



## HILLARY GETS REAL(ITY)

Sunday, January 13, 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, January 13, 2008 after watching "The Chris Matthews Show" and "Meet the Press."*

**Salit:** Here's one thing that I take away from Hillary Clinton's presentation on "Meet the Press." She frames the campaign between herself and Barack Obama as a choice between "rhetoric and reality." Her message, just below the surface, is you can only do so much, and you have to accept the limitations of reality. If you accept the limitations of reality, she's the better choice because she knows how to navigate (i.e. triangulate) reality. Obama knows how to put forth rhetoric, but doesn't really have a grasp of reality. And her unstated conclusion is: *Don't think that you can make any kind of dramatic changes of the sort that Obama is envisioning in his rhetoric. This is the way things are and, consequently, I'm your best bet.*

**Newman:** I think what you're saying is surely one valid way of putting it. I might be inclined to put it a little differently. I think she's also articulating a distinction between realities and possibilities. She's suggesting – and this is somewhat similar to what you're saying – that she's better with realities and maybe he's better with possibilities. Now, if you accept that formulation, then you can go on to raise the following question. If she had been a little bit better with possibilities, she would have thought more about the possibilities of what might happen when she voted to give Bush the authorization to go to war in Iraq. She now says 'I was promised this, I was assured that by the White House and by the intelligence experts.' I don't hear her talking with any seriousness about how she considered the possibilities of what could happen if we did invade Iraq. It seems to me if you're Hillary Clinton, and you're dealing with a president, George Bush, and advisors who have great influence, the neo-cons, who were aching to go into Iraq, you would have given more thought to the possibilities that could play out. And if you had, you might have reconsidered your vote. She has a way of talking about "possibilities" which makes it seem as if considering possibilities is impractical. It's not impractical. It's perhaps the most critical and practical thing to do, given our modest capacity to read realities. So, I think that she's not being genuine. She says, *That was the best we could do. We got a report. It gave us this information. The president said he was going to do only this. But then he did these other things.* Okay, that's plausible. But she's left out that there were other possibilities. I'm less than inclined to be responsive to people who have a less than positive view about including possibilities. Part of what I like about Obama – I don't agree with him on everything – is that he seems to have a relationship with possibility that is more practical than Hillary's. I think her notion of possibility is that there's not very much there. In her overemphasis on reality, she gives insufficient attention to possibility.

Now, couldn't someone say *What about the possibility that Barack Obama is going to turn out to be no different than any other politician?* That's a real possibility. That's why I'm an independent, precisely for that reason. Major party candidates, Democrats and Republicans in general, are unwilling to look at possibilities which go beyond the realm of two party politics. That's exactly what I consider their weakness. Are independents automatically better?

**Salit:** Better at seeing possibilities?

**Newman:** Better at doing whatever it is you should do in really considering possibilities. Independents can be less constrained because the major parties are committed to holding onto their positions of power and won't even consider things which run the risk of cutting into that. That's why independents have to make quick changes when they get into office or else they're going to end up as entrenched, and therefore as limited, as the current major parties. The independents shouldn't forget that. They're as vulnerable to institutionalized reality as anybody else, if too much time passes. The independents have to get elected on a mandate of change...but more than change, on a mandate of development, to be instituted as quickly as can be. Because everything can be institutionalized, including the independents. A lot depends on how the independent movement advances even at this point, before it's in power. How it constructs itself, how it relates, how it carries out its business.

**Salit:** Something else I was struck by, which I think is connected to what we're talking about here, was the exchange over Obama's record in fighting for political reform. Clinton and Obama were asked recently "What was your greatest accomplishment in the Senate?" Apparently Obama answered that writing and passing a bill for ethics reform and lobbying reform in Congress was his greatest accomplishment. I thought it was interesting that Obama chose an initiative designed to limit special interest control in policy making, in other words, a process reform. What struck me in the interview was Hillary's posture towards this. She brought this up to Russert as an example of Obama's lack of accomplishment and lack of being a realist: 'He doesn't really have anything to put on the table that changed the lives of real people in real ways. This is the best that he can offer, this kind of flimsy reform package.' What an attitude! She was mocking and denigrating the feeling that so many people have that there is something profoundly wrong with the process and that politics is very corrupt. Whether you think that ethics bill was or wasn't the cat's meow, is neither here nor there. I was put off by her. The story that she's selling is "real results for real people." But results are determined by the process that creates them. Hello!

**Newman:** I appreciate what you're saying. I think it's important. She was as demeaning in her body language as she was in her verbal language as she said 'Well, he worked on such and such as opposed to me, who has a real record.' What's your record? Your record was you attempted to use your position as the president's wife – he was elected president, not you, back in '92, remember, he won, not you – you attempted to use that position to get some kind of universal health care plan and you failed. What else is your record? The Clinton administration failed to take seriously the position of American workers when you passed NAFTA. Even you admit that you failed at that. You've failed

at lots of things. What you've succeeded at is getting elected. So, I don't think Hillary has the record to justify looking down her nose at the people who have made efforts to try to eliminate corruption which is, as you say, an important issue to the American people. Obama is not running on a record of huge legislative accomplishments. He's running on a record of modest accomplishments but great possibilities for the American people. That's what he's running on. Senator Clinton, with all due respect, has a longer list of non-accomplishment than most people running for the presidency of the United States.

**Salit:** You're so right. They know how to get themselves elected. Russert ran a clip of her giving a speech about how she is running as a woman and the historic first of that and she said, 'I'm running to break through the hardest of glass ceilings. I'm doing it for women. I'm doing it for our daughters.' And then she adds, 'and our sons.' I burst out laughing because it was such a classic piece of Clintonian triangulation! Even when you're supposed to be making a point about girls breaking through, you're going to somehow tie it back to boys, because you don't want to lose the "boy" vote. It was ludicrous. It was so unbelievably opportunistic, it totally cracked me up.

Anyway, on "The Chris Matthews Show" Chris said: 'Obviously either Hillary or Obama is going to be the Democratic nominee, which means that the Democratic nominee is going to be a history making first, either a black person or a woman. What's the Republicans' best move to go up against that? Is it the "old hand" John McCain? Is McCain now clearly, from the Republicans point of view, the best choice to put up against what is going to be the "historic" Democratic ticket?'

**Newman:** I'm inclined to think that McCain's on something of a roll and that roll might end up with him being in that position. I think what the Republicans are going to do in the general election is obvious. McCain's going to say, if McCain's the nominee, *I think it's wonderful that we have a woman or we have an African American running for president. I couldn't be more supportive. I've worked for that. I believe in that. I think that's wonderful. But don't forget one thing, everybody. This person is a Democrat. I'm running against a Democrat. And that has political meaning. And we all know who the Democrats are. We all know what they stand for. Boom, boom, boom.* So you neutralize that and then you try to make the campaign be simply a Republican against a Democrat. McCain's the truth teller. He'll sell that story – and paint that stark choice – as a straight talker.

**Salit:** So if it is McCain vs. a Democrat, what do independent voters do? Do moderate and progressive indies support the Democrat and conservative independents support McCain?

**Newman:** I don't know what they will do. I can only say what I think they should do. They should clearly articulate the changes they want to see, as independents in the political process, and then challenge the candidates to support them – to support the independent movement.

**Salit:** In other words, to continue doing what we have been doing. Thanks, Fred.