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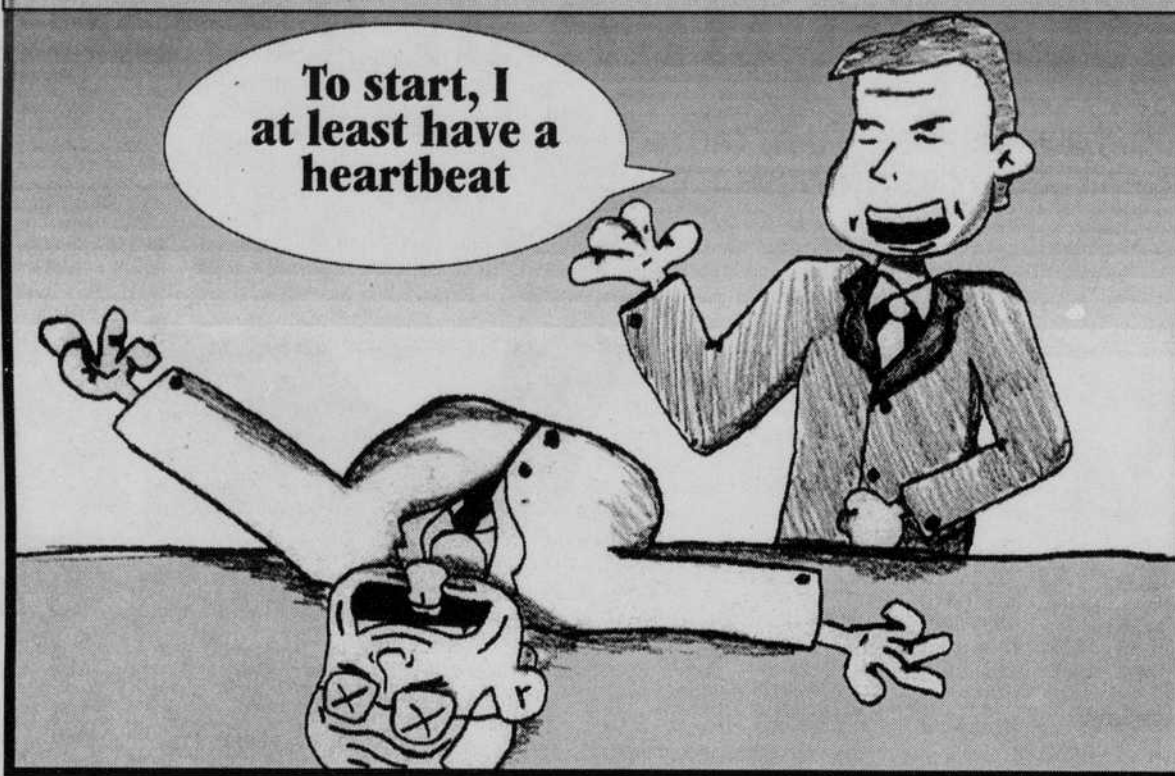
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**CNN: VICE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE**  
**"WHAT QUALIFIES YOU TO BE A HEARTBEAT AWAY FROM THE VICE PRESIDENCY?"**



DUSTIN REESE | DESIGNER

## Where's the *mind* candy?

Eugene hung heavy with scents of hamburger and marijuana, the streets empty of people, as everyone stuffed themselves sausage-like in front of flickering TV sets. It wasn't "Survivor" or "C.S.I." they were watching, but a smackdown of presidential proportions. As I wandered the streets, I heard voices echoing from open windows: "Liar!" "Traitor!" and "Damn, she'd look hot in a bikini!"

OK, maybe everyone doesn't swoon over speeches from our much-derided candidates. Presidential debates aren't exactly must-see-TV, and it's much, much easier to wait for the CliffNotes. The problem is that the condensed version ignores concrete issues in favor of fluffy punditry.

I am sick of analysts trying to force-feed me my opinion. I am sick of anchors who beat me over the head with a steakfork in order to make a point. But what sickens me most are "experts" pontificating not about what a candidate said but how they said it.

Maybe it's because Bush is supposedly a regular guy, a virtuous teddy bear you'd invite to dinner for some homemade mac and cheese. Maybe it's because reporters have been writing about "the issues" for nine months and got bored with old angles. Maybe Americans are comforted knowing that even politicians are poor at public speaking. Whatever the reason, the story emerging from the debates isn't flip-flopping or North Korean neglect, but whether or not Bush is an angry white man.

The New York Times sniggered Friday that Bush's "body and facial language (was) sometimes downright petulant." Ceci Connolly of The Washington Post called him a "sourpuss" and declared the President "looked like he was sucking on a lemon." U.S. News & World Report's political editor, Roger Simon, accused Bush of making Thursday's



JENNIFER MCBRIDE  
QUASHING DISSENT

exhibition "the scowl and growl debate." Bush was so appalling, Howard Wolfson, Democratic strategist, put together a montage of Bush's facial expressions for reporters. It's called "Faces of Frustration," and he promises "at the end ... you will say, 'Yup, it's the smirk, that's the story of the debate.'"

After viewing it, all I can say is that it's a Greek tragedy ... with podiums. If you want to view this masterpiece of quality cinema, it's featured prominently on Democrats.org, because God forbid the two major parties actually talk about issues. That would be informative, and giving Americans information is a dangerous thing to do.

The Bush campaign shares my frustration with media superficiality. Nicholle Devenish, Bush's campaign communications director, snipped: "We made the arguments about (Kerry's) credibility gap, but people were swooning over the Clintonista spin machine — they saw that they had a better chance of winning on style points than substance."

If it seems hypocritical for Republicans to whine after "the sigh heard around the world," you're being unpatriotic and should desist questioning immediately. It's important to note that media obsession with nuances of body language is hardly new. An original lead by former Vice President Gore in post-debate polling fizzled after a deluge of press focused, in the words of columnist Paul Krugman, on "Mr. Gore's sighs, (not) Mr.

Bush's lies."

The spin-war of Coral Gables struck me with a stinging case of *deja vu*. Right after Thursday's debates, CNN reported 53 percent of those polled thought Kerry had won, while 37 percent backed Bush. By Sunday, Newsweek put the gap at 61 percent favoring Kerry as opposed to 19 percent Bush. This vast shift proves the power of the bully pulpit. When a race is sneeze-close, it's disgusting to see networks giving more airtime to candidates' leather-clad stunts on Harleys than to their stance on Sudan.

Gimmicks such as "Faces" shouldn't have the slightest sliver of influence on anybody's opinion. This isn't a decision that should be based on likability or media sizzle — a President won't take you to prom or tackle you in the back seat of his '96 Chevy. Bush and Kerry could make fishfaces at the camera, cross-dressed, while doing the can-can, and I wouldn't care less. If I think a candidate is good for the country, I'll vote for him, even if he's so annoying I want to stuff his intestines full of spicy mustard, then nail his twitching body to a wall.

Despite my reservations, the analyst armies march swiftly forward. Experts say Bush's anger-holism set massive expectations for yesterday's veep event. Jonathan Sallet, Joe Lieberman's old debate manager, said pre-debate: "Cheney can't afford to act in a way that would contribute to a belief that the Republican ticket is a bunch of angry guys." Because whether a man can keep his temper on television is far more important than what happened during the past four years he's been in office.

If this is what politics is devolving to, I'll have to start channel surfing for those hot bikini women. At least then I'd get some eye candy.

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■ Editorial

## Rage against the spin-machine

The public's perception of who wins a debate is often shaped by the media's post-debate coverage rather than by the debate itself. After President Bush's dismal showing in the polls following last week's debate, Bush's campaign operatives sent letters to supporters urging them to defeat the "Kerry campaign spin machine." The Democrats countered by telling supporters to double their spinning efforts.

After watching last night's debate between V.P. Dick Cheney and Sen. John Edwards, we thought we would help the two campaigns. Because if there is one thing we know how to do here at the Emerald, it's spin a story.

### Talking points for Republicans:

1. Sure, Americans are 90 percent of Coalition casualties, but if you add Iraqi security deaths, we are only 50 percent. And if you add the number of Iraqi civilians we've killed, Americans are only 10 percent of casualties. If that's not a strong Coalition, we don't know what is. And let's not forget Poland (who has decided to pull out of Iraq since the President pointed out their cooperation in the first debate).

2. The vice president has never insinuated that there was a connection between Saddam bin Laden, I mean, Osama bin Hussein and Sept. 11. We couldn't be clearer: There was never not a non-connection between Sept. 11 and Saddama bin Husladen and his terror camps in Iraqiranistan.

3. The senator has his facts all wrong. Iraq and Afghanistan are free and peaceful. Americans all have jobs and are perfectly healthy. Edwards' pessimism is a smoke screen, a big-time trial lawyer trick to obscure the fact that he is a piece of shit.

4. Edwards certainly didn't look more handsome than Cheney and anyone who thinks so is obviously completely gay.

### Talking points for Democrats:

1. Edwards said we have spent \$200 billion and counting on the war in Iraq. Sure, Sen. John Kerry was exposed for this misstatement during the first debate, and the correct figure is really \$120 billion, but we are sticking to the lie. Now who is a flip-flopper?

2. Kerry and Edwards never flip-flopped on the war. As we know, Sept. 11 was a tragic day that changed the world and caused all of us, including the President, to reevaluate our beliefs. For Kerry and Edwards, Oct. 25 was also a tragic day that changed the world. So was Nov. 9, Dec. 2, Dec. 3 ...

3. Edwards promised to internationalize the war. Countries from across the planet would rush to send their people to die in Iraq if Kerry asked them to because, uh ... Vietnam?

4. Cheney voted against Martin Luther King Day, Meals-on-Wheels and freeing Nelson Mandela. He also voted against ending slavery and the creation of fire.

### Blunder of the night:

During last night's debate, Dick Cheney was defending Halliburton when he said, "They know that if you go, for example, to factcheck.com ... you can get the specific details."

Cheney meant to say factcheck.org. If anyone took Cheney on his word and went to factcheck.com, they were transferred to www.georgesoros.com, the Web site of billionaire and John Kerry supporter George Soros. The Web site is titled: "Why We Must Not Re-Elect President Bush."

You just can't make this stuff up.

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