



IT WON'T BE HILLARY

Sunday, August 24, 2008

Every Sunday CUIP's president Jacqueline Salit and strategist and philosopher Fred Newman watch the political talk shows and discuss them. Here are excerpts from their dialogue on Sunday, August 24, 2008 after watching "This Week with George Stephanopoulos" and "The McLaughlin Group."

Salit: Like everyone else, we should spend a couple of minutes talking about the Joe Biden selection. Here's the "story" on Biden: Expertise in foreign policy, an independent guy, strong roots in blue collar America, a statesman, and somebody who brings experience to the ticket. Would you add anything else to that list of "positives" for Obama?

Newman: The choice of Joe Biden resembles John Kennedy's choice of Lyndon Johnson. And that's a key thing with Obama trying to project a Kennedy image, which would be a big plus.

Salit: Not to mention that Caroline Kennedy was on Obama's VP search committee. OK, here's the counter attack: Yes, Biden brings all those things, but the choice highlights Obama's weaknesses. He had to go to somebody like Biden, a six-term senator who's experienced in foreign affairs, etc. and while he brings those plusses to the ticket, the minus is that it shines a light on Obama's weakness in that area. So, effectively, it's a negative for Obama.

Newman: Obama's going to have the light shone on his weaknesses in any event. Another spotlight isn't going to add a whole lot more light. If you're lit, you're lit.

Salit: The Hillary subplot. Let's talk about this a little bit. Stephanopoulos has Rudy Giuliani on his show. What does Rudy do? His main focus is the Hillary argument. He says, 'Here's what happened here. It's the Obama/not-Hillary ticket.' He's highlighting the fact that Hillary was not chosen for the VP slot. Here's how Giuliani maps the thing: Obama has 50% of the Democratic vote. Hillary has 50% of the Democratic vote. Why not put those things together? Obama didn't make that choice. Why? Because Hillary told the truth about Obama during the primaries. Obviously, what Giuliani is doing here is he's trying to get the Hillary supporters who are not happy with Obama (or are not happy with the fact that Hillary lost, or are unhappy with the fact that she's not on the ticket, etc.) all ginned up going into the convention.

Newman: No kidding.

Salit: Is there a Hillary problem here, do you think?

Newman: What's a Hillary problem?

Salit: A Hillary problem is you've got 10% or 20% or 30% of Hillary's supporters – white blue collar Democrats, including some women, who are unhappy that she didn't get the nomination. They're unhappy that she's not on the ticket. So, they're going to break away and they're going to go for McCain. And, given how close the election is going to be in November, that could be the difference. That's the argument you have to make for it to be a story at all. Otherwise, it's just a story about who's going to act a little pissed off in Denver and that's the end of it. In order to make it a story, you have to spin an endgame where Obama loses because of this.

Newman: That's not going to come until November.

Salit: Yes.

Newman: Does anyone have any information that that's happening?

Salit: Reporters are going to go to the convention floor to try and find Hillary delegates who are going to say, *I'm not voting for Obama in November*. They're going to try and blow that up into this bigger story: "The Blue Collar Democrats Who Are Going to Vote Republican." I'm not sure how big a story that is because that's been true for, presumably, a number of election cycles. The story is really just that the media and the McCain camp are looking for a little sensationalism on the floor of the convention. Otherwise the convention is going to be a pretty scripted affair. But I'd say if there is a real story here it's what does the new Democratic Party look like?

Newman: The old Democratic Party.

Salit: OK.

Newman: The winner has her or his supporters and the person who came in second has her or his and they have to figure out the endgame and win as much as they can as a united party. That's been characteristic of the Democratic Party for a very long time. What's new?

Salit: I guess the only thing that's new is that it's the Obama forces that are running the show, as opposed to the Clinton forces.

Newman: You could say that's what "new" is almost by definition. But there's nothing new here. Probably the biggest story is that there's nothing new, which is a hard story to write.

Salit: Back to the Biden thing. One of the advantages they're projecting of having Biden on the ticket is that Obama wanted somebody who differed with him on issues and would speak out about that, who wouldn't be a rubber stamp. One difference is that they had different positions on the Iraq war. Obama opposed going into Iraq and Biden voted for the authorizing resolution.

Newman: Yes.

Salit: Now Biden says that vote was a mistake. He didn't realize the extent to which Cheney and the neo-cons would drive this thing towards war. Part of what is nibbling at the sidelines of the Obama campaign is "the Left." The Left is unhappy with Obama's moves to the center. Does this give some grist to the mill?

Newman: What grist could it give? The presidential and the vice presidential candidates were either against the war or voted for it but have since come out against it. What's the grist? As opposed to a candidate who is for a stronger and longer war than anybody? That's obviously what the debate has to be about. We all have to deal with the levels of stupidity that pundits and leftists will take things to. But this is a little extreme. The Democrats are going with anti-war.

Salit: Yes.

Newman: And the Republicans are going with pro-war. Could that be more plain? No. Will that be the only consideration of the American people? No. But it will be an important one.

Salit: Is there anything in particular you're watching for in the Democratic convention?

Newman: I'm not watching it.

Salit: Well, you don't have to watch it to watch for something. Any personalities that you're looking to see how they're positioned?

Newman: All the characters have made plain who they are and where they're at. What am I supposed to watch for? Am I supposed to sit around for five million hours to see if some Hillary delegate gets up and says, *I'm going to go vote for John McCain?* The whole thing, as a play, as a theatre piece (and it's a

long play), is a play they've taken most of the drama out of. The event of interest for me is the election. I'll probably watch that.

Salit: Taking the drama out is the Obama strategy. They wanted drama, and they got drama, during the primary season in getting the nomination. Now they want less drama. A little theatre. And more votes.

Newman: They just want to win.

Salit: Yes, they want to win. We watched *The McLaughlin Group*. They had a somewhat crazed discussion about the situation with Russia and Georgia and South Ossetia. I guess the main thing you take away from their discussion is that George Bush is a lame duck president. There's not a lot that he can do and there's not a lot that he's going to do.

Newman: This is a liberal/conservative agreement between Eleanor Clift and Pat Buchanan that the U.S. shouldn't have its foreign policy determined by the relationship of the Russian Bear to the Georgian Cub. The U.S. should determine what's in its best interest.

Salit: You get a little bit of the more unadulterated right wing voice from Monica Crowley. 'We should throw Russia out of the G8. That's what we should do.' Then everybody responds, 'No can do. This is an oil rich country which has close ties to all of Europe. You'll never get that through. Forget about it. We have to find a way to make them pay a price for what they did, but it can't be that.' That's roughly the discussion. One last question. Do you think the Biden selection impacts on the McCain choice?

Newman: I have no idea. It's probably been decided already anyway. Biden is a perfectly sensible selection for Obama. Is there a mirror image of that for McCain? Difficult to say. In spite of Giuliani's protests, though, I can assure you it won't be Hillary.

Salit: Thanks, Fred.