



The WYHS

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BRAINSTORM

It's Time To Hear What's On Your Mind



Brainstorm is a student op-ed newspaper.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The WYHS **BRAINSTORM**

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Dear Reader,

November 4, 2008, saw the last time that the American people gathered to determine its nation's new leader; the historic election ushered in the first African-American President, saw many traditionally conservative states abandon the G.O.P. for the first time in many years, but perhaps most significantly of all, demonstrated this nation's resounding desire for a steep departure from the policies and course of action of the past eight years. The 2012 election is upon us, yet many Americans remain convinced that the past four years have not brought the vaunted and desperately needed "change" that the Democratic Party propagated in 2008. It would seem as if the issues that shaped the election of four years ago are still just as influential today, in addition to an abundance of others (as if there aren't enough financial crises, social debates, and foreign policy concerns to occupy this nation)—healthcare, a broken economy, and social programs remain at the forefront of presidential campaign advertisements; the threat of a nuclear Iran, the future ideological alignment of the Supreme Court, and energy independence have emerged as noteworthy causes enjoying consideration.

Many of you will recall the first presidential debate of this election, which took place on October 3rd at the University of Denver. Obama was subsequently crucified by the media for his lack of aggression and tranquil disposition (and for his succumbing to the high altitude!); this became a general trend throughout the debates: the media established a link between "aggressiveness" and the viability of the candidate. At one point, a news station ("C-Span" as I recall) featured video footage of a 1984 presidential debate, which was fought between President Ronald Reagan and Vice President Walter Mondale. It was truly disheartening to see how, twenty-eight years ago, the candidates actually discussed the issues, and were extremely respectful of the other candidate and moderator. In 2012, the candidates dodge the questions, ignore the moderator, and speak very little about their own ideas—instead, each elects (no pun intended) to aggressively vilify his opponent's ideas and character. Indeed the "mudslinging campaigns" run by both parties have no doubt driven many to regard the election season



Letter from the Editor cont.

as one of the most repulsive and unfortunate times that the United States staggers through every four years.

As Jews, we carry the burden of considering both the needs of the United States and of Israel when casting our ballots (though many of us cannot). We must determine, and often decide between, which candidate is capable of steering this country down the path of an economic rebirth, and which candidate will defend the needs of the State of Israel to the multitude of Arab nations surrounding it. When voting we must weigh, which utmost prudence, which candidate is capable of reforming an education system that is giving rise to an ignorant and uninformed public, and which candidate has the convictions to refuse to ask Israel to make unreasonable concessions. This issue is proud to feature articles discussing a wealth of topics: the needs of America, how our religion impacts the Jewish votes, and just how precarious Israel's position in the twenty-first century is. President Obama and Governor Romney feud on a great many things, and many aspects of this nation hang in the balance of this election, but there is no doubt that Israel will long outlive the presidency of either.

It is indeed remarkable when three hundred million people can all come together to accept anything—especially a contest upon whose outcome hinges the direction in which America will travel. I will quote George W. Bush's 2001 Inauguration Address, fully aware of the risks attached: "the peaceful transfer of authority is rare in history, yet common in our country. With a simple oath, we affirm old traditions and make new beginnings." Regardless of the outcome of November 6th, the dawn of a long-needed new beginning hopefully awaits the United States of America.

Sincerely,

Jared Samilow

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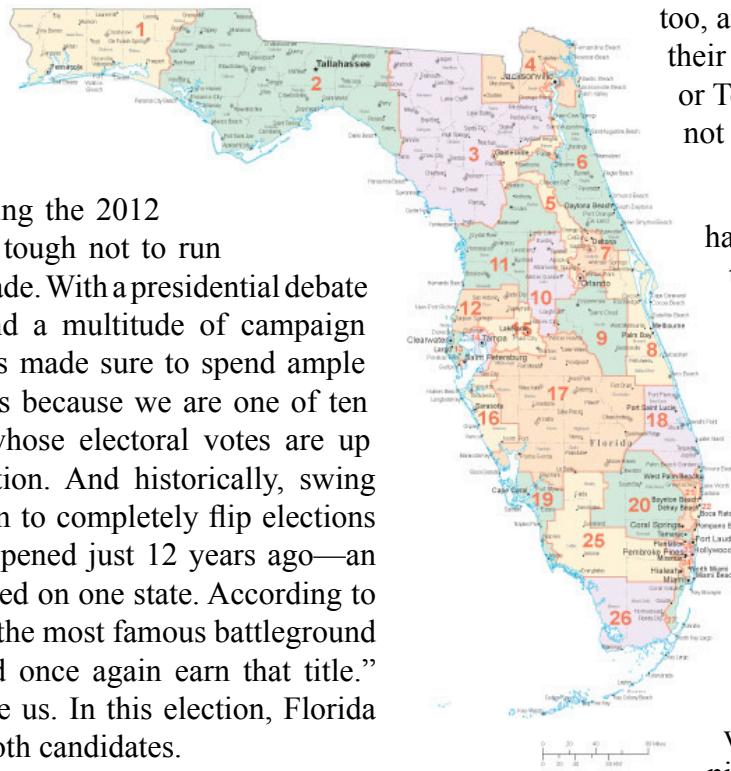
Florida's Role as a Swing State in the 2012 Election

Matthew Silkin ('14)

Have you ever noticed the amount of time a candidate spends in Florida? Or Ohio, for that matter? Well, during the 2012 election, it was pretty tough not to run into at least one motorcade. With a presidential debate at Lynn University and a multitude of campaign events, both candidates made sure to spend ample time in Florida. That is because we are one of ten swing states—states whose electoral votes are up for grabs in this election. And historically, swing states have been shown to completely flip elections around: look what happened just 12 years ago—an entire election predicated on one state. According to the New York Times, “the most famous battleground state in America could once again earn that title.” And yes, that would be us. In this election, Florida really does matter to both candidates.

What makes us a swing state? Senior citizens who populate most of Florida come here from very diverse backgrounds and therefore led themselves to very split voting records. Moreover, in Miami, Broward and Palm Beach Counties—whose main populations are Hispanic and African American—the vote usually favors the left, while the rest of the state leans conservative. But we're not the only ones who matter. Ohio plays a big role in the election

**So, one can see:
a candidate doesn't win
too often without the support
of our deeply divided state.**



too, and though states usually stick to their guns, a big state like California or Texas might switch sides (though not in the foreseeable future!).

But, you might be asking, what happened in 2000, which gave us the “swing state” reputation? Well, when the polls closed on November 7, 2000, Al Gore had the majority of the votes, but still didn't have the necessary 270 electoral votes to secure the presidency (he only had 255; George W. Bush had 246). However, one state was still not quite sure which candidate would receive its twenty-five electoral votes: Florida. After a tedious night of television speculation, and several weeks of legal battles and recounts, Bush was declared the president-elect.

Although not totally relevant, I will brief you on the controversy shrouding the election of '00. On the night of November 7, 2000 and into the morning of November 8, Florida was impossible to call for either candidate. The closeness of the vote mandated a recount under Florida law (ordered by the Florida Supreme Court). Katherine Harris, the Florida Chairperson of Elections (and a prominent member of the Bush campaign—which may answer a lot of questions about the events that followed) ordered the end of the recounts in Florida, and proclaimed Bush the winner by around 500 votes. Both sides initiated legal proceedings against the other, which culminated with the Supreme Court decision in Bush v. Gore; the five conservative justices wrote an opinion which effectively clarified some matters of law, but for all



Too Much Money Ain't Enough Money

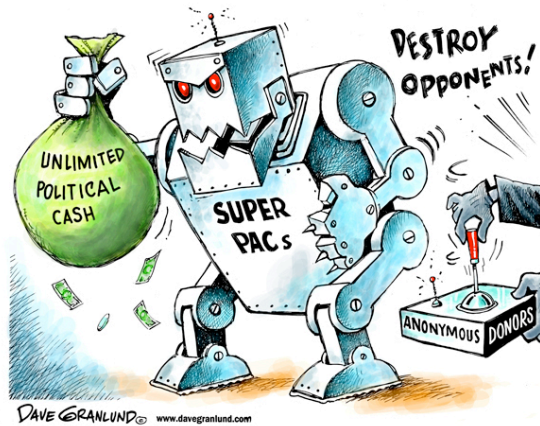
Isaac Kurtz ('14)

Citizens United v. Federal Election Commissions—The Supreme Court resolved this landmark case in 2010. According to many, this ruling took away the voice of the people in this election, and handed it over to corporations and unions. For the first time in modern America, “groups were permitted to donate unlimited sums of money to a political organization,” which “officially” could not coordinate with the candidate it supported. These “unaffiliated” political organizations have been termed Super-Pacs.

The drawn-out Republican primary demonstrated the power of Super-Pacs, which ran numerous attack commercials based on questionable truths. However, this practice of mudslinging carried into the general election. Donations from citizens were once limited to \$2,500; due to the 2010 Supreme Court decision, individuals are empowered to contribute without restriction to presidential campaigns. For instance, Sheldon Adelson has already contributed \$70 million dollars to Super-Pacs, in a desperate attempt to undermine the Obama campaign and see the end of the current presidency.

However, these “millionaire-funded” Super-Pacs raise a significant question. Should the amount of money that one possesses grant him, for lack of a better term, “more speech?” And is the voice of one individual able to drown the voice of corporations and still compete to be heard? The Supreme Court was conflicted over this, and as expected, the conservative majority did not believe that the government had the right to regulate the expenditure of private funding; the liberals of the court sided with the existing law, resulting in a 5 to 4 split.

Some argue that while Governor Mitt Romney has held countless “million-dollar fundraisers” to fill the coffers of his campaign, it is perhaps President Obama’s inability to schmooze with big donors that may be his downfall; the existence of Super-Pacs directly links the amount of fiscal resources a candidate has to the likelihood of his winning the election. At the annual White House Christmas and Chanukah parties, President Obama refused to take pictures with donors who feel that their money allows them more time with the president.



No matter how much money is raised in the end, the court decision has led to perhaps one of our dirtiest and lowest elections—with over 107 million dollars spent by Super-Pacs on attack ads against Obama and 43 million being spent by Super-Pacs against Romney. This election will by far be the most expensive election with four hundred million dollars

already spent on television ads and six hundred million more expected before the campaign. It is almost impossible to avoid these ads, from YouTube to Thursday Night Football and everywhere in between—millions has been spent to sway your opinion.

So, should an out-of-context sound bite be able to convince Americans whom to vote for? Can a thirty-second video be enough to determine a candidate’s true political leanings? In a society where conclusions are drawn in seconds, it has come time for Americans to stop listening to what they are told and to think for themselves. Whose policies will allow for our great nation to progress? Who will be willing to compromise to ensure we succeed as a nation? Who will not play political games that affect the lives of millions of Americans? And will it be your voice that is heard on Election Day?



RELIGION

A Matter of Faith?

Danielle Sobol ('13)

As Orthodox Jews, religion is something that plays a role in our everyday lives; it dictates what schools we go to, what communities we are a part of, and what values we adhere to. But what role does religion play in the presidential election?

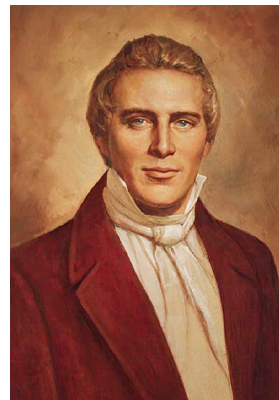
Americans have always looked to their president as a bastion of morals and dependability

Religion and belief in a god are core principles that America was founded on—after all, the first pilgrims came to America on the Mayflower in pursuit of religious tolerance and the right to practice their religion in the way they desired. As a result of this, many of the first colonies were founded with guarantees of religious freedom. Beginning with these early colonists, Americans have always looked to their president as a bastion of morals and dependability (both of which they commonly associate with a strong religious background). In fact, according to a Public Religion Research Institute survey, two-thirds of voters (67%) said it is either very important or somewhat important for a presidential candidate to have strong religious beliefs.

Most of the early presidents were Episcopalians or Presbyterians, and religion was not even an issue until the 1860 election, when Lincoln became president. Lincoln openly challenged the Deist views he had grown up with, but submitted to public expectations by attending Presbyterian services with his wife. He realized that the repudiation of religion subconsciously links a candidate to “lack of morality.” Lincoln, along with predecessor Thomas Jefferson and successor William Taft, was accused of being atheist, which was not excluded from consideration by voters. The importance of religion to voters is clear from

the fact that as a whole, except for the two Quaker presidents, Herbert Hoover and Richard Nixon, most of the US presidents can be categorized as Christian, in one denomination or another. Up until current times, there have been no Jewish, Buddhist, (openly) atheist, Hindu, Muslim, or any non-Christian affiliated presidents.

Because of this trend of demanding staunch religious convictions from candidates, many constituents were disturbed during the 2008 presidential election when presidential candidate Barack Obama’s former pastor of the church he frequented for over twenty years, Jeremiah Wright, was discovered to be very radical and to have espoused much anti-American sentiment. Obama condemned Wright’s comments, but did not denounce him as a person or pastor and stood by his church and religion. This persisted as a source of controversy throughout the election season, and many voters were deterred from voting for Obama because of his—in their minds—questionable religious views.



The issue of religion in the presidential election has once again emerged in 2012. Governor Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential nominee, is affiliated with the Mormon religion, and even served in local positions as a clergy member of his LDS church. Romney’s religion has played a role in both his past policy and campaign, and he has made it clear that God and religion will play a large role in his presidency; in a speech he delivered in Virginia, the former governor said: “The pledge says ‘under God.’ I will not take God out of the name of our platform. I will not take God off our coins and I will not take God out of my heart; we’re a nation that’s be-



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stowed by God.” This was a response to the Democratic party’s decision to omit any mention of God from the party’s official platform. This propelled the issue of God and religion into the forefront; it became a primary concern among Americans following the conventions and following the race.

Initially, many voters reacted negatively to the idea of having a Mormon president, and it became an extremely significant stigma that accompanied Romney for some time. When the Pew Research Center, in a 2011 survey, asked Americans the first word that came to mind when they thought of Romney, “Mormon” was the most frequent response. However, in a 2012 survey, just a year later, only 8 out of the 1,010 respondents answered in that fashion. This shows that although the religion of a president is an important part of his identity to voters, as the race comes closer, the issues and facts are the predominant factors that voters are considering. When Protestant Evangelicals likened Mormonism to a cult, Romney, in order to maintain a respectable public image and favorability among the voters, avoided mention of his religion and elected to focus more strictly on political views.

Romney’s religion has played a role in both his past policy and campaign... and religion will play a large role in his presidency

Although society as a whole has begun to somewhat separate religion from their practical lives, with some public schools prohibiting denominational school dances and celebration of religious holidays, it is heartening to note that when choosing the next leader of the United States, voters still consider the religious views of potential candidates when casting their ballots, while remaining focused on the real issues.



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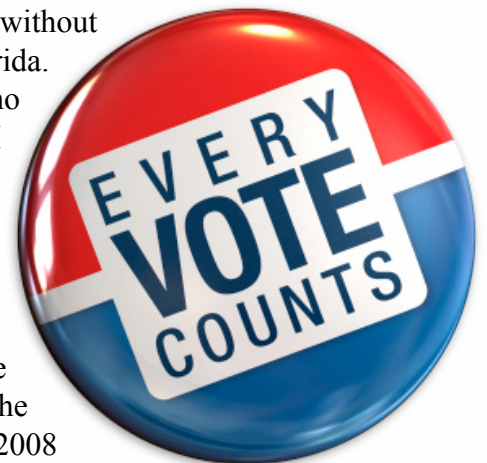
purposes, declared that Harris’ decision (backed by Jeb Bush, Florida’s governor) would stand.

Aside from the 2000 election, it has been quite a long time since a candidate has become the president without winning Florida: 2008, 2004, 2000 (well, we’ll dodge that one!) and so on. In fact, since 1940, Florida has only voted against the winning candidate twice; we went for Nixon in 1960 (over JFK) and for Bob Dole in 1992 (over Clinton). So, one can see: a candidate doesn’t win too often without the support of our deeply divided state.

And historically, swing states have been shown to completely flip elections around: look what happened just 12 years ago – an entire election predicated on one state.

This year, both President Barack Obama and former Governor Mitt Romney appreciate the electoral significance of Florida—in fact, it is nearly impossible (if even possible at all) for Romney to become the president of the United States without winning Florida.

Now, I’m no prophet, and I can’t tell you what’s to be in the 2012 election. But I can promise you this—the landslide of 2008 is unlikely to be repeated.





Economic Equivocality

Jared Samilow ('14)

It is undeniable that the current economic crisis is the single most important factor influencing this presidential election. Each candidate argues the incompetence of his opponent, slanders him as “conviction-less” and bent on furthering an agenda, and labels him as openly dishonest. In fact, all of these charges are wholly true—the only valid challenge confronting the American people is the following: who is the lesser of two evils? Well, we shall attempt to answer this with regard to the terrible economic state of our country.

The global economy collapsed in 2008, the effects of which—for many Americans—left a strong distaste for the Republican Party and a desire for “Change,” which the Obama campaign convincingly (sort of) championed and promised. Four years later, many Americans see this promise and grand dream of President Obama as unfulfilled and hopelessly broken. Be that as it may, a significant number of Americans dissatisfied with the government of the past four years find no greater promise in Governor Mitt Romney—whose campaign is disadvantaged by the very fact that its leader bears a stigma of the Republican Party. So, what exactly is each candidate’s strategy for revitalizing the United States economy—the statistical “health gauges” of which have consistently yielded appalling numbers for four years?

Obama’s campaign website provides a brief summary of the Obama/Biden economic recovery plan. Upon visiting the website, the general theme that one can glean is the following: “President Obama will cut taxes on incomes under \$250,000.” The

Obama tax code “asks the wealthiest among us to contribute to deficit reduction; and lays the foundation for future growth.” The campaign website claims that “The President is committed to reducing the deficit through a balanced approach—one that restrains spending across the budget.” I cannot resist raising the following issue: Obama has enlarged the federal deficit by approximately six billion dollars since he assumed office in January 2009, and has little to show for it, other than several bail-outs—the methods of which were controversial. To be fair to the president, Keynesian economics back

So, what exactly is each candidate’s strategy for revitalizing the United States economy—the statistical “health gauges” of which have consistently yielded appalling numbers for four years?

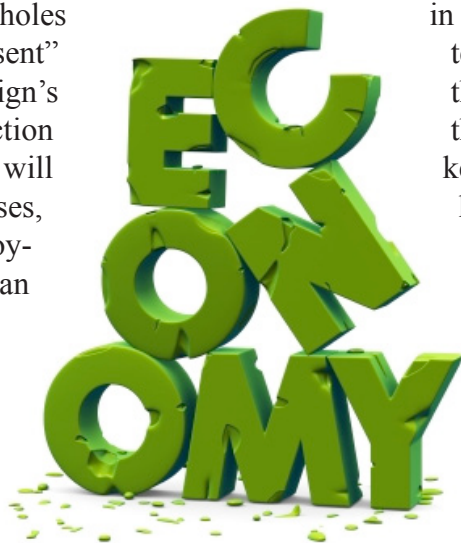
his actions—that is, to introduce money into the economy is critical in order to rejuvenate it. A major platform of Obama’s 2008 campaign was healthcare reform: that is indeed a promise that has been kept. An excellent Obama

proposal is his “Campaign to Cut Waste,” whose goal is to identify areas of government which are “[misspending] tax dollars across the federal government...scaling back on no-bid contracts and stopping improper payments to getting rid of unneeded Federal real estate and ending out-of-control information technology (IT) projects.” In general, Obama supports a commitment to achieving energy efficiency and improving both the quality and accessibility of education. The president is ambitious, but his ideas are largely the same as those of “Change ‘08.” As Jon Stewart cleverly put it, the Obama 2012 campaign could easily be tagged as “Hope & Change: 2.”

The Obama Campaign charges Romney with intending to implement and practice the now-infamous “trickle-down” plan—that is, to reduce the



taxes of wealthy people in hopes of enticing them to invest money in this country (which can in turn create new jobs), Romney has fervently denied these accusations for the past several months (not necessarily before then, however) and proposes an alternate theory. He intends to lower taxes by 20 percent for all Americans currently paying federal income taxes, and account for this massive loss in federal revenue by closing deduction loopholes through which people “misrepresent” their incomes. The Romney campaign’s logic dictates that a uniform reduction in taxes across all income brackets will foster the growth of small businesses, which provide the bulk of employment in this nation. Romney’s plan also calls for achieving energy independence by 2020. His campaign website explains that “America is blessed with extraordinary natural resources, and developing them will create millions of good jobs—not only in the energy industry, but also in industries like manufacturing that will benefit from more energy at lower prices. America’s economy will boom when the billions of dollars we send overseas for our oil are kept here at home instead.” A significant tenet of Romney’s campaign ideology fanatically supports the repeal of the 2010 Affordable Care Act, astutely termed “Obamacare.” Details regarding trade and numerical explanations of the Romney/Ryan tax reform plan have been omitted in this article, but the outline of Romney’s recovery strategy is clear: taxes can be cut while maintaining the necessary supply of federal revenue, while the United States must strive to reduce its dependence on foreign nations such as Saudi Arabia and China. To be honest, the mathematical viability and practicality of this bold economic recovery proposition must indeed be questioned, but it is far more precise than any such strategy articulated by the President.



While Mitt Romney’s economic proposals should definitely endure scrutiny, the most compelling support that I can raise for it is the following argument: Obama’s proposals have been attempted and practiced, yet have consistently delivered resounding disappointment. The general sentiment of pro-Obama television and Internet commercials has been, to say it very colloquially: “Elect Barack Obama in November—he’s not great—but the alternative is far worse.” None can deny that he stepped into the Oval Office as the heir of an enormous debt and a broken economy, and the recipient of perhaps unreasonable public expectations, but it is imperative that this nation’s president accept that his ideals have failed to achieve anything but to prevent a complete fiscal collapse, and to marginally combat the worst economic crisis since 1929. A candidate with hitherto untested ideas has presented himself, so I cannot find the logic in resigning ourselves to accepting the near-mediocrity that we have endured for the past four years, simply because the Obama campaign has performed a marvelous job at pegging the Romney/Ryan campaign as unprogressive and as propagators of the same ideas that, from 2001 to 2009, set the stage for Obama’s rise.



HEALTHCARE

Can Anyone Cure Healthcare?

Yaffy Israel ('13)

In the eyes of Governor Mitt Romney, healthcare is not something seen as optional, but as a necessity. He chastises President Obama for Obamacare—what he deems a failed attempt to eradicate the host of problems that stem from our nation's broken healthcare system. Romney points out that Obama's solution cost Americans more overall than it saved them due to the vast amount of money required to implement Obamacare into our system and how it will raise taxes for those who already were struggling to make ends meet. Romney also maintains that Obamacare is not in keeping with the spirit of America—it is socialized medicine, the name of which links it to socialism.

President Obama firmly stands by his belief that his Affordable Act Care is the most beneficial program possible for Americans due to its three unique components: it prevents insurance companies from abusing their naïve customers, it strengthens Medicare so that is financially feasible for many more, and it focuses on reducing the gap between insurance premiums for men and women.



Women currently pay higher premiums, due to the fact that a woman is more likely to make use of her insurance coverage. Obama has voiced that his plan cares for disadvantaged members of society in all respects: the fiscally disabled, elderly people, and all minorities. He also claims that the implementation of his plan costs \$6,150, while Romney's would cost \$12,500. The Obama Administration also boasts having made healthcare accessible to over three million youngsters who would not have otherwise been covered.



There is no doubt that the healthcare system in this country is failing millions, and that an immediate remedy is needed.

Obama argues that not only would Mitt Romney's idea of turning healthcare into a voucher program (although Romney denies that he would) has catastrophic implications for many Americans. According to Obama, Romney's vision of healthcare prioritizes money for media relations and advertising, instead of actually providing care. Obama intends to use taxpayer dollars to translate healthcare information into languages for people who don't understand English. Frankly, neither is right; spending money on advertising in an economy like this is not necessary, and it is not helpful to encourage immigrants not to learn the language; rather it is imperative that we encourage them to do so. Obama brings to light the fact that Romney's plan is not as kindly predisposed toward women as his is, since Romney's stance on healthcare is largely against Planned Parenthood.

There is no doubt that the healthcare system in this country is failing millions, and that an immediate remedy is needed. Frankly, neither Obama nor Romney has provided a viable solution to the problem. Obamacare is largely skewed to favor people who are unemployed, as opposed to middle-income tax payers, while Romney, in keeping with the traditional doctrines of the conservatives, advocates a state-by-state solution to an immense problem, but does not believe that the federal government's strict regulation of healthcare is a solution. With whomever you concur, the healthcare debate has polarized this nation for the past two years, and if the not the central issue, is certainly certainly a huge consideration in this election.



FOREIGN POLICY

The Iranian Missile Crisis

David Ostrofsky ('14)

As we rapidly approach “Decision Day 2012,” President Barack Obama and Governor Mitt Romney will continue to propagate their solutions to the confluence of problems confronting America: terrorism, the economy, and education (or lack thereof), just to list a few. Despite the importance of these platforms, this year your vote should be based on one issue, and one issue alone—which candidate will be more likely to take whatever action is necessary to prevent the Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons?

Fortunately, our country is blessed with a wealth of problems for people to base their votes on—health-care reform, immigration, gun control—and the Iranian nuclear threat is simply one in dozens of issues. With America’s economic stability threatening to relapse, with my generation’s opportunity for prosperity in doubt, and an unprecedented widening gap between the rich and the poor, how can I assert that Iran is the only factor that you should consider on November 6th? The answer is simple—a nuclear Iran poses a hazard not only to the lives of millions of people, but to something even more important to Americans: our deflated economy.

Many rely on the notion that “Iran will never actually use it” to belittle the existential threat Iran poses to Israel and all of Western society. The problem with this rationale is that “mutually assured destruction” only holds true when both parties behave rationally and act in their own interests. It is crucial to recognize that Iran—driven by fanatic religiosity and a quest for the “Islamic Apocalypse”—might unleash the world’s most lethal weapon should the opportunity present itself. Iran has publicly called for the whole-scale destruction of Israel, and it is imperative that we do not dismiss these threats as

It has been effectively demonstrated that the repercussions of Iranian nuclear capabilities will be absolutely devastating.



unfounded, but that we react swiftly to combat any threat made against our homeland.

But even if Iran does realize they are “assured destruction” in a nuclear war, the threat of their possessing nuclear weapons will not dissipate. Iran is currently the world’s most powerful supporter of terrorism, and the Iranian government has close ties to countless terrorist organizations, including Hezbollah. Can the world, let alone Israel, ever be safe if an ally of Hez-

bollah is armed with a nuclear weapon? Furthermore, amidst the instability in the

Middle East, if Iran attains nuclear weapon capabilities, a nuclear arms race will inevitably ensue. As Rabbi David Wolpe explained: “Saudi Arabia is not likely to stand idly by while its neighbor attains instant hegemony.” Immediately following Iran’s development of the bomb, many other Arab nations will follow suit, feeling “squeezed” by their powerful neighbor’s supremacy. A nuclear arms race in the Middle East combined with radical Islam’s call for the annihilation of Israel is a recipe for disaster.



The Electoral College: *Valid System or Anachronistic Tradition?*

Aaron Zimmerman ('13)

Following the turmoil of the War of Independence, the long-awaited emancipation from the British marked the burgeoning of a new nation—the United States of America, where the equal political rights of all citizens were inalienable. Having experienced the terrors of British tyranny, the American leaders prioritized the right to vote as a spearheading tenet of the newfound democracy. However, the constitutional framers worried about the legitimacy of a popular vote; the common man of the time, the leaders feared, was not necessarily educated, and was thus unable to

America is purportedly the most democratic nation in the world, yet this country does not even elect its leader by popular vote.

vote intelligently. As a compromise between electing the nation's head via Congress and voting by popular vote, the Founding Fathers crafted an institution that has endured for the last two centuries and will decide the election of 2012—the Electoral College. What exactly is the Electoral College system, you might ask? This body consists of a group of people who represent the fifty states and cast the votes for president and vice president. The more populous a state, the more electors it is granted. All states—with the exception of Nebraska and Maine—function on a “winner takes all system,” meaning that when a candidate wins the popular vote of a state, he receives all of the states electoral votes, regardless of the margin by which he carries the state. When the average citizen votes, he or she technically votes for an elector rather than directly casting a vote for a presidential candidate. Both the Democratic and Republican parties select their electors for each state

with the hope that the electors will remain loyal to their parties—however, each elector has the legal right to vote for the nominee of the opposite party. While this system precludes election by the popular vote on technical terms, the Democratic and Republican parties do their best to ensure the faithfulness of the electors. Should electors betray their parties, they will likely lose their coveted position and all respect within the party. Some states even levy fines against “treacherous electors.” Although the modern Electoral College is designed to reflect the wishes of the public, historical examples have demonstrated that this idealism is by no means infallible. By law, a candidate must receive the majority of electoral votes to take the presidency; if no majority is won, the House of Representatives elects the president under the Twelfth Amendment. In the 1824 Presidential Election, no candidate managed to secure a majority of the Electoral College; John Quincy Adams, although he did not receive the most electoral votes or popular votes, was elected president by the House of Representatives—raising serious doubts about the

Now, the question arises as to whether or not the Electoral College should remain the institution through which America chooses its president.

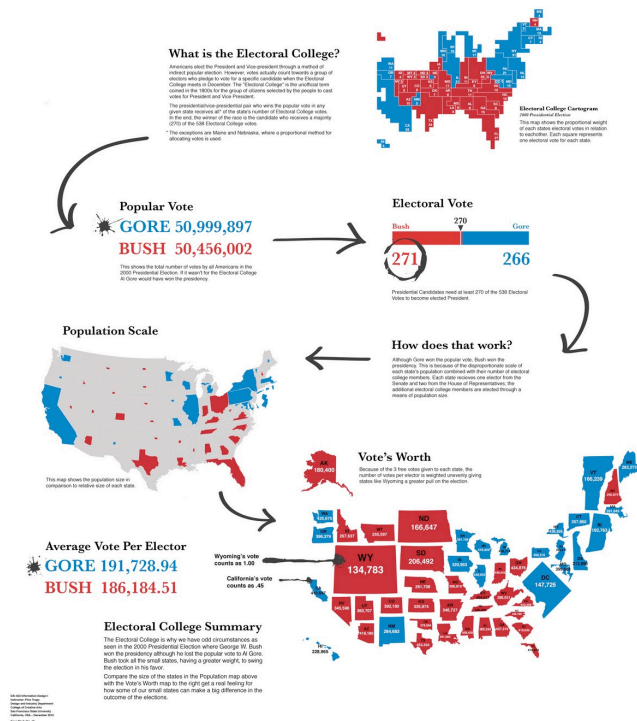
logic and democratic nature of the Electoral College system. In 1876, although Samuel J. Tilden clinched the popular vote, he ultimately lost to Rutherford B. Hayes due to the support of the small states. And most recently, the 2000 election raised eyebrows when President George W. Bush defeated Al Gore 271 to 267 (in the Electoral College), although Gore won the popular vote by a fairly significant margin.



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Now, the question arises as to whether or not the Electoral College should remain the institution through which America chooses its president. In support of the system, one can argue that the Electoral College provides political stability by promoting a two-party system and also maintains a representative system of government. On the other hand, the system poses risks such as the potential for “faithless” electors and the possibility of not accurately reflecting the popular vote. Considering both the pros and cons of the system, none can argue that the Electoral College is flawless. In fact, aside from respecting longstanding tradition, maintaining the Electoral College seems rather frivolous. The voting system is clearly antiquated, offering nothing but a pesky potential for skewed elections. America is purportedly the most democratic nation in the world, yet this country does not even elect its leader by popular vote. Does the Electoral College appropriately represent our values and beliefs as the champions of liberty? Perhaps the current leaders of our nation should reconsider...

How legitimate is our ELECTORAL COLLEGE?
2000 **Bush / Gore**



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Additionally, regardless of Iran’s intent, just the mere fact of their possessing a nuclear weapon will threaten the economy of the entire world. About 20 percent of all world petroleum travels through the Strait of Hormuz, the body of water that borders Southern Iran. If Iran is armed with nuclear weapons, they will essentially be in control over this geographically significant strait. Consequently, the price of gas will soar rapidly. Every aspect of the global

Every aspect of the global economy will be affected by exponentially increasing gas prices.

economy will be affected by exponentially increasing gas prices. Everything from shipping costs to the price of basic necessities will escalate and economies worldwide will suffer. In a worst-case scenario, Iran will block the strait and prevent its commercial usage. Due to the diminishing supply of world petroleum, gas prices will climb so high and the economic depression will be so extreme that it may take years or even decades to recover.

It has been effectively demonstrated that the repercussions of Iranian nuclear capabilities will be absolutely devastating. Many Americans make the mistake of believing that we are impervious to attack, that no country can threaten our existence, that to vote based on the “nuclear Iran” issue is really an Israeli matter. Well, maybe no country has the military prowess to challenge us in an open fight, but Iran—through its control of a significant portion of the world’s petroleum supply—is capable of deepening an already crippled economy. When you vote (if you can!) in November, it is essential that this issue decide which candidate will receive your crucial vote.

Where Young Voters are Holding this Election

Saige Rosenberg ('13)

President Barack Obama's victory in the 2008 presidential election is largely owed to the age 18-29 demographic, of which 66% voted for Obama. The big question is: where are the young voters holding now in the 2012 election between President Obama and Governor Mitt Romney?

While most people think that Obama's large support from young voters in the election was due to a huge increase in turnout among young voters, the Washington Post recorded that there was only a one-point increase in the percent of youth voting from the 2004, 2000, and 1996 elections. The youth vote's extraordinary impact on Obama's win was actually the wide margin between votes for Obama and McCain; Obama received two-thirds of the youth vote, resulting in a 34 point margin between him and McCain—the largest margin any winning Democratic candidate has received recently. The Harvard University Institute of Politics' (IOP) poll, which was taken in the spring, reveals that Obama has a 17 point advantage over Romney among young voters in this upcoming election.

In this election, the IOP poll records that Obama's approval has not increased amongst young white voters, of whom only 41 percent approve of his efforts to create new jobs. While young Hispanic voters give Obama 66 percent approval of his performance as president, Obama would need the approval of young white voters to keep the great support he received from youth voters last election.

Members of this nation's youth are obviously concerned about their futures and the abysmal unemployment rate—the major topic of interest specifically among youth voters is the economy. Fifty-eight per-

cent of young voters declared jobs and the economy as the national issue with which they are most concerned—beating out issues such as affordable access to healthcare, reducing the federal deficit, and preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Unemployment rates have bottomed out and are remaining steady as of Fall 2012—reaching 7.8% in October, but if the employment rate declines, Romney may have the chance to improve his standing among the youth.

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The IOP poll also revealed that there is a lack of excitement toward voting this year among 18 to 29-year olds. Only 49 percent are defi-

nitely voting, and another 15 percent declared they would "probably vote." Furthermore, only 22 percent of college student say they are "politically active."

To a large degree, the raw energy that Obama enjoyed with the whole "Change" mantra in 2008 has lost its steam. Many young people have become disillusioned with "Change '08," and are convinced that the idealistic vision of the future that Obama spoke of four years ago has not yet been realized, and that it does not seem like it will be realized in the next four years, or even in the next decade for that matter. This does not imply that young voters are convinced that Mitt Romney's policies will steer the nation on a more prudent course, but it is undeniable that the enthusiasm that impelled many college students and other young Americans to the polls in 2008 is practically nonexistent in 2012.

Even though young voters were the margin that helped make the difference for Obama last election, if the turnout of young voters declines this election, support among the remaining young people will not give Obama the advantage as it did last election.



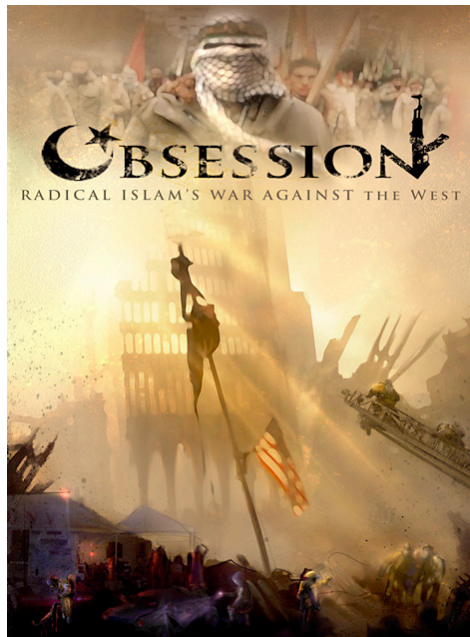
Radical Islam

Jared Samilow ('14)

The September 11, 2001 attacks brought to the forefront the ongoing struggle between the ideas of western secularism and Islamic fundamentalism. Since the enlightenment began in the sixteenth century, western ideas of culture, liberty, democracy, commerce, social organization, minority rights, and women's rights have permeated the globe. These ideas have fundamentally altered the political, social, and economic relations within and between societies. Islamic fundamentalism, on the other hand, centered on a strict interpretation of the Koran, is essentially opposed in almost every facet of its creed to the notions advanced by the enlightenment. Restriction, stratification, sexism, implementation of religious law, and discrimination against non-believers are the hallmarks of Islamic fundamentalism. The contrast between western secularism and Islamic fundamentalism has only heightened with the increasing globalization of trade, communication, and travel. This in turn has led to violence and disorder, most often instigated by Islamists.

The current situation in Europe is emblematic of the clash. After the Second World War, the European states welcomed workers from former colonies to provide labor. The immigrants were supposed to be temporary workers who would return home after a short stint. This in fact did not happen and the workers stayed and raised families. Most of these workers were non-white and many were Muslims. Over the past 50 years, the Muslim population of Europe exploded. These Muslims, however, often lived on the fringe and were not integrated into the fabric of society. Moreover, economic opportunities were often denied to the children of the immigrants, who were

not considered "French," "British," or "German," even though many had been born in those countries and were citizens. This in turn led to alienation, poverty, and anger. Islamic fundamentalism, with its critique and criticism of the openness of western culture, provided easy answers. It has acted to channel Muslim anger towards violence—riots (Paris), intimidation tactics, threats, fatwas (death sentences meted out by Islamic religious authorities), and terrorism.



The European governments have responded in varying ways. In France, efforts have been redoubled to integrate immigrants into French society. France has even gone as far as banning the wearing of the burqa, a full-length covering of a woman's body and virtually her entire face.

Muslim prejudice and intolerance has sparked terrorism in reaction. Recently, Utoya, Norway, was transformed into a death trap for 69 teenagers following a murderous shooting spree by a Norwegian angered by the growth of Islam.

The United States certainly hasn't escaped unscathed from this worrying epidemic. The shooting at Fort Hood is but a recent example. As the Muslim populations of many Western nations grow, it is imperative that governments take the steps necessary to educate and synthesize Islamic culture with their own. The challenge for the West is to ensure that the growing Muslim population is not further radicalized. In this crucial election year of 2012, Americans must consider which candidate will be more adept at addressing an issue which is likely to seriously threaten this nation, and others, many years down the road.

Ripley's BELIEVE IT OR NOT

Judging a Candidate by his Cover: The “Tallness” Factor

Bracha Brauser ('13)

Who really cares about the presidential candidates' platforms on Medicare or foreign policy? And what difference does it make where the candidates stand on social security and the economy? According to research, the voters of America are not concerned as much with the policies of Obama and Romney as they are with their physical appearances. Gone is the idiom “don't judge a book by its cover” and gone are the yesteryears of our grandparents, before television and media, times when decisions were made based on substance rather than the mere facade of looks. America today is a blur of fast-moving pictures and brightly colored screens, suggestively luring the public into a web of media bias. Bookstores are closing across the country as the American public rapidly shifts from the ancient world of paper and pen to a modern and digitalized world. With the blink of an eye, everything from newspaper and books to the presidential candidates is computerized and available at your fingertips through the tap of a small icon. How could you not make your choice for the leader of our country by examining a photograph for a second as you flip through images on your iPad?

Ever since the first televised presidential debate took place in 1960, the taller candidate has won eight out of the 13 subsequent elections, the shorter candidate won four times, and in one particular instance the candidates were the same height. Three out of the four times the shorter candidate won, the candidate had won less than 51 percent of the popular vote. This phenomenon has even been given a name—“the Presidential Height Index” and is elaborated on by Alexander Toldorov, an associate professor of psychology at Princeton University. “Appearance can be a proxy for competence,” says Toldorov. “This is most often the case among voters who are least informed and get most of their information from the television.” The first instance of this was the 1960 presidential election, where Nixon and

John F. Kennedy's debate was, for the first time in American history, televised. JFK is widely accepted to have won because of his groomed appearance, which was in stark contrast with Nixon's bad makeup, knee injury handicap, and “poorly colored suit.”

Research conducted by the American Marketing Association finds that “voters often make inferences about the personality of political candidates according to how they look (e.g., whether they look friendly, dishonest), and such inferences can carry over into voting decision.” Height in particular seems to be a large factor regarding the attractiveness of the candidate, as tallness seems to connote leadership and conforms to the Darwinian idea of “survival of the fittest.” America seems to feel that the competence of a leader is directly correlated to his physical height and not just his moral and intellectual virtues. A Washington Post blog writes, “Campaigns often go to great lengths to shroud a shorter candidate's height and avoid side-by-side comparisons with larger rivals, just as Hollywood moviemakers use visual tricks to disguise the real size of some of their biggest—or, that is, smallest—stars.” The reality of this trend is both disturbing and pathetic: is our country's leader really going to be chosen based on his vertical measurement? With the knowledge of this somewhat frightening research in our hands, it is up to us, the American public, to make informed decisions, to research the policies and platforms of the candidates, and ultimately to choose the one that best aligns with our opinions and beliefs, and not merely the candidate who literally hovers over us with an air of competence. Imagine the headlines: “Romney Beats Obama by One Inch and Stands Tall at 6'2.” Humorous? Yes. Scary? Even more so. This election, make educated decisions, inform yourself, and see past the digital revolution that is speedily overwhelming America.

