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English 104
Political Ad Critique

The Original Mavericks

I feel the need...the need for speed! is just one of the over-used, over-dramatized lines that comes to mind when thinking of the movie *Top Gun*. Anyone familiar with movie knows the character Maverick owns the infamous tag. Admittedly, this classic makes my list of favorite movies. But, as with any form of media, there comes a point where one's enjoyment becomes saturated due to over exposure; and can only be enjoyed in small doses. Any more is just simply too much. George Orwell, in his essay *The Politics of Language*, claims political writing is bad writing, and that two of its biggest problems are 'staleness of imagery' and 'lack of precision.' Although written nearly sixty years ago, Orwell's claims still hold validity when used to examine the political ad campaigns in the upcoming 2008 presidential election. 'Staleness of Imagery' and 'Lack of precision' are certainly two notions that come to mind, especially when examining a video advertisement entitled "The Original Mavericks" on John McCain's campaign website. As with the movie *Top Gun*, the ad is quite amusing and holds a certain entertainment value, but the aforementioned saturation point in terms of the Republican party's stigma. The same can said of the democratic ticket, too. Change '08—we get it, Barack. Maverick—sure thing, Johnny.

My friends, the John McCain/Sarah Palin ticket has gotten just about as much mileage out of the term *maverick* as the early part of Tom Cruise's career. Perhaps the term has had the same effect on both entities, though. John McCain's tenurous political career and status as a military veteran make him a likeable candidate for the presidency. Also, prior to doing any sort of research on the subject, I found McCain's picking Sarah Palin—a young, inexperienced female candidate from Alaska—as his vice-presidential pick to be both intriguing and cavalier.

But as I have had more exposure to the republican duo, my take on these two terms have changed. I now find the pair's claims about democratic candidate, Barack Obama, to be intriguing; and their plans to drill for oil in the United States recklessly cavalier. Their constant portrayal as reformers and mavericks may perhaps be overplayed. Like Cruise, McCain and Palin may find out the American people can only take so much maverick. Their campaign certainly violates Orwell's term of "staleness of imagery", but that is not all it violates.

The republican ticket's ad campaign seems to cover the 'lack of precision' base quite well, too, in their criticism of Barack O'Bama, but especially in terms of their own personal achievement and promises for advancement. The official website of John McCain features a series of campaign video which do plenty of both. This jumped out on the site for sheer namesake: *The Original Mavericks*. The video, in just thirty seconds, summarized and effectively proved Orwell's 'lack of precision' accusation by showcasing several bold, unsubstantiated claims about the achievements of McCain and Palin. One of the slides used in the ad features Palin, smiling with a wilderness backdrop and the caption "Palin takes toll on oil industry, Republicans" which, as the ad claims, came from the *New York Times*. And that is where the audience is left. There is never any mention of how or what kind of 'toll' the vice-presidential candidate took on either area. Certainly, whether or not McCain's picking Palin had a positive impact on his campaign is up for debate, as is whether or not the quote used in this section of the advertisement was used in its original context, or slighted in favor of the Republican ticket. The advertisement makes two more bold, generic statements claiming "They'll make history" and that "They'll change Washington," but never proposes a 'how' or states the kind of impact they will have on both. The claims effectively tell the audience nothing. No matter who is elected president, there will be some sort of change occurring in

Washington and history will have been made. The left touts and African-American as their presidential pick, while the right a female for the office of vice-president—both are unprecedented. The Democratic ticket is running off the ‘change’ platform, too; but unlike their opposition have stayed consistent with marketing strategy since day one. McCain’s slogan of ‘Country First’ figures prominently in this and almost all of his other advertisements, but in this particular ad a shift occurs and the two *Original Mavericks* promote themselves as ‘Real Change.’

George Orwell was correct in his assertion that all political writing is bad writing. The ability to sort through various forms of political advertisements and issues objectively is of great importance, since all political writing—no matter how ‘bad’ it may be—ultimately serves its intended purpose: to promote a candidate in the most favorable light and do the opposite for their party’s opponent. Political advertisements and writing are largely an art of persuasion. Sifting through these advertisements helps one determine which claims hold water and make the most informed decision possible come election day.