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Fine Art
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First Ever
Promo Guide



Hitting the Campaign Trail



By Tamara Lackey

So, have you decided whom you're going to vote for yet? Wow. That's a dumb question to ask nowadays. But it's one I'm asking people all the time.

Based on most responses, I might as well be asking people for their social security number. Or to tell me the graphic tale of how they consummated their current relationship.

I am saying the words, "Have you decided whom you're going to vote for yet?" And they are watching my mouth move while hearing the words, "I'd like to start an extremely personal dialogue with you that will make you quite uncomfortable." It's unbelievable, really, that I even have the nerve to ask.

Over the course of the past six months, I've taken on a photographic quest of sorts in an effort to cover this historic election, and there's a lot to shoot—everything from small fundraisers to huge rallies, but also stump speeches, interactive town hall meetings, private receptions, meet and greets, soaring presentations delivered to tens of thousands, and, of course, the good ole fashioned photo op.

At nearly all of these events, there is



a sense of euphoria, genuine belief, passion and excitement. There is also protest, seething anger, boisterous heckling and inner-party division, even among those who support the same candidate but feel differently about key issues.

So I watch the people around me. And although I get a lot of my answers that way,

I talk to everyone too. I ask the dreaded question: How is their vote shaping up?

McCain supporter? Obama supporter? Apathetic (genuinely) or declared apathetic (and many relatively angry about it too)?

I use clumsy research methods; wholly inadequate by even the loosest of social science standards. Sometimes I lose my

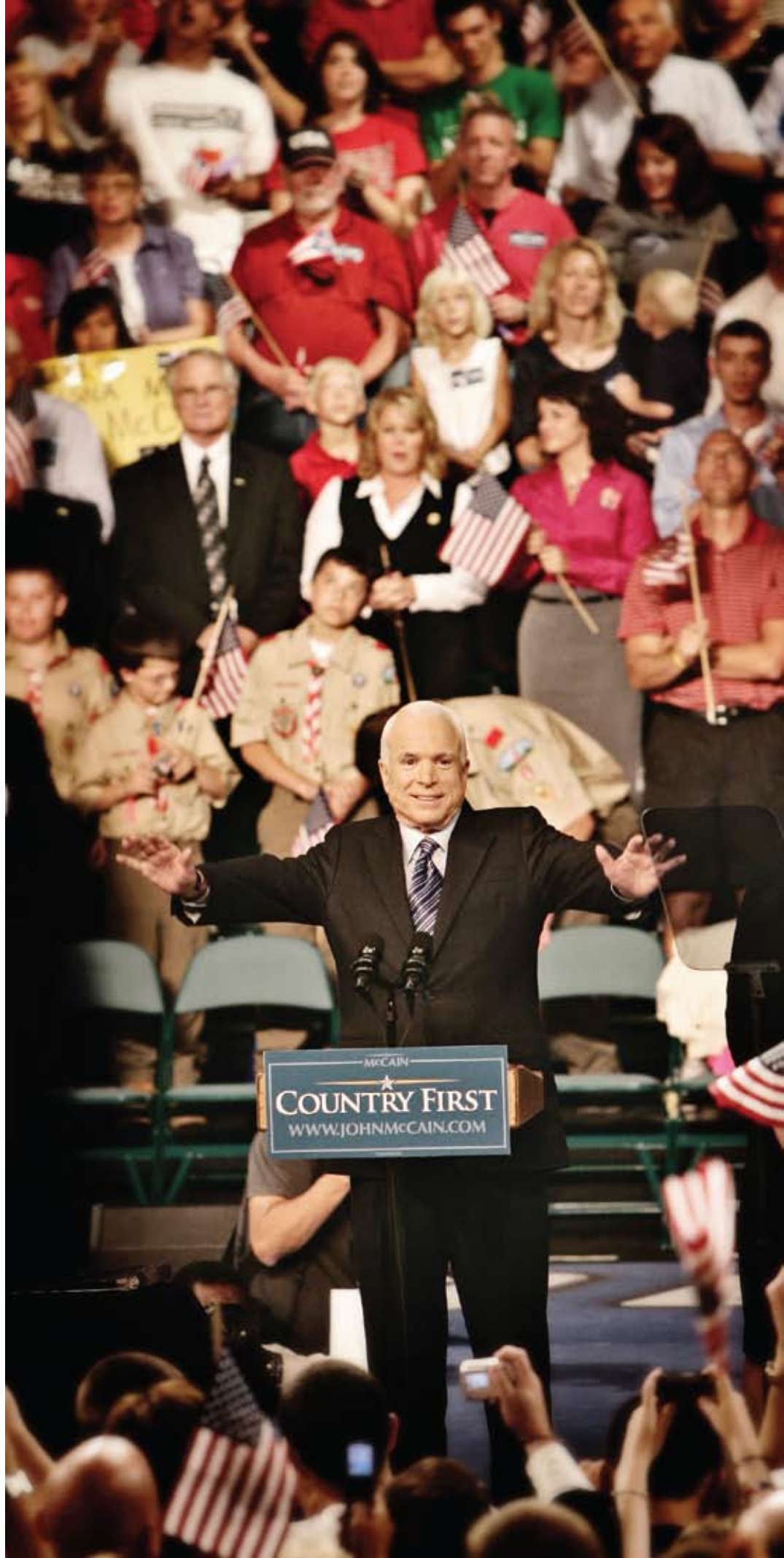
nerve and ask in a more roundabout way. Sometimes I don't ask until we're nearing the end of a discussion; every now and again I hint at the fact that I'm hoping for a bigger answer than just a one-worder, thereby polluting their response right out of the gate. And, of course, usually I am photographing them first, giving more weight to what I see rather than to what they say.

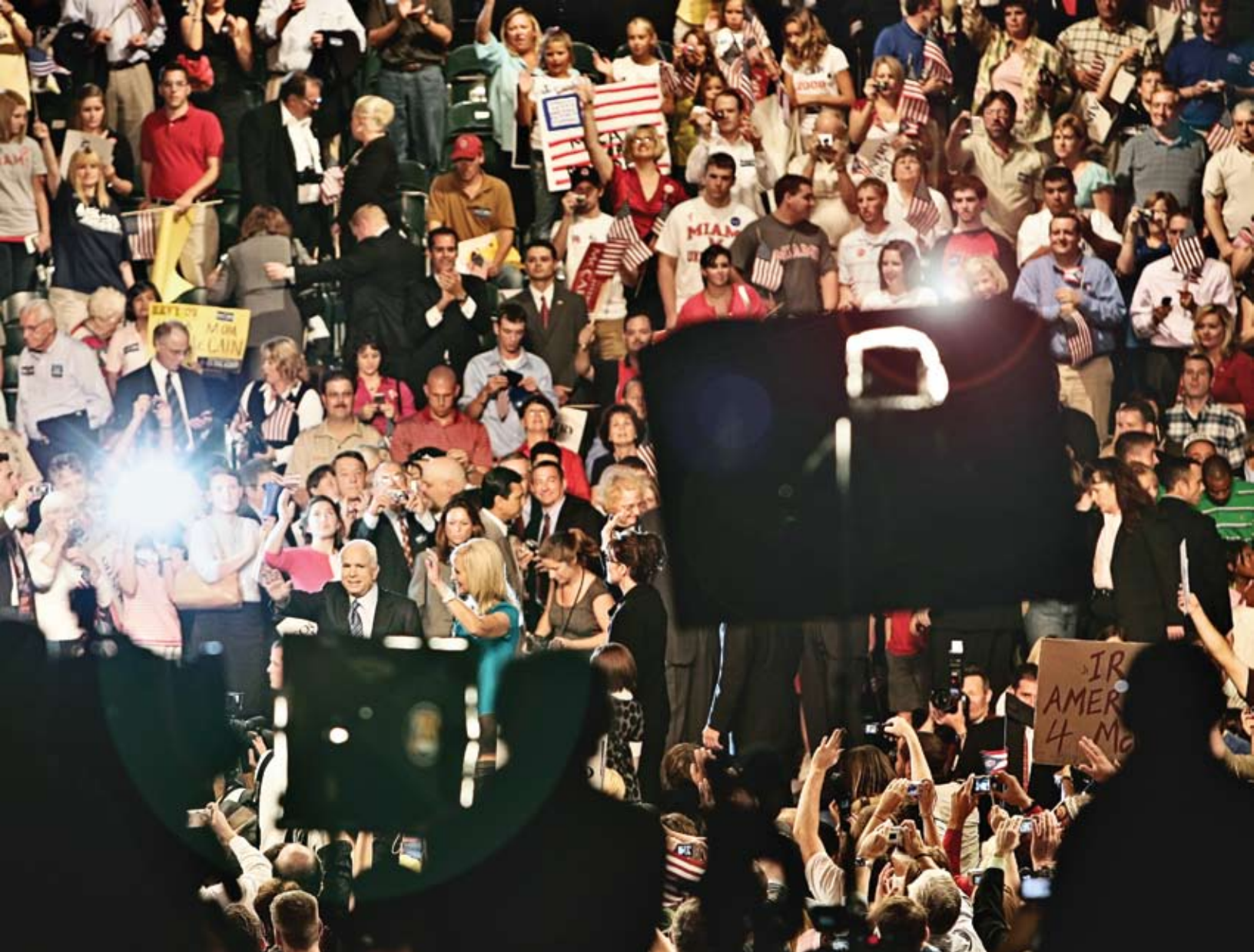
Nonetheless, I get a pretty even split across the four categories, surprisingly even when you account for the fact that these questions are stretched across socioeconomic, political and geographic borders.

Hands down, the most interesting responses inevitably come from self-declared apathetics, those who have such a negative take on the political process that they've emphatically decided to remove their attention from it.

Politics have always been divisive. This election year, however, the schism seems particularly remarkable—not necessarily between Barack Obama and John McCain, although there is enough of that, no doubt—but between those who care and those who don't. The ones who care are putting passion behind their interest in the process and their candidate of choice: They buy the bumper stickers, don the T-shirts and plant the lawn signs. They hold primary results parties, not just on Super Tuesday but even on the day the victor of South Dakota is announced. They pore over newspapers and blogs, forwarding along thought-provoking or amusing links and they embed a lively succession of YouTube clips on their blogs. They knock on doors. They wave flags. They raise funds. With a renewed sense of hope, they see a true opportunity for needed impact. Many of these individuals are getting involved in politics for the first time, while some are rediscovering a passion for it after decades away. Still others have loyally followed their candidate for years.

But there are those who are frustrated with the same old game. Many of these individuals have been through the ups and downs and are just tired of it all. Some are downright angry, giving specifics of exactly why they are more than merely disinterested. They have been down this road before, and they





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see it all as history repeated, wrapped up in better rhetoric, or even the exact same verbiage now set to music or cutting-edge, Web-ready, color-corrected video. They say that no matter what they read about Candidate A, they will see that same argument repackaged and repurposed and then slammed with even more impact against Candidate B. The political process is so broken, they exclaim, that they are

not sure how it can ever be fixed again. And they do not choose to waste any more of their time worrying about it. They are simply done with it all.

Their opinions are expressed in remarkably similar ways: “At first I got caught up... I used to believe... I always thought that I could at least trust in... Y’know, there used to be a time...”

It struck me how much our ties to our

candidates are eerily similar to an authentic relationship. The media brings politicians so close to us now—and, man, do they work hard to do so—that we hear their every utterance, and we learn nearly everything there is to know about our potential presidents. It’s easy to forget that we aren’t actually dating them.

But every partnership has a great beginning: The first time you ever saw him



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or her, the piqued interest, the rush of excitement, your belief, your hope, your admiration, your affection. He is different from anyone who came before; she does not conform. He has always set himself apart.

The truth, of course, is that no one is perfect, yet we are shocked to learn (typically in vivid and repetitive detail) that they are not. The declared apathetic will discuss how their preferred candidate once fell from grace, at least from grace as they see it. They relate this experience as something akin to hurt, like a child abandoned or a lover betrayed. It's visceral. It raises their ire. It is truly personal.

What many candidates eventually must do, it seems, is bend a bit on their initial promises in order to move forward in the process. They make concessions for what they feel is the greater good.

And compromise is a dirty word in today's politics, despite the fact that we learned growing up that it was a good thing. Our primary school system promotes books like *ValueTales* meant to advocate the best of our personal morals—ground rules for the way a society functions at its best. We teach our children all

about the importance of values such as kindness, understanding and forgiveness. And, yes, we teach about compromise—a tactic one uses to bring about a settlement of differences by mutual concessions.

And that got me thinking, photographing so many who believe so differently, so passionately: How do you govern a nation of radically varied individuals—a spectrum of diverse ethnicities, religions, political leanings, and fundamental moral values—and never once compromise? And if you never give and take, how can you be best suited to govern all of us?

A lot of rumination on my part, I suppose. But when the media is required to set up two to five hours before each event starts, you have some time on your hands. You find yourself thinking about all these questions and more, especially why a single inquiry into one's current decision-making is typically considered to be a very personal question.

Many of the answers can be found through photography. One beautiful combination of glass and metal lets you see straight into some people's hearts, and it gives you the opportunity to see so much about what they are thinking before you

even get the chance to ask.

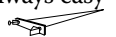
You see people scream in support, and you hear them shout in protest. You watch them embrace the candidates, even as they push up against each other. You watch them anticipate and then react.

You see them feel.

You think about the entirety of every one of the steps involved in this complex political process, of all the effort, the reporting, the emotion—every hyped stage that leads to that one great election in November, with hundreds of millions of us along for the ride.

Put in that context, at least, it makes sense why this one implicit question provokes such a strong range of reactions. It's not just about a private choice. It's about the public's future. You can see it on our faces.

And an answer that big isn't always easy to give.



Tamara Lackey does not normally ask questions that she knows are none of her business. Honestly. Her work has appeared in Vogue, O Magazine and Martha Stewart Living, and her new book, The Art of Children's Portrait Photography (Amherst Media) is available this fall. You can see more of her work at www.tamaralackey.com.