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Introduction

"I love those hockey moms. You know, they say the difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull? Lipstick (sic)." These words, uttered off the cuff by Sarah Palin during her vice presidential acceptance speech at the Republican national convention, marked the starting point of Palin's national political career. Her speech was delivered to an adoring crowd and tens of millions of home viewers nationwide. This speech was Palin's coming out party, her first real attempt to illustrate to the American public just who she was as candidate. However, her political qualifications, voting record and experience played a distant second fiddle to the personal story and appeals that made her larger than life. The first few minutes of the speech are devoted to McCain as a candidate, and his position in the race. Once the topic turns to the newly nominated vice presidential candidate, this narrative changes completely. The audience is introduced to Sarah Palin not as a competent governor and politician, but rather as a down home, country living, mother of the five. She was viewed as one of the people, far from the professional Washington politician. She would try and help McCain take the presidency, attempting to carry him along on her wave of populist appeal.

The idea of Palin as a candidate and Palin's acceptance speech being labeled populism is completely unfounded. Labeling it as such presents a major misreading of the original populist movement. The Populist movement of the late 19 century occurred when farmers and disenfranchised working Americans sought relief from what they saw as pandering of the politicians to big business. An embracing of the common mans interest and celebrations of his lifestyle were important to this movement; true students of history

know that this came as a call for more government rather than less. The populist wanted someone in Washington to fight their battles, not necessarily someone who wore the same brand of coveralls. They wanted regulation for big business and programs to help the working farmer. They wanted someone who understood their issues.

What follows is a rhetorical criticism of Sarah Palin in the 2008 election. A persona is created and projected by Palin, allowing for a claim to populist appeal. Three tenets govern this persona: an appeal to motherhood/feminist tropes, reinforcement of small town ideals, and a denigration of rhetorical fluency/ anti-intellectualism.

History of Populism

The Peoples (Populist) party got its start at in the end of the 19th century. Several group movements had been attempted previously; however, the Farmers Alliance was the group that really stimulated the creation of the third party. It was a perfect storm of circumstance which allowed the movement to gain traction. Poor crop prices, a struggling economy, and disillusionment with the democratic nominee, all helped create the conditions in which a third party could grow.

> Despite the southern tradition of one-party rule, forces were at work which encouraged the formation of the People's (Populist) party. Farm conditions, already bad, now worsened. The cash crop, cotton, sold at the lowest price that cotton had reached in a third of a century. More important, even than the price of cotton, was the nomination of Grover Cleveland by the Democrats in 1892. An avowed foe of free silver, which had become a rallying cry of the alliance, Cleveland's nomination seemed to many proof positive the Democratic party was unresponsive to the plight of the farmer, and that the farmer would have to look elsewhere for help. (Erlich 77')

The Peoples movement also depended on thee distrust and paranoia of its members, both big business and city dwellers. The party saw America as being divided into two camps, producers and consumers; and the producers were righteous. According to Erik

Hofstadter, there were two types of people in America, and between them was no middle ground. The corporate monopolies, money trusts, and railroad barrens versus the 'little man': farmers, laborers, and merchants. He believed that the little man bore the brunt of America's tax burden.

On July 4th, 1892, The Populist party had its founding conference, at which the group's basic platform was set forth. The "Omaha Platform", addressed the issues of the day and a distrust of the current two-party system. Its call was for the federal government to step in and take control of things; seizing of assets, seizing of land, and regulation of big business were all desired.

> Our country finds itself confronted by conditions for which there is no precedent in the history of the world; our annual agricultural productions amount to billions of dollars in value, which must, within a few weeks or months, be exchanged for billions of dollars' worth of commodities consumed in their production; the existing currency supply is wholly inadequate to make this exchange; the results are falling prices, the formation of combines and rings, the impoverishment of the producing class. We pledge ourselves that if given power we will labor to correct these evils by wise and reasonable legislation, in accordance with the terms of our platform.
>
> We believe that the power of government—in other words, of the people—should be expanded (as in the case of the postal service) as rapidly and as far as the good sense of an intelligent people and the teachings of experience shall justify, to the end that oppression, injustice, and poverty shall eventually cease in the land.

This excerpt from the Omaha Platform signals a much different version of populism than the version discussed in the 2008 election. The Populist Party also had conspiracy theories, mostly concerning monetary systems like silver and gold.

The Populist movement reached its apex in the 1896 elections. The party grew large enough for the democrats to finally take notice and begin absorbing some of their ideals. After the Populist Party candidate lost the presidential election by over 600,000 votes, the party was weakened. It would never return to its highest levels of membership, however,

the Populist Party created more than just a political movement. It created a political and rhetorical term, populism, which has continued on through the generations, mutating in meaning and public appreciation.

Populism has gone through many rhetorical permutations. Even in the time of the actual Populist Party, contention surrounded it. Depending on whom you asked, populism was either a mass social movement by the people, or a plea from a disenfranchised group of farmers towards the federal government, all the way to a hysterical, paranoid group of country bumpkins. According to the *History and Criticism of American Public Address*, the populist "…gave speeches that were vigorous, colorful, almost fanatical, delivered by shouting, haranguing zealots of a cause, that to them was as vital as property or even life itself." The term has now come to its current usage in which, at least in mainstream media, it now simply means any movement started from or by 'the people'. Obviously this extends its usage to encapsulation of almost endless scenarios.

The tenets of populism have risen from the ashes a few times since their original inception. After the failure of the original populist movement, the concept died down for many years. The tenets were ultimately revitalized by George Wallace. A polarizing figure in the civil rights movement, Wallace attempted to regain the momentum of the people by incorporating the tenets of populism in his bid for the presidency. His utilization of its devices and appeals proved Populism could support two ideologies: one progressive, in terms of the original populists and their attack on big business; and one conservative, in terms of Wallace and his attack on big government.

George Wallace is a good example of a man who exploited the ideals of the populist movement and forever expanded the rhetorical and social implications of the term populism. According to several communication scholars, Wallace added another level to the rhetorical trademarks of populism, an appeal to powerlessness. In his "Conservative appeals to the people: George Wallace's populist rhetoric", Lloyd Roheler argued:

> Wallace's standard campaign speech follows Burke's pattern of pollution-scapegoating-redemption-salvation. According to Wallace, the American dream of a democratic society based on a moral order of religion, patriotism, and hard works where people control their own lives has been polluted by the rise of an undemocratic elite who under communist influence are undermining traditional values. This victimization has created a sense of powerlessness and guilt by the working class that requires the sacrifice of the scapegoats of the federal courts, faceless bureaucrats, and social engineers. A vote for George Wallace will send "them" a message and redeem the American dream of a democratic society and make possible the salvation of the white working class.(360)

This new identification of a rhetorical feature of the movement, an identification of the importance of powerlessness, is something that has added to the contemporary understanding of the populist movement. Now it has become something people want to be a part of, an appeal to fears and disenfranchisement. Populism as a rhetorical tool inspires acquiescence using a multitude of these rhetorical devices. The movement being sold may not even really support the actual good of its said supporters. Populism now, at least in the eyes of the politicians, is simply a trope to be lauded as it incorporates oneself as being tied to a 'movement of the people for the people'.

Palin as a Populist

Sarah Palin as a populist is a misnomer. Really, Sarah Palin was a Republican who rhetorically employed Populist appeals. According to several weekly newsmagazines and talk radio shows, Palin indeed had captured the hopes and ideals of the common

man…and even more strongly the ideals of the common woman. On October 3, 2008, *The Wall Street Journal's* opinion page commented as follows

> "The heart of her message was a complete populist pitch. 'Joe Six-Pack' and 'soccer moms' should unite to fight the tormentors who forced mortgages on us. She spoke of 'Main Streeters like me.' A question is at what point shiny, happy populism becomes cheerful manipulation."

However this idea of a populist everywoman contrasted sharply with her platform as a whole. The ideas espoused by Palin and her Republican party argued for less government rather than more, and deregulation of big business in the interest of a free market rather than the protections and regulations sought by the original populist party. Then what is the political movement being created by Sarah Palin? It is simply a campaign run from an appeal to the populist rhetorical ideal. Like Wallace, Palin embraces the movement as a means to her own political ends, while also adding her own special subversive twist to the concept of Populism in American public discourse.

How then, does a republican candidate, who, by definition, received some breaks in life, attempt to identify with average Americans?

The political climate at the time mirrored the fear and angst of George Wallace's generation. A fear of the future, an African-American running for the presidency, similar fears being coddled. However, Wallace had been on the political scene for a long time, and had earned a reputation that put him on par with the people he was trying to motivate. Palin had neither experience nor credibility. Instead, she created and reinforced a projection of herself as a candidate, which directly stem from her creation of a projected personal self. This personal self becomes a

persona. The persona is reinforced and strengthened through the use of down home vernacular and colloquialisms. This is the layer that Palin brings to populism. Palin's candidacy marks an evolution in the rhetorical considerations of a populist ideal. A persona will now suffice in the face of incongruities when applying the Populist appeal. This new dimension, a fabricated connection to the people, would be attempted. After the vice presidential debates, Russ Britt from *Market Watch* magazine considered Palin's techniques:

> "What do two 'darns,' a 'doggone,' a 'Joe Six Pack' and three uses each of the term 'bless' and 'Main Street' get you? It gets you through a debate with Joe Biden, that's what. The folksy persona of Gov. Sarah Palin, R-Alaska -- never more clearly enunciated than in her Thursday night debate for the vice presidency with the Democratic senator from Delaware -- seems to have helped stop the public relations tidal wave that was crashing down upon her. Whether the Palin persona can help the sagging fortunes of GOP presidential nominee John McCain remains to be seen, but it seems certain that she at least put a tourniquet on the bad press that had surrounded her. And it may have been as simple as Palin being Palin - or at least accentuating the candidate's image. 'I think it played well last night and it will continue to play well as long as it is perceived to be genuine,' said David Bartlett, senior vice president at Levick Strategic Communications in Washington, D.C. 'The message she was trying to send out was, 'I'm like you'." (25)

What tenets define the Palin persona, which rhetorical tools are utilized in the creation of this persona, and is it successful? Does Palin actually succeed in creation of her persona, and in turn ability to garner Populist rhetorical appeal? These are the questions that will be considered in the following critical analysis of Sarah Palin's 2008 Vice Presidential nomination acceptance speech.

The 2008 Election

The Republican national convention is held every four years directly preceding the presidential elections. The convention is the place where the presidential

candidates are formally nominated (after the primaries), and are full of republican delegates. The delegates are republican supporters who have been given the honor of attending the convention usually because of some contribution they have made to the campaign or party. Thus, the audience at the 2008 convention would have been full of a supportive audience, many of whom had already volunteered. Conventions are televised and are intended to invigorate both the party base and the American voting public. The vice presidential candidate was announced at the convention in 2008, not beforehand, adding to the excitement and anticipation of Palin's speech.

The 2008 Republican National Convention was held in September. John McCain was the nominee for president and had been trailing in the polls. Barack Obama, the democrats' nominee, had ridden to the front of the pack with the messages of hope and change. Pundits were declaring McCain dead in the water, as displayed in a *Time* magazine article, authored on July 22, 2008, by Micheal Grunwald:

> Oh, let's just admit it: John McCain *is* a long shot. He's got a heroic personal story, and being white has never hurt a presidential candidate, but on paper 2008 just doesn't look like his year. And considering what's happening off paper, it might be time to ask the question the horse-race-loving media are never supposed to ask: Is McCain a no-shot?

In an attempt to shock the campaign back to life, focus was put on the selection of a vice presidential nominee. The usual laundry list of VP candidates was making its rounds. However, when it came time to introduce the republican vice presidential nominee, the announcement was quite a shock. Sarah Palin, the governor of Alaska, had been tapped

for the nomination. Palin was the first woman ever to be nominated to the Republican national ticket and was relatively unknown to those outside of Alaska. Her nomination marked a change in the Republican strategy, as they veered from the beaten path of seasoned and well known lawmakers in order to take a chance on shaking things up with a fresh young face. Perhaps in response to dwindling interest in the campaign, or in an attempt to sway battleground state Alaska or as a response to Obama's' appeal to youth, the nomination took most if not all of the country by surprise. This speech at the convention marked her coming out party.

Palin's speech from the convention was televised, and thus must be examined visually as well as compositionally. A one-time beauty queen, the first thing noticed and noted by the television public was her physical appearance. Sexist or not, we as humans immediately categorize others based on how they look. Wearing a pink skirt suit and pearls, along with her trademark glasses, Palin looked more the politician's wife than the politician. She introduces her family shortly into the speech; each dressed impeccably, less Alaskan wild life than East coast prep. Her speech, although fewer than seven prepared pages, ran for over forty-five minutes. Punctuated by raucous applause and sign waving supporters, the speech rang true of contemporary nomination remarks. Unlike other acceptance speeches, Palin focuses extensively on the creation of her persona. With little legitimate experience, it is of the utmost importance that she identifies with the audience. Throughout the speech, Palin includes rhetorical devices such as theme repetition and alliteration, while delivering her remarks in a dialect that sounds as if it could be from the Midwest, and colloquialisms which ring true to Alaska. This speech

walks the fine line between identification of the everywoman, and the need for innovative talent in government leadership. Palin does not want to come off as stupid, just folksy.

The audience was not limited to those in the building however. It is also important to consider the situational constructs of this time. McCain had been trailing in polls and was competing against an African-American who was young and extremely gifted at oratory. Obama was very well educated and came from a multicultural background and childhood. Many people in the American public and the republican constituency were troubled by these facts. Fears ran high as disparities in the public's intellect surfaced again and again. The McCain campaign recognized this and Palin capitalized on it during her acceptance speech. Here finally for the republicans, was a reassuring figure. Here finally, was a candidate they could relate to, mothers and small town hunters alike. Sarah Palin's acceptance speech at the 2008 RNC is extremely important for communication scholars. It marks a peculiar mode of communication, which draws heavily on implied figures and tropes of American culture. It is unique in its ability to project the illusion of a documented social movement, populism, while refraining from any of the ideals of said movement. Palin, as the rhetor, creates an ethos almost entirely through association and an appeal to pathos. She manipulates many stereotypes held by the audience, often to her own advantage. It is important not just for communication scholars, but also for the general public to be informed when it comes to a new breed of speech such as this. Political acceptance speeches in particular and political campaigns in the general have relied ever increasingly on the projection of the personal rather than the experiential. Although we as voters have often been swayed by personal appeals, it is important to balance these thoughts with reasoned examination of the facts.

Throughout the acceptance speech, Palin creates three main tenets upon which she constructs her persona; an appeal to motherhood/feminist tropes, creation of small town ideals, and a denigration of rhetorical fluency/intellect. Each will be discussed and analyzed.

Creation of Persona

Considered first in the persona construction is the appeal to motherhood/ feminist ideals. After her obligatory opening remarks about her running mate, Palin launches into her biography, with life as a wife and mother remaining in the forefront. Nearly a third of her speech is geared towards this topic, dominated with discussions of her special needs child and her military son. Palin appears to be reaching out to mothers across America.

> The mother stereotype cuts several directions. First, women are viewed as more caring and understanding—which can be an advantage. Women candidates may be seen as being better able to understand the average voter's plight as Susan J. Carroll from the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers explained: ''When voters want change, women tend to represent change. They represent something other than politics as usual'' and voters see them as ''more compassionate and as more likely to be honest'' (Jost, 2008, p. 1).

When speaking of McCain, Palin does not miss a chance to identify with the millions of American military families. "And as the mother of one of those troops, that is exactly the kind of man I want as commander in chief. I'm just one of many moms who'll say an extra prayer each night for our sons and daughters going into harm's way." The realities of the costs of war are brushed over. Rather than comment on her own opinions on our military activity, Palin chooses to put her faith in the lord. This resonates with many people, most of whom have no choice in the matter. Palin does have a choice. She ran for the second highest office in the land; appeals to simple faith in God may not be an enlightened enough answer. She explicitly attempts to show her 'mother' side, constantly employing language that will keep her in the supportive 'woman' role. What is not

discussed, however, is the importance of her candidacy to the feminist movement. Her nomination is revolutionary; marking the first time women were on both parties' tickets, at the same time. That is the not the point of Palin's message. The audience, and it's identification of Palin is the real goal of this rhetoric. She knows that the voter with whom she must identify are more concerned with the fact that she is 'one of us', not that she is different and special. Hence, the focus must be kept on the motherly, supportive women persona and not the groundbreaking, progressive nature of her nomination.

Towards the end of the speech, she expounds on this "womanly" persona. Palin speaks at length of McCain's military accomplishments, reveling in his service as if it were her own. Rather than recognize her own limited experiences, Palin plays the confident wife more than the supportive under candidate.

The next tenet in her personal appeal comes with talk of her Governorship and small town roots. Palin speaks of giving up unnecessary trappings of the office. "And I thought we could muddle through without the governor's personal chef -- although I've got to admit that sometimes my kids sure miss her. I came to office promising to control spending -- by request if possible and by veto if necessary." Whether or not this statement is true is irrelevant. Palin knew one important thing; her audience was generally unaware of her record. And even if they were aware, her target audience probably did not care. It was Palin they appreciated, her persona they were embracing. The firing of the chef becomes a rhetorical tool, an anecdote which serves to buoy Palin's populist persona. In actuality, the firing never occurred at all. According to an article in the *Alaska Daily News*, the chef had simply been reassigned.

> "Stefani Marnon was first reassigned as a 'constituent relations assistant' in the governor's office and later to the state museum. Earwigs report she's finally landed where they really appreciate a good chef: the Legislative Lounge. Lawmakers were smacking their lips in anticipation, according to Sen. Kim Elton's newsletter." Sarah Palin, far from being a down-home fiscal hawk standing up to a decadent government culture, first placed Marnon in a make-work job, then placed the chef where her presence would most appeal to political insiders, literally catering to the finicky taste buds of state politicians." (A-7)

The true version of the story did not make the major media at the time. Although now, two years after the speech, it is easily found on the internet, Palin's fabrication never entered the political picture. This only further exemplifies the fact that it was not her actions, but her persona that was important. The mainstream media followed this story line, even supposedly liberal publications like *Newsweek*. If the public wanted folksy persona, folksy persona they would get.

> She tried being a sportscaster for a while, but ended up as a politician, or rather an anti-politician. She seemed to love to take on the good ole boys, to get in the face of the state's Republican political establishment and Big Oil, the two dominant forces in Alaska, at least until Palin came along. She smiles a lot and has a thick skin, laughing off reporters who write about her black go-go boots or leering bloggers, like the Washington, D.C.-based Wonkette, which dubbed her "the hottest governor in all 50 states." She is fearless and natural, and it's no wonder she charmed a fierce contrarian like John McCain. (63)

It is hard to believe this article came from a major US news magazine and not from a Palin sponsored pamphlet. Her persona was completely accepted and in turn projected by the media. This allowed her to start capitalizing on a populist rhetorical appeal. She was now one of the people, someone to whom the masses would listen. In this matter she was very successful in her rhetorical pursuits.

The Alaska Palin governs is full of small town charm and flowing fields of oil; at least according to her. She exploits this assumed fact during her acceptance speech, creating a type of falsified 'ethos by connection'. She is the governor of a state that has oil, thus she

must be qualified to comment on events which may be connected to oil. Many of her opponents questioned her lack of experience in foreign affairs. This was an issue that must be at least mentioned during the speech. Palin utilized her roots in 'oil country' as her connector to all that America must face.

> With Russia wanting to control a vital pipeline in the Caucasus, and to divide and intimidate our European allies by using energy as a weapon, we cannot leave ourselves at the mercy of foreign suppliers. To confront the threat that Iran might seek to cut off nearly a fifth of world energy supplies ... or that terrorists might strike again at the Abqaiq facility in Saudi Arabia ... or that Venezuela might shut off its oil deliveries ... we Americans need to produce more of our own oil and gas. And take it from a gal who knows the North Slope of Alaska: we've got lots of both.

In this short excerpt it is clear Palin is using fear appeals (Iran, Russia, Al-Qaeda) while finishing strong with persona, all while promising to deliver the sacred oil from her own back yard. Word choice, dialect and nonverbal mannerisms all aid in the creation of a folksy persona. The use of fear appeals aids in creation of the feeling of powerlessness that was developed by Wallace. It is a direct appeal to the contemporary view of populism. Palin will continue to pursue this vein of argument throughout the campaign as it proves to be extremely effectual.

Finally, Palin shifts to talk of her opponent, Barack Obama. Although never directly mentioning him by name, Palin rails against the oratorical gifts of the nominee, hinting at an arrogance of anti-intellectualism.

> This is a man who can give an entire speech about the wars America is fighting, and never use the word "victory" except when he's talking about his own campaign. But when the cloud of rhetoric has passed ... when the roar of the crowd fades away ... when the stadium lights go out, and those Styrofoam Greek columns are hauled back to some studio lot - what exactly is our opponent's plan?

Palin criticizes Obama's ability to produce effective rhetoric, seeming to downplay it to simple pomp and circumstance. This seems to be hypocritical, especially in the face of her continued appeals of a fictional persona. The momentum behind Obama was about a myriad of issues, a real movement was created. His candidacy created a movement, yet Palin resisted any acknowledgement of that fact. Rather than comment on Obama's positions, Palin decides to use anaphora, or a repeated use of word groupings, to create a picture of a tax happy liberal.

> The Democratic nominee for president supports plans to raise income taxes ... raise payroll taxes ... raise investment income taxes ... raise the death tax ... raise business taxes ... and increase the tax burden on the American people by hundreds of billions of dollars. My sister Heather and her husband have just built a service station that's now opened for business -- like millions of others who run small businesses.

Although Palin does not have any actual proof of these taxes being raised, that is hardly important. The focus for the audience is the anaphora used to focus on the word taxes. Most voters do not think taxes are a good thing, even though they pay for our communities and safety systems, so by repeating taxes so many times so closely together, Palin reinforces her point through simple repetition.

Obama is seen as the liberal elite especially when juxtaposed with the war hero myth of McCain found in the end of the speech. Rather than focus on her own accomplishments, Palin brings the speech full circle, concluding with images of McCain as the war hero, the ultimate man. It is clear that she is presenting a contrast of fluency in speech and tenacity in action.

> And though both Senator Obama and Senator Biden have been going on lately about how they are always, quote, "fighting for you," let us face the matter squarely. There is only one man in this election who has ever really fought for you ... in places where winning means survival and defeat means death ... and

> that man is John McCain. In our day, politicians have readily shared much lesser tales of adversity than the nightmare world in which this man, and others equally brave, served and suffered for their country.

Bringing up McCain's service is a very smart way for Palin to end her speech. Ultimately she wants the audience to see McCain as a war hero, a man who we can all trust. Although she does not say Obama is weak, the juxtaposition of her speaking of his oratory abilities and McCain's war service serves to present a 'weak academic' picture of Obama.

Analysis

Sarah Palin's acceptance speech was pivotal for many reasons. It is important to be considered by rhetorical scholars that this speech was a success, at least as far as the public was concerned. Approval ratings for McCain shot up after the convention and many people caught 'Palin fever'. The speech is also important as it proves that anecdotes and colloquialisms can indeed take the place of actual qualities. Despite the fact that the public at large had virtually no idea of Palin and her political tendencies, that was not important. The mood of the day was becoming increasingly alarmist, divisions amongst the citizenry becoming inflamed. The push for change was strong, and united behind Barack Obama's campaign were progressive, educated, liberal supporters; many of whom were young or minorities. In a classic populist ripe atmosphere, this change also produced a counter citizenry. Like the original populist movement in the late 19th century, and articulated more fully in the Wallace movement, a sense of fear and paranoia existed. Palin seized on this fear and presented a comforting and reassuring figure, her projected persona, on which the public could rely.

Palin attempts to create three main tenets in the speech with which she supports her persona: an appeal to motherhood/feminist tropes, reinforcement of small town ideals, and a denigration of rhetorical fluency. She is successful in all three. With her focus on the mother she relegates herself to the supporter role, subconsciously easing fears about females in power. She will be the supporter of John McCain, a proverbial political wife for the Republican nominee. She shuns the mention of the progression towards feminist appeals; ignoring the elephant in the room. Although her existence as the Republican candidate marked significant change for women in the political realm, this remained wholly ignored by Palin. Palin lured the audience into her created world, focusing their attention with flourishes of golly gees; conceptions of feminist progression were summarily dismissed.

Her identification with small town ideals is successful as well. Her family plays a large contextual role in this, as her mentions of her dog sledding husband, or military son, or pregnant daughter, all serve as connecting points between Palin and the American public. The rhetorical metaphor of the chef firing (for it was indeed solely metaphorical) served Palin's interest as well.

Finally, Palin succeeds in denigrating Obama and his oratorical gifts. With an anti-intellectualist tilt, Palin creates a silver-tongued politician, whose sole goal is to lull the public into acquiescence. Her own delivery and word choice create the perfect antithesis to Obama's style. She understands that she must speak in the vernacular of the common man, despite the fact that Palin is actually a member of the educated elite that she takes such joy in bastardizing. This is her perhaps best area, as she is able to condemn Obama

and his gifts, while back-handily subverting the identification tools found in rhetorical theory. The public is being lulled by her words as well, just in a manner completely opposite of Obama. Her speech identifies; communes with a mood of discontent in her audience. In contrast Obama intends his speech to inspire. Obama represents the progress of ideals, supported by what original populists would call 'consumers. Palin looks to restrict such progression. She appeals to the 'producers', those for whom a move forward may not seem like a good thing; perhaps progression even seems to be a bad thing. Palin's persona hits the nail on the head when it comes to displaying a vernacular that could be easily indentified. She at once tears down Obama for his oratorical trickery, all while effectively pulling a rabbit out of the hat.

Conclusion

What are the ramifications of this breed of speech? Political speeches have long been unique creatures in terms of motivation behind language and audience appeal. Political rhetoric is most focused on convincing the general public of the importance of one person over another. Regardless of experience or knowledge, it seems certain speeches have a moment in time that allows them to work. The creation of Palin's persona and the resultant ability she has to manipulate the Populist appeal may be the most interesting part of the whole speech.

Palin's contribution to a now updated view of populism has been echoed in the success of the contemporary Tea Partiers. This group of citizens coalesced on April 15th, tax day, in order to share their voices and discontent over what they saw as government overreach. Although this movement may indeed be fueled by recalcitrant citizens, Palin's acceptance

speech, indeed her entire candidacy, tied her in people's minds to the populist persona she had projected. Palin is riding high on the success of the Tea Party movement, fueled by financial gain and adulation of the masses. One could argue, she, like all populist movements, was simply a reaction to the times.

Palin's speech was delivered to an audience who was perhaps feeling snubbed by the intellectual democratic nominee. They felt comfortable turning to white Midwest sounding women with a traditional name. If there had never been a Barack Obama, I doubt there would have been a Sarah Palin; hers was a niche created by competition, and her manipulation of the rhetorical process must be considered somewhat successful. Although she did not reach the vice presidency, Palin created a place for herself, if not in Washington, at least in people's minds.

Palin was able to recreate the divided nature of the country, except rather than focus on producers and consumers, as the original populists had, the division was between the educated elite and the 'self-sufficient' masses. Although education has long been a cornerstone of our country, something to be treasured and held up as positive, in this election it is directly linked to Barack Obama. The republicans then, seize on the opportunity to create a picture of distant educated elite who were out of touch with real people. The fact that Obama had raised himself by his bootstraps from the same populous that was now rejecting him was of little concern. Palin, with her projected persona, was able to create different exigencies in her audience, subverting the ideals of populism to match her political motivation. Much as Wallace shaped the evolution of the

populist ideal, Sarah Palin was able to demonstrate that populism can work, even when based on a projected persona, and not an actual person of similar experiences.

The election of 2008 was significantly shaped by many rhetorical devices. An appeal to populism became one of the most important tenets of Sarah Palin's candidacy. Although the election was lost and Barack Obama would rise to the highest elected office, Palin would continue the projection of her persona throughout the rest of the campaign. She was embraced by a large group of supporters, many of whom felt she was a direct link from them to Washington. After the furor of the election died down, Sarah Palin hit the talk show circuit and wrote a book. Although it is still unclear whether or not she will remain in the political realm (stepping down from her governorship leaves only national politics possible), Sarah Palin has now been courted with many talk show offers, and has spoken multiples times at Tea Party events. Her persona and contributions to the evolution of American Populism have made lasting marks on our collective conscious and no doubt will be looked back on as a turning point in American political rhetoric.

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