



LISTEN.

Sunday, November 2, 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, November 2, 2008 after watching "The McLaughlin Group" and "This Week with George Stephanopoulos."

Salit: A lot of predictions on the shows today. Guys and gals on Stephanopoulos calling it for Obama. *The McLaughlin Group* crowd posturing as equivocal on the outcome. Eleanor Clift says in one of the few intelligible moments in their discussion, since they basically screamed at each other for 28 minutes, 'Barack Obama came in as a transformational candidate and he transformed the electorate.' It was hard to hear, though, because *The McLaughlin Group* was literally hysterical.

Newman: Irrationality to the point of insanity, that's what you saw on McLaughlin, for people to be screaming as loud as they can about something that we'll know the answer to on Election Day.

Salit: Yes.

Newman: So, I think it reflects more on those shows than anything that exists this side of Mars. These people cannot accept and will not accept that it's not their turn to talk.

Salit: OK.

Newman: It's their turn to listen.

Salit: And as it is their turn to listen, it's worth noting that the message delivered on Tuesday will be a loud one. The predictions are that the size of the voter turnout will be 130 million voters, which is 25 million more voters than voted in 2000, the last high turnout election.

Newman: Yes. And all the more reason that the pundits should stop talking. It's like someone looking at a painting, one that has not been completed, and then is asked *What do you think of this painting?* I don't know. It's not finished.

Salit: Of course.

Newman: This is a process which has a beginning, a middle and an end. The end's not complete yet, and it's an indecent affront to what America stands for, for these pundits to be just screaming their heads off. It's time for the American people, totaling millions, to speak. To not acknowledge and accept that is simply crude and impolite, and I'm offended by it. Listen. This is what American democracy is about. Shut your trap and listen to the American people. And they'll do whatever they do. They will complete,

roughly speaking, their process. The screamers are hysterical people who are anti-democratic.

Salit: Maybe the Stephanopoulos show was the “sane and rational” version and *The McLaughlin Group* was the “insane” version. But, part of what you see in these conversations is that the conventional wisdom has been upended. How? There are all these things that have happened that are the result of the American people participating in the political process, in the primaries, in giving money to candidates, in early voting. The pundits, in some ways, are trying to catch up with that. They’re trying to come up with new formulations to explain that.

Newman: No, they’re trying to come up with traditional explanations of why they exist.

Salit: Of why they themselves exist?

Newman: Right. But they’re no longer in it. They have little or nothing to do with it.

Salit: The American people are speaking now.

Newman: It’s like having to chair a meeting and the Hallowed Whomever is present and when it’s time to move the agenda, he or she persists in wanting to speak. But, it’s not their turn to speak anymore. I find it exceedingly offensive. It reminds me of the sports commentators who were commenting on Secretariat’s 31 length victory in the 1973 Belmont Stakes and saying *This is this, this is that*. No, don’t think you can narrate this one. This is that horse showing that he’s completely in a class by himself. It’s not like anything you’ve ever seen before. That’s what it is. It’s Secretariat’s time to speak.

Salit: Right.

Newman: It’s time for you to shut your trap. Nobody cares, you’re not relevant. This event is of that significance. Let the American people say what they have to say. Reality is about to happen. But the “explainers” job is to deny reality. And the closer we come to reality – which means the American voter asserting her or himself, the more hysterical they become.

Salit: Because the more irrelevant they become.

Newman: Yes, so, what we’re looking at here is, particularly in the McLaughlin show, is a half hour of utter irrelevance and arrogance.

Salit: I guess, even the discussion on Stephanopoulos about the so-called “turning points” in the campaign had something of this quality.

Newman: There is no room on the ballot for the turning points, last I heard. They’re talking to the American people about turning points? What does that have to do with what’s going to happen on Tuesday? Nothing.

Salit: Well, the things that the experts are now calling turning points were things that the American people made happen at different stages along the way.

Newman: I don't know that I would think about it in those terms. I don't think the American people make turning points. If that were the case, I think that would be a good thing and it would mean the system is more responsive to expressions of democratic opinion than it actually is. But the American people don't get a chance to express the turning points. The turning points are probably more determined by these handful of people who call themselves the pundits, both during and after.

Salit: No doubt Tuesday will be narrated as a turning point.

Newman: That's when the American people get to speak. It's pretty much the only means they have to speak out on these matters.

Salit: Yes.

Newman: This is generally how I watch sports of all forms. The sportscasters talk endlessly. But, then, the players take the field. It's their time to play the game. The rest of you, shut your mouth. You couldn't throw a javelin three feet. These other people can. The players determine the outcome. Let the game be played.

Salit: And now it is.

Newman: Yes, if they decide for John McCain, then they will have decided for John McCain. If they decide for Obama, then they decide for Obama. The voters are the relevant players. Anyone who tries to take that little bit that the American people have away from them is impolite and anti-democratic and I'm insulted by it. The pundits get to play every week, every moment. The American people hardly ever get a chance to play.

Salit: Well, I'm looking forward to voting. I know you voted already.

Newman: I've voted already, yes.

Salit: You're part of the one third who voted already.

Newman: I am indeed.

Salit: And I'm going to vote on Tuesday.

Newman: But the important vote is the sum total of the American people.

Salit: Yes. Thanks, Fred.