In the pages that follow, there are three op-ed pieces. Please select one of these and make it the focus of your group efforts on Tuesday, 9 October, and Tuesday, 16 October. Read them before class on Tuesday, as they are each around 1000 words.

The papers should again be about 600 words (more or less) and they should focus on providing three things:

(1) A reconstruction of what your group believes is the main argument from the op-ed piece you’ve selected.
(2) An analysis of how that argument is supposed to work—e.g., is it a deductive argument? Or is it a non-deductive argument, such as an inference to the best explanation? (You don’t need to use logical terminology in this part, but you do need to comment on how the premises are intended by their author to support the conclusion.)
(3) A critical response from your group to the argument. Since these are political op-ed pieces, not everyone in the group may agree with a response. In this case, concentrate on the response as a type of response—you can even say something like, “Were someone to disagree with George Will, this is what they might argue.” Alternatively, you could go with the majority and then indicate dissent at the end.

Each of these could be the focus of a paragraph, if you wanted to organize the paper that way. In addition, at the end of the blue book, I want you to provide a standard form of the argument. In my view, it is best to prepare this first, as it can then be used as an outline of your reconstruction paragraph.

Once again, the assignment will be graded according to the following schedule: 10 points for in-class notes, 10 points for between-class thoughts, and 80 points for the paper and standard form. Be sure to have your notes initialed by Michael before you leave class on Tuesday, 9 October. Also, be sure to put your between-class thoughts on a separate sheet of paper that you will turn in at the end of class on Tuesday, 16 October. Remember to put your name on both the notes and the thoughts.

Please let me know if you have any questions about this assignment. Pressing questions can be sent to me by email at orourk51@msu.edu; less pressing questions can be asked at the beginning of class on Thursday. And Michael will be available on Tuesday to answer questions as well—I would recommend starting with him if you have questions about the readings.
Can Romney turn this contest around?

By George Will
Washington Post
October 1, 2012

WASHINGTON — In baseball, a game without a clock, each player on a team that is behind by a bunch of runs is advised to “stay within yourself.” That baseball lingo means: Do not try to do too much. Instead, get ‘em on, get ‘em over, get ‘em in. There are no five-run home runs. Small, incremental gains matter because the game goes on until someone makes the 27th out. Until then, there is hope.

Unfortunately for Mitt Romney, presidential politics is, like football, a game with a clock, one with just five weeks of ticks remaining. In football, a team behind by lots of points late in the game must take gambles. Romney is behind — in the important swing states, with the national electorate regarding who would best handle the economy and health care, and in national measures of favorable voter perceptions.

So on Wednesday night it might be risky for Romney not to take risks. But what can he do? He might add to his menu of policies by embracing, say, the idea of breaking up the largest banks, a sound policy that would subvert the caricature of him as rapacious capitalism embodied. But debates are not good venues for explaining ... well, anything, actually, but especially not new initiatives. And October is a time for summations to the jury, not new submissions of evidence. Worse, Romney and his advisers must be bewildered by this fact: In October 2011 they would have been serenely confident of victory if they had been told that 12 months later the following would be true.

That President Obama would be waist deep in muddy and contradictory descriptions and explanations of the terrorist (he now concedes) attack on the U.S. diplomatic compound in Libya. That data just released for August 2012 showed that real disposable income had again declined. That Obama would actually celebrate the fact that, for the first month since he took office, there were more U.S. jobs than when he took office. That the most recent figures show a 13.2 percent decline in durable goods orders. That nearly 25 percent — the highest in three decades — of Americans between ages 25 and 55 are unemployed. That the second-quarter growth rate was adjusted down from an anemic 1.7 percent to the stall speed of 1.3 percent.

And regarding the Investor in Chief, that his Tesla Motors would be troubled. The California firm has received a $465 million loan from the world’s most incompetent venture capital fund, the U.S. Department
of Energy — source of Solyndra’s $535 million — to make electric cars for the affluent. The Model S, unlike Tesla’s $109,000 Roadster, is supposed to sell for between $50,000 and $98,000 — after the $7,500 federal tax credit. But Tesla has just received a waiver on the terms of its DOE loan. Tesla joins California-based Fisker, another floundering would-be maker of high-end rides for rich people, which has received a $529 million DOE loan.

Obama’s administration is in shambles, yet he is prospering politically. This may not, however, entirely be evidence of the irrationality of the electorate. Something more benign may be at work.

A significant date in the nation’s civil rights progress involved an African American baseball player named Robinson, but not Jackie. The date was Oct. 3, 1974, when Frank Robinson, one the greatest players in history, was hired by the Cleveland Indians as the major leagues’ first black manager. But an even more important milestone of progress occurred June 19, 1977, when the Indians fired him. That was colorblind equality.

Managers get fired all the time. The fact that the Indians felt free to fire Robinson — who went on to have a distinguished career managing four other teams — showed that another racial barrier had fallen: Henceforth, African Americans, too, could enjoy the God-given right to be scapegoats for impatient team owners or incompetent team executives.

Perhaps a pleasant paradox defines this political season: That Obama is African American may be important, but in a way quite unlike that darkly suggested by, for example, MSNBC’s excitable boys and girls who, with their (at most) one-track minds and exquisitely sensitive olfactory receptors, sniff racism in any criticism of their pin-up. Instead, the nation, which is generally reluctant to declare a president a failure — thereby admitting that it made a mistake in choosing him — seems especially reluctant to give up on the first African American president. If so, the 2012 election speaks well of the nation’s heart, if not its head.
Can Obama and Romney tell the truth – and win?

By Frida Ghitis
Special to CNN
Published October 5, 2012

Editor’s note: Frida Ghitis is a world affairs columnist for The Miami Herald and World Politics Review. A former CNN producer/correspondent, she is the author of "The End of Revolution: A Changing World in the Age of Live Television." Follow her on Twitter: @FridaGColumns

(CNN) -- Can presidential candidates talk to voters like adults? Will voters support a candidate who tells them the truth? The answer to that question is obvious to anyone who has observed American politics in recent years.

One day -- let us hope it comes soon -- voters will demand that their political leaders present them with a more realistic sense of the possibilities and choices they face. But for now, voters demand perfect odds and simple solutions, and politicians oblige.

President Obama confessed as much in a recent Vanity Fair profile, when he revealed he knows that each one of the decisions he makes as president could turn out wrong. "Nothing comes to my desk that is perfectly solvable," he said. "Any given decision you make you'll wind up with a 30 to 40 percent chance that it isn't going to work." But the American public, the president suggested, cannot handle those odds. After you have made your decision, you need to feign total certainty about it.

Despite knowing this, Obama did not project that supreme confidence and simplified arguments in Wednesday's debate. Romney did. That was not the president's only problem, but it was one of the reasons he didn't fare well.

The frustration showed after the debate, when Obama accused Romney of blatant lying in a debate that, like both campaigns, has been rife with distortions. Both candidates twisted the facts. Romney did it to better effect. It's a tragedy for American democracy that the tactic works.

Four years ago, Obama betrayed no doubts that he would succeed in achieving highly ambitious promises. It's harder to speak in dreamy, inspirational platitudes when you've been president for four years, when the prose of real life has not caught up with the poetry of the campaign.

The American political system demands charisma, leadership and boundless optimism, even if they are artificial and hollow.

Some voters tell pollsters that a "strong leader" is one of the most
important traits they look for in a candidate. And pollsters track the perception obsessively. But the prevailing idea of what a strong leader is has become manufactured and artificial.

Candidates have to sound self-assured and authoritative, in a version of leadership that resembles more the utterances of Donald Trump in "The Apprentice" than the wisdom of the great politician-philosophers who founded the country.

Real charisma allows leaders to change their mind. But that's different from reshaping your supposed ideology to win different audiences.

Intellectual and political honesty are not Etch-a-Sketch tricks. Romney's penchant for telling one audience one thing and then taking it back when it doesn't suit another audience -- as he just did with his infamous "47%" comments by saying he was "completely wrong" -- does not count as mettle.

In the debate, Obama slipped in his efforts to don that leadership mantle. He even acknowledged that some of the choices are a matter of odds, that the country is a laboratory and we can only hope the experiments will turn out well.

On the economy, he said, "Look, we've tried this; we've tried both approaches," comparing the Bush approach with the Clinton years. Obama took a step toward honesty with the public in suggesting that we can make only an educated guess as to what strategy is likely to work. "In some ways," he said, "we've got some data on which approach is more likely to create jobs and opportunity for Americans."

Evidence, "data." That's not a modern American politician's way of framing a decision. Americans like it when their leaders (and their pundits) are completely sure of what they propose, totally convinced it will work.

Some people believe this is the inevitable way of politics. But it doesn't have to be.

In other countries facing great problems such as high unemployment and shrinking economies, these days, "difficult choices" and uncertain outcomes are the centerpiece of political discussions. Voters are treated as intelligent, responsible adults who have to decide what is the most promising of unpalatable options.

Friday's unemployment figures seemed to support Obama's belief in his economic approach. But they don't erase the uncertainty ahead. In the end, we have competing philosophies for facing a world where countless unexpected challenges are sure to emerge.

It's true. An appearance of self-assurance creates a reassuring aura of competence and charisma. It makes people feel better. People are drawn to those who seem most sure of their ideas. But being more
certain does not make you more right.

True charisma and leadership require acknowledging the uncertainties, recognizing the gaps in our knowledge. In the view of presidential scholar Michael Beschloss, they require the courage to tell difficult truths, to make unpopular decisions, to work with people who have different beliefs.

Following the current definition, Romney proclaims with absolute conviction, as he did during Wednesday night's debate, that "the private market and individual responsibility always works best." And he promises to bring 12 million new jobs while guaranteeing without a hint of doubt that if he is not elected, life will get worse, prices will go up, incomes will come down, and America will become weaker.

Four years ago, Obama made promises that today sound just, well, sad.

After his 2008 win in the Iowa caucuses, he told his exhilarated supporters that he would put an end to years of partisan bitterness and pettiness in Washington. He would be the president who would bring "Democrats and Republicans together to get the job done."

As a candidate, Obama could draw a dreamy vision. He would bring red and blue states back together, close down the prison at Guantanamo, fight climate change and genocide. His election, he said, would "mark the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal." He even vowed to "reboot America's image in the Muslim world."

Instead, he tackled much greater problems than he had expected even when he exaggerated his competence. The economy, the world, they all proved more complex than the black and white choices of the election. Unemployment is still high. He has made little headway on the environment. Republicans and Democrats remain at each other's throats, and people in Muslims countries are still not fond of America or its president.

In the first debate, candidates again avoided talking about the need to make difficult choices. The talk was of tax cuts, not tax ("revenue" is the euphemism) increases. There are other areas where the choices are difficult and unappealing in foreign and domestic policy.

Voters may feel placidly satisfied when the candidates avoid mentioning the dangers ahead or the hard truths. But beneath the wishful thinking, Americans know that the world is complicated, the economy is challenging, the choices difficult.

A candidate who tells voters he is 100% certain that the choices are clear and his plans will work out is lying, deluded or foolish.
Moderate Mitt returns

By David Brooks
New York Times

A sour fog settled over the Republican Party during the primary season. Several plausible candidates decided not to run for president, and the whole conversation ended up tainted by various political circus acts.

The GOP did its best to appear unattractive. It had trouble talking the language of compassion. It seemed to regard reasonable political compromise as an act of dishonor. It offered little for struggling Americans except that government would leave them alone.

The Obama campaign took advantage. President Barack Obama could have run against Mitt Romney by calling him a flip-flopper. Instead, the president tapped into the GOP gestalt and accused him of being a soulless ideologue or the tool of ideologues. Judging by how the president was prepared for Wednesday's debate, Obama's staff apparently believed that that charge was actually true.

But, on Wednesday night, Romney finally emerged from the fog. He broke with the stereotypes of his party and, at long last, began the process of offering a more authentic version of himself.

Far from being a lackey to the rich, Romney vowed that rich people will not see tax bills go down under a Romney administration. He attacked Obama for giving a "kiss to New York banks." Instead, he focused relentlessly on job creation for the middle class, which, he noted, has seen incomes fall by $4,300 under this president while gas prices have doubled and health care costs have surged.

Far from being an individualistic, social Darwinist, Romney spoke comfortably about compassion and shared destinies: "We're a nation that believes that we're all children of the same God, and we care for those that have difficulties, those that are elderly and have problems and challenges, those that are disabled."

Far from wanting to eviscerate government and railing about government dependency, Romney talked about how to make government programs work better. "I'm not going to cut education funding," he vowed. He praised government job-training efforts and said he wanted to consolidate them. He lamented that $90 billion has been shipped to energy corporations, which could have paid for 2 million teachers.

Far from being a pitchfork-wielding populist who wants to raze Washington, Romney said he would work with the people he finds there. "We have to work on a collaborative basis, not because we're going to compromise our principle but because there is common ground." He bragged that in his old job as governor, he met with Democrats every week. He boasted about his bipartisan health care bill. He praised the
(semimythical) friendship between Ronald Reagan and Tip O'Neill.

Far from being an unthinking deregulator, Romney declared, "Regulation is essential. ... I mean, you have to have regulations so that you can have an economy work." Instead of championing unfettered capitalism, he said he wanted predictable and workable rules. He criticized housing regulations that can't give a clear idea of what a qualified mortgage is. He criticized financial regulations that favor big banks over small ones.

Romney didn't describe a comprehensive governing philosophy, but he gave us a hint of a strong center-right pragmatic approach. It starts with 1986-style tax reform and Wyden-Ryan Medicare reform and then offers a glimpse of experimental pragmatism on most everything else.

Yes, it's true. Romney's tax numbers don't add up. Yes, there's a lot of budgetary flimflam. No, Romney still doesn't have an easy answer to wage stagnation (neither does Obama). But Romney's debate performance signals the return of Governor Mitt. Democrats call it hypocrisy; I call it progress.

You could conceivably build a majority coalition around this framework, winning over more working-class women and some Hispanic voters. The crucial test will be whether Romney can develop, brand and sell this approach over the campaign's final month.

Most important, Romney did something no other mainstream Republican has had the guts to do. Either out of conviction or political desperation, he broke with Tea Party orthodoxy and began to redefine the Republican identity. And, having taken this step, he's broken the spell. Conservatives loved it! They loved that it was effective, and it was effective because Romney could more authentically be the man who (I think) he truly is.

Now it's the Obama campaign that has problems to solve. Politically, the president will have to go back to portraying Romney as a flip-flopper instead of an ideologue. Substantively, Obama will have to kindle new passion. So far, he's seemed driven by the negative passion of stopping Republican extremism. He'll have to develop a positive passion for something he actually wants to do.

I gave Obama better reviews than most pundits did Wednesday night, but his closing statement was as bad as any I've ever heard. If he can't come up with a two-minute argument for why he should be president again, the former Mr. Audacity might still lose to the former Mr. Right Winger.