

= Tracy Flick =

Tracy Enid Flick is a fictional character , originating in the 1998 novel *Election* by Tom Perrotta and portrayed by Reese Witherspoon in the 1999 film adaptation of the same title . Tracy is a smart , ambitious high school student , whose quest to win a school election is nearly derailed by her own ruthlessness and desperation . In both the novel and the film , she is the main antagonist .

Witherspoon 's performance as Tracy was widely acclaimed by critics and garnered her multiple awards and nominations , including a Golden Globe nod . The character has since become an icon , as her driven , focused personality and unpopularity among her peers have led to comparisons with many real @-@ life public figures , particularly female politicians such as Hillary Clinton .

= = Overview = =

Tracy is an overachieving high school junior , preparing for an easy election to the office of student body president after three years of extracurricular toil . Her assumptions of an unopposed victory are dashed when two unexpected challengers enter the race : friendly and popular athlete Paul Metzler (Chris Klein) , sidelined from the football team by a skiing accident , and Paul 's younger adopted sister Tammy (Jessica Campbell) , a moody , sarcastic rebel . Paul has been coaxed into running by election supervisor Jim McAllister (Matthew Broderick) , a well @-@ liked civics teacher nursing a deep resentment towards Tracy since her affair with Jim 's best friend and fellow teacher cost the man his job and family .

As the race continues and Paul 's effortless popularity continues to jeopardize Tracy 's once @-@ sure victory , Tracy 's frustration drives her to commit an act of sabotage against Paul 's campaign by ripping down his posters right before election day . Despite Jim McAllister 's conviction of her guilt , she escapes punishment again through a stroke of pure luck when Tammy claims responsibility for the crime and is subsequently expelled , which was her objective in " confessing . " Tracy wins the election and goes on to attend Georgetown University , her dream school , though she had difficulty fitting in and was disenchanted with her schoolmates . She is later seen working closely alongside a congressman , named Mike Geiger , a Republican from Nebraska , in Washington , D.C.

= = Reception = =

Roger Ebert began his review of *Election* by noting , " I remember students like Tracy Flick , the know @-@ it @-@ all who always has her hand in the air , while the teacher desperately looks for someone else to call on . In fact , I was a student like Tracy Flick . " He goes on to compare Tracy to Elizabeth Dole : " a person who always seems to be presenting you with a logical puzzle for which she is the answer ... She is always perfectly dressed and groomed , and is usually able to conceal her hot temper behind a facade of maddening cheerfulness . But she is ruthless . She reminds me of a saying attributed to David Merrick : ' It is not enough for me to win . My enemies must lose . ' "

A 2006 profile of the character in *The Washington Post* called her " wonderfully monstrous . " " In [director Alexander Payne] 's study of her pathologies , Tracy 's will is so fiery and her perfection so total that no one dares stand against her in her goal . " *The Stranger* wrote , " Like Humbert Humbert , the Reverend Harry Powell , and Baby Jane Hudson before her , Tracy Flick is a real and lasting contribution to the cinematic understanding of the villain , and the feather in Witherspoon 's cap . "

= = Witherspoon 's portrayal = =

In the late 1990s , following her starring roles in the 1996 dramas *Fear* and *Freeway* , Witherspoon found herself in an unexpected career slump that led her towards a change in direction . " All my serious dramatic performances suddenly weren 't getting me the jobs or opportunities that I really wanted , " she said in a 2005 interview . " I have stacks and stacks of letters from great directors saying I can 't cast you because you don 't mean anything to the studios . That 's why I turned the boat toward comedy . "

Election 's director Alexander Payne was anxious to cast Witherspoon as Tracy , based on her performances in Freeway and the 1991 film The Man in the Moon , and Witherspoon was equally eager to sign on to the project ? but not to play Tracy . Witherspoon was drawn to the part of Tammy Metzler , the cynical outcast who becomes the election 's dark horse presidential candidate . Referring to the scene in which Tammy delivers a shocking campaign speech denouncing the school 's administration and the entire concept of elected student government , Witherspoon said , " That speech alone made me want to play Tammy ! So I was terribly conflicted . " (Tammy was eventually portrayed by Jessica Campbell .)

To play Tracy , Witherspoon developed a distinct speech pattern combining strident intonations with a chipper Midwestern accent . She also worked on clenching her facial muscles and maintaining a clipped walking pace . " That was just Tracy , it so escapes me how it came out ! " she said . " I just imagined how uptight people carry themselves , and they grind their teeth at night and they clench their jaw because everything has to be just perfect . " Praising her performance , her co @-@ star Matthew Broderick said , " From the first she knew exactly what she wanted--a very aggressive person in a small and cute package ... she comes out very funny and very scary at the same time . "

Witherspoon 's performance as Tracy Flick received widespread critical acclaim , as well as her first Golden Globe Award nomination and several other accolades (see below) . However , she later said that her career struggles continued after Election due to public confusion between the character and the actress . " I 'm not Tracy Flick . I couldn 't get jobs for a year after that because people thought I was that crazy and angry and controlling and strange . But yeah , um , I 'm not . " It wouldn 't be until after the box office smash success of Legally Blonde two years later that her career would fully take off .

= = = Awards and nominations = = =

= = Comparisons = =

Tracy Flick has been a frequent point of comparison in commentary on real @-@ world political figures . Hillary Clinton has more than once been compared to the character . In a January 2008 video mashup produced by Slate , campaign footage of Clinton was combined with clips from Election to draw a comparison between Clinton 's and Tracy 's feelings about the inferiority of their opponents . The video was widely circulated and praised .

A Christian Science Monitor review of Clinton 's 2003 biography , Living History , quoted an excerpt in which Clinton discussed her participation during high school in a Cultural Values Committee and noted , " There is obviously some truth here , but the tone of the passage reeks of Tracy Flick , the overachieving , overly serious high school student from the film " Election . " Not to belittle the efforts of the Cultural Values Committee , but a brief aside to show that Clinton understands that high school sociopolitics is not exactly on par with race relations would be nice . "

Later in 2008 , following Clinton 's defeat for the Democratic presidential nomination , multiple commentators likened Tracy to the Republican vice @-@ presidential nominee , Alaska governor Sarah Palin . Actress and comedian Tina Fey credited Witherspoon 's performance as Tracy as an influence for Fey 's extremely popular Emmy @-@ winning impersonation of Palin on Saturday Night Live .

Other political figures compared to Tracy include former U.S. vice @-@ president and presidential candidate Al Gore ; Seattle City Council member Heidi Wills ; , Texas senator and 2016 U.S. Presidential candidate Ted Cruz , and New York senator Kirsten Gillibrand , whom Maureen Dowd wrote was nicknamed Tracy Flick by her colleagues for her " opportunistic and sharp @-@ elbowed " manner .

Outside the political arena , several reviews of the 2007 film Rocket Science noted similarities between that film 's character of Ginny , portrayed by Anna Kendrick , and Tracy .

= = As a cultural icon = =

Tracy Flick has been included on a 2007 list on mtv.com of " our 10 favorite high school archetypes from the movies " (as " The Annoying Overachiever ") ; a 2008 New York Daily News list of " high @-@ school fast @-@ talkers before Charlie Bartlett " ; and a 2008 E ! Online list of " the top 9 creepiest movie bad guys . " TV writer Dan Harmon has also mentioned in interviews and on his podcast that Tracy Flick was the inspiration for the character of Annie Edison on Community .