

December 19, 2008

Jonah Goldberg: Cinderella, The Barracuda and 'experience'

Jonah Goldberg
Tribune Media Services

For people who think there's no cultural divide in this country, consider the treatment of two women much in the news in 2008.

The first is Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin. A woman from very humble roots and with a very blue-collar life story, she worked with her steelworker and professional-fisherman husband to provide a life for their large family. She got involved in the PTA. She became mayor of her small town, then rose, by dint of her dedication and almost naive fearlessness, to the job of governor. In a mainstream, almost romantic sense, it's as if she were designed by God for a Hallmark movie of the week.

But, when John McCain picked her to be his running mate, the full fury of the liberal establishment — and sizable swaths of the conservative establishment, some of whom dubbed her a "cancer" on the GOP — came down on her with a vengeance usually reserved for Klansmen and pedophiles.

Then there's Caroline Bouvier Kennedy, daughter of John F. Kennedy, brother of John Jr., niece of Sens. Ted and Robert Kennedy, granddaughter of Ambassador Joseph Kennedy, and the cousin of myriad other Kennedys and Shrivvers who've burrowed deep into the timber of the house of liberalism. A multimillionaire from birth, Ms. Kennedy has spent most of her life on the charity-benefit and cotillion circuit. A product of the Brearley School in New York and the Concord Academy in Massachusetts before she attended Harvard and Columbia, Kennedy has made the importance of public education her signature cause.

Sweet Caroline (she was the inspiration for the Neil Diamond song) recently made it known that she would like to be appointed to Hillary Clinton's vacant Senate seat.

One could say without fear of overstating things that the liberal reaction to the inexperienced Caroline has been somewhat more gracious than the reaction to the "inexperienced" Palin. Ruth Marcus of the *Washington Post* has devoted two columns in as many weeks to this "fairy tale" scenario in which Kennedy, our "tragic national princess," is finally rewarded — for her years of quiet dignity, selflessly avoiding scandal and the paparazzi — with the Senate seat that once belonged to her uncle Bobby. What's astounding about the normally sensible Marcus' case for "the Cinderella Kennedy" (*New York* magazine's phrase) is that she doesn't really make one, at least not on the merits. Marcus doesn't even bother. It's all schoolgirl gushing.

The editors of the *New York Times*, in a more skeptical editorial, summarized her qualifications thusly: "Ms. Kennedy has much going for her. As a public figure, she carries the glamour and poignancy of her family ..." The editors then went on to describe what great liberals her dad and uncles were. That's it.

This is a perfect example of the bowel-stewing self-indulgence of elite liberalism.

Here's a news flash: Not everyone truckles with doe-eyed awe at "America's royal family." Some of us don't even like the idea of American royal families. JFK and RFK had their good points, but they don't deserve the beatification they receive on a daily basis. As a man, Teddy Kennedy is hardly a role model, and as a public servant he's not much better.

Simply, the Kennedy clan is no priestly caste, serving as the conscience of the nation, and its progeny do not deserve eternal deference.

Now, I know the comparison between Palin and Caroline Kennedy is not perfect. Each has strengths where the other has weaknesses, and the jobs of senator and vice president aren't identical (the former actually has more responsibility, for starters).

But the comparison is nonetheless revealing. Palin's selection triggered troughs of bile, vomited up from nearly every respectable liberal quarter. A Florida congressman, and Obama surrogate, insinuated that Palin was a "Nazi sympathizer" and anti-Semite (she's not, but Caroline Kennedy's grandfather was). Her by-the-bootstraps story was ridiculed by nearly every ex-debutante newsreader and avowed "feminist" in America.

Meanwhile, Caroline, with a resume perfectly suited to being a Kennedy and little else, is a Cinderella who deserves a Senate seat because, well, she just does.

Whatever Palin's faults, Sarah Barracuda's America has a lot more going for it than Sweet Caroline's.

- Contact Jonah Goldberg at JonahsColumn@aol.com.

