

This race may hit historic lows

The 2016 presidential election is shaping up to be one of the nastiest ever, and we're not even through the primaries yet. Although Hillary Clinton, the presumptive Democratic nominee, is still locked in a highly contested race with U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders (D-Vermont) she has been pivoting her attacks increasingly to the general election and a showdown with GOP front-runner Donald Trump.

Tensions have been boiling over in recent days, stemming from Trump's vulgar comment last December that Clinton got "schlonged" in the 2008 primary by Barack Obama. Since then, Clinton has accused the billionaire of "bigotry and bluster," "inciting violence at his campaign rallies" and "without substance or experience when it comes to national or foreign policy."

Trump, an expert at translating headline-grabbing rhetoric and promises to make America great again into victories in key primary and caucus states, retaliated by calling Clinton a "hypocrite" for crying sexism while defending her husband, former president Bill Clinton, after his sexual escapades.

Considering all the mud being slung, the upcoming general election promises to be one

of the nastiest in U.S. history, rivaling only three other presidential campaigns.

When incumbent John Quincy Adams, a Republican, ran against Democrat Andrew Jackson in 1828, his handlers said Jackson had the personality of a "dictator" and was "too uneducated" to be president. They also took aim at his wife, Rachel. She had been in an abusive marriage with a man who finally divorced her at a time when divorce was considered scandalous. As a result, Adams' campaign managers called her a "dirty black wench" and a "convicted adulteress" and said she was prone to "open and notorious lewdness."

Not to be outdone, Jackson's Democratic supporters accused Adams of selling his wife's maid as a concubine to the czar of Russia. Apparently, Jackson's rhetoric was more convincing as he won the election handily with 642,553 votes to Adams' 500,897.

During the presidential election of 1860, the candidates focused on more substantive issues such as the future of chattel slavery and popular sovereignty as a means of allowing voters to decide the issue in each



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new state, but they also attacked each other's appearance and habits.

Abraham Lincoln, the Republican candidate, insisted that his opponent, Democratic candidate Stephen Douglas "talked a great deal, very loud,

and always about himself." He also claimed that Douglas' nickname, "Little Giant," referred to the fact that he was "about five feet nothing in height and about the same in diameter the other way." Douglas took aim at Lincoln, too, saying he was a "horrid-looking wretch, sooty and scoundrelly in aspect, a cross between the nutmeg dealer and the horse-swapper" as well as a "radical abolitionist" who believed in the "intermingling of the (white and black) races." Fortunately, the voters were more concerned with the substantive issues and Lincoln prevailed, winning the election 1,866,452 to Douglas' 1,380,202.

Finally, there was the election of 1884, which probably wouldn't be much of a scandal by today's moral conventions. But at the end of the 19th century, adultery and shady business dealings were incriminating, giving Grover Cleveland and James Blaine

all the ammunition they needed to discredit each other.

Cleveland, the Democratic candidate, was accused of lechery. While still a bachelor, he fathered a child with a widow named Maria Halpin. Although he fully supported the child, the Republicans and their candidate, James Blaine, made up the chant, "Ma! Ma! Where's my pa?" and used it to taunt Cleveland. Blaine was no innocent, either.

Democrats accused him of shady dealings with the railroad. Blaine admitted his corrupt involvement after the discovery of a letter confirming it. The underhandedness helped Cleveland secure a narrow 4,874,986 to 4,851,981 victory.

Today, negative campaigning is a popular technique among our presidential candidates. While the unattractive practice might pique the interest of the voters, it has diminished the integrity of the electoral process by compromising substantive dialogue for boorish behavior.

Considering the offensive remarks of Clinton and Trump, this election promises to be no different – and probably the nastiest in recent history.

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