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Projection of Conservative Ideology in the Republican Campaign

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The thesis concerns the Republican influence on voting behavior in the presidential elections of 2008 with the emphasis on linguistic and psychological dimensions of their campaign. The theoretical part of the thesis introduces the ideological background of the two political parties and, in the light of the culture war theories, presents the conflict between the ideologies as a struggle over “the unified meaning of America”. The analytical part consists of two phases. The first, based on the content analysis of the campaign media coverage, attempts to define specific strategies and problematic issues of each ideological narrative. In the second phase, the television advertising of the candidates is analyzed with the emphasis on the extent to which they are able to incorporate these strategies into their message.

Key words:

United States. Electoral politics. Culture war. Presidential elections. Ideology. Narrative. Candidates.

## **ABSTRAKT**

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Diplomová práca sa snaží v kontexte amerických prezidentských volieb v roku 2008 zmapovať súčasné stratégie republikánov pri ovplyvňovaní voliča, pričom sa zameriava hlavne na lingvistickú a psychologickú dimenzáciu volebnej rétoriky. Teoretická časť práce ozrejmúje základné ideológie amerických politických strán a predstavuje volebnú kampaň ako súčasť širšieho boja týchto ideológií o ovládnutie verejného diskurzu, takzvanej kultúrnej vojny. Analytická časť pozostáva z dvoch fáz. Prvá fáza spočíva v rozbere spravodajského spracovania predvolebného boja a jej úlohou je vymedziť konkrétne stratégie a problematické miesta jednotlivých naratívov. Druhá fáza analyzuje volebné spoty kandidátov oboch strán, pričom sa snaží exemplifikovať ako jednotliví kandidáti využívajú, resp. reagujú na tieto stratégie.

Kľúčové slová:

Spojené štáty americké. Prezidentské voľby. Kultúrna vojna. Ideológia. Naratív. Kandidáti.

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## Introduction

The United States has been in recent years predominantly seen as politically leaning to the right. Administration of George W. Bush has managed to build its powerful base on the legacy of Ronald Reagan, mainly through the morality and values talk, but also through various strategies of deepening the average citizen's resentment towards a strong government. Bush's political adviser and the main manufacturer of the President's successful policy Karl Rove, together with other Republican personalities such as Frank Luntz and Grover Norquist, succeeded in turning the United States much closer towards one party country, virtually neutralizing any opposition from the Democrats.

The Republican success stems mainly from contrivance to build a strong narrative of what the Grand Old Party (GOP) and any candidate of this party stands for. The narrative is necessary for the success of every party as it not only sums up their signature issues but, more importantly, it incorporates the party into higher *Grand American narrative*, that is described as the story of freedom, equality, faith and exceptional position in the world. The GOP narrative, predominantly based on abstract concept of *values*, has successfully framed virtually every domestic or foreign issue, and it not only unprecedentedly changed the meanings (or, at least the connotations) of everyday vocabulary both of politicians and ordinary people but also merged with the *Grand American Narrative* that is now interpreted in terms of American conservatism.

Of course, their narrative itself may be inconsistent or even paradoxical to some extent, but the opposing Democratic Party was not able to stress these flaws nor use them in the elections. What is more, the Democrats also failed in proposing their own counter-narrative. The narrative and its parts historically carry emotional appeal to the people, and as the Democratic Party has been obsessed with demanding a rational appeal to their policies, the Party induced a very complicated situation that caused it to lose all elections since 2000<sup>1</sup>.

With the nonexistent Democratic alternative it was inevitable that the instances of the Republican narrative, and unfortunately, mainly those most important ones, became to dominate common American culture. This means that the notions, meanings and vocabulary of the political right spread from the political sphere through media to private lives of the American people. What is more, even the Democratic politicians

consequently adopted the vocabulary and so in the effort to hide their disadvantage in the use of language, they started avoiding important issues in the race for both the Congress and the presidency.

This thesis draws from a claim that the presidential elections of 2008 are critical in defining the future course of the culture war and that they are described as the last chance of Democratic Party before the U.S. politics turns into “permanent majority of the Republican Party.”<sup>2</sup> The thesis therefore focuses on the political campaign for the 2008 presidential elections as it attempts to find out which party/candidate is delivering a more coherent message to the voters. Basing the analysis on the theories of the underlying culture war, theories of psychological appeal of campaigns, as well as on the linguistic adequacy of the campaign advertisement, the practical part of the thesis assesses the success/failure of political parties to address not only the issues of the contemporary U.S. politics and culture but also the problems of their very existence on the U.S. political scene for the future.

The thesis is subdivided into four chapters. The first tries to summarize the cultural conflict between the two parties as a conflict between two ideologies with different understanding of the Constitution, *morality*, *values*, as well as political issues stemming from these understandings.

The second chapter points out the complexity of the conflict and a few of the different ways of looking at it, i.e. historical/cultural/political, linguistic and psychological (in terms of necessity of emotional appeals, conscious v. unconscious prejudices and motivation), each point of view based on the respective theories of James Davidson Hunter, Geoffrey Nunberg and Drew Westen.

The third chapter is modeled on the analysis of media coverage of the 2008 election campaign in order to discuss the strategies of political appeal and the contemporary situation in the electoral politics<sup>3</sup>. For better understanding of the electoral preferences, the chapter starts with a brief summary of the conflict and the changes that occurred in the electoral politics since the first Nixon presidency. The chapter then continues with media coverage of the campaigns as it takes a closer look at the linguistic supremacy of the Republicans by which they are able to dismiss claims of the opposition and to successfully marginalize Democratic influence by stereotyping and radicalizing the opposition, as well as by privatizing the *Grand American narrative*. The chapter also works with the view of how is this supremacy closely connected to the emotional appeal that guaranteed success of the party in virtually every election and

legislative process since Reagan, despite the unpopularity of the policy implementation by the Republican government.

The fourth chapter of the thesis concentrates on the television advertisement of the 2008 presidential candidates. Incorporating the findings of the previous three chapters, it focuses on the way the campaign advertisement is constructed; which issues are addressed and how; whether the candidates are able to incorporate their messages into a higher narrative of their respective parties (or, whether they participate in shaping the new narrative that could mobilize the people to vote for the party); how is the candidate using the vocabulary, especially the terms and notions as *freedom, the American Dream, values, morality, traditional family, middle-class, government, welfare, patriotism, elite, Iraq war, terrorism, taxes*; and at last, what roles the music and the selection of images play in creating of the emotional appeal of the advertisement. The analysis also deals with the message of *authenticity* of each candidate's public image and how it fits into the notion of the American character.

The thesis offers a rather rare view on the factors deciding the success of presidential campaigns as the analysis precedes the actual election. Such analysis was enabled by uncountable number of similar research dealing with the Gore v. Bush elections of 2000 and the Kerry v. Bush of 2004, although these were conducted retrospectively after the results of the election were known and widely discussed. The purpose of the thesis is not to guess which candidate becomes the next President of the United States, but rather on the basis of summarizing the trends in the contemporary American politics, culture and economics assess the extent of the success the parties have in addressing them in their political campaigns.

Although the thesis touches several contemporary theories of conspiracy, focusing on any of them is not the purpose of it, neither is the thesis an attempt to claim any of them valid. The thesis tries to stay objective to a sustainable extent and works only with the three main scientific approaches that can be exemplified by extracts from the media and the campaigning.

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- 1 This includes both the presidential elections and those for the Congress. Although the mid-term elections of 2006 brought more seats for the Democratic Party, the victory was related to rising unpopularity of Bush. According to polls, many voters that cast their vote to Democratic candidate did so because they did not agree with Republican policies, but they also said they did not know what the Democratic policies actually were. For more, see Westen, p. 191.
  - 2 The thesis bases this claim on the theories of Tom Hamburger and Peter Wallace as described in their book *One Party Country*.
  - 3 As these days every quest for political office is organized around its media coverage, the media play a vital role in campaigning. The thesis therefore requires the basic understanding of the role of media in the political process as well as in the process of shaping the common culture of the nation. For this purpose, it is necessary to emphasize that media are no longer only the carriers of the message (i.e. the reporters of the truth) but rather, through simple processes such as choosing, shortening, emphasizing, ordering, timing etc., media started creating the message themselves. Therefore the possibilities of the form and the content of the message that reaches the viewer/listener/reader are countless. This allows media networks such as Fox News to create their own reality that is later uncritically adopted by their audience and to effectively manipulate the public opinion. Moreover, media tend to shape all news as a conflict between A and B, no matter how complex the problem is. In these terms, creation of virtually any societal conflict is enabled. And as the conflict is the main underlying topic of this thesis, for the sake of the exact illustration of the two tendencies in politics and culture, the media excerpts used are mostly from the media that are known for their political slant.

## **1. Ideologies and their narratives**

The two political parties that compete on the American political scene mostly mirror the two different ideologies that try to articulate two different narratives of the history and the mission of the nation. The Republican Party is closely connected to conservative ideology while the Democratic Party follows the ideology of liberalism. Despite various connotations connected with the two terms, the chapter simply sums up the basics of the two competing narratives in order to explain the ideological mechanism behind the electoral behavior of various groups in the United States. The intricacies and the paradoxes of these two visions will be dealt with later in the thesis when dealing with their implementation through the account of the recent political history of the United States.

The narrative and its importance can be explained through citing Hunter:

Often the mechanisms for articulating our public philosophies (and thus the meaning of national identity) is nothing more than a simple narrative – chronicles that begin with an account of the nation's mythic origin and end with a vision of its future. The impact of these stories is critical. When they are intelligible, credible, and compelling to those who hear them, not only do they inspire a sense of cohesion within communities but they provide a ready justification for the nation's conduct in world affairs – for only actions consistent with a nation's self-conception will be an appropriate field of national endeavor. (1991, p. 108)

So the narratives are not only accounts of history but also attempts to define the common national identity. Therefore, both political parties try to create a narrative that would be universal and inclusive, but still following the ideological mechanisms summing up the most important values that each ideology reveres.

It is necessary to emphasize, that the following narratives of liberalism and conservatism are unique to the United States and cannot be applied to political systems of other countries.

### **1.1. Narrative of conservatism**

Both ideologies draw from the ideas of Christianity and Enlightenment but they differ in the extent to which they stress one over the other. The conservative account of the United States history stresses the mythical origin of the nation as a “civil government that is ordained of God.” It claims that the United States of America was founded upon Christian principles:

The founders of our nation, George Washington, James Madison, and even Thomas Jefferson (who did not have any church affiliation), believed that government must be based on God; that governmental structures must have an authority greater than itself, which is God. This is the meaning of our motto, 'In God We Trust'. (cited in Hunter, 1991, p. 109)

This vision of the religious origin of the American government, therefore, also applies the importance of the founding documents, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, as follows:

The Founding Fathers were Newtonians. They believed in absolute, unchanging, God-given laws of science – as well as moral laws. When Jefferson spoke of the 'laws of nature and of nature's God' in the Declaration of Independence, he used language both Christians and Deists would approve. . . . To the Founding Fathers, law was God-given, absolute, unchanging and revealed to man through Scripture, nature and conscience. (cited in Hunter, 1991, p. 110)

From this explanation of the founding documents as based on the Bible, that they cannot be changed or differently interpreted, stems the conservative opposition to any different interpretation of the Constitution which is also reflected in contemporary reluctance to modify the reading of the Second Amendment, or, historically, all conflicts based on the interpretation of words like “man”, “equal”, “freedom”, “liberty”, “justice”, or other, that were connected with emancipation of slaves, women suffrage, gay rights or the various judicial reviews or Supreme Court hearings that defined the course of the nation.

According to Hunter (1991, p. 111) there are two key concepts *freedom* and *justice* that the two ideologies view differently and are innate to the conflict. The conservative meaning of *freedom* is “the freedom enjoyed by a society when it does not live under despotism; the freedom of society to govern itself,” and *justice* is defined “in standards of moral righteousness.”

From such an understanding of *freedom* stems the conservative distrust of government based on a simple premise that even Puritans distrusted the English government and that the American Revolution simply meant the fight with government. In the religious tradition, the conservatism claims that

God is in favor of freedom, property, ownership, competition, diligence, work and acquisition. All of this is taught in the Word of God, in both the Old and New Testaments. Therefore people should have the right to own property, to work hard, to achieve, to earn, and to win. (cited in Hunter, 1991, p. 111)

Often quoted is also Jefferson's first inaugural address: “a wise and frugal

government which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuit of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned.” (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2005, p. 320) These visions of government non-interference participated, among other factors, to the creation of *American dream* myth. In application, the Republicans are against any government involvement in the principles of capitalism and also against taxation.

As to the term of *justice*, it is defined on moral standards rather than equity. Based on religious belief that only those “deserving” were given by God the means for a good life, the conservatism claims that the state should not be the provider of welfare for the “undeserving”. Or, in words of Langdon Morris (2004, p. 48):

Since this entire system of morality is built on punishment and reward, it's assumed that individuals who overcome their innate failings attain God's reward in this world. This reward is believed by many to take the form of financial success, because why else would God make anyone rich?

Hence the Republican opposition to the universal healthcare, Social Security or welfare funding.

The close connection of the religious view and capitalism has a lot to do with the “conviction that economic and spiritual freedoms go hand in hand, that one is impossible without the other” (Hunter, 1991, p. 111). According to Micklethwait & Wooldridge (2005, p. 324), the freedom of religion allowed more people to seek God and so the competition between different churches made religion suit everyone, creating unique schooling and welfare system as a by-product of this competition. Similarly, the competition in economic system gave rise to social inequality that was balanced by philanthropy of the wealthy towards those in need – i.e. parallel system of schooling and welfare systems are created by the expansion of capitalism. And as these systems work, according to conservative view, perfectly, there is no need for building governmental systems that would mirror or replace those created by churches and capitalism. And as the former two are based on the *voluntary* principle, the government should not use taxes for creating abundant governmental structures in form of the latter one.

Taxation is, in these terms, an instrument for penalizing the successful, having the effect of diminishing the motivation to succeed.

In the terms of moral values, the two concepts, *freedom* and *justice*, are also applied onto the model of *strict father morality* by Lakoff (p. 65) that he uses as a

metaphor for conservative vision of the nation. This model assumes the highest moral authority to the father mirrored in God or, in the conservative application, in government. According to this authoritarian view, “moral strength is developed through trials and tests, and therefore the right enthusiastically supports many forms of competition that sort winners, who are good, from losers, who are bad” (Morris, 2004, p. 46) – a principle that is applied to all spheres of life, from one's belief of heaven to unrestrained capitalism. And even that this model does not require the unification of the church and the state, the government must be the force for maintaining the moral integrity of the nation. Hence the close connection of the conservative government to the religious right in politics of the United States.

## **1.2. Narrative of liberalism**

The basic difference of liberal narrative from that of the conservatives lies in emphasizing the importance of Enlightenment ideals over the religious ones. The creation of the nation is not perceived as the act of God but rather as based on principles of humanity. The National Education Association, for example, insists that “when the Founding Fathers drafted the Constitution with its Bill of Rights, they explicitly designed it to guarantee a secular, humanistic state” (cited in Hunter, 1991, p. 113).

However, despite the conservative efforts to monopolize the religious principle, the God and religion are not completely excluded from the liberal narrative: “America and every nation on earth is called by God to seek justice and serve the common good of humanity, not as a special privilege, however, but as special responsibility” (cited in Hunter, 1991, p. 113).

The founding documents are seen as living, therefore, they can be differently interpreted or amended to suit the ever-changing world in order to maintain the basic principles that the Founding Fathers entrusted in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

As different as the notion of the founding documents are the concepts of *freedom* and *justice*. *Freedom* is a principle the American liberalism built on the *classical liberalism*, where it meant individualism and the notion of choice the individual has that is not restrained by tradition (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2005, p. 343). According to Taylor, the liberal *freedom* is defined largely in terms of the social and political rights of individuals as “immunity from interference by others in his life, either by state or

church or by other individuals”. *Justice*, on the other hand, is “understood in terms of equality and the end of oppression in the social world - “fair play”.” (cited in Hunter, 1991, p. 114)

The American Revolution is seen as a fresh start for mankind to create a “better world”. The Democratic Party became the advocate for all the inequalities in the society, whether it is segregation and racial prejudice, women rights, gay rights or simply economic disparities stemming from unrestricted capitalism. The capitalism is, however, venerated in the liberal vision because it creates wealth, but it has to be regulated in order to serve the common good. “Progressive social change and an active role by the government are important, and initiatives such as the New Deal and the Civil Rights Movement are positive forces that improve society. Increasing wealth creates new opportunities to achieve fairness and justice.” (Morris, 2004, p. 56) Therefore, the *American Dream* has also a different interpretation; in the view of liberalism it means equal opportunity for success for anyone.

According to Lakoff (2002, p. 108), the liberal model is a reflection of *the nurturant parent morality* model, where the government builds on mutual respect rather than on control, and where the “compassion” and “caring” are the keywords. In order to end the inequalities in the society, the government has to play a significant role in the lives of the people. Taxation is required for the common good of the society and in implication, a big governmental apparatus has to be formed for a fair distribution of wealth. Schooling and welfare systems are the governmental responsibilities as well.

The problem of liberal ideology is the concept *equality* that especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century became linked with Marxist theories and their implementation after the Second World War. The Democratic Party therefore struggles to form a new narrative that would stress the differences with Marx, but at the same time, will be consistent with the Democratic Party's role of the correcting force in the course of American history (desegregation, civil rights, women rights, New Deal etc.).

So, as to sum up the main difference between the two ideologies, the quote from Hunter (1991, p. 114) can be borrowed: “Where the cultural conservatives tend to define freedom economically (as individual economic initiative) and justice socially (as righteous living), progressives tend to define freedom socially (as individual rights) and justice economically (as equity).”

## 2. War of Ideologies

The year of presidential elections in the United States traditionally highlights the most urgent policy problems of the sitting government and both parties try to focus the national attention on their opposing strategies of dealing with them. Not that the criticism of the administration is limited to the election year, but in the twelve months before the elections the polarizing issues in American politics, culture or economics become even more visible and the views on them radicalized.

In few recent elections (going back to Nixon era), the fight for defining the future political course of the country has advanced from theoretical claims to active influencing of the common culture. The importance of policy issues has been suppressed by the role the emotions play in voters' decision making – an effect of a successful definition of the meaning of two key terms *morality* and *values*. Crafting a narrative that skillfully uses these two terms for the purpose of the party's political dominance enabled the Republican Party to redefine not only the degree to which voters actually can influence politics but also change what is perceived as the common culture of the country. This struggle for a single unified definition of the American culture is described as the *culture war*.

The culture war stands and falls on the differences between different groups within the nation – people of various backgrounds, whether it be social, economic, religious, ethnic, gender, sexual preference etc. Their similarities, differences and conflicts are crucial to the dynamics of American electoral politics (through their party affiliation) as much as to definition of common culture of the United States. The cultural unification of the country therefore requires a fight on all spheres of life and so shows interconnectedness of culture with policy, politics and ideology.

Even though the complete unification is a myth, the history proved that although many different voices form the reality, only one ideology becomes dominant in discourse. The importance of an ideology that dominates the discourse goes far beyond the way the country is governed – it results in domination in every sphere of public as well as private life. So the conflict of ideologies is the ultimate struggle for power over the culture, the politics and, consequently, the economics.

The term *culture war* itself can be confusing in reflection of some studies that use this term in connection to issues like abortion or education that primarily see the conflict as a conflict between religious beliefs and secular society. This thesis is,

however, using the term in a broader definition<sup>1</sup> that sees the *culture war* as a conflict of two opposing ideologies that strive to take control of the American politics, culture and economy<sup>2</sup>.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the selected research on the strategies of contemporary American *culture war* in three different fields of study, mainly for the purpose of pinpointing the complexity of the issue as well as to define the main approaches of this diploma thesis towards the campaigns for the presidential elections of 2008.

### **2.1. Connecting religion, culture and politics (James Davidson Hunter's defining study of American culture war)**

The issue of culture war is not new, drawing its origins from the German word *kulturkampf* that described the political circumstances of Otto von Bismarck's nineteenth century efforts to unify the German principalities into a unified nation-state. With growing multiculturalism of the United States that posed a threat to the dominant Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture, the politicians as well as scientists from various fields started to see the parallels between the German struggle and that of the United States. The single most important study of the American culture war that defined all the consequent research of the issue was published in 1991 by James Davidson Hunter, the Professor of Sociology and Religious Studies at University of Virginia, in the work named *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*.

Hunter's theory draws from ideological disputes between established religions in the United States. He claims that in the past the cultural conflict was shaped by the religious disparities between Protestants and Catholics, Jews, Mormons and other religions, mainly through their different understanding of the Bible and the essence of the world authority. Today, as these groups found the common ground in fight against what they see as immoral trends in society, the cultural conflict departed from arguing the doctrinal differences to unprecedented realignment of the sides of the opposition, in a way that now the conflict is fought between the so-called Orthodox and so-called Progressivists united across all denominations: "That is to say, [divisions] no longer revolve around specific doctrinal issues or styles of religious practice and organization but around our most fundamental and cherished assumptions about how to order our lives and our lives together in this society." (1991, p. 42)

These assumptions include a range of issues – abortion, gay rights, health care,

affirmative action etc. - that, according to Hunter, can be “traced ultimately and finally to the matter of moral authority. . . . The competing moral visions that are at the heart of today's culture war often take expression as *polarizing* impulses or tendencies in American culture” (1991, pp. 42-43).

As already pointed out in the first chapter, for Americans, the moral authority is materialized in the Bible as well as in its “earthly reproduction” – the Constitution of the United States. The two opposing poles in politics, therefore, can be viewed as the literal versus the free interpretation of the two documents. From these two views stem the two main ideologies that form the only polarizing force for any cultural and/or political conflict.

But Hunter further observes that the conflict goes much deeper than to polarization of the society; that the underlying effort is to *unify*: “This is a conflict over how we are to order our lives together... We come to see that the contemporary culture war is ultimately a struggle over national identity – *over the meaning of America.*” (1991, p. 50) This conflict therefore has an impact on the family, education, media, law, and *electoral politics*.

Even if the conflict itself has been fictionalized the fact remains: it must exist, whether primarily or as evolved into reality, the latter being a result of the politically used fictional concept<sup>3</sup>. According to the author, the basic conflict is manufactured and lies in that

Both ends of the cultural axis claim to speak for the majority, both attempt to monopolize the symbols of legitimacy, both identify their opponents with a program of intolerance and totalitarian suppression. Both sides use the language of extremism and thereby sensationalize the threat represented by their adversaries... Signs of America's failure to compete economically or educationally with the rest of the world – those mediagenic events that remind us of our failure to cope with the drug problem, homelessness, crime, teenage pregnancies, and so on – all these things provide the fertile ground for accusation and counteraccusation in the culture war. By inflating the nature, size, and political power of their opposition, the identity and mission of each alliance has been forcefully reaffirmed. (1991, pp. 156-157)

Hunter warns that in the political implication of his theory it would be very simplified to conclude that the two opposing sides of the conflict, i.e. Orthodox and Progressive, have their political equivalents in Republicans and Democrats<sup>4</sup>. Instead, he advocates their equivalent in division into conservatives and liberals (1991, p. 46).

As influential as Hunter's theory is on all further research of the issue is his claim that the culture war conflict is not about “who is right and who is wrong” but

rather who is *stronger* - who is able to use the symbols, the language and who is more skillful in imposing discrediting labels upon the opposition (1991, p. 158).<sup>5</sup>

## **2.2. Fighting the culture war**

As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, there are various 'fronts' on which the culture war can be fought, abortion debate, role of religion, healthcare or taxes are just few of the examples. However, this thesis is not trying to cover them all, nor it is discussing many in detail. Rather, as the culture war is primarily a political issue, the thesis concentrates on the strategies the two opposing ideologies use in their attempts to tilt the country to the conservative or the liberal majority.

The basics of the historical (or cultural/political) approach to the culture war were described in the previous part. The other two approaches discussed in the thesis focus on the means of communication, especially the use of linguistic and non-linguistic means in conveying the meaning of the political message that serves as an instrument for fighting the culture war. Namely, the second approach to the culture war is based on Geoffrey Nunberg and deals with the use of the language in the political process; and the third, based on the research of Drew Westen, deals with psychological dimensions of the process where the emphasis is laid on emotional appeal and creation of associations.

### **2.2.1. War for words (Geoffrey Nunberg's linguistic approach)**

Geoffrey Nunberg, a linguist at UC Berkeley based his book *Talking Right* on a simple hypothesis that the Democrats are unable to win any major elections because the Republicans are better in use of the words, that they stole and re-created the American narrative against the Democrats by shifting meanings of words like *elite*, *liberal*, *government*, *morality*, *values* and *patriot*.

According to Nunberg, the culture war is primarily fought as a *war for words*:

In poll after poll, a majority of middle-class voters acknowledge that the Democrats would do a better job on most of the issues that affect their daily lives, from Social Security and taxes to the environment and education. But when it comes to the crunch, a significant number of voters seem to ignore their own best interests and make choices on the basis of patriotic appeals and cultural issues, only to be rewarded with policies that favor the rich and powerful at their expense. ... If voters can't see where their interests lie, it must be because the Democrats aren't telling their story well enough. (2007, p. 8)

Democratic inability to create a coherent message is only part of the problem. Their Republican counterparts are highly prolific in successful addressing of the public

and at the same time denouncing Democrats. Whenever the Democrats try to communicate the morality or values issue, they are being ridiculed or fiercely attacked.

The reason is that the political right succeeded (in Reagan's footsteps) to monopolize the values and morality as well as demonizing the concept of the word *liberal* by connecting it to its extreme manifestation in the same way as, for example, with the word *feminist* that in most day-to-day use now refers to radical feminism; or making it an equivalent of once opposing term *leftist* (2007, p. 47).

Other words the meanings of which the political right successfully redefined (as well as disconnected from the liberal discourse) include *patriotism* that became tightly connected with the emotional appeal of the word and no longer means only 'the love for the country' but is polluted with 'support for and no questioning of any decision of the President', that, of course cannot be expected from voters of the opposing political party.

Moreover, the inability of the Democratic Party to assign positive meanings to certain words and phrases, or to create new ones, resulted in another failure – that the meanings created by Republicans

became dominant in everyday usage without setting of many alarm bells. That's why the most telling evidence for the right's linguistic dominance comes not from looking at the way people talk at National Review or Fox News but from the language of the mainstream media and the Web. (2007, p. 32)

Nunberg further claims that the Republican success in monopolizing the narrative is because the language of their leaders as well as the right's political talk media is invariably conversational, and therefore much closer to the ordinary Americans who can then relate not only to the politicians but also to their policies (2007, p. 38).

Then it is not surprising that “a 2005 Harris poll showed that Americans were more likely to identify people as being liberals or conservatives according to their views on issues like abortion and gay rights than their views on taxes” (cited in Nunberg, 2001, p. 61). The results of this type of polls support the claim that the success of a political party is bound more to the successful communication strategy rather than to policy.

### **2.2.2. War for emotions (Drew Westen's psychological approach)**

Westen in *The Political Brain* uses practical approach to the theory of culture war where he through the instances of particular campaigns asserts the role of emotion in the ability to persuade voter not only to cast a vote for a particular candidate but also

to change his everyday private assumptions. Psychologist Drew Westen claims that the last few election campaigns witnessed radically different tailoring of the message. This was not due to the rise of negative or unethical campaigns but rather because of simple reorientation of the message toward mind, brain, and emotion.

Just as there are two ideologies that compete in contemporary American culture war there are also two visions of mind and brain. These two visions not only characterize the two main political parties but also condition their strategies of addressing the issues and the electorate:

One is a dispassionate vision, which suggests that voters choose candidates by examining their positions on the issues, seeing who has the best positions on the most important issues. The other, a passionate vision, suggests that voters are moved by the feelings candidates and parties elicit in them. (2007, p. 417)

Contrary to theories of political scientists who claim the most of the electorate to be in the middle of the political spectrum with their vote unpredictable<sup>6</sup>, Westen claims (2007, p. 99), that about 80 percent of electorate preferences can be predicted “from their prior emotional prejudices and predispositions, irrespective of the facts.” The reason Westen gives is that people tend to form opinions and argue on the basis of the emotions they have about the subject:

Although Western philosophy and culture have a history of viewing reason and emotion as opposing forces, what becomes clear from understanding their evolution is how intimately they typically work together. It is difficult to think about virtually anything or anyone that matters to us without experiencing a corresponding emotional response. The fact that someone or something holds any significance to us at all means that it has *emotional associations* that generally become active along with any thoughts of it, whether or not we are aware of them. The capacity of judgment evolved to augment, not replace, evolutionarily older motivational system. (2007, p. 62)

Therefore, as emotions can distort the way people reason, in any election, the candidate that wins is usually not the candidate that has the best policies, but the one that is most likable. This single factor for making a choice is the reason why the campaigns became so obsessed with showing the candidate in situations as meeting with family or children, talking to ordinary people about their problems, or the by accentuating the candidate's authentic character of hero, hunter, Texan, philanthropist, non-elitist etc.; and also the reason why the negative campaigning is on its rise.

Westen (p. 58) further explains that the advertisement's emotional appeal is processed unconsciously and much faster than the brain processes the information rationally. This finding has important implications for understanding the way candidates

appeal to voters: “Contrary to rational decision models, the decisions we make and the analogies we find compelling are constrained not only by the available data but by how these decisions or analogies make us *feel*.” (2007, p. 99)

As an example, Westen uses a television advertisement that connected the two words *Democrats* and *bureaucrats*, where in the latter the letters *RATS* were written in large bold letters. Such an association of the three words in human brain may be perceived as unethical but is simply effective. Negative connotations of *bureaucrats* are magnified by the even more powerful negative image of *rats*, and as Westen explains:

In politics, much has been made of the distinction between positive and negative campaigning, which is another way of talking about appeals to positive versus negative emotions. Positive and negative emotions independently affect behavior, including voting behavior, and failing to shape and elicit negative associations to opposition can be just as disastrous as failing to shape and elicit positive associations to your own candidate. (2007, p. 79)

This Republican tactics of influencing the electorate on the level of emotional associations also explains their success in policy implementation. Through efficient use of the language they were able to win support for passage of acts such as No Child Left Behind (Who would like to leave a child behind?), Patriot act (Do you love your country enough to protect it?), or simply for re-naming tax *cuts* with tax *relief* that “implies a narrative with a hero who relieves helpless sufferers of a burden or affliction imposed by something or someone powerful and dangerous” (2007, p. 256).

Such uses of the brain's associative networks in political campaigning also serve as a valid manual for this thesis' practical analysis of the excerpts from media covering the 2008 Presidential election campaign as well as the particular television advertisements of the respective candidates.

Westen's research shows that the emotional approach to political affiliation is very important, if not the single most decisive one that is superior even to the logical brain. Therefore, many times the ideology which is dominant in the culture war is the one whose representatives are able to focus the national attention to the issues that bear the highest emotional appeal (usually the most polarizing ones) but not necessarily are the most urgent ones.

- 
- 1 Inspired by Hunter's observations.
  - 2 Although some politicians and scientist on both sides of the 'barricades' degrade it to a sheer nonsense and a fabrication of the political elites and claim that the war is withdrawn from the ordinary people, the single fact that the issue itself has already captured attention of linguists and psychologist and that the research of culture war expanded into these scientific disciplines make it a valid and worthwhile issue taking place in the American culture. The claim that the conflict is withdrawn from the ordinary people is also misleading, as the private lifestyles of the people are directly influenced by governmental policies as well as narratives of morality and traditional family (most of times degraded to a simplified view of good v. bad).
  - 3 Many authors reacting to Hunter deny the culture war, but this usually stems from misunderstanding of the complexity of the issue and the fact that it touches all parts of social co-/existence.
  - 4 As for in the US political spectrum, it is not an exception to find a socially liberal Republican or a socially conservative Democrat, e.g. Arnold Schwarzenegger of California who is Republican but is also pro-choice and environmentalist, and Ken Lucas of Kentucky who is Democrat only in the name as he is progun and prolife.
  - 5 Theory of James Davidson Hunter is much broader than the brief summary in part 1.1. and will be further discussed in this thesis when dealing with the problems of elections, media and misuse of symbols.
  - 6 This is not to say that they do not have preferable political affiliation. In fact, Westen's argumentation only explains why voters so often choose the candidate whose policies are contrary to the voters' best interests (e.g. policies against universal health care or tax cuts that lower taxes only for big businesses).

### **3. Main issues of the 2008 election campaign**

The third chapter presents an analysis of media coverage of the 2008 election campaign in order to discuss the strategies of political appeal and the contemporary situation in the electoral politics. For better understanding of the campaign preferences (symbolic over policy issues), the chapter starts with a brief summary of the conflict and the changes that occurred in the electoral politics since the first Nixon presidency. Reflecting these changes in electoral politics, the chapter attempts to explain the contemporary issues of the cultural divide that are covered in the media and which will be decisive in the 2008 Presidential elections. In implication, the chapter also tries to assess the extent to which the media influence the voters and the course of the culture war.

#### **3.1. Overview of the political climate since 1960s**

The cultural conflict among diverse American population always existed in some form. But it was only during Nixon candidacy that the conflict started to be used politically, especially in order to polarize the partisan affiliations within the electorate. Nixon foresaw the importance of stressing the opposing tendencies in people's perception of the course of American way of life, intensified by the Vietnam War, women rights and affirmative action, and called for the necessity for *positive polarization* of the society in order to make the Republican political success last next few decades.

This *positive polarization* was positive only for the Republican Party. As to the way people saw the other side of the conflict, it meant a real “warfare” with seeing the liberally inclined part of the population as the enemy of the United States. Nixon skillfully used political manoeuvring to deepen the already existent cultural divide of the population, for example, he stressed the morality and traditional values of the society while harshly criticizing the moral decadence of the 1960s and 1970s, or used the affirmative action to disconnect the Southern white voters from their traditional support for the Democratic Party. The polarizing brought up the emotionally laden issues, as for example abortions, into the day-to-day fight for the unification of the American culture. The polarization also meant, that only two sides of the conflict were represented in the media, without the middle-ground opinion. Then it was easy to

radicalize the opposition, from which the liberals came as the unfeeling and the immoral. By this step he not only strengthened the conservative base of Republican voters but also attracted new voters that were disillusioned with the cultural tendencies of the era.

This era of conservative onslaught on liberal tendencies developed into a pathologic merging of the term *liberal* with immoral, elitist, unpatriotic, snobbish, withdrawn from ordinary people, abortionist, communist etc. This gave rise to even harsher negative campaigning focusing on these newly created stereotypes of liberals.

Ronald Reagan gave this tendency ideological drift that connected the Republican Party with tax cuts, balancing the budget, and desperate call for diminishing the government, while still stressing the necessity of high moral standards of the society in connection with traditional values. Just as during Nixon, this all was not only aimed at keeping the support of the already Republican side of the bipolar conflict but also at connecting the opposition with corrupted governmental system that restricts the nation's wealth. One of the terms that has its origin in this period of negative campaigning is *tax-and-spend liberals*. The message Reagan sent to the voters resulted in a successful realignment in the electorate, when people of working class (especially white Northerners) supported Reagan's Republican administration. It is necessary to emphasize, that conservative ideology did not yet suffer from its biggest flaw, i.e. of stressing the importance of the ideology rather than really implementing its particulars.

George W. Bush was elected in 2000 as a political successor of the Reagan legacy. The electorate became even more unified in rather private issues of morality and values, particularly in the wake of political abuse of the radical feeling of patriotism after the 9/11 attacks. These emotions, together with criticism of the other party, brought yet another voter realignment, especially when large portions of working and lower middle-class voted for Bush on the account national security and large portions of immigrant and Jewish electorate voted Republican for their stance on morality and traditional values.

But the same issue that gave rise to Bush popularity made the Reagan legacy suffer from failures of the Bush presidency, especially the costly Iraq war that rocketed the expenses of the federal budget, and the unregulated capitalism that caused the economic slump in early months of 2008. With the Republican Party's name suffering from the unpopular administration of George W. Bush and the overall perception of country as being on a “wrong track” heading a wrong direction (USA Today<sup>1</sup>), it seems

that the Democrats have the edge in the 2008 elections.

The elections of 2008 are therefore to be dominated by the economic crisis. This allows Democrats to parallel their policies with those of Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency following the Great Depression. Despite the similarities of the New Deal era and the necessity to revitalize the country's faltering economy and healthcare system, the politics of the United States are in 2008 still haunted by the course of the Iraq War - which is another issue to be perceived as the decisive in the 2008 presidential elections.

Traditional cultural issues that are to resonate during the elections of 2008 are, however, still those same polarizing issues of abortion (particularly, overturning *Roe v. Wade*), stem cell research, and most recently, with the California supreme court decision, the issue of gay marriage.

### **3.2. Overview of media coverage**

The overview of media coverage focuses on the use of vocabulary, stereotypes, emotional appeal, the process of positive and negative branding of the parties, and attempts to connect the ideology with the *Grand American narrative*. The overview is organized into smaller parts each covering an issue with their contrasting implementations according to parties, occasionally discussing the different approaches of the media according to their political bias. The media chosen for the content analysis are: The New York Times, The Washington Times, The Washington Post, The New York Post, The Wall Street Journal, The Weekly Standard, USA Today, Slate, RealClearPolitics.com, Fox News, and some others that in single instances drew the attention by publishing an article interesting in terms of this analysis. The total number of material analyzed is 176, whereas the choice was randomly focused on the articles that are in related the topic of the thesis. For those interested, the exact division of the articles according to the media and topics covered is annexed in the Appendix of the thesis.

#### **3.2.1. Liberal narrative issues**

In the situation when the economic crisis is easily comparable with the Great Depression and the policy of addressing it preceded in the New Deal, the Democratic Party has an important advantage in winning the elections. This advantage of

contemporary economic situation, moreover, makes their problems with creating a comprehensible narrative not so vital for their success in 2008. Even Karl Rove (The Wall Street Journal<sup>2</sup>) the leading strategist of Bush administration and conservative agenda, warns that the situation “should cure Republicans of the habit of simply shouting “liberal! liberal! Liberal!” in hopes of winning an election. [Republicans] need to press a reform agenda full of sharp contrasts with the Democrats.”

And so if, according to various polls, voters are dissatisfied with the Bush's Republican government so much that they are “willing” to listen to particular policy proposals rather than rely on their past political preferences, then it is more important that the Democratic candidate himself/herself creates their own personal narrative that would make them prepared to sustain the attacks from the opposition in field of “symbolic issues”. The reason being, that these symbolic issues were in great part responsible for the losing the elections in 2000 and 2004, the particulars of which, for example, Nunberg and Westen dealt with. The amount of media coverage of the political “non-issues” such as the meaning of patriotism or elitism in the period covered in this analysis proves that these are to dominate the campaigns in 2008. One of the examples that summarizes it all:

Ever since Barack Obama took off his flag pin, Democrats and liberals have had a queasy feeling that talk of patriotism would be a covert way to raise the matter of Obama's race; to cast him as some sort of alien figure (“You know what his middle name is?”); to paint him as an effete intellectual out of touch with true American values. (Washington Post<sup>3</sup>)

### **3.2.1.1. Elitism**

For more than two centuries, the presidential candidates are trying hard to look as down-to-earth as they can throughout their campaigns. In the contemporary American politics, where political labeling is often the deciding factor between success and failure, it is important not to be labeled as *elitist*. This is due to presence of so called “common man myth”. For example, George W. Bush also studied Ivy League universities, yet, in popular imagination he was never connected with these circles. The article from Washington Post, explains this oddity:

With few exceptions since [William Henry Harrison], American voters have picked presidents who mimic the public's most ordinary habits – men who regularly mention drinking, or NASCAR, or old-fashioned farm work. (Washington Post<sup>4</sup>)

In the United States the references to *elite* are more common in their connection to Hollywood, media or universities than to politics or business. It is then clear, that the meaning of *elite* has been much changed. The frequency of use of the word from Republicans attacks on Democrats switched the collocations, according to Nunberg (2007, p. 87), that it now “presupposes the modifier *liberal*.” In this connection it simply became to mean “disdainful liberal who is out of touch with regular American and their beliefs, ideals and needs.” This definition has a strong emotional ammunition, and so branding Democrats as *elite* characters brought a strong support for the Republican Party. Following are few excerpts illustrating this new meaning:

In more recent elections, Republicans have depicted Democratic presidential candidates as un-American cultural elitists heading up a dangerously diverse party. (Washington Post<sup>5</sup>)

[Obama was diagnosed with] an intellectual pride bordering on arrogance. (Washington Post<sup>6</sup>)

Mr. Obama is increasingly seen not as the Second Coming, but as a typical liberal Chicago pol with a thin record, little experience, an array of troubling relationships and, to top it off, elitist sensibilities. (The Wall Street Journal<sup>7</sup>)

Mr. Obama has a tendency to make such cultural miscues. Speaking to small-town voters in Iowa last year, he asked, "Anybody gone into Whole Foods lately and see what they charge for arugula?" (The Wall Street Journal<sup>8</sup>)

Columbia- and Harvard-educated, bad-bowling Obama is an elite, the conservatives – and the Clintons – claim. He is out of touch with the working class, they say. (Real Clear Politics<sup>9</sup>)

Even Michelle Obama's attempts to contradict the accusations of her husband being an *elitist* by saying: “Now, when is the last time you've seen a president of the United States who just paid off his loan debt? But, again, maybe I'm out of touch,” (New York Times<sup>10</sup>) prove that the meaning of the word is many times misunderstood in economic terms. An explanation is provided by *The Wall Street Journal*<sup>11</sup>:

No one means by this term [elitism] that Mr. Obama is a wealthy person (he wasn't until last year), or even that he is an ally of the wealthy (although he might be that). What they mean is that he has committed a crime of attitude, and revealed his disdain for the common folk.”

What is even more interesting is that in December 2007, Obama was described in sharp contrast to *elitist*:

Americans are unhappy with the status quo and hence the surprise showings of candidates like Barack Obama, Mike Huckabee, and Ron Paul. They're sick of detached, elitist, power-hungry candidates whose personal agenda is something other than genuine concern for people and clear and honest principles.” (HumanEvents.com<sup>12</sup>)

In the 2008 campaign, candidate Hillary Clinton was not charged with being an *elite* mostly due her early attacks on Barack Obama's remarks about Middle American voters who when they “get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations.”

She effectively defined herself and made him look more elitist like Dukakis and Kerry. (New York Times<sup>13</sup>)

Mrs. Clinton repeated her charge that Mr. Obama's remarks were “elitist, out of touch and, frankly, patronizing.” She said his words helped perpetuate the idea that Democrats looked down their noses at church-going Americans and hunters, an attitude that many Democrats believe contributed to their last two presidential losses.” (New York Times<sup>14</sup>)

As mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, the Democrats seem to have adopted the Republican vocabulary as in the case of the word *elitist*. What is more, as illustrated in Hillary Clinton's approach to her opponent for the Democratic nomination, she is not only familiar with the tactics of focusing on symbolic issues that the conservatives used in past elections but she is willingly using them against her own party and thus accepting the validity of these charges against all liberals.

And then, it is not surprising that the conservative journalist Thomas Frank used the situation in further application of the resurrected issue for the Republican campaign – blaming the origin of the culture war to the liberals.

[The Democrats are trying to] return again to the culture war, what the soldiers on all sides are doing is talking about class without actually addressing the economic basis of the subject. . . . It is by this familiar maneuver that the people who have designed and supported the policies that have brought the class divide back to America – the people who have actually, really transformed our society from an egalitarian into an elitist one – perfume themselves with the essence of honest toil, like a cologne distilled from the sweat of laid-off workers. (The Wall Street Journal<sup>15</sup>)

For Barack Obama, however, such remark had far-reaching consequences, because he was not only accused of being *elitist* but also because he projected this negative image in two of the most important fields of political appeal to Middle Americans as well as to independent voters – religion and guns.

Even though Obama tried to explain the slip by saying:

Religion is a bulwark, a foundation when other things aren't going well. . . That's true in my own life, through trials and tribulations. And so what I was referring to was in no way demeaning a faith that I, myself, embrace. (Washington Post<sup>16</sup>)

the opposition was quick in portraying him as even more anti-religious and, therefore, anti-egalitarian and un-American.

Obama tried to smooth this statement over with the observation that “Scripture talks about clinging to what's good.” So evidently, in hard economic times, people find shelter, comfort and refuge in religion – and anti-immigrant sentiments and antipathy to people who aren't like them. (Washington Post<sup>17</sup>)

...a crude academic Marxism, claiming that religion is an epiphenomenon, the outgrowth of deeper social trends; that the deepest realities of politics are economic instead of moral... (Washington Post<sup>18</sup>)

Besotted with latte-fueled arrogance, the liberal looks down on average people, confident that he is a superior being. He scoffs at religion because he finds it to be a form of false consciousness. He believes in regulation because he thinks he knows better than the market. (The Wall Street Journal<sup>19</sup>)

The previous excerpts also illustrate the attempts of Republicans to disconnect Democrats from the religious narrative that has always been a part of the *Grand American Narrative*. Less than accidental is also William Kristol's (New York Times<sup>20</sup>) citation from German original of Marx: “Die Religion...” that most Americans would read with English pronunciation getting a complete different meaning that activates psychological associations that have far more devastating effects on Democrats trying to communicate their values to voters. Yet another instance is the *Washington Post* article that introduces the opinion of Christian Evangelicals who explain Obama's prospective presidency “as a biblical plague visited upon a sinful people” (Washington Post<sup>21</sup>).

By late May 2008, Barack Obama lost much of his support, especially through coverage of elitist charges against him. After the charges, the candidate tries hard to look as down-to-earth as possible, even changing the focus of his campaign from appeal of idealism to everyday issues that matter to Middle Americans.

[In Pennsylvania and Indiana] He was talking less of the audacity of hope and more often of anxieties of middle-class Americans, while throwing in allusions to NASCAR, fatty foods and beer, and playing occasional game of basketball. (New York Times<sup>22</sup>)

The opinions now vary, whether this manufactured issue can influence voters in November, however, it surely is going to be in focus of the negative campaigns by Republicans.

Should Mr. Obama become the nominee, however, the charge of elitism will surface against the Democrats again, as it has in every recent presidential campaign. (New York Times<sup>23</sup>)

If he defeats Mrs. Clinton, will accusations of elitism dog him as they have previous Democratic nominees? Does Senator John McCain, the presumptive Republican nominee, suddenly have an issue that will resonate for the next six months? (New York Times<sup>24</sup>)

At the opposing camp, John McCain is more than unlikely to be charged *elitist*, even though there were attempts to do so when Hillary Clinton called him that when he refused government help to homeowners facing foreclosure. Accusations were, in this case, ignored basically because McCain's authentic public image of a great American. McCain's life is not the only factor of his likability among voters, his campaign can be summed up as:

The tour, which will include lots of freewheeling town halls, is more like performance art, an attempt to show off authenticity and the unfiltered McCain. "People can come in and do what they want," says McCain's top adviser, Mark Salter. "They can praise, chastise, and argue with him. This isn't just his style. It's a part of his message." . . . McCain's strategists are mapping the tour – and his campaign – on the theory that even if voters disagree with McCain, they come away with a favorable gut-level sense of his character when they get to see him up close." (Slate<sup>25</sup>)

Moreover, McCain, already appealing to Americans as a hero, is showing off his authenticity as he drinks "coffee with cream and sugar" (as opposed to a long tradition of describing liberals as drinking only fancy coffee drinks as lattes) and eats donuts with sprinkles (sprinkles being loved by children and kitsch-loving lower classes):

McCain's moderators . . . greeted McCain with a box of Dunkin' Donuts. "We spend quite a bit of time with you on the back of the Straight Talk Express asking you questions, and what we've decided to do today was invite everyone else along the ride. We even brought you your favorite treat." McCain opened the offering. "Oh, yes, with sprinkles!" he said. Sidoti passed him a cup. "A little coffee with a little cream and a little sugar," she said." (Washington Post<sup>26</sup>)

The previous excerpt is taken from the same article that likens Obama to Osama; coffee-milk-sugar and sprinkled donuts as McCain's favorite are also described in the *New York Times*<sup>27</sup> article in comparison to Obama's *elitist* remarks.

### 3.2.1.2. Patriotism

If there is any symbolic issue that was during the covered period treated in the media proportionally with *elitism*, it must be *patriotism*. As mentioned in the second chapter, the term *patriotism* has been privatized by the Republicans who slightly changed its meaning. According to Nunberg (2007, p. 191), the *patriotism* has been associated with the political right since Vietnam era but it was only after attacks of 9/11 that the right started to use the word in “a ruthless and divisive way” – a strategy that was introduced by the Patriot Act as well as with the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security. These two set a new trend in using *patriotism* for support of the Republican policies where they framed any voice from opposition as “encouraging enemies”. Nonetheless, Nunberg (2007, pp. 196-199) warns that, in terms of electoral politics, it is the cultural value of *patriotism* that is being abused by Republicans, that it is not questioning of the real affections towards the country but rather whether Democrats are being demonstrative of loving your country enough. This is why the term is closely connected with the *elitism* – “the liberals’ disloyalty, in other words, isn’t to their nation but to the values and tastes of ‘regular American’.” ‘Regular Americans’ are often exemplified by Middle-Americans and their shared values, of which demonstrating the *patriotism* is one of the most vital ones, mirroring itself in everyday use of its symbols, especially the flag, on the flag poles on houses, in windows, in gardens, on clothing, key chains, bumper stickers etc. Therefore, any attack on the presidential candidate not wearing the flag pin on his/her lapel presupposes loss of many votes from ‘regular Americans’ that see these demonstrations as a way of un-American lifestyle.

This tendency is described also in the course of the 2008 presidential campaigns, mostly in terms of branding Barack Obama as unpatriotic due to his refusal to wear a flag pin on his lapel:

A woman from Latrobe . . . pointedly asked Mr. Obama about his patriotism, saying: “I want to know if you believe in the American flag.” “I revere the American flag,” said Mr. Obama, who does not regularly wear a flag lapel pin. “And I would not be running for president if I did not revere this country.” (Washington Post<sup>28</sup>)

Seven months ago, Senator Barack Obama said he did not feel compelled to wear a flag pin, saying he would prove his patriotism in deed, not apparel. What gives? Was it the woman in Indiana who pulled him aside, gently suggesting that he wear one? Was it part of a larger embrace of all those things presidential candidates simply have to do on a campaign, along with eating cheese steaks in Philadelphia or chugging Miller in

Milwaukee? Or was it in reaction to continued questions like the one this week from a local reporter in South Charleston, W.Va., who asked how Mr. Obama could attract “blue-collar, white voters in this state,” adding, “They think you are un-American.” (New York Times<sup>29</sup>)

He is, writes one leading conservative columnist, “out of touch with everyday America.” His reluctance to wear a flag pin, writes another, shows that he “has declared himself superior to an almost universal form of popular patriotism”. (Washington Post<sup>30</sup>)

Patriotism is, sadly, a crucial challenge for Obama now. His aides believe that the Wright controversy was more about anti-Americanism than it was about race. Michelle Obama's unfortunate comment that the success of the campaign had made her proud of America "for the first time" in her adult life and the Senator's own decision to stow his American-flag lapel pin — plus his Islamic-sounding name — have fed a scurrilous undercurrent of doubt about whether he is "American" enough. (Time<sup>31</sup>)

As seen from the recent campaigns, the abuse of fearmongering tactics is no longer limited to scaring the voters by radical liberalism or leftism, but rather, extended to rebranding the leader for the Democratic presidential nomination as a terrorist or an *alien figure*. Moreover, Republicans managed to portray their candidate as a great American in order to produce sharp contrast:

Campaigning for GOP presidential nominee Alf Landon in 1936, Republican leader Frank Knox said that the Democratic Party under President Franklin Roosevelt “has been seized by alien and un-American elements. Next November, you will choose the American way.”(Washington Post<sup>32</sup>)

McCain's first post-primary ad proclaimed him “the American president Americans have been waiting for.” Not the “strong” or “experienced” president, though those are contrasts he could seek to draw with Obama. The “American” president – because that's the only contrast through which McCain has even a chance of prevailing. (Washington Post<sup>33</sup>)

Condoleezza Rice: “Let me just say, first of all, that Senator McCain is an extraordinary American, a really outstanding leader, and obviously a great patriot.” (Washington Post<sup>34</sup>)

What is more, with the constant emphasizing that Obama's middle name is Hussein, clearly reminding of Saddam Hussein, the evil force Bush administration spent lot of effort to frame as the biggest threat to American democracy and ideals; and his surname Obama easily identified with Osama bin Laden, the presumptive terrorist that stood behind the 9/11 attacks, the conservatives have clearly activated the unconscious associative networks, that according to Westen's theories, can change voting behavior of the electorate (in the same way as the example of *bureaucRATS/DemocRATS* in the second chapter).

At luncheon for the editors hosted by the Associated Press, AP Chairman Dean Singleton quizzed Obama about whether he would send more troops to Afghanistan, where “Obama bin Laden is still at large.” (Washington Post<sup>35</sup>)

Discussing Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton’s reference last week to the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy during the 1968 primary season, the Fox analyst, Liz Trotta, said Sunday that “now we have what some are reading as a suggestion that somebody knock off Osama, um, Obama – well, both, if we could.” (New York Times<sup>36</sup>)

These kind of symbolic issues are often seen as ridiculous, but their real impact cannot be measured by polls. The Democratic Party is well aware of the changed vocabulary and their presidential candidates are on the crossroads of attempts to change the meaning of the word to its original – as many of the quotations of Barack Obama can suggest:

Mr. Obama said that he had occasionally worn one after the attacks of Sept. 11, but added that he thought the pins had become a substitute for true patriotism.

“My attitude is that I’m less concerned about what you’re wearing on you lapel than what’s in your heart,” he told audiences in Iowa. “You show your patriotism by how you treat your fellow Americans, especially those who served. You show your patriotism by being true to our values and our ideals.” (New York Times<sup>37</sup>)

"Loving your country shouldn't just mean watching fireworks on the Fourth of July; loving your country must mean accepting your responsibility to do your part to change it." (Washington Post<sup>38</sup>)

That is to say that there is a gap in the concept of *patriotism* that could be used against Republicans. Democrats could use the bleak contemporary situation where 81 percent of Americans see their country “on a wrong track,” especially due to unpopular Iraq War and declining economy. This statistical finding could be turned into Democratic advantage if only they could, prior to explaining their policy solutions to contemporary problems, use the popular concepts such as *patriotism* in a way of populist criticism of the Republican government. For example, by questioning whether it is patriotic to let the big corporations profit from Iraq War (and even let the government lower their taxes) while future generations of Americans will have to pay for the rising deficit through their taxes or shrinking of the welfare and education funding.

According to *Poll on Patriotism and Military Duty*, a poll conducted in 1983 showed that 61 percent of respondents thought that “it is enough to love your country,” while only 33 percent thought that they “actually have to do something to be patriotic”. The Chicago Tribune article echoed the question recently: “Who is the real patriot? . . .

Are the patriots the people who actually sacrifice something or those who merely talk about their love of the country?" (Chicago Tribune<sup>39</sup>) But, during the G. W. Bush era, the notion of 'doing something' was connected with displaying the symbols of patriotism. Consequently, the question that arises is whether it is possible to change the cultural associations of the *patriotism*, if the strongest Democratic candidate on the issue of *patriotism* in years succumbs to the tendency set by post 9/11 years?

He initially resisted wearing a flag pin because "my attitude was my patriotism is what's in my heart," Obama said. He changed his mind after an Internet rumor campaign about his patriotism. "I just wanted to make sure that nobody was confused because there were e-mails going out that somehow I didn't say the Pledge of Allegiance and so forth," he said. "I just wanted to knock down those lies." (USA Today<sup>40</sup>)

It would be an advantage to the Democratic narrative, if Obama's decision to wear a flag pin had not been a result of negative campaigning. This again proved the supremacy of the Republican narrative and it is only a question of time until Democrats stop relating to the value of *patriotism* at all. The tendency of avoiding the explicit talk about the meaning of *patriotism* can be read from the following excerpt:

But there was still something missing. I noticed it during Obama's response to a young man who remembered how the country had come together after Sept. 11 and lamented "the dangerously low levels of patriotism and pride in our country, the loss of faith in our elected officials." Obama used this, understandably, to go after George W. Bush. . . . But he never returned to the question of patriotism. He never said, "But hey, look, we're Americans. This is the greatest country on earth. We'll rise to the occasion." (Time<sup>41</sup>)

So to conclude, although Barack Obama is not avoiding the debates about his patriotism, he is still unable to raise the issue by himself in offensive against the Republican Party (an even more complex issue if McCain's career as soldier is taken into account). This is due to strong cultural association of *patriotism* to American identity that has been implanted into popular narrative by the conservatives. The above excerpts proved that it was the conservatives who branded Democrats with all the *unpatriotic* and *un-American* tags that resonate in voters in an extent that can affect voting behavior by the successful use of the brain's association network. So it is not an extreme opinion to assess that, in contemporary political and consequently cultural climate, the country is still leaning to the right, at least in the popular concepts of *patriotism* and *elitism* discussed so far.

### 3.2.1.3. Racism

According to Westen's studies, most Americans are ambivalent about race. On the conscious level they would rarely identify themselves as prejudiced against people of a different race. Research on the unconscious level, however, as Westen (2007, p. 236) put it "finds that, irrespective of what [they] may feel and believe consciously, most white Americans – including many who hold consciously progressive values and attitudes – harbor negative associations toward people of color." This can be exemplified in the judicial system where the defendants whose facial features appear more "African" (i.e. darker skin), the more likely are to be sentenced to prison; or, in employers who tend to interview applicants with "white" names more often than those with "black" names. Therefore, the unconscious prejudice, which occurs through the activation of thoughts, feelings, motives, and stereotypes outside of awareness, is more powerful than the conscious feelings about race - the finding that can also be applied to voter behavior.

When Barack Obama referred to Middle-American economic anxiety with his now famous quote that started accusations of him being *elitist*: "It's not surprising that they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them ... as a way to explain their frustrations," (<sup>42</sup>, Washington Post) he has also described the above mentioned unconscious prejudices of many Americans. According to the *Washington Post* article:

He referred to "a similar anger" existing within "the white community" that politicians have routinely exploited on issues such as crime and welfare. America, in this view, is beset by anxiety and fear and resentment and racial stalemate... (Washington Post<sup>43</sup>)

As noted, these prejudices are constantly being used by politicians, but according to Westen (2007, p. 220), the secret of a successful campaign that exploits Americans' ambivalence about race is not to talk openly about it. That is why Nixon spoke of *law and order*, Reagan made use of phrases such as *welfare queens* and *states' rights*, and George H. W. Bush declared Dukakis *soft on crime*. These changes in vocabulary were directed towards traditional Southern Democrats who sworn not to vote Republicans for a reason rooted in the aftermath of the Civil War – the Republican Party was the party that liberated slaves as well as sent carpetbaggers to replace the established system in the South. For long were the Southern Democrats, comprising mostly from white Southern population, loyal to their party, but with the Segregation

policies of 1960s and changes in the Republican dictionary they switched their partisan allegiance. In the context of Nunberg's linguistic theories, this, again, reflects Republicans' superior language competence. On the other hand, these "code words" for racist policies made it impossible for Democrats to openly call the Republican Party racist and so were Democrats forced to speak evasively about issues such as affirmative action, welfare, or crime in the inner cities.

It would be superficial to claim these prejudices of mostly Southern whites long gone. Rather, as many of the excerpts prove, to quote at least one:

Racial attitudes have changed dramatically in the United States over the past several decades, of course, and overtly racist beliefs are much less prevalent among white Americans of all classes today. But a more subtle form of prejudice, which social scientists sometimes call symbolic racism, is still out there – especially among working-class whites. (Washington Post<sup>44</sup>)

these prejudices are still valid for the 2008 elections and were even magnified by the historical presidential bid of Barack Obama who has become the first African American with the realistic chance to get to the White House. Whether the negative campaigning from the Republican Party makes use of conscious or unconscious level of associations is the main purpose of the following analysis.

The most serious threat to Obama's campaign yet is present in his spiritual leader Reverend Jeremiah Wright, especially by the controversy around publicly broadcasted sound-bites of his sermons in March 2008. As has been mentioned previously, this issue has been discussed also in connection to the "patriotism problem" of Barack Obama due to the frequent repetition of Wright's quote "God Damn America," for its treatment of racial minorities. However, the claim that this is more of a racial issue is supported by Obama's consequential speech on race relations and country's racial schism. Moreover, Obama who was believed to be a post-racial candidate, and for this purpose, avoided the subject of race in his campaign, suddenly had to take a stand on race issue that could define him as a "black" presidential candidate.

In terms of Westen's theory, the attempt of Barack Obama to explain or even distance himself from the pastor's comments addressed only the conscious level of racial prejudice. The polls taken in the aftermath of the first wave of Wright controversy show that Obama did not lose much of his voter support. The following excerpts show the conscious effects of the speech:

There was a [national conversation about race] for maybe a day or two and then we moved onto other issues. (Bloomberg.com<sup>45</sup>)

It was an important speech for a black man who wants to be president, but it didn't directly address the difficult situation with Reverend Wright. (The Boston Globe<sup>46</sup>)

Yet, the problem runs much deeper than acknowledging Obama's speech. His unwillingness to distance himself from the pastor completely, although he distanced himself from those controversial sermons, allowed, that the opposition, whether it be Republicans or Hillary Clinton, managed to associate him with all the racial ambiguity that influences the voting behavior of mostly the white working class voters (*symbolic racism*).

By maintaining his association with Wright while the controversy percolated, Obama gave his political enemies a chance to tie him to Wright's statements. (The Boston Globe<sup>47</sup>)

First, he didn't see how regular folks who saw the videos of the Reverend Jeremiah Wright wouldn't be able to get them out of their heads. (Bloomberg.com<sup>48</sup>)

You have a fair number of voters who are ambivalent on race. They have positive views on some aspects of race, but their negative views can be activated by something like Reverend Wright controversy. It gives them a reason to vote against [Obama]. (New York Times<sup>49</sup>)

You can't be with someone for 20 years, call him your mentor and not know about his racist and anti-American views. (Washington Times<sup>50</sup>)

At this point, some statistics may be useful. By May 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Fox News poll showed that "48 percent of white Democrats surveyed said they are less likely to vote for Obama because of Wright" (Washington Post<sup>51</sup>). By May 11<sup>th</sup>, the polls from primaries from Indiana and North Carolina indicated that almost half of the voters in both states indicated the recent controversy over Obama's former minister as an important factor in their decision (Washington Post<sup>52</sup>). By May 27<sup>th</sup>, the West Virginia voter polls showed that one in five white voters said the race of the candidate was a factor in their choice and only one-third of them said they would back Obama over McCain in November (USA Today<sup>53</sup>).

So by the time of Obama's complete condemnation of Wright and his parting from Wright's church in May 2008, the damage on the voters' unconscious level of racial prejudice was already done. The explanation lies, in accordance with Westen's theories, in the associative networks of the brain. However, impact of the unconscious

effect of this issue has been magnified by its close resemblance to George H. W. Bush's campaign against Michael Dukakis in 1988, that is, to *the Willie Horton controversy*.

Obama's opponents in the media have done their best to make Jeremiah Wright a household name. And before this contest is over, Wright is going to be Willie Hortonized – that is, converted into an ever-present threat to white America. (Washington Post<sup>54</sup>)

The case of an Afro-American Willie Horton is the best example of exploitation of American racial prejudices in the issue of crime. Willie Horton was a convicted murderer who on his weekend furlough raped a woman. In his campaign, Dukakis kept defending the furloughs while Republicans were against them. It was Dukakis stubbornness to admit that Horton should not have been on furlough at all because he saw that if he admits it, the opposition would make him look like he did not have a strong stance on issues. The climax of the negative campaign came when Dukakis was not able to answer the hypothetical question, whether he would have supported a death penalty for a man who had raped his wife. Republicans have been for long before branding Democrats with *soft on crime* label but in this case, this label was the most decisive in George H. W. Bush's victory.

According to Westen (2007, p. 64), the Willie Horton ad was “surely one of the low points in American electoral history.” Because of its crude negativity, the Bush campaign could not afford to run it in his name and so an “independent” committee took responsibility for it. At this point, there is a strong uniformity with the Jeremiah Wright advertisements:

[Willie Horton ad] was done by a renegade, Jesse Helms-affiliated, North Carolina committee, the same kind of committee that was running Jeremiah Wright ads in . . . North Carolina primary, ads that of course didn't cost Obama anything with black voters, but may well have played role in his losing the white vote in that state to Hillary Clinton by double digits. (Real Clear Politics<sup>55</sup>)

According to Westen (2007, p. 67), the goal of the Willie Horton advertisement was to “activate fear and loathing,” in which it succeeded. The number of media coverage, as well as recent poll numbers, indicate strong racial prejudice against Obama, especially in Southern states as well as in areas with large black minority. It is therefore inevitable that the issue of Jeremiah Wright will become one of the most important factors in the general election campaign in case that Barack Obama wins the Democratic nomination and will run against John McCain in November 2008.

What remains for the GOP is a campaign premised more on issues of national identity, aimed largely at that portion of our population for which “American” is synonymous with “white” and “Christian”. . . In Appalachian America [. . .] a disproportionate number of people write “American” when answering the census question on ethnic origin. For some, “American” is a race – white – no less than a nationality, and it's on this equation that Republican prospect depend. (Washington Post<sup>56</sup>)

#### **3.2.1.4. Sexism**

With the historical candidacy of Hillary Clinton as the first woman in the contest for the White House, several voices were raised in concern whether the country is ready to accept a woman-president. Many thought that Clinton’s bid is damned from the beginning due to the lingering distrust of women in high political positions that stem from the history of unequal treatment of women in society.

Yet her campaign managed to resonate in voters, mainly because Clinton with her centrist political orientation is the compromise for many voters who dislike the way how President Bush ran the country but still do not feel inclined to open liberalism of the Democratic Party on many of the issues. However, the opponents of her campaign formed a wide Hillary-hating alliance, as illustrated by the *Financial Times* article “Hillary Clinton cannot let go of her dream.” This article, also featuring a caricature of Clinton as a small girl playing with her dolls in the doll house that looks like the White House, is just one example of the derogatory media coverage that her campaign had to face.

How much this opposition to her presidential bid has to do with the popularity of Barack Obama, unpopularity of her strategies of campaigning that resembled those of Republicans, or with the fact that she is a woman, remains yet to be concluded by historians and political analysts. This part of the thesis is focusing on a claim that much of the opposition to Hillary Clinton stems exactly from her being a woman.

But a larger factor is that Clinton is being held to a different standard than virtually any other candidate in history. That's being driven by Clinton fatigue, but it's also being driven by a concerted campaign that examines every action the Clintons take and somehow finds the basest, most self-serving motivation for its existence. Thus, in this case, when Clinton is simply doing what everyone else has always done, she's constantly attacked as an obsessed and crazed egomaniac, bent on self-aggrandizement at the expense of her party. Is there a fair amount of sexism in the way she's being asked to get out of the way so a man can have the job? (Real Clear Politics<sup>57</sup>)

The following few excerpts illustrate that the opposition treated her through the sexist remarks in the media comparatively harshly as they did Obama on elitism:

Everyone knows Mrs. Clinton’s electoral vulnerabilities – GOP consultant Mike Murphy jokes that “half of the country thinks she rides a broom.” (The Wall Street Journal<sup>58</sup>)

O’Reilly: But this is a broader-based discussion about you get a woman in the Oval Office, most powerful person in the world, what’s the downside?

Guest: You mean besides the PMS and the mood swings, right? (Fox News<sup>59</sup>)

Male pundit on Fox News: “When men hear Hillary Clinton speak, they hear, ‘Take out the trash’.” (New York Post<sup>60</sup>)

Questioner at a McCain event: “How can we beat the b----h?” (McCain laughed.) A male reporter who covers Clinton’s campaign told CNN that he thought the question was funny and asked, “What voter in general hasn’t thought that?” (New York Post<sup>61</sup>)

[Obama’s] description of Clinton attacks on him: “She’s got the kitchen sink flying, the china flying, the buffet coming at me.” (Washington Post<sup>62</sup>)

For many women, Clinton candidacy “has shattered myths and broken barriers and changed the America.” (New York Post<sup>63</sup>) For these, as another article (Real Clear Politics<sup>64</sup>) put it, “Obama is less the dashing dreamer and more the arrogant interloper dashing their dream” of seeing a woman president. With the possibility that Barack Obama wins the Democratic nomination, he will need to attract voters that chose Clinton over him in the primaries. This concerns not only racially prejudiced voters that have been mentioned previously, but especially white women who are offended by remarks that they believe are based on deep sexism in political environment.

Some media are questioning why are such expressions of sexism not treated as those of racism would be? When the racial stereotypes are compared to the examples of sexist remarks above, the racially motivated ones with the same structure would be strongly reprimanded in the media, while those sexist ones are prone to be treated as humorous. Several articles were pointing out the paradox where open “sexism is OK and everything is viewed as racist now” (Real Clear Politics<sup>65</sup>).

It has become a commonplace for Obama supporters to view the Clintons as having made racist appeals in attempting to slow Obama’s momentum, and for Clinton partisans to see Obama as the all-too-willing beneficiary of an even more embedded – and accepted – misogyny in the American media and public life. (Real Clear Politics<sup>66</sup>)

The conclusion of the two subchapters on *racism* and *sexism* points to two symptoms of the contemporary American culture that were thought to be marginal in a narrative that builds on a concept of *equal opportunity*. Even more that because the two historical campaigns, of Hillary Clinton as the first woman, and of Barack Obama as the

first African American, turned the supporters of the Democratic Party into mutual recriminations between the Obama and Clinton camps. The liberal movement that promotes equality of all Americans, no matter their race, economic background or gender, is suddenly accused of being too racist and too sexist. Of course, this paradoxical situation can only mean more votes for John McCain and the Republican Party.

### **3.2.2. Conservative narrative issues**

Most of the books written after 1990 consulted in the process of writing this thesis predicted a slow but certain political realignment of the country to the right, basing the claims on the Republican linguistic and psychological advantage in addressing the electorate. Hunter, Westen, Hamburger and Wallsten, as well as Micklethwaith, see the greatest cultural and political advantage of the conservatives in their strong narrative that is presented as a unique set of basic values and beliefs most Americans can connect with.

With President Bush's rising unpopularity, however, even the conservative media tend to describe the situation before the elections of 2008 as a crisis within the Republican Party. Still, it is a crisis of the party, not of the conservative values it stands for. Therefore, it is necessary for the party to make the voters distinguish between the traditional values of the conservatives that are deeply embedded in the common American culture and all the negative trends Bush administration either caused or did not address.

#### **3.2.2.1. Limited government**

The conservatives inherited much of its narrative from the Reagan era – the strong stance on *limited government* is the most important issue. With the growing deficit, the Republican Party blames George W. Bush for destruction of the agenda he ran on as an heir to Reagan legacy.

The Reagan era in American politics is about to end, and we have George W. Bush to thank for its demise. Regardless of who takes the oath of office in January, the paradigm that reigned for nearly three decades – the notion that government is useless, if not inherently evil – is no longer operative. (Washington Post<sup>67</sup>)

We should be winning in certain areas just by being Republicans. Yet being a

Republican isn't good enough anymore. Voters are tired of buying GOP package and finding a big-government liberal agenda inside. What we need is not new advertising, but truth in advertising. (The Wall Street Journal<sup>68</sup>)

The recent problem with the notion of limited government is not only in the deficit created by Iraq War but also in the various acts of the Bush administration, such as the Patriot Act, that intrudes into private sphere and limits people's civil rights. However, this kind of activist government is not so much of a concern in the 2008 elections than the solution to the economic crisis is – in the New York Times/CBS Poll<sup>69</sup> conducted in April 2008 only 17 percent of respondents named war as their primarily concern in comparison with 37 percent that named the economy and the homeowners' crisis.

According to the same article<sup>70</sup>, Americans blame government officials (40 percent) for the crisis more than banks (28 percent) or home buyers and other borrowers (14 percent). A clear majority of respondents favor governmental help for individuals but not for financial institutions. The same poll<sup>71</sup> showed that 43 percent of those surveyed would prefer a larger government that provided more services, while identical 43 percent want smaller government that provided fewer services.

Therefore, with the rising deficit and economic crisis, it is going to be very difficult for John McCain to justify his belief in limited government and unrestricted economy. At this point of the subject, a comparison of liberal and conservative media bias may be fitting. Conservative media such as *Washington Times* describe McCain's proposed policy in a positive way in concord with the conservative narrative.

As the economy sours, voters are increasingly demanding immediate government relief – a boost for Democrats who propose just that sort of quick fix, but a problem for Republican Sen. John McCain, whose focus has been on longer-term solutions such as tax and spending cuts and free trade. (Washington Times<sup>72</sup>)

Those twists and turns have left voters uncertain and looking for “an activist government right now,” Mr Morici [professor at the University of Maryland] said, which puts pressure on Mr. McCain to find a plan that will help in the short-term while keeping true to his long-term, limited-government principles. (Washington Times<sup>73</sup>)

On the other hand, according to a *Washington Post* article<sup>74</sup>, both of his economic advisors have reputations of aggressive capitalists. This could hurt McCain when he starts to be compared to Herbert Hoover.

Democratic opponents are already plotting attacks on . . . “dog eat dog capitalism.” . . . McCain is counting on people having very short memories. (Washington Post<sup>75</sup>)

In a speech last week, Mrs. Clinton compared Mr. McCain's approach to that of Herbert Hoover, and said, "I don't think we can afford four more years of that kind of inaction." (New York Times<sup>76</sup>)

It turns out that if government declines to adequately regulate or even monitor the financial system, unfettered markets can make catastrophic blunders. (Washington Post<sup>77</sup>)

However, it was exactly this kind of criticism that forced McCain to revise his stance on the governmental aid to the homeowners. Democrats have managed to start a negative campaign making use of the same association networks as Republicans use against Democrats in branding them as *unpatriotic* or *elitist*. This reduced the Democratic disadvantage in productively using the language and emotions in sending their message to voters. The same psychological networks were used when McCain argued that the governmental help to "the speculative lenders and reckless home buyers" would be "a massive *bailout* that put debt on future generations" (New York Times<sup>78</sup>):

The Bush administration dismissed such ideas [rescue homeowners] as bailouts and vowed to veto even modest Democratic bills to help homeowners. Mr. McCain asserted this week that "it is not the duty of government to bail out and reward those who act irresponsibly. (New York Times<sup>79</sup>)

McCain was soon charged with being insensitive and *out of touch* with the needs of the average Americans (New York Times<sup>80</sup>). Successful Democratic counter-campaign resulted in that McCain switched his positions and is now advocating governmental intervention in issues such as the mortgage crisis, climate change and high energy prices. However, the Democratic negative portrayal of McCain did not finish there. For his revised stance on the homeowner aid, he was promptly charged with being a *flip-flopper* – a term that Republicans invented to describe John Kerry's changing attitude on Iraq War.

There are, however, two problems with the above-mentioned Democratic counter-campaign and changes in the McCain's attitude, both hurting the election prospects of the Democratic Party rather than McCain's. The first being the fact, that it was Hillary Clinton whose campaign camp was prompt and creative in associating McCain with the negative narrative. And, according to recent course of the Democratic primaries, she seems to be the weaker candidate that might not win the nomination for the general elections, so there is a chance that Barack Obama, who is known for his condemnation of such practices, will not be able to attack McCain in the general

election campaign in a way that would resonate with voters. The second problem lies in the fact that McCain now supports governmental intervention in the issues for which many independent voters previously chose the Democratic Party. Moreover, McCain is trying to connect with Reagan's narrative that could attract even more independent voters:

When Senator John McCain was asked . . . how he plans to balance the budget, he said that he hoped to do so by stimulating economic growth – and approvingly cited the example of President Ronald Reagan. “I do not believe in a static economy,” McCain said. “I believe that when there's stimulus for growth, when there's opportunity, when people keep more of their money – and the government is the least efficient way to spend your money – that economies improve.” (New York Times<sup>81</sup>)

### 3.2.2.2. Compassionate conservatism and “Change You Deserve” slogan

Much criticism has been sent towards Bush's agenda of *compassionate conservatism* which was one of his signature issues he managed to win in 2000 and 2004. According to Tom Hamburger and Peter Wallsten (2006, p. 119), the agenda of *compassionate conservatism* was a linguistically skillful use of popular concept of compassion with the conservative concept of government that is less active in welfare. The main aim of the policy was to “encourage religious organizations to battle poverty and other social ills” but it turned into a political tool when the government awarded grants to faith-based organizations that were helping to organize support for the Republican Party (p. 125). Liberally leaning author Langdon Morris (2004, p. 24) dismissed the term as one of the great nonsense in conservative narrative.

Today, the concept is being criticized even by the Republican senators. However, they focus on this policy in its original meaning as presented by President Bush – that it is a kind of governmental intervention in matters of welfare: “Compassionate conservatism convinced the American people to elect the party that was truly skilled at activist government: the Democrats.” (The Wall Street Journal<sup>82</sup>)

Nevertheless, they perceive it as a fallacy inconsistent with what the GOP stands for, especially when taking into account conservative concept of *justice* as discussed in the first chapter. The criticism is even sharper as it comes through one of the most conservative media in the United States – *Wall Street Journal*<sup>83</sup>:

The essential argument that Republicans should orient policy around how our ideas will affect the poor, the widow, the orphan, the forgotten and the “other” is indisputable . . . Yet conservatives are conservatives because our policies promote deliverance from

poverty rather than dependence on government. . . . Common sense and the Scriptures show that true giving and compassion require sacrifice by the giver. This is why Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell his possessions, not his neighbor's possessions. Spending other people's money is not compassionate.

The traditional conservative meaning of the concept of *justice* is being often used in the 2008 campaign, mostly as a cure to negative outcomes of the Bush administration. As discussed in the first chapter, the *justice* in the conservative sense means the distinction *deserving v. undeserving Americans* (those undeserving being mostly people undereducated, unemployed or living in poverty). An attempt of returning the Republican narrative to this original meaning is best exemplified in the new slogan of the party for the 2008 elections: “Change You Deserve.”

“Listen, I think that Americans know that Washington is broken, isn’t it?” [House minority leader Joe Boehner] asked. “As Republicans, we have to show them that we can help fix their problems and give them the kind of change they deserve.” (New York Times<sup>84</sup>)

After the outburst of criticism on the governmental division in the wake of the economic crisis between *deserving* businesses and borrowers and *undeserving* homeowners, the Republican Party representatives changed the rhetoric and started actively wooing voters by describing them as those *deserving*. This is paradoxical as the homeowners that now face foreclosure are, in terms of the traditional conservative narrative of competition, the losers and in no way deserving the help of the government. Moreover, as seen from the following excerpts, John McCain applies the myth of *the American Dream* to his speeches, which is a powerful tool to relate his policy to voters emotionally:

McCain: “Let me make it clear that in these challenging times, I am committed to using all the resources of this government and great nation to create opportunity and make sure that every deserving American has a good job and can achieve their American Dream.” (Washington Post<sup>85</sup>)

Senator John McCain, who drew criticism last month after he warned against broad government action to solve the deepening mortgage crisis, pivoted Thursday and called for the government to help qualified homeowners with subprime mortgages refinance and get federally guaranteed 30-year mortgages. [McCain said,] “There’s nothing more important than keeping alive the American dream to own your home, and priority number one is to keep well-meaning, deserving home owners who are facing foreclosure in their homes.” (New York Times<sup>86</sup>)

But still, even if McCain applies the term *deserving* to ordinary people, his policy proposals are more oriented towards big businesses, whom the Republican Party

considers *even more deserving*. This tendency is observed, for example, in the *Washington Post* article “McCain’s Plan for Working Class Offers Plenty for Corporate World”<sup>87</sup>:

Sen. John McCain yesterday offered sweeping rhetoric about the economic plight of working-class Americans, promising immediate assistance even as he spelled out a tax and spending agenda whose benefits are aimed squarely at spurring corporate growth.

It can be concluded that the measures promised by the Republican Party to address the economic crisis are still in accordance with the conservative concept of *justice*. However, due to the unpopularity of government inaction in this matter as well as the criticism from the opposition that compares the Republican’s advocacy of free-market principles to those of Herbert Hoover during the Great Depression, the Republican presidential candidate as well as the party itself has to use populist rhetoric in order to attract voters.

### **3.2.2.3. Healthcare**

One of the critical problems in contemporary United States is the healthcare – for millions of Americans a change in the system is needed, however, the centralized system of healthcare is in the popular terms of free-market economy un-American. Therefore, Clinton’s proposal of ‘mandated’ insurance has been criticized as well as is its milder version proposed by Obama (that would still leave millions uninsured).

McCain said his Democratic opponents rely too much on government. He told . . . that he requires no mandates, because “that’s what big government is all about.” . . . McCain’s healthcare plan hews to a longtime GOP approach of emphasizing the free market. (USA Today<sup>88</sup>)

McCain: “My approach to transforming health care is to put families in charge.” (USA Today<sup>89</sup>)

The Republican Party has once again done a lot of research on how to disguise their solution of maintaining the existing situation behind a “change” slogan. Primarily, they achieved it through the use of language as they named the broad plan that includes the issue of healthcare *American Families Agenda*. Secondly, the agenda incorporates the conservative narrative of not only free-market but also, and more importantly, of *traditional values*, of which one of the most important is the *family*. Proposal of tax credits for individuals will still leave millions uninsured, nevertheless it was described as a way “how to *right* the ship” by a Harvard professor (Washington Post<sup>90</sup>).

#### 3.2.2.4. Bush's third term

As mentioned before, George W. Bush is the single most important factor that causes the unpopularity of the Republican Party before 2008 elections. The Democratic candidates as well as liberal media try to connect McCain with Bush, often describing future McCain presidency as *Bush's third term*.

Such connection tries to abuse the McCain willingness to continue the costly and unpopular War in Iraq as long "as necessary to bring peace to Iraq." However, in the popular discourse, the connection will be very hard to establish due to several factors. First, McCain is known as an opponent not only to Bush in the primaries in 2000 but also to many of his policies. And the second is McCain's story of a war hero and a great patriot:

Mr. McCain's biography came in useful after his campaign was all but written off last summer. Advertisements and Web videos featuring images of him as a prisoner of war in a hospital bed helped persuade voters to take a second look. (New York Times<sup>91</sup>)

According to Westen (2007, p. 119), such positive or negative associations to a candidate are far much better predictors of voting behavior. This is because the likeability of a candidate is measured in feelings not in policies he/she stand for – and so if voters disagree with the candidate on some issues they often will still vote for him/her on the basis of their gut-level sense. Creating voters' negative associations of Barack Obama through his negative portrayal in the media has proven to be a successful campaign tool for Republicans yet again in 2008 - and a reason why many supporters of Hillary Clinton say that they will vote for John McCain in case Obama wins the Democratic nomination.

Still, being seen with the unpopular president may underscore McCain's appeal to the moderates within the Party as well as to independents voters. This is why during McCain's endorsement by Bush in White House in early February 2008, and even when President Bush joined McCain's fundraising events in May, the two kept a strict distance from each other.

Every shot that comes out through election day where McCain is sharing a podium with the president is going to be a day when more ammunition is provided for the Democrats for the fall campaign. (Washington Post<sup>92</sup>)

The following are two excerpts that illustrate, in the first instance, the negative campaigning by Obama trying to connect the two Republicans and, in the second one,

McCain's typical answer to such attempts:

Obama: No cameras, no reporters. And we all know why. Senator McCain doesn't want to be seen, hat in hand, with the president whose failed policies he promises to continue for another four years." (New York Times<sup>93</sup>)

"You will hear from my opponent's campaign in every speech, every interview, every press release that I'm running for President Bush's third term," McCain said. "You will hear every policy of the president described as the Bush-McCain policy. Why does Senator Obama believe it's so important to repeat that idea over and over again? Because he knows it's very difficult to get Americans to believe something they know is false." (Washington Times<sup>94</sup>)

Both sides clearly recognize that McCain's success in the general elections depends on distinguishing himself from the president. But it is McCain's popularity as an authentic personality that makes him sustain these attacks with such an ease, that is, by a single sentence that it is "not true." However, as popular as Obama is among many voters, he is not able to dismiss claims of his non-patriotism and elitism even with a much bigger effort than that of McCain's, mostly because of the opposition and media regular portrayal of Obama as an inauthentic American. This, again, may point to Democrats' inability to turn the popular discourse into their advantage. And respectively, if Democrats let the opposition control the discourse, they let them control the issues of the media coverage, and, consequently, they lose the control over the associations that voters create in their minds.

### **3.3. Conclusion**

This chapter tried to summarize the contemporary situation in the electoral politics as seen through media. It was, however, not inclusive of all issues that will influence the outcome of the elections. Not mentioned were the cultural issues of gay marriage (which, again, raised a wave of controversy after the California Supreme Court ruling) and abortion. These are the traditional issues discussed in the course of culture war where positions of the political parties are quite stable. Although there was a lot of stereotyping of Democratic candidates on these issues in the past months, they again, can be explained by Hunter's concept of labeling the opposition by its extreme representation. From the non-cultural issues that were not covered either but may have an influence on voting behavior, are the old age of John McCain and Barack Obama's inexperience in foreign affairs two of the most discussed. These two are, however,

going to be briefly discussed in the fourth chapter when dealing with their campaign advertisement and its effects.

From the overview of issues covered, the question that arises is whether the ideological war that has been fought primarily through cultural issues could be won through policy, i.e. whether the Democratic Party economic policy can win in the culturally conservative electorate that is disgusted only by the policy of Bush administration and not necessarily that of the Republican Party as such. As the history of elections since Nixon would prove that the elections were won on cultural rather than economic issues, in 2008 it will be necessary for the liberals to create a narrative that would be culturally inspiring, and for the conservatives a narrative that would alter the negative views of their economic policy that arose from the late economic crisis.

Therefore, while the Democrats have to focus on solving their problems with narrative on symbolic issues (elitism, patriotism or religion), the Republicans, as pointed out by Rove in the beginning of the analytical part, have to formulate their policy and its implementation in sharp contrast to the liberal agenda that seems to have met the needs of voters in the economic crisis. But in a situation, where the conservative journalists as well as the interest groups fight for the Republican cause through the symbolic issues, the possibility of influencing voting behavior through the use unconscious associations is very high, as recent polls would confirm (or, as has many times been reflected on in Comedy Central's shows as the Daily Show with Jon Stewart or the Colbert Report).

The next chapter is going to use all these findings in order to analyze television advertisement of the candidates and assess to what extent they are able to find the balance between addressing the policy and the symbolic issues.

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1 May 4, 2008 USA TODAY/Gallup Poll results  
2 Rove, 2008, May 15, ¶3  
3 Dionne, 2008, May 26, ¶2  
4 Radosh, 2007, May 26 ¶11  
5 Meyerson, ¶6  
6 Gerson, 2008, May 23, ¶6  
7 Rove, 2008, May 8, ¶7  
8 Fund, J., ¶2  
9 Crouch, 2008, May 14, ¶7  
10 Abramson, ¶3  
11 Frank, ¶4  
12 Parker, ¶13  
13 Powell & Zeleny, 2008, May 6, ¶6  
14 Broder, J. M. (2008, April 14). ¶3  
15 Frank, ¶ 3 and 8  
16 Murray & Bacon, 2008, April 14, ¶6  
17 Gerson, 2008, April 16, ¶4  
18 Gerson, 2008, April 16, ¶8  
19 Frank, ¶5  
20 Kristol, 2008, April 14  
21 Novak, 2008, May 12, ¶2  
22 Powell & Zeleny, 2008, May 6, ¶3  
23 Bai, ¶8  
24 Zeleny, 2008, April 16, ¶15  
25 Dickerson, 2008, April 9, ¶3-4  
26 Milbank, ¶10  
27 Alexovich, 2008, April 14  
28 Nagourney & Zeleny, ¶20-21  
29 Rutenberg & Zeleny, ¶4-8  
30 Meyerson, ¶7  
31 Klein, ¶6  
32 Meyerson, ¶5  
33 Meyerson, ¶3  
34 Akers, ¶13  
35 Milbank, ¶2  
36 Rutenberg, 2008, May 27, ¶3  
37 Rutenberg & Zeleny, ¶15-16  
38 Dionne, 2008, May 26, ¶12  
39 Canellos, ¶6  
40 Kiely, ¶12-13  
41 Klein, ¶4  
42 Gerson, 2008, April 16, ¶3  
43 Gerson, 2008, April 16, ¶10  
44 Abramowitz, 2008, May 11, ¶7  
45 Hunt, 2008, March 30, ¶14  
46 Canellos, ¶8  
47 Canellos, ¶9

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48 Carlson, ¶3  
49 Powell & Zeleny, 2008, May 6, ¶15  
50 Sowell, ¶14  
51 King, ¶16  
52 Abramowitz, 2008, May 11, ¶4  
53 Page, ¶21  
54 King, ¶24  
55 Estrich, ¶9  
56 Meyerson, ¶9  
57 Stark, 2008, April 3, ¶13  
58 Fund, ¶10  
59 O'Reilly, ¶4-5  
60 Powers, ¶11  
61 Powers, ¶13  
62 Dionne, 2008, April 22, ¶8  
63 Powers, ¶3  
64 Tilove, ¶4  
65 Tilove, ¶14  
66 Tilove, ¶13  
67 Robinson, 2008, May 16, ¶1-2  
68 Coburn, ¶3  
69 Leonhardt & Connely, ¶16  
70 Leonhardt & Connely, ¶9-10  
71 Leonhardt & Connely, ¶25  
72 Dinan, 2008, March 20, ¶1  
73 Dinan, 2008, March 20, ¶7-8  
74 Weisman, 2008, April 2, ¶3  
75 Weisman, 2008, April 2, ¶4  
76 Andrews, ¶14  
77 Robinson, 2008, May 16, ¶10  
78 Alexovich, 2008, April 14, ¶8  
79 Andrews, ¶8  
80 Cooper, 2008, April 11, ¶6  
81 Cooper, 2008, April 9, ¶1 and 6  
82 Coburn, ¶5  
83 Coburn, ¶6-7  
84 Alexovich, 2008, May 14, ¶7  
85 Balz, ¶4  
86 Cooper, 2008, April 11, ¶1-2  
87 Shear & Weisman, ¶1  
88 Jackson, 2008, April 28, ¶6 and 8  
89 Jackson, 2008, April 28, ¶3  
90 Will, ¶ 8  
91 Cooper, 2008, March 31, ¶3  
92 Pelofsky, ¶9  
93 Meyerson, ¶9-10  
94 Feller, ¶9

#### 4. Campaign narratives

The television advertising during the campaigns becomes one of the purest forms of political advertising. In comparison with printed or radio advertisement, it has an advantage of using more channels at the same time – it combines visual message with the audio message, while the combination creates yet another meaning. In comparison with media coverage of the candidate, it is not manipulated by media bias, and therefore, sends exactly the same message the candidate wants to convey. When using the word ‘exactly,’ it is necessary to add, that it presupposes the knowledge of the meanings and connotations of the vocabulary, symbols and myths used in the advertisement, as well as a mastery of combining them into one coherent message.

As discussed throughout the third chapter, the campaign advertisement uses the meanings and connotations in order to stimulate the right set of emotions in the viewer. According to Drew Westen (2007, pp. 16; 137), there are several elements which a successful campaign combines. These are (in the following order):

- a) emotionally compelling lead – e.g. a moral issue facing the country, a personal narrative of the candidate, a story about a person the candidate has met on a campaign trail, or an instance of injustice in society;
- b) contrast between the two candidates or parties, creating emotional resonance with one and dissonance with the other;
- c) description of policy, i.e. of solving the problem, but a candidate should use policy positions to illustrate their principles, not the other way around;
- d) a conclusion that appeals emotionally, i.e. manages positive feelings towards the candidate’s personal characteristics.

On the basis of the previous model, this chapter tries to analyze the television advertisement of the 2008 presidential candidates<sup>1</sup>. Incorporating the finding of the previous three chapters, it focuses on how is the campaign advertisement constructed and how are the issues addressed. The analysis tries to assess whether the candidates are able to incorporate their messages into a higher narrative of their respective parties, that is, how they use vocabulary and create associations, especially by the terms as *the American Dream, values, family, middle-class, government, welfare, patriotism, elite, Iraq war, terrorism, taxes, hope, change*. And at last, it tries to examine the role music

and selection of images play in creating of the emotional appeal of the campaign advertisement. The analysis also deals with the message of *authenticity* of each candidate's public image and how it fits into the notion of the American character.

The main aim of this chapter is to exemplify the Republican dominance over the discourse through examination of the extent to which the Democratic candidates react to the issues of their narrative that have been stereotyped by Republicans, and the extent to which they acknowledged the necessity to change their traditional way of campaigning.

#### **4.1. Hillary Clinton**

The advertisements of the Hillary Clinton campaign chosen for the analysis are “Scranton,” and two of the “3AM” series - “Ringing” and “Children.” These were chosen because of their non-traditional structure of introducing the candidate.

##### **4.1.1. “Scranton”**

This advertisement could be categorized as biographical. But it is not a brief narrative of candidate’s life and motivations. Rather, it uses the imagery of childhood and nostalgia for ‘good old days’ in order to deliver a promise of optimistic future. For the purpose of this analysis, the transcript is broken into three thematic parts that will be each analyzed separately in order to describe the overall message conveyed by the advertisement.

- (1) [Black-and-white footage of a small girl scampering toward the camera, smiling, with her hand trying to touch the camera. Words “Hillary 1950” in the bottom right corner.]  
“This is me in Scranton, where my father was raised [image of little Hillary with her grandfather] and my grandfather worked in a lace mill [image of the mill].  
[image of the cottage] Every August, we’d pile into our car and head to our cottage on Lake Winola. There was no heat or indoor shower [image of little Hillary with her mother helping her down the stairs of the cottage (both dressed nicely)] — just the joy of family.” [image of little Hillary running towards her father holding her brother]

This part of the advertisement sends two important messages to voters. Next to the symbol of innocence of childhood, the nostalgic feeling of past is implied, that is in sharp contrast with recent economic situation. The image of a nicely dressed family of a mill worker going every summer to their nice white-painted cottage, those are the images today’s working-class aspire. This creates the first psychological association with promise of the optimistic future throughout the advertisement.

Never mind that their modest cottage did not have heating and showers, the family was happy to spend their time together. Yet, this is another implied promise of the better future for (not only) working class, this time one of better paid or newly created jobs, so that Americans will not need to work long hours or several jobs and families can spend more time together. The overall theme of family values sends a strong message to the voters, that this time, the Democratic candidate is not an elitist who concentrates on the policy only, but rather, that she thinks as the regular people and connect with their values. In terms of Westen's model of a successful campaign advertisement, this part is in accord with the first instance. What is remarkable is that it incorporates several different emotional leads – from the personal narrative of the candidate, through the nostalgia for the good old days to the issue of moral and economic injustice.

- (2) “I was raised on pinochle and the American dream. [image of the Rodham family, all smiling] I still have faith in that dream — it's just been neglected a little. [the same image of Hillary from the beginning]

In this part of the advertisement, a strong symbol of *the American Dream* is used. An allusion to the bleak economic situation is made, however, by using passive voice “it's been neglected” there is no explicit mention of the source of this situation. The reason is that, in the 2008 campaigns, the sources of the problems are well known to voters and so this advertisement, in order not to digress from its calm pace does not create any tensions but relies on the use of the psychological associations it inspires. The purpose of not creating any tension throughout the advertisement is maintained also by modifiers “just” and “little,” because even though Americans know the seriousness of their situation, the advertisement's goal is in the next step - to offer *hope*. According to Westen's model, this part corresponds with his second instance - although “Scranton” advertisement only implies the conflict it nonetheless fulfils the purpose stated by Westen.

- (3) We all need to dream it again, and I [the image changes into an image of an adult Hillary on campaign stage with microphone and the same smile, the statement “a President who will be strong for us” appear on screen] promise we will. I'm Hillary Clinton, and I approve this message.”

In the third part, the description of policy is missing, however, there is a promise of solving the situation, so that the American Dream can be lived by all Americans again. An implied meaning of this part could be summed up in one sentence: “If you

want to live your American Dream but the Bush administration created so many obstacles, there is a way – vote Hillary Clinton.” However, the appeal to voters to choose Clinton is, only implied, so that the audience does not feel forced.

The whole advertisement flows smoothly through fade outs of previous image. It nevertheless carries a strong emotional impact as it is based on childhood memories intensified by music that does not change throughout the advertisement and grainy black-white images, both implying the atmosphere of peace and calm. It has a soft and intimate feel that corresponds with the emotion of feeling safe and associating trust to the candidate. This factor influences her likeability and creates *authenticity* of her character as a caring person who would be “a president strong for *us*,” that is, for ordinary people, their needs and aspirations. And as she uses notions and avoids straightforward criticism that would create tension or polarization, the resulting advertisement is powerful in its ability to connect with variety of voters.

The promise of *optimism for future* is exceptional because it goes against “traditional” narratives of Democratic presidential candidates that focused in their campaigns mostly on the wrongs of the society that need to be cured through liberal agenda.

#### **4.1.2. “Children” and “Ringing”**

The two advertisements use the same imagery, yet they have completely different structure and convey different meanings. For the best illustration of the two approaches, after the brief analysis of “Children” the contrastive analysis with “Ringing” and “Scranton” follows.

##### “Children”

[whole advertisement uses an effect a dark blue hue]

[image of a house during a night]

“It’s 3am and your children are safe and asleep.

[changing images of sleeping children, phone rings repeatedly]

But there’s a phone in the White House and it is ringing. Something is happening in the world. Your vote will decide who answers that call, whether it is someone who already knows the world’s leaders, knows the military. Someone tested and ready to lead in a dangerous world.

[image of a mother entering the room to check on her sleeping children]

It’s 3am and your children are safe and asleep.

Who do you want answering that phone?”

[image of Clinton picking up the phone, talking, blue hue lifted, she is lit with white light of a lamp]. “I’m Hillary Clinton, and I approve this message.”

The advertisement has an original structure, as its plot is based on a question. It challenges the stereotypes through which was the Democratic Party branded as *weak* on national security and *soft on terrorism*. It also creates a contrast between the two Democratic candidates, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, where the latter is often described by the opposition as inexperienced – this being also the main theme of this advertisement. The advertisement presents a claim that Clinton is as qualified on the matter of foreign policy as McCain claims to be. Through the blue hue of the picture the advertisement implies pessimistic mood of the country in the course of Iraq war. The hue is replaced by bright light shining on Hillary Clinton - here, the light is a symbol of change. Moreover, the underlying theme of the advertisement is protection and trust, connecting the image of mother with the president, forming psychological associations between the emotional attachment to a mother and that to a candidate. The images and the music used are appropriate for the illustration of the meaning, however, in this advertisement, the symbolism of the message is dominant and more important.

Moreover, it is arguable, to what extent Clinton turns her disadvantage of a woman running for a high political position into an advantage through this mother metaphor. Especially, when the subject of this advertisement is national security, in which many describe Clinton’s disadvantage through sexist language stressing emotionality of women’s character.

### “Ringin’g”

[whole advertisement uses an effect a dark blue hue]

[image of a house during a night] “It’s 3am and your children are safe and asleep.  
[images of children sleeping]

But there’s a phone ringin’g [phone ringin’g] in the White House and this time, the crisis is economic [phone ringin’g] detail of hands counting one-dollar bills].

[still image of a house sign informing about a foreclosure] Home foreclosures mounting [phone ringin’g], [image of a pile of bills] markets teeterin’g [phone ringin’g]. [image of a worried couple studyin’g their bills]

John McCain just said the government shouldn’t take any real action [phone ringin’g] in the housing crisis. [image of an elder man studyin’g papers, ignorin’g the phone] He’d let the phone keep ringin’g [phone ringin’g]. [image of the same couple studyin’g their bills, this time not worried]

Hillary Clinton has a plan to protect our homes [phone ringin’g], create jobs [phone ringin’g]. [image of a boy sleepin’g calmly]

It's 3am [phone ringing], time for a president who's ready. [image of Clinton picking up the phone, talking], blue hue is lifted, she is lit with white light of a lamp. "I'm Hillary Clinton, and I approve this message."

The "Ringing" advertisement is much more simple in the structure as well as in the meanings conveyed, although it carries the same message – Hillary Clinton as the solution. The meaning, however, differs as this advertisement is anti-McCain while "Children" is anti-Obama with implicit positive associations to McCain. When taking into account Westen's model, "Children" includes all the instances, but could be compared to "Scranton" with its hidden meanings and complex structure. On the other hand, the "Ringing" advertisement can be split into all four instances. It begins with the emotionally compelling lead that describes the economic crisis with the emphasis on the homeowners facing foreclosures. The contrast is achieved by description of McCain's 'callous' approach to the problem, intensified by the image of a man ignoring the ringing; and thus creating negative associations to the Republican candidate. The third part informs that Hillary Clinton has a solution and is ready to implement it as a president. The advertisement has an emotional climax, as Hillary advocates *change* and *optimism*. This underlying theme is similar to that of "Children."

As to the imagery, while "Scranton" relies on creating the unconscious psychological associations, appeal of "Children" depends on ability to use the already existent associations. "Ringing," on the other hand, is explicit in its criticism of the opposition and therefore, the associations that are to be formed rely purely on conscious networks. "Ringing" is therefore very illustrative and the symbolism of "Children" is missing. It seems to follow the traditional Democratic narrative of emphasizing policy over creating the emotional appeal through positive image of the candidate. What is absent in this advertisement is the explicit use of notions of values, patriotism, class, family or the American Dream that could have been incorporated in order to initiate emotional response from voters. Moreover, both "3AM" advertisements fail to embrace the candidate as an *authentic* character that would distinguish her from the rest of the candidates and connect her to the ordinary Americans. This includes her portrayal in "Children" as well because the contrast on foreign policy experience distinguishes her from Obama but also equates with McCain.

## 4.2. John McCain

The three television ads of the John McCain ads chosen for the analysis are “True Conservative,” “Service to America: 624787” and a reaction to Clinton advertisement of the 3AM variety - “Ready.”

### 4.2.1. “True Conservative”

This advertisement builds upon John McCain’s positive public image and appeals to voters’ sense of patriotism.

- (1) [narrated by the announcer]  
[archive footage of McCain in hospital, words JOHN McCAIN, POW 1967-73 in the bottom left corner] As a prisoner of war, John McCain was inspired by Ronald Reagan [video footage of McCain and Reagan meeting and shaking hands, huge letters REAGAN REVOLUTION through the middle of the screen].

[McCain says:] “I enlisted as a foot soldier in the Reagan revolution.” [the words still there, footage of Reagan and McCain in office talking]

In order to attract viewers’ attention, the clip starts with archive footage of McCain as a prisoner of war, establishing the first emotional association to the candidate (feelings connected with respect or even admiration). This affirms McCain’s *authenticity* as a patriot and a hero. The following image captures McCain’s meeting with Ronald Reagan, who is perceived as the president with the strongest conservative legacy of all Republican politicians, the one that enabled the Republican Party to dominate both the politics and the culture since the 1980s. There are only few voters in the country who would not relate to Reagan positively. Therefore, after the initial positive identification of McCain as a hero, the image of the two men together creates association between the two that further influences voters on the necessity to admire both men in the same way. What is more, it presents implicit promise made by McCain that he would be the same president as Reagan was. In connection with the notion of *revolution*, a powerful symbol for a *change*, the change offered by McCain is coming after eight years of Bush administration that is believed to have failed the Reagan legacy. This first part of the advertisement follows the first Westen’s principle, i.e. establishes emotional contact with the audience. It, however, achieves more than that. This first part, through the successful connection of the candidate’s narrative with the Reagan’s, inspires in the voter the initial trust in the candidate and willingness to listen

further.

- (2) [image changes, black background, top centre with McCain's picture in front of a flag] Guided by strong conservative principles, he'll cut wasteful spending and keep taxes low. [the words CUT WASTEFUL SPENDING appear underneath McCain's picture, then KEEP TAXES LOW]

At this point of the advertisement, McCain connects further with the narrative of conservatism. It is done through the enumeration of the conservative economic principles that, in using Westen's model, also distinguishes the candidate from the opposition. However, the simple enumeration would be appealing mostly to the dispassionate part of brain<sup>2</sup>, and so the advertisement makes use of symbolism of the American flag, that is equally dominant on the screen as the image of the candidate. This is an appeal to the popular form patriotism that, as analyzed in the previous chapter, relies on demonstrative symbolism.

- (3) [image changes, footage of McCain talking, five flags on poles in background] A proud social conservative who will never waver. [screen splits into two, the left side is the continuing footage of McCain, the right side is a presentation of still pictures of soldiers.] The leadership and experience to call for the surge strategy in Iraq that is working.

The flags are visible in the first image of this part as well. They may have been intended to further enhance the sense of patriotism as it is used together with "proud" that the narrator uses to describe McCain. At this point, it is appropriate to mention the soundtrack of this advertisement. A dominant but slow orchestral brass invokes pomp or ceremony that is connected with the army, and therefore, the advertisement generally elicits feelings of patriotism.

The split of the image that follows is a skillful coupling of topics that uses the positive emotions stemming from the previously emphasized patriotism in order to neutralize the anxiety connected with the unpopular issue of Iraq War. The result of this is not only having the two interconnected on the unconscious level of association, but also creating a bridge between the policy and the optimistic message of the final part. In this case, the advertisement exactly follows Westen's advice of using the policy only for illustration of the principles, in this case, the "true conservative values." It may be interesting to focus on why the "social conservatism" part of the message is not embedded into any specific imagery. The reason is that McCain is not known in close connection to religious right<sup>3</sup> that has been setting the moral agenda during all

Republican administrations since Reagan. Therefore, the McCain campaign this way skillfully avoided an issue the candidate is not comfortable with.

- (4) [image changes, black screen with McCain campaign logo]  
John McCain - The true conservative [words TRUE CONSERVATIVE appear underneath McCain's name]. Ready to be commander-in-chief on Day One. [words COMMANDER IN CHIEF appear underneath]

From the concluding part of the advertisement the imagery stands out as the most worthwhile to analyze. The last two frames have the same format of black screen with John McCain's name. As the frames switch, the "true conservative" label is flipped into "commander in chief." This imagery sums up the message of whole advertisement, reminding the voter of all the connections between McCain and Reagan with emphasis on their *authentic* characters worthy of presidential office.

This advertisement is a fine example of proficient use of narratives on all levels as well as connecting all of them together – the advertisement starts with McCain's personal narrative, continues to McCain's political narrative that is derived from that of Reagan's, then it connects it with the one of the conservatism and finally, it ties McCain's conservative narrative to the Grand American – as a narrative of patriotism and success.

As a side note, the announcer's final line "Ready ... on Day One" was borrowed from the Clinton campaign, where Clinton uses the line for a symbolic contrast between her experience and Obama's inexperience. The intention of McCain using the slogan can be interpreted, in the context of this advertisement, as a reply to Clinton's campaign or even as a message of McCain's advantage stemming from his military status over the other candidates.

#### 4.2.2. "Service to America: 624787"

This advertisement as well as the "True Conservative" build on McCain's personal experience and speak to the voters' values, especially to the value of patriotism. What is special in this advertisement is its inverted structure when compared to the ones analyzed previously. It initially uses the Grand American Narrative in order to later exemplify the candidate as being in accordance with it.

- (1) [John McCain:] "Keep that faith. Keep your courage. Stick together. Stay strong. Do not yield. Stand up. We're Americans (loud applause in the background). And we'll never surrender."

This first part is very efficient in setting the tone of the advertisement. Not only are these the words of a strong leader but they also speak to the American sense of the national pride, that has been challenged by recent problems with economics, military interventions and negative image of the country abroad. It was also a powerful choice to start the message as it tone and volume produce a shock effect, and create as strong emotional response in viewers.

- (2) [orchestral music starts in background, dominant flute and quiet violins, calming, nicely flowing] [narrator:]

What must a president believe about us? [image of McCain on podium with A NATION OF COURAGE banner behind him] About America? That she is worth protecting? That liberty is priceless? [newspaper article “American values” in the collage with McCain’s recent image and his younger image when he came from Vietnam] Our people, honorable? Our future, [collage of yet another McCain’s recent image (with serious face) and one from the campaign with young students (all happy and smiling) with an article “McCain forges path to future”] prosperous, remarkable and free? [McCain’s image (giving speech) in collage with newspaper article McCain Promises Middle-Class Tax *Relief*”]

And, what must we believe about that president? [another collage of an article saying “McCain: Ready on Day One” with McCain’s image that depicts him as a strong leader – presidential looking] What does he think? Where has he been? [collage of “Time for a Real Hero” article and McCain’s image] Has he walked the walk?”

From the psychological point of view, this thematic second part of the advertisement works exactly like an advertisement of a product. It connects the next two instances according to Westen’s theory, as it sets the contrast with the opposition as well as introduces the candidate’s policies. None of the two are, however, made explicitly. The first instance is presented through the narrator and focuses on the voters’ private assumption of what the strong president should be like and also what the future of the country should be (protected, free, prosperous and brave). It therefore creates a wish to have such a president. In connection with the second instance, that is presented through the collages, i.e. visual part of the advertisement, it introduces McCain as an able leader, having the right principles and values to be the president the Americans wish for.

- (3) [video footage of McCain in army hospital after Vietnam]  
[music calms down, with quiet piano sound continuing]  
Interviewer: “What is your rank?”  
John McCain: “Lt. Commander in the Navy.”  
Interviewer: “And your official number?”  
John McCain: “624787.”

[a sound of a gong] [image of McCain's official campaign graphics]  
[narrator:] "John McCain. The American president Americans have been waiting for."

In the final part of the advertisement, the implied become explicit. The introduction of the conclusion is done in an original way. For creation of a even stronger emotional association to the candidate, the campaign bet on yet another mention of McCain's *authenticity* of a patriot that the McCain's public image is built on and serves as a distinguishing mark from the other candidates. The use of the archive footage of McCain as a soldier speaking to reporter can be interpreted as the report of the candidate to serve the country.

The final line of the advertisement, returns the viewer back to the Grand American Narrative, although it also implies that the other candidates have to be seen as un-American, because of lacking the correspondence with the narrative, i.e. with values set by it.

#### 4.2.3. "Ready"

This advertisement is a reaction to Clinton's "Ringing". Except the final frame (the image of the candidate), it uses the same footage (including images, effects, sounds) as the original one. What differs is the narration by the announcer:

"It's 3am and your children are safe and asleep. But there's a phone ringing in the White House and this time, the crisis is economic. Home foreclosures mounting, markets teetering."

"Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama just said they'd solved the problem by raising your taxes, more money out of your pocket. John McCain has a better plan. Grow jobs, grow our economy, not grow Washington."

"It's 3 am, time for a president that is ready."

As an answer to Clinton's use of negative campaigning against McCain is this advertisement efficient. It tries to create similar negative associations to the opposition's candidate as the original one. The most powerful is the utterance "more money out of your pocket" that relates to *tax-and-spend liberals* label. It also polarizes the two narratives, when it contrasts conservative ideas of "free market full of opportunity" with the liberal "big useless government".

However, the most striking achievement of this advertisement is incorporating an allusion to Barack Obama as an *alien figure* (that further activates association already created by the media, as analyzed in the third chapter). While Clinton's name is

pronounced correctly, Obama's is pronounced rapidly with shortened vowels, in a way that makes it sound Arabic, although his middle name is not mentioned. Therefore, it can be considered to be an example of negative campaigning employing a subliminal message.

### **4.3. Barack Obama**

The advertisements of the Barack Obama campaign chosen for the analysis are bibliographical "Opportunity," original "Join" and "Inspiring." All the advertisements are in accordance with the overall message of his campaigning - with the one concept of *hope* and *change*, however differ in the degree of success of incorporating this message into higher structures.

#### **4.3.1. "Join"**

[Obama:] "We want an end to this war, and we want diplomacy and peace. Not only can we save the environment, we can create jobs and opportunity. We're tired of fear; we're tired of division. We want something new. We want to turn the page. The world as it is is not the world as it has to be."

[Visual: photographs of young people, cheering crowds and Obama. Black background with various slogans as "We can end a war," "We can save the planet," "We can change the world," "Change begins with you," flash through the screen in between the photographs.]

When compared to the most political advertisements, "Join" is rather atypical. It uses modern vibrant music to create an atmosphere of cheer that is further developed by the energetic tone of the message.

The message consists of contrasting the contemporary political situation with the wishes of "us." The target audience of this advertisement are the younger generations and therefore, "we" includes young people that are depicted in the advertisement and the candidate as one of them. The advertisement makes use of images of young people gathered around Obama during his campaign speeches to further contrast the old and the new, to allude to the future and inspire to revolt ("Change begins with you.").

As the *change* is the main theme of "Join," Barack Obama has been clearly associated with this concept during his campaign. His call to change includes not only politics of the United States (division, fear-mongering, polarization of the society) but, idealistically, also the "world." The advertisement, therefore, tries to introduce Obama

as a candidate who has ability to solve domestic as well as global problems. Here, however, the advertisement lacks in portraying the candidate as *authentic*, mostly because he is often criticized for being inexperienced as a politician and he does not challenge this view in any way in this advertisement. Also, the concept of *change* in this advertisement is blurred as it only names its agents but not the means (policy).

The fast pace of the commercial can be counter-productive as it does not give enough explanations and relies exclusively on the charisma of the candidate. However, as mentioned previously, Obama is seen as a politician of hope and change by younger generations of voters who share his idealism. And as this advertisement is aimed primarily at such voters, Obama's public image does not suffer from this shortcoming of the narrative structure of the advertisement.

It could be argued that completely opposite associations are activated when viewed by the older generations or voters of Obama's opponenets, who are unable to relate to such a radical concept of *change*. Connecting these negatives with the charges against Obama analyzed in the third chapter (elitism as the most serious one), the positive identification of most voters with the candidate is impossible. Also in the view of Westen's theory, this advertisement does not follow the proposed structure.

#### 4.3.2. "Inspiring"

The advertisement is divided into three thematic parts in order to demonstrate a claim that they are disconnected and do not form a coherent narrative.

(1) [Obama:] We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes.

(2) [Narrator:] After college and law school, Barack Obama could have cashed in. Instead he fought for change. Working to rebuild an area torn apart by plant closings. [Professor Tribe:] It was inspiring, absolutely inspiring. To see someone as brilliant as Barack Obama take all of the talent and devote it to making people's lives better.

[Narrator:] In Illinois he brought Republicans and Democrats together, cutting taxes for workers, and winning health care for children.

[Senator Dillard:] Senator Obama worked on some of the deepest issues we had, and he was successful in a bipartisan way.

[Narrator:] And in the US Senate he's lead on issues from Arms Control to landmark ethics reform.

[Senator McCaskill:] It was hard to get that ethics bill passed. This is a man that knows how to get things done. He understands that we have to move forward with a different kind of politics.

(3) [Obama: ]There is not a liberal America, and a conservative America. There is the United States of America.

The first part is a wise inclusion of the symbolic reference to the Pledge of Allegiance as it helps Obama to challenge the claims of his lacking *patriotism* and to connect with the private assumptions of voters.

After the first contact with the audience is established, the advertisement continues to introduce the candidate. For higher credibility, it uses testimony of other people to introduce the character of the candidate. Nevertheless, this advertisement fails again in presenting Obama as *authentic*. It tells that Obama's career as a community organizer was a choice, without explaining his motivations. This makes him look *elitist* (in the sense as described in the third chapter), the one who knows more and is better than the others, even though the advertisement was probably meant to challenge these charges against him.

Although his life story is a subject of many other advertisements, e.g. "Opportunity," this fails to mention his humble origin and the life opportunity the good education gave him. The inspiration could be drawn from McCain's campaign, where they include his service and POW status in every possible message for a single purpose of connecting the candidate to the audience emotionally.

The other disadvantage in addressing voters, when compared to McCain, is that it uses the visual only to illustrate while McCain creates a completely new meaning through the use of images, and added value when combining the visual with the narration. Obama's failure to do so seriously distorts the psychological effect of the advertisement.

However, the biggest flaw of this advertisement is in its disconnectedness. As it has many subplots, it becomes hard to identify the one that was intended to dominate. Guessing from the opening and closing lines, the dominant message is the appeal to end the culture war and polarization of American society.

The problem transmitting this message arises especially through the second part of the advertisement, where the bipartisan action is mentioned only once throughout the advertisement (having a Republican senator telling about the political qualities of Obama is always a valuable plus in such an appeal).

As to the structure, the advertisement lacks contrasting and naming the opposing party. This is however understood as an attempt to unite – that is also the main theme of the advertisement.

The final part of the advertisement seems to be the most important one, in which Obama tries to address the original meaning of the Grand American Narrative, i.e.

concept of the unity (*One Nation under God*). However, such an appeal is idealistic because Obama calls to overcome the innate conflict in the American culture and politics. Moreover, in the conflict as it has been radicalized through the conservative interpretation of the narrative (as exemplified in the third chapter), the advertisement also fails to define the opposing, i.e. Democratic or liberal, narrative.

#### 4.3.3. “Opportunity”

- (1) My own story wouldn't be possible if it weren't for the American Dream.
- (2) I was raised by a single mom and my grandparents. My grandfather served in Patton's army. My grandmother worked on a bomber assembly line. They didn't have money but they gave me love, a thirst for education and a belief that we're all part of something larger than ourselves. So I worked my way through college and law school. I first came to Chicago because I saw people being laid off of steel plants that were closing and nobody was fighting for them. As an organizer with Christian churches I helped those workers, took their fight to the state senate, passing tax cuts and health care for families. In Washington I got better care for wounded troops who had been neglected and passed the toughest law ever to rein in lobbyists so we could make government work for people.
- (3) So I've seen the power of opportunity in America when it's working. I've lived it. If we don't let narrow interests capture the agenda in Washington there's no problem we cannot solve.

When compared to the previously analyzed “Inspiring,” this advertisement is more skillful in creating the candidate's personal narrative. As it explains his motivations, the advertisement succeeds in creating a credible narrative and establishes Obama's *authenticity*.

The advertisement shapes the Democratic narrative as it draws from concepts of welfare and opposition to unregulated free markets (mentions of steel plants, healthcare, lobbyists) and, moreover, as it uses the concept of the American Dream, it tries to incorporate this narrative into the Grand American narrative.

This incorporation is vital for Obama's credibility as an authentic American. And as this credibility depends on the emotional associations the advertisement strives to create, it is achieved through the choice of symbols as the American Dream, service to community and belief in opportunity. Moreover, it appeals indirectly (through Obama's grandparents) to the notion of patriotism as well as to religious values of the candidate.

As to the Westen's structure, the advertisement manages to offer an emotionally

appealing lead through the concept of the American Dream. In the second part, it describes the policy to illustrate the candidate's principles as well as indirectly (through the injustices in society) creates opposition to the other party's policy. The final lines of the advertisement are shaped around the symbol of opportunity – the one which was given to Obama and that he now offers to the country.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

The comparison of the analyzed advertisement showed manifold differences between the preferred ways of addressing the electorate.

In terms of pitch of the message (i.e. whether it is more abstract or concrete), the most abstract advertisements appear to be those of Barack Obama due to their reliance on abstract concepts of hope and belief in change. Hillary Clinton shapes her messages mostly on specific issues and all analyzed advertisement had only one subject matter and one corresponding plot of the narration. The chosen John McCain's advertisements have mostly abstract subject matter, however, he was skillful to use these in specific situations.

In terms of the framing the message for emotional impact, both Clinton and McCain managed to purposefully frame their policy through the emotionally appealing images and notions, of which McCain's appeal stems from using the abstract concepts and myths in specific contexts while Clinton uses abstraction. Obama's advertisements lacked the complete connection between the two, mostly because of disconnectedness of the visual and sound levels of his advertisements. However, the emotional appeal of Obama's campaign relied on the candidate's charisma and the creativity of illustrating the concept of *change* (again, only verbally).

All the candidates framed the message incorporating the concept of change – McCain offers change that returns the politics to the Reagan era, Clinton wants to help return the original concept of the American Dream while Obama frames the message on a completely new vision of world.

As to the uses of symbols and myths, all candidates tried to incorporate the American dream and the values. McCain was the only candidate that used the flag extensively, as opposed to the Democrats' never. Although there were some appeals to the patriotism in the Democratic advertisements, these strictly reflected their concept of non-demonstrative patriotism as opposed to the McCain's. This time, all of the

candidates avoided explicit use religious imagery (they relied on the *values* instead) as well as did not use accusations of disconnection from the religious narrative<sup>4</sup>.

All candidates attempted to challenge the charges made against them by their opponents. Clinton was successful in disconnecting herself from the traditional charges against Democrats as being unfeeling and concentrating on policy only, McCain used the disadvantage of his age to stress his experience and devotion to serve the country while Obama attempted to challenge charges of elitism and lack of authenticity, however, with mixed results.

In condition that the majority of electorate is culturally leaning to conservative ideology, it is also more sensitive to Republican appeal through symbolic issues. Barack Obama's public image suffered under the allegations of his elitism and un-patriotism and his campaign is still not able to create a message that would completely avoid or counter voters' associations with them. In this way, from the Democrats it is Hillary Clinton whose campaign is more appropriate in reflecting the necessity of change which it was created by the cultural dominance of the conservatism.

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- 1 In the time of writing the thesis, the presidential candidate for Democratic Party has not yet been decided upon. The thesis therefore analyses both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton as a prospective candidates. On the side of the Republican Party, John McCain has not yet been confirmed by the Convention, however, he is the only candidate that stayed in the race for the Republican nomination and is likely to win the ticket.
  - 2 Modifier “mostly” is used because if such enumeration occurs in isolation, it has an effect of appealing to the dispassionate mind “only.” Even though the voters are expected to know the context and already have some established associations to these policies through their life experience, in the case of this advertisement, the candidate hopes in further connection of these associations with positive emotions, making use of the connection between the message and the voter on the passionate level that was made at the beginning of the advertisement.
  - 3 Actually, contrary to it, as there has been a lot of criticism of McCain from America’s religious leaders. On this issue, McCain is in sharp contrast to Reagan who was the first political leader to openly embrace his religion. According to Westen (p.388), “Reagan made his faith, and the interpretation of Scripture of a narrow and a narrow-minded minority the moral foundation of his presidency, on issues ranging from abortion to prayer in schools...”
  - 4 This is mainly because none of the candidates has close connection to the Religious Right or other organizations, and all are believed to be religious. For comparison, one of the candidates that discontinued his presidential campaign, Mike Huckabee, used advertisements which were all incorporating religious narrative into the conservative one, and the Grand American respectively. He identified himself as a religious man, quoting bible, applying it to Founding Fathers, Constitution and American principles of morality and values, calling himself “authentic conservative” as opposed to “real conservative” of McCain’s.

## Conclusion

Two ideologies strive to dominate the American culture and politics. Their differences are based on opposing perception of the two key terms *freedom* and *justice*, as well as on the different understanding of the mythic origin of the nation and the importance of the Constitution.

The basis of the conflict lies, according to James Davidson Hunter, in the struggle over the unified national identity. The conflict between the opposing ideologies is not a mere dispute over who is right and who is wrong, but rather consists of attempts to influence the common culture. As the ideology that becomes to dominate is the one which is able to use the symbols and the language in order to frame their message more skillfully, the linguistic theory of Geoffrey Nunberg and the theory of emotional appeal and psychological associations of Drew Westen are viable in analyzing the conflict.

The thesis therefore focuses on the political campaign for the 2008 presidential elections as it attempts to find out which candidate, or party, is delivering a more coherent message to the voters, that is, who is more successful in influencing the common culture.

As the campaigns proceed, the candidates try more and more to persuade the voters of their eligibility to lead the country. Taking into account the course of the culture war, the victory may not be decided on the policies but rather on the overall image of the candidate and the way he/she fits in the newly re-told *Grand American Narrative*.

Assessing the extent to which the Republican Party has the edge in winning the presidential race of 2008 is closely connected to the extent to which the conservative ideology penetrated into the minds and hearts of the American people. However, the mastery of emotional appeal of the conservative message as well as the strategy of branding the opposition by political stereotypes – the two factors that enabled to tilt the majority of Americans culturally and politically to the right – may not be enough in the elections of 2008. The Republican Party has to articulate their policy issues, mainly because of the recent unpopularity of the Republican administration of George W. Bush stemming from the state deficit, ongoing war in Iraq, limited personal freedoms under the Patriot Act, and economic depression.

However, as has been illustrated in the third and the fourth chapter, the

Republicans are more successful in using the vocabulary in the cultural division of the country, both as a means and ends. The role of conservative politicians, think-tanks and media in defining the meanings of the stereotypes has been analyzed, as was the degree to which the conscious and unconscious associations created by these stereotypes have the ability to influence voting behavior.

The media are of a great help in spreading new meanings, as well as they are, through their nature of shaping the issues as bipolar, enabling further division of the society. The analysis in the third chapter indicated that the issues that have been extensively covered by media were the symbolic issues as patriotism, elitism, sexism and racism, all presenting the Republicans' superior use of political labeling while disfavoring the Democratic candidates who try to focus on the policy issues – a tendency shown also in the advertising chosen for the analysis in the fourth chapter.

The Republican candidate is also more skillful in incorporating the emotionally appealing message into his narrative and has the advantage of culturally conservative majority of voters, who despite being disillusioned by the Bush administration did not necessarily lose interest in the Republican Party as such.

At the side of the Democratic Party, the most important factor deciding the success of their candidate in the presidential elections is the creation of emotionally appealing narrative that would challenge the stereotypes associated with the liberal label. Their policies of solving the economic crisis and the proposed plan for universal healthcare have their advantage in the urgency that resembles the New Deal era.

Summing up the main points of the thesis, the question that arises is whether the ideological war that has been fought primarily through cultural issues could be won through policy, i.e. whether the liberal economic policy can win in the culturally conservative electorate. The tendency set by the historical overview of the negative campaigning and dominance of the symbolic issues in campaigning since Nixon, the possibility of influencing voting behavior through the use unconscious associations is very high also in 2008, as recent polls would confirm.

## Resumé

Spojené štáty americké sú v poslednej dobe často vnímané ako spoločnosť preferujúca politickú pravicu. Súčasné konzervatívne cítenie voličov má pôvod v politike Ronalda Reagana, avšak až vďaka administratíve Georga W. Busha a politickým poradcom ako Karl Rove, Frank Lunz alebo Grover Norquist sa konzervatívna ideológia stala dominantnou ideológiou, cez ktorú sa interpretuje všeobecný americký naratív (Grand American Narrative). Z toho vyplýva, že Republikánska strana si nielen vytvorila silný naratív, ktorý sa zakladá predovšetkým na abstraktných pojmoch ako *hodnoty* a *moralita*, ale aj bola prostredníctvom neho schopná eliminovať akúkoľvek opozíciu zo strany demokratov. Predložená diplomová práca skúma práve tieto spôsoby potlačania opozície prostredníctvom silného naratívu. Všeobecne sa jedná o jazykové a psychologické dimenzie republikánskej rétoriky, pri ktorých sa využíva stereotypizácia, radikalizácia, sémantický posun slov a emocionálne podfarbenie politického diskurzu.

Hlavnou úlohou práce je dokázať kultúrnu a politickú dominanciu konzervatívneho naratívu v kontexte kampaní k prezidentským voľbám v roku 2008.

Diplomová práca je členená na štyri podkapitoly. Prvá kapitola ozrejmuje dve základné ideológie amerických politických strán na základe ich odlišnej interpretácie konceptov ako *Americká Revolúcia*, *ústava*, *Biblia*, *sloboda*, *rovnosť*, *spravodlivosť*, *Americký sen*, a na ich základe sa odvíjajúcich rozdielov v politickom programe.

Druhá kapitola predstavuje koncept kultúrnej vojny ako boja o jednotnú definíciu národnej identity. Keďže úplné zjednotenie je nemožné, v skutočnosti ide o to, ktorá ideológia sa stane dominantnou a ovplyvní názory bežných ľudí o fungovaní spoločnosti. V priebehu kultúrnej vojny zohráva významnú úlohu práve volebná kampaň, pretože v čase zvýšeného záujmu o politiku poskytuje priestor politickým stranám a ich ideológiám pre oslovenie širokého spektra obyvateľstva. Táto kapitola taktiež vysvetľuje teoretické pozadie lingvistickej a psychologickej úrovne konfliktu.

Tretia kapitola sa na základe poznatkov z predchádzajúcich kapitol sústreďuje na spravodajské spracovanie priebehu volebnej kampane, pričom sa snaží vymedziť problematické časti naratívov oboch politických strán, ktoré sú podkladom pre kritiku zo strany opozície. Jedná sa hlavne o rozličnú interpretáciu významov ako *patriotizmus*, *elitárstvo*, *rasizmus*, *politický aktivizmus* atď. Táto časť zároveň poskytuje oporné body pre nasledujúcu kapitolu.

Štvrtá kapitola analyzuje volebné spoty jednotlivých kandidátov oboch politických strán a snaží sa určiť, ktorý kandidát dokáže lepšie využívať lingvistickú a psychologickú dimenzáciu rétoriky a akým spôsobom formuje svoj osobný ako aj ideologický naratív svojej politickej strany. Kapitola tým pádom exemplifikuje dominanciu republikánov v efektívnej tvorbe politického odkazu.

Prezidentské voľby v roku 2008 predstavujú podľa mnohých teórií poslednú šancu na úspech Demokratickej strany predtým, než sa spoločnosť na dlhú dobu preorientuje na väčšinovo konzervatívnu, ako sa to v opačnom smere stalo počas administratívy Franklina D. Roosevelta. Kým Európa očakáva víťazstvo demokratického kandidáta, táto práca sa snaží vysvetliť, prečo to aj napriek klesajúcej popularite konzervatívnej administratívy Georga W. Busha a prebiehajúcej ekonomickej kríze nie je také jednoznačné. Z tohto pohľadu je preto dôležité vysvetliť stratégie kultúrneho vplyvu republikánov, ktoré spočívajú v implementácii ich naratívu v rovine každodenného diskurzu. Práca teda rozširuje výskum teórie, ktorá tvrdí, že pri rozhodovaní voličov veľakrát nie je až tak dôležitý program strany ako spôsob jeho prezentácie.

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**Appendix** – Division of the articles used for content analysis according to the media and topics covered

|   | <b>New York Times</b> | <b>Washington Times</b> | <b>Washington Post</b> | <b>Weekly Standard</b> | <b>Wall Street Journal</b> | <b>USA Today</b> | <b>Real Clear Politics</b> | <b>Fox News</b> | <b>Other*</b> | <b>TOTAL NUMBER OF ARTICLES ON THE TOPIC</b> |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|---------------|--|
| <b>Barack Obama</b>   | 18                    | 1                       | 20                     | 2                      | 4                          | 3                | 5                          | 2               | 11            | 66   |
| <b>Hillary Clinton</b>                                      | 8                     | -                       | 11                     | 1                      | 1                          | -                | 2                          | 1               | 7             | 31   |
| <b>John McCain</b>  | 16                    | 4                       | 18                     | 2                      | 1                          | 3                | 1                          | -               | 4             | 49   |
| <b>Republican Party</b>                                     | 7                     | 3                       | 7                      | -                      | 2                          | 2                | 3                          | -               | 2             | 26   |
| <b>Democratic Party</b>                                     | 4                     | -                       | 7                      | 5                      | 2                          | -                | 2                          | -               | 7             | 27   |
| <b>Elitism</b>  | 11                    | -                       | 9                      | 1                      | 3                          | 1                | 2                          | -               | 6             | 33   |
| <b>Patriotism</b>   | 7                     | 1                       | 6                      | 2                      | -                          | 2                | 1                          | 1               | 7             | 24   |
| <b>Sexism</b>   | -                     | -                       | 4                      | -                      | 2                          | -                | 2                          | 1               | 2             | 11   |
| <b>Bush's third term</b>                                    | 7                     | 1                       | 6                      | -                      | 2                          | -                | -                          | -               | -             | 16   |
| <b>Economic crisis</b>                                      | 8                     | 2                       | 7                      | -                      | 2                          | 1                | -                          | -               | -             | 20   |
| <b>Racism</b>   | 1                     | 1                       | 5                      | -                      | 1                          | 1                | 3                          | 1               | 3             | 16   |
| <b>Narratives</b>   | 7                     | -                       | 8                      | -                      | 1                          | -                | -                          | -               | 1             | 17   |
| <b>Nature of media</b>                                      | 4                     | -                       | 2                      | -                      | -                          | -                | 1                          | 2               | 3             | 12   |
| <b>TOTAL NUMBER OF ARTICLES<sup>†</sup> FROM THE SOURCE</b> | 52                    | 6                       | 53                     | 7                      | 7                          | 9                | 13                         | 5               | 23            | X  |

\* Other sources and number of articles:

|                   |   |                   |   |               |   |
|-------------------|---|-------------------|---|---------------|---|
| Bloomberg.com     | 3 | CNN               | 1 | New Yorker    | 1 |
| Boston Globe      | 2 | HumanEvents.com   | 1 | New York Post | 1 |
| Financial Times   | 2 | Los Angeles Times | 1 | Nymag.com     | 1 |
| Slate             | 2 | Newsweek          | 1 | Salon         | 1 |
| American Prospect | 1 | Nation            | 1 | Time          | 1 |
| Chicago Tribune   | 1 | National Review   | 1 | USNews.com    | 1 |

<sup>†</sup> Total number of articles from all sources: 176