. That was 1940. Who were you thinking of?

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