Bill Ayers, Blackberries and John McCain

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I hope John McCain brings up Bill Ayers every chance he gets in the debate tonight. McCain is trying to make the absurd and implausible argument that Barack Obama is somehow a terrorist or a threat to the US because he served on a board and knew Bill Ayers years ago. This is the kind of argument that might work for McCain if the economy were doing well, the country was at peace and McCain were already up in the polls, but in this election, this issue will not get any traction for McCain.

That is not, however, the reason, I hope McCain dwells on this issue. The Bill Ayers issue underscores just how out of touch John McCain is with the country he seeks to lead. To McCain's ears, Bill Ayers and the Weatherman conjure up images of dangerous radicals seeking to overthrow the American government, which is, to a large extent, what the Weatherman were. However, for many Americans, Bill Ayers and the Weatherman are something from the history books, and probably from a chapter they didn't bother to read. The Weatherman were, after all, a fringe group and largely a footnote to the history of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Therefore, mentioning Bill Ayers is, for many Americans, just another way for John McCain to tell us he is old. Focusing on Bill Ayers is about as helpful as McCain turning to Obama during the debate and saying "I don't know how to use a Blackberry, but you do." Americans of all ages, but particularly those under 50, are simply tired of hearing about the 1960s. Obama has understood this, and probably felt this as well. This has contributed to his success in winning the Democratic nomination and his ongoing popularity among young people. McCain clearly is still somewhat stuck in that decade. Parenthetically, I understand that many of the Weatherman attacks occurred in the 1970s, but the 1960s lasted well into the 1970s. In fact in my hometown of San Francisco, the 1960s lasted well into the 1980s. It is now, however, 2008 and the 1960s are not very salient for voters anymore.

So let John McCain talk about Bill Ayers all night. If he does he will be breaking one of the cardinal rules of politics, and probably life, when you are in a hole, the first thing you should do is stop digging.