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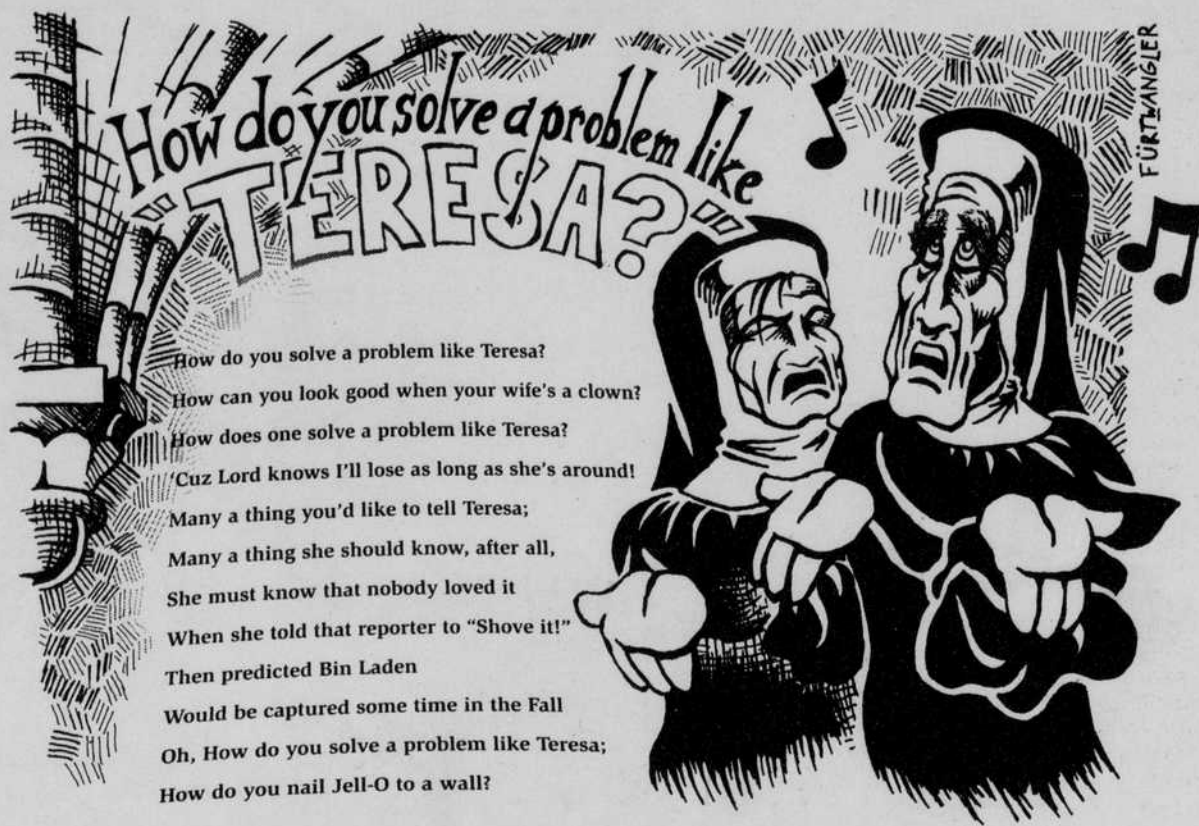
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■ In my opinion

## Ketch-ing up politics

"You don't support Democrats. Why should your ketchup?"

That's the slogan for W Ketchup, the all-American counter-ketchup out for regime change. More and more people are offered the choice of putting their money where their mouth is when it comes to supporting political causes. According to [www.wketchup.com](http://www.wketchup.com), 5 percent of every sale of W Ketchup goes into the pockets of the Freedom Alliance Scholarship Fund. The alternative is supporting "Teresa Heinz and her liberal causes."

Well, technically, Teresa Heinz owns only 4 percent of Heinz shares, and the Heinz company donated all but \$500 of its \$22,000 campaign contributions to Republicans this year, according to financial documents, but let's not quibble.

The point is that we are facing an all-out political food fight. It's freedom fries vs. French fries, and the blows are all below the belt.

An on-air taste test on "Good Morning America" between Heinz and W resulted in a W victory, as the ketchup was judged "more conservative with a sweeter, more compassionate taste." Bottles of W Ketchup are \$3 apiece and come decorated with George Washington's face. That's what the W stands for, in case you were thinking it was an overt campaign ad or something.

No, Bill Zachary declares he runs a strictly nonpartisan ketchup, defining himself as strictly middle-road. This was demonstrated by statements to the Talon News Web site: "Hopefully, with our combined efforts, we can ensure that, in November, Teresa Heinz Kerry's G-5 ... lands in the People's Republic of Taxachusetts, and not Andrews Air Force Base," the clearly-neutral centrist said.

Unfortunately for Zachary, W Ketchup has its own conservative



JENNIFER MCBRIDE  
QUASHING DISSENT

competition, and it is certainly saucier. Some Republicans are seeing red because W Ketchup isn't pro-Bush enough. Writes Patrick Spero, co-founder of Bush Country Ketchup: "W Ketchup appears to be trying to have it every which way, engaging in Kerryesque flip-flopping and capitalizing on conservatives' affectionate use of President Bush's middle initial."

Bush Country Ketchup is the true ketchup for conservatives. As "The Official Ketchup of Right-Thinking Americans," the "100-percent conservative condiment" purports to help consumers "relish" four more years of Bush and leave "Democrats in a pickle." A little pricier than the competition at \$5.99 per bottle, Bush Country Ketchup boasts "unlike John Kerry ... every bottle of Bush Country Ketchup is consistently good." And unlike W Ketchup, the creators donate 15 percent of their gross profits to Republican groups, thus Bush Country's claim that it is the only ketchup that ensures "Kerry won't 'ketchup' to Dubya."

And they say Republicans don't have a sense of humor.

Food wars don't stop with condiments, however. Many conservatives are looking for other ways to give Democrats their just desserts. Conservative lobbyist Richard Lessner created Star Spangled Ice Cream as an alternative to the liberal-leaning founders of Ben & Jerry's, who spent this summer on the road burning Bush in effigy. Well, Bush's pants in effigy, technically speaking. Liar,

liar, pants on fire? Get it?

Star Spangled flavors include: I Hate the French Vanilla, Smaller GovernMint, Nutty Environmentalist, Choc and Awe, Iraqi Road, Rushmal-low and Gun Nut (officially endorsed by weapon enthusiast Ted Nugent).

Ben & Jerry's came up with a similar idea during the Democratic primaries. Maple-Powered Howard was only sold in Vermont, so you may have missed it. Personally, I'd like to see someone marketing "Vice-President Dick Cheney's Undisclosed Flavor," or super-small servings of "What Middle-Class Americans Got From Their Tax Cuts," or even, "Bush's Neapolitan Complex: Special Iraqi Edition! Watch as the clear-cut flavors melt together, resembling an indistinguishable, inescapable mush!" Mmm, I'd liberate that delicacy from its tyrannical carton, that's for sure.

Oddly enough, I found Kerry didn't have a flavor. Yes, I know that was a tasteless joke.

Personally, if I wanted to support a candidate, I'd skip the middleman and donate my money directly. Why donate 10 percent when you can give 100? But if you are interested in shopping companies that support your causes, albeit in a less comical manner, [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org) has a soft money search that will tell you that, for example, Costco funds more Democrats, and Safeway more Republicans.

But enough of that. The question I'm dying to know is: What ketchup could you find at a Bush family barbecue? Taylor Gross of the White House media relations office said, "We don't release that information because we don't want to advertise for anybody."

I'm guessing that means Heinz.

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■ Editorial

## Showtime: The debates must go on

The first of three scheduled debates between President George W. Bush and Sen. John Kerry will be televised on Thursday. If you are expecting a rousing, confrontational battle of wits, you are sure to be disappointed. This so-called debate is a fraud — a bipartisan political stunt better described as a side-by-side press conference than an argument over ideas.

We feel the rules shaping presidential debates should be radically restructured to provide the public with a true forum for choosing the best person to lead the free world.

Ironically, the debates are the one time during the election that the two major parties work together as one, united in their common goal of disenfranchising third-party candidates and protecting their carefully constructed images.

This directly conflicts with the will and interests of the voter. According to a recent Zogby poll, 57 percent of Americans feel that Ralph Nader should participate in the televised debates. An even greater percentage of Republicans and Independents (62 percent) believe that Nader should appear.

The collusion between the two major parties is designed to stifle debate, not encourage it. Every four years both campaigns negotiate and sign a "Memorandum of Understanding," which regulates every detail of the debate from the heights of the podiums to the angles of the TV cameras. In the past this document has been kept secret, but this year, after intense pressure, the ridiculous 31-page agreement was released to the media. Here are a few highlights:

- "The candidates may not ask each other direct questions, but may ask rhetorical questions;"
- "The candidates shall not address each other with proposed pledges;"
- "No props, notes, charts, diagrams, or other writings or other tangible things may be brought into the debate;"
- "At no time during these debates shall either candidate move from their designated area;"
- "The candidates shall shake hands."

The debates will be held in front of a live studio audience, though the audience members will be instructed "not to applaud, speak, or otherwise participate in the debate by any means other than by silent observation." Sounds more like a dead studio audience than a live one.

The only person allowed to participate is the moderator, who was agreed upon by both campaigns, and is responsible for preparing questions ahead of time. Even during the second debate, which will employ a "town hall" style, the audience questions must first be approved by the moderator. Audience members who deviate from their prepared approved question will have their microphones turned off.

As in years past, this process ensures that important questions will remain unasked. And even if important questions are asked, the short pre-terminated time limits for answers will ensure that memorized one-liners and talking points rule the day, not insightful, in-depth discussion.

These are not the conditions for real debate. The Commission on Presidential Debates is doing a terrible disservice to our democracy. In the absence of engaging debate, the public will be forced to choose between two men that have said as little of substance as possible and let others do their dirty work.

We need more debates. Third-party candidates with adequate support, such as Ralph Nader, should be allowed to participate. The public should be allowed to ask unvetted questions about any topic. And the candidates should be free to ask direct questions of each other.

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