

# THE POLITICS OF RESENTMENT

There's been criticism and applause (both justified) for the way in which Biden has hit on McCain and Palin's convention performance. But I'm most fascinated by his attack in this video, from 2:11 to 2:44.

**Biden:** It was about how well placed – and boy she is good – how a left jab can be stuck pretty nice. It's about how Barack Obama is such a bad guy.

It's about how in fact, how in fact, they got great quips. Man, they're like the kids you know when you went to school and you were very proud of the new belt or the shoes you had, and there was always one kid in the class who said, "oh, are they your brother's?"

**Crowd:** Yeah.

**Biden:** Remember that kid? That's what this is reminding me of. "Oh, I love your dress, was that your mother's?"

You know what I'm talking about.

It was fairly tentative, but IMO, a really important attack on Palin especially, though it applies to McCain as well. With this response, Biden flips the structure of resentment the Republicans are trying to use to make Palin untouchable.

Digby has written about the addition of Palin as a reality show or as a Joan of Arc appealing to the resentment of Americans.

It's very difficult to know how the Jerry Springer stuff is going to play out. It's never a "good" thing for a politician to have the media drooling and licking their chops over their personal life, but they often not only

survive but thrive as a result, depending on the transgression. Edwards betrayed his cancer stricken wife and that's just too much for most people to bear. Clinton had a few furtive sexual encounters that were exploited by his political enemies which ended up gaining most people's sympathies. You don't know where these scandals will go, but you do know that they will distract from the normal coverage of issues and policy. (That, of course, would suit McCain just fine. The last thing he wants is for this campaign to be about issues.)

So, I still don't know about the effect of Sarah Palin. A lot of this is untrod ground, with her being a female with young kids and a very conservative Christian to boot. Anybody who says they can completely predict the outcome of this "scandal" is fooling herself. This is new territory.

[snip]

Palin could become the winner of America's Working Mom from all this – at least to those who don't know enough about politics to realize that she wants her church and the government to be our "Dad." If you haven't read Nixonland, you won't understand it when I say that it's possible that Palin could end up being the orthogonian Joan of Arc. That's certainly what the Conservative Christians are gambling on.

And Jane warned against getting overconfident because of Palin's Jerry Springer life.

I think Palin could work out to be any of a number of things: Digby's Joan of Arc of resentment; a reality show contestant we like until her really nasty side comes out, at which point we turn on her, hard; or the fallen Christian conservative, someone like Mark Foley

who is celebrated up until the second his foibles became too much to tolerate.

But Palin's speech reminded me, instantly, of what it felt like in sixth grade when Laura Paluska and her band put handcream on my locker handle, sat in the back of classrooms and mocked me because I didn't have a closet full of Jordache jeans, and finally ambushed me as I walked out of the building, trying to pick a fight. And yes, they laughed at the book bag that I had sewn myself, talking about how ugly it was. To this day, I can viscerally recall how I hated Laura and her whole little band, for how ugly and intrusive and pointless their taunts were.

That's the aspect of Sarah Palin Joe Biden was describing in his speech—and from the response of the crowd, I'm sure I'm not the only one who has a Laura Paluska or a Sarah Palin in my past.

And so, I would repeat Digby's warning:

Anybody who says they can completely predict the outcome of this "scandal" is fooling herself. This is new territory.

Digby's absolutely right that the Republicans are trying to use Palin as another Nixon, someone who mobilizes large numbers to reject the rationally best choice in favor of someone like them who has suffered from the same sleights from the popular kids.

But she's not Nixon. She **is** the cool kid, the Heather who gathers her popularity by tearing down those around her.

And that might work. A lot of people don't necessarily grow out of that sixth grade mindset, the urge to feel better about yourself by cruelly mocking others. But I suspect that there are actually more people who have a Laura Paluska in their life—and they don't want one to be their Vice President. I suspect that if Joe Biden continues this line, he may remind all the people the Republicans are trying to attract

with this ploy that Palin actually **isn't** the one being attacked unfairly. She's the archetypal attacker, the girl who, when we were all just forming our adult character, tried to rip that down.

We don't know how this is going to play out. But the politics of resentment can go both ways, and Sarah Palin is definitely vulnerable to attack as a Heather, the popular girl who no one much likes anymore after they graduate from high school and realize there are more important issues in life than who wears the coolest jeans or who dates the hottest guy.