



## CROSSING OVER

Sunday, February 3, 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, February 3, 2008 after watching "The Chris Matthews Show," "Meet the Press" and "The McLaughlin Group."*

**Salit:** The consensus across the board about the last Democratic debate was that Hillary was at her most vulnerable and Obama was at his strongest in the discussion about the Iraq war. Obama pointed out the disingenuousness of her war vote. And, clearly it was either a terrible lack of judgment on her part because she believed the Bush neo-con story or it was a political choice based on her projection that she couldn't run for the presidency and still vote against the war. In either case, you're looking at a lack of leadership and a lack of judgment. The Democratic primary started out on the issue of the war. And now it's back to the issue of the war.

**Newman:** The war is the issue of the campaign. As you say, it was at the start and it still is. The polls show other issues entering in from time to time. But the war, I think, is what has propelled the whole presidential campaign.

**Salit:** Here are some things that I was struck by. Joe Klein, on "The Chris Matthews Show," talked about the important role of independents and the war issue. Klein says, 'I don't think there are two dozen independents in the country who think we should be in Iraq for 100 years.' He was commenting on McCain's pronouncement that we might be in Iraq for a century and how that position hurts him among independents. Some people say, 'Well, McCain has a history with independents.' Some of the polls show him pulling 30% or 35% of independents in a general election. How would you characterize the independents' view on the war issue?

**Newman:** The independent movement has its own history. It goes through transformations, as do the Democrats and as do the Republicans, on major issues. Independents change positions over time depending on historical circumstances. Today's independent movement that has been playing a role for the last two, three, four years, is very directly connected, in my opinion, to the anti-war movement. Which is not to say that there aren't independents who are pro-war. Of course there are. But, the independent movement today is much more responsive to Obama's message than to any other message that's being put out there. Dennis Kucinich and Ron Paul are strongly against the war and independents appreciated that, but their candidacies have not gone the distance. Of the candidates who remain viable, Obama is the most connected to the anti-war sentiment. And I think that's a big factor relative to electability.

**Salit:** Chris Matthews, I believe, showed a clip of Obama making a statement after the Thursday night debate. Obama said 'If I'm the nominee, Hillary's supporters will vote for me, but if Hillary's the nominee, I don't know that she'll get all of mine.'

**Newman:** That's accurate.

**Salit:** Yes. This has to do with the war with independents and with the nature of the Obama coalition.

**Newman:** Yes. And Obama was there early and has been very outspoken in opposition to our being in this war, to the policy of U.S. intervention. Obama is running a very smart campaign. If he wins the nomination, when it comes to November, what Obama is going to be saying is *Look, it's a relatively simple vote. If you want to vote for the U.S. entering into a 100 years of intervening into every hotspot, from Southeast Asia to the Middle East, then you should vote for John McCain. If you want to vote for someone who doesn't favor that, who believes that we should spend our financial and political capital for our domestic needs, not for war, then you should vote for me.* It becomes war vs. anti-war. If he says that with his degree of credibility, he'll likely win.

**Salit:** What do you think the impact of the Kennedy endorsement is for Obama? We see over the last six or seven days, Obama's been picking up a half a point or a point a day, if you want to just do the quantitative measurements.

**Newman:** I see that, as you just pointed out. It's obviously helpful. Ted Kennedy is pointing to the fact that whatever it is that you want to say about the Clintons and the Clinton years, they were not inspirational.

**Salit:** No.

**Newman:** Those might have been better times. But they weren't inspirational.

**Salit:** The Kennedy years were inspirational.

**Newman:** And Obama is the inspirational candidate.

**Salit:** Yes.

**Newman:** So, it reinforces what Obama has done. But, it also says there's got to be room in this party for inspiration. So, don't say no to Obama on the grounds that he's insufficiently experienced. He's very experienced at inspiring people.

**Salit:** I'm sure you picked up on this, but on "The Chris Matthews Show" when he asked the panelists whether there would an Obama-Clinton or Clinton-Obama ticket, the two white people on the panel said yes and the two people of color on the panel said no.

**Newman:** Yes.

**Salit:** James Carville's narrative on McCain and on the situation in the Republican Party was that the interesting thing going on there is that the three groups that everyone assumed were the power players – the religious conservatives, the talk show circuit

and, as he called them, the supply-side fringe – have all been bypassed by McCain, who most people think is going to prevail. So Carville said that he thought that was interesting because it shows that the power groups are not as powerful as everybody thought or as they once were.

**Newman:** It goes without saying that those three groups aren't as powerful as they once were. We just had eight years of Bush and he was elected by them, and at the moment, he's very unpopular. And McCain is many different things, and that includes that he's the anti-Bush candidate. He's done a lot of things which line him up with Bush, but nonetheless, he is the anti-Bush candidate. No one would dare say it because he's "Honest John McCain," but John McCain's the biggest flip-flopper in the presidential race. He's flip-flopped all over the place. But, you know, so far he's getting away with that. In the general election, he won't get away with it.

**Salit:** No?

**Newman:** No.

**Salit:** On "Meet the Press," Michael Murphy, a Republican consultant who likes McCain a great deal – he called McCain a maverick and described the election overall this year as a maverick election – says that if the strategy is simply a party-based strategy, that the party loses. That's fundamentally the argument for McCain to be the nominee, because he can attract the "crossovers," he can be competitive with Obama for independent voters. His point is that any Republican who thinks he can win the election by mobilizing the party base is out of step, because that's not what the election is about.

**Newman:** Well, you might not be able to win the election by mobilizing the party's base. But, that's not the same thing as saying you can win it without mobilizing the party's base.

**Salit:** That's true.

**Newman:** Those are two different things.

**Salit:** Yes.

**Newman:** If Obama is the candidate, there's a two-pronged attack on McCain which I don't think he'll be able to withstand.

**Salit:** The two prongs are?

**Newman:** The two prongs are the disaffection within his own party's base, and the independents who won't want to support a pro-war candidate.

**Salit:** How does he survive that?

**Newman:** It's a hard one to survive.

**Salit:** Yes.

**Newman:** It's a different story if he's running against Hillary. But we'll see who the Democrats decide on. It's their primary.

**Salit:** Super Tuesday is Tuesday.

**Newman:** That seems a tautology.

**Salit:** Indeed. 22 states are voting. A bunch of them have open primaries. I was sort of amused by this – somebody in Hillary's camp was quoted as saying "The setup isn't fair because independents can vote and Hillary does better with Democrats."

**Newman:** It is their primary.

**Salit:** Yes. And they made the rules. If you were writing Obama's speech for the night before the voting on Tuesday, what would you have him say?

**Newman:** Vote for me.

**Salit:** I'm looking for a little more.

**Newman:** I think he should, as he is doing, transition into more of a focus on Iraq. He was very successful in the last debate when he did that with Hillary. He should continue to do that. My hunch is that the Super Tuesday results in the Democratic primary will be something of a split. And they'll come out of it roughly the way they're going in. I think in the Republican primary, McCain will come out of it stronger than he is right now. So, Obama should hit the war issue as it relates to the economy and his electability. That is what he should be all about from here on out. I don't know if the Democrats are going to go towards a brokered convention. But it's going to be close, no matter how you cut it.

**Salit:** Thanks, Fred.