

Editorial: We'll always have Paris ...

August 6, 2008

The Star Tribune Editorial Board met Wednesday morning and discussed numerous weighty subjects, including No Child Left Behind and airport security. Then we went back to our cubicles and watched Paris Hilton on YouTube. Hilton, it turns out, has some *serious* opinions about energy and the presidential campaign. Because we're serious, opinionated types, too, this prompted the following e-mail analysis between staff members Tim O'Brien and John Rash. (If you haven't seen the video, go to www.startribune.com/a/?4573.)

JR: On the surface, the ad may appear to hurt McCain. It knocks him about his age and it shows how absurd it was to make Paris as prominent as Baghdad and Kabul in such an important election.

But from a media placement perspective, it could advance McCain's argument by using "free media" to create an echo chamber for "paid media." It's a tactic increasingly used in politics. Whichever candidate it helps or hurts more, it's not exactly the Lincoln-Douglas debate the country needs.

TO: That's for sure. It's a stunning indictment of the political discourse in this country when the most entertaining and substantive ad in this cycle so far stars a dilettante most famous for her sex tapes and a stint in the county jail.

But I can't see how this is a plus for McCain. It points out how ridiculous his juvenile "Celebrity" ad was. And any video that refers to McCain as "the oldest celebrity in the world. Like super old," juxtaposed with pictures of Yoda and the Crypt Keeper, isn't one that your campaign wants to see get much play.

JR: Sure, in today's youth-obsessed society -- which makes celebrities of people like Paris Hilton -- McCain's age is an issue we'll hear more about. But for now, the upside for the McCain campaign is that it has seized the news narrative, albeit with a disappointing, distracting focus on celebrity. When the history of campaign 2008 is written, one of the more compelling chapters will focus on Obama's star appeal. McCain's message makers clearly think they're on to something. On Wednesday they released another attack ad, entitled "Family," which asks, "Is the biggest celebrity in the world ready to help your family?" Not surprisingly, the ad suggests not.

Polls are too tight to predict a presidential winner in September, and November is a lifetime away, in political terms. But a clear winner can be declared: Paris Hilton, who once again is famous for, well, being famous.

TO: This will be the week McCain jumped the shark. Outgunned by the 27-year-old star of "The Hottie and the Nottie." It's taken a little of the luster off of his "maverick" glow. His ad and Paris' response has made him look like just another politician, and a desperate one at that.

