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Preview of the Bush campaign endgame

With the presidential debates now behind us, the struggle for the White House will tilt even more toward decentralized media battles for electoral votes. Between now and Election Day, vast resources will go toward spinning local news coverage in swing states while launching carefully targeted commercials on radio and television. For the Bush campaign and its allies, the media endgame will include these components:

Smearing John Kerry

For months already, paid advertisements and interviews with pro-Bush operatives have portrayed Kerry as a betrayer of American troops in Vietnam. President Bush gained a temporary lead in the polls thanks largely to deceptive commercials aimed at discrediting Kerry's bravery under fire. Next came a fierce propaganda assault on the most laudable actions of Kerry's life — his antiwar efforts as a Vietnam veteran.

In 1971, Kerry gained national prominence as an eloquent leader of Vietnam Veterans Against the War because he expressed the thoughts and feelings of so many veterans. Today, the media attacks on his activism are efforts to sway voters by rewriting history, as though the Vietnam War amounted to some kind of noble undertaking instead of the illegal and immoral crime against humanity that it was.

The TV chain that owns more stations than any other firm in the country, the Republican-allied Sinclair Broadcast Group, has ordered its stations to preempt usual programming to air a 42-minute film, "Stolen Honor: Wounds That Never Heal," in late October. The movie is devoted to bashing Kerry for his antiwar activism. Conveniently, more than a dozen of Sinclair's stations are in pivotal swing states — Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Especially in battleground states, such defamation of Kerry is likely to intensify until the last votes are cast on Nov. 2.

*** Exploiting anti-gay prejudices**

It has become a media truism that ballot measures against gay marriage in some

states will boost the turnout of Bush voters. The Bush-Cheney '04 campaign has winked and nodded at virulent anti-gay bigotry on the ground.

It's part of a dual-track strategy: While the Republican ticket avoids overt anti-gay comments, and Dick Cheney uses high-profile media venues to express personal support for his lesbian daughter, the GOP campaign is avidly working to gain votes by capitalizing on anti-gay prejudice.

*** Inverting realities of class warfare**

All four men on the major-party tickets are rich. But the positions taken — and constituencies represented — by Bush-Cheney and Kerry-Edwards aren't the same. Typically, Bush has denounced the Democrats' call to raise taxes for Americans earning more than \$200,000 a year.

To obscure their own ultra-elite loyalties, Bush and Cheney will keep trying to portray Kerry and Edwards as tools of wealthy trial lawyers and Hollywood snobs. In reality, however, as reflected by the delegates to the Republican and Democratic national conventions, the base of the GOP is far more wealthy, corporate and non-union.

*** Making use of Ralph Nader's 2004 campaign**

In a little-noticed GOP maneuver during the last days of the 2000 campaign, Republican forces poured money into commercials boosting Nader in some battleground states. This time, we can expect pro-Bush forces to do the same — but on a much larger scale.

"In a pre-election twist," the Associated Press reported on Oct. 27, 2000, "Republicans are buying TV ads featuring Ralph Nader in states where votes for the Green Party candidate might tip the outcome to George W. Bush. ... Republicans hope the commercials will help Bush by persuading would-be Gore voters to back Nader instead." A Republican group targeted three closely contested states in 2000 — Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin — with ads that featured film clips of Nader attacking Al Gore, the Democratic presidential nominee. AP reported that the Republican Leadership Council earmarked at least \$100,000 for those commercials, airing just days before the election.

The official Bush campaign of 2000 was glad to leave such Nader advertising endeavors to unofficial Republican allies. The Associated Press reported four years ago (on Nov. 4) that the Republican Leadership Council "ran ads last week to help GOP presidential nominee George W. Bush. The ads were designed to induce Democrats to defect to Green Party candidate Ralph Nader." The executive director of the Republican

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Leadership Council, Mark Miller, said: "I don't think he [Bush] could have gotten away with it the way we did."

This year, Nader wasn't able to get an endorsement from the Green Party. But he'll be on the ballot in most states — including most swing states. And it would be surprising if Republicans don't flood the airwaves in many of those states with commercials featuring Nader in the final days of this election campaign.

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