

CENTRE FOR

**AMERICAN STUDIES**  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

Social Science Centre

Room 1003

London, Ontario, Canada N6A 5C2

Tel: 519-661-4185

Fax: 519-661-3904

Cell: 519-319-1970

CRITICAL ISSUES OF OUR TIME

**WAITING FOR MADAM  
PRESIDENT**  
LORI COX HAN



CENTRE FOR

**AMERICAN STUDIES**  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

## EDITORIAL TEAM

**Director:**

Don Abelson  
*Chair, Department of Political Science*

**Associate Directors:**

Monda Halpern  
*Assistant Professor, Department of History*

Rob MacDougall  
*Assistant Professor, Department of History*

Bryce Traister  
*Associate Professor, Department of English*

**Managing Editor:**

Lorrie Lefebvre

**Administrative Assistant:**

Christine Wall

**Acknowledgements:**

This publication series is made possible through a donation to the Centre for American Studies from Dr. Katherine L. Morrison.

Design and print - Graphic Services, Western

# STILL WAITING FOR MADAM PRESIDENT: ASSESSING HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON'S 2008 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Lori Cox Han, Ph.D.

**Just** one day after Barack Obama took the oath of office to become the 44th President of the United States on January 20, 2009, Hillary Rodham Clinton was sworn in as the 67th U.S. Secretary of State. While it surprised no one that the new president would select a known political quantity to hold such an important and prestigious position within his new administration, Obama's decision to select Clinton became one of the most talked-about decisions during the presidential transition. Despite the history that had been made on many fronts during the 2008 presidential campaign, the newsworthiness of the Clinton pick for Secretary of State did not result from yet another gender barrier being broken in American politics since Clinton became the third woman to hold the post in twelve years (the position had been held previously by Madeleine Albright from 1997-2001 and Condoleezza Rice from 2005-2009). Instead, political pundits focused on whether or not Obama was putting together his cabinet based on a "team of rivals" theory,<sup>1</sup> or similarly, a theory based on the old adage, "keep your friends close and your enemies closer." Just one year earlier, Obama and Clinton had been locked in a political battle for the ages for the Democratic presidential nomination, a fight that Clinton would not actually concede until a few days after the last nominating contest on June 3, 2008, after she had failed to secure the necessary number of delegates to win the nomination (even though most news outlets had declared Clinton had little chance of winning as early as March 2008). In

addition, much press ink had been spilled during the summer of 2008 over whether or not Obama would select Clinton as his running mate, as there are many examples of presidential candidates selecting a previous rival as their running mate in an attempt to forge party unity. Instead, Obama selected Senator Joseph Biden to join him on the Democratic ticket (Biden was also a previous presidential contender in 2008 that dropped out of the race after a poor showing in the first few primary contests). For the remainder of the summer and fall of 2008 Clinton pondered her political future as she campaigned on behalf of the Obama/Biden ticket, and it also left the news media pondering whether or not Americans had seen the last of Clinton as a presidential candidate. In an interview with Fox News in October 2008, Clinton stated that the chances were “probably close to zero” that she would ever run for president again despite the constant media speculation about Clinton’s status as a frontrunner in 2012 if Obama lost and in 2016 if he won.

After Obama won the election in November 2008, he immediately began to put together his cabinet and team of advisors. Naming his national security team on December 1, 2008, Obama said of Clinton that she was an “American of tremendous stature who will have my complete confidence. Hillary’s appointment is a sign to friend and foe of the seriousness of my commitment to renew American diplomacy and restore our alliances. I have no doubt that Hillary Clinton is the right person to lead our State Department and to work with me in tackling this ambitious foreign policy agenda.”<sup>2</sup> Many observers noted that naming Clinton as Secretary of State was a shrewd political move by Obama; the resignation of her Senate seat would remove a potential intra-party rival on contentious domestic battles on Capitol Hill (most notably on Clinton’s previous signature issue of health care, over which she and Obama sparred on the primary campaign trail) while capitalizing on her skill and goodwill with many foreign leaders to be the nation’s chief diplomat. Despite the fact that the position of Secretary of State had once been a stepping stone to the presidency during the 19th century,<sup>3</sup> the modern view of the office had become one that emphasized diplomacy over politics, meaning that it is no longer a good position from which to launch a presidential bid. While Clinton now held a position that placed her fourth in line for the presidency, thanks to the Presidential Succession Act of 1947, one had to believe that fact provided little comfort and mixed emotions to the new Secretary of State, the same woman who had put “18million cracks”

in the political glass ceiling in her quest to become the first woman president of the United States.

As Clinton has shown throughout her political career on the national stage, from first lady to New York senator to presidential candidate to Secretary of State, political fortunes can change quickly, as can career trajectories, in Washington.

---

“HILLARY’S  
APPOINTMENT  
IS A SIGN TO  
FRIEND AND  
FOE OF THE  
SERIOUSNESS  
OF MY  
COMMITMENT  
TO RENEW  
AMERICAN  
DIPLOMACY  
AND  
RESTORE OUR  
ALLIANCES.”

Hailed as the early frontrunner and presumptive Democratic nominee for the better part of three years starting in 2005, Obama’s victory in the Iowa Caucus on January 3, 2008 sent a shock wave through the political establishment that changed what had seemed to be the inevitable—Clinton as the Democratic presidential nominee in 2008. While much has, and will continue to be, written about Obama’s successful campaign and historic election, news media coverage beginning in 2005 had all but given the Democratic nomination to Clinton due to her political star power and early fundraising advantage. Several key points can be made about why

Obama won, and conversely, there are several arguments to be made about why Clinton lost. The latter is the focus of this article, along with the legacy that Clinton’s campaign leaves behind, as it is a fascinating story about political timing and campaign strategy. First, why did Clinton really lose the Democratic nomination? Theories abound, like whether or not Americans are really ready for a woman in the White House or whether voters had “Clinton fatigue,” but looking at the Clinton campaign from a political science standpoint provides the most substantive analysis by focusing on the nuts and bolts of what it takes to run, and win, a presidential campaign. For example, understanding the strategy and organization behind the Clinton campaign in terms of key issues like fundraising and voter outreach shows that Clinton’s chances of winning the nomination were never as strong as early media predictions suggested. Second, even though she did not succeed at winning the Democratic nomination, what did Clinton accomplish with her history-making candidacy? Or, to put it more simply, what does 18 million votes translate into—a

trailblazing campaign effort that paves the way for a future woman presidential candidate, or simply a campaign by a woman who was uniquely situated to run for president in a way that no other woman politician can match? And finally, what is the long-term legacy of Clinton's campaign, and where does that leave the prospects for future women presidential candidates—did Clinton's campaign help or hurt the cause of electing the first woman president?

## Why Clinton Really Lost the Democratic Nomination

Clinton's prospects for the 2008 presidential campaign burned brightly in 2005. Following the 2004 presidential election, political pundits and pollsters were paying a lot of attention to the issue of whether or not America was ready for a woman president, and news coverage kept suggesting that the time may be right to elect a woman to the White House. In the fall of 2005, ABC premiered one of its top new dramas, *Commander-in-Chief*, starring Geena Davis as the nation's first female president. The political timing of the show and the attention it generated seemed perfect for Clinton as she geared up for her Senate reelection campaign in 2006, and as she continued to emerge as one of the biggest political stars on the national stage for the Democratic Party. Clinton, along with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, were two of the most talked about potential candidates leading up to the 2008 presidential election; both women had been at the top of public opinion polls in recent years for who voters would like to see running for president. By the end of 2006, most news organizations had all but given the Democratic nomination to Clinton, regularly labeling her as the clear Democratic frontrunner (although the potential candidacy of Senator Barack Obama did begin to capture much media attention as well by year's end). The news media seemed to love the story of Hillary running for president (she was routinely referred to as simply "Hillary" by the news media). Polls at the time began to show that Americans would overwhelmingly support a woman candidate for president; three separate polls in early 2006 showed a large majority of respondents saying they would vote for a woman for president. A CBS News poll found 92 percent of respondents saying they would vote for a qualified woman, while a Hearst/Siena College Research Institute poll found 79 percent of respondents willing to vote for a woman, and 69 percent of respondents in the California Field Poll stating that the country was ready for a woman president.<sup>4</sup> One

of the most popular narratives of the 2008 election revolved around the possibility of not only electing a female president, but of electing Clinton as the first female president. The Internet was full of web pages devoted to Clinton's possible candidacy, and numerous books and articles were being written about whether or not she would run, how she would win, how she could be stopped, and/or the prospects for a second Clinton presidency.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the abundant signs in popular culture that America might be ready for a woman in the White House, the political landscape by early 2007 presented a different reality for Clinton's candidacy. Still considered the strongest candidate and probable frontrunner among the Democratic candidates for the upcoming primary season, the door was nonetheless left open for other challengers within the Democratic Party. While Clinton's name recognition and star power had obvious advantages, the downside came in the political baggage that she brought to the campaign. Many successful presidential nominees in recent years gained much of their recognition considerably later in the process and were not well known on the national stage, with more of a clean slate going into the primaries, while Clinton already had many recognized detractors.<sup>6</sup> For many voters, their minds seemed already made up about Clinton—either they loved her or hated her—which left Clinton with tremendous polling negatives that needed to be overcome on the campaign trail. This meant that in addition to the hurdles Clinton would face as a woman candidate—being considered a novelty and an anomaly in presidential politics, and stereotyping and gender bias in news coverage, among others—Clinton also had to overcome the "unease" among voters "about her personal history, demeanor and motives—among the very Democratic and independent voters she would need to win the presidency."<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, Clinton maintained her frontrunner status throughout 2007, continually beating her other opponents (including Obama, Biden, John Edwards, Bill Richardson, Chris Dodd, Dennis Kucinich, and Mike Gravel) in public opinion polls, as well as Republican contenders (like John McCain and Rudy Giuliani) in national polling in Democratic/Republican matchups. In addition, the news media continued to cover her campaign once she officially announced her candidacy in early 2007 as the frontrunner and "the one to beat" in the Democratic field; Clinton was viewed as having "the best brand name in Democratic politics."<sup>8</sup>

Looking back at the start of the primary season in early 2007 (most contenders had officially announced their candidacies by March 2007, making the pre-primary season longer by several months than any previous campaign), there were obvious pros and cons to Clinton's campaign. The strengths of her candidacy were obvious—along with her early frontrunner status

YET, THE  
NEGATIVES  
ABOUT THE  
CLINTON  
CANDIDACY  
WERE ALSO  
OBVIOUS AND  
ALREADY BEING  
ASSESSED BY  
POLITICAL  
OBSERVERS.

and media attention, she had a tremendous fundraising advantage and name recognition, all of which provide the essential momentum in the so-called "invisible primary" season (a time of campaigning prior to any votes being cast). In addition, Clinton was known as a smart and politically savvy politician who was ambitious, knowledgeable about the issues (both domestic and international), and in possession of a tremendously experienced campaign staff who were veterans from Bill Clinton's successful presidential campaigns in 1992 and 1996 (known as the "Clinton machine"). Yet, the negatives about the Clinton

candidacy were also obvious and already being assessed by political observers. Among the questions being posed—was she too divisive and polarizing to win the nomination, or more importantly, to win the general election? Did she have too much baggage from her White House years as first lady—would the American electorate be subjected to a rehash of her husband's personal shortcomings and remind voters of their "Clinton fatigue?" (Her toughness and resilience in surviving the many personal scandals of her husband's presidency were also viewed as strengths). Would Bill Clinton on the campaign trail be an asset or a liability? No one doubted the former president's skill as a master politician and campaigner, yet the focus on him and his presidency could prove to be a distraction to his wife's campaign. Also, while Clinton was marketing herself as an experienced leader, could that trump the emerging theme of "change" coming from other candidacies, most notably Obama's? On the one hand, Clinton had been well known on the national stage since 1992, and had been a very engaged first lady on many policy issues. Yet, she had only been in the U.S. Senate since 2001,

and there was talk of how voters did not like political dynasties (had Clinton become president, and if she had served two terms, the U.S. would have had 28 straight years of either a Bush or a Clinton in the White House).

Still, Clinton was well positioned when she announced her candidacy on January 20, 2007, with the front page of the *Washington Post* declaring her "the front-runner for the Democratic nomination," telling supporters on her webpage announcement that "I'm in, and I'm in to win."<sup>9</sup> Clinton's announcement came just days after Obama officially announced his candidacy, and also set off the furious race for campaign donors among all the Democratic hopefuls. According to the *New York Times*, Clinton's announcement "highlighted the urgency for her of not falling behind in the competition for money, especially in New York, her home turf, where the battle has already reached a fever pitch."<sup>10</sup> It was in the area of fundraising where the first apparent crack in Clinton's campaign strategy came to light. The general assumption seemed to be that no one could match the fundraising prowess of the Clinton machine; Bill Clinton had been perhaps the most successful fundraiser ever for the Democratic Party, and the Clintons turned to the same donors and fundraising methods to fund Hillary's presidential campaign. Bill Clinton's strategy in 1995 and 1996—raise all of the available Democratic funds early to discourage any challengers in the primary—seemed to be the plan for Hillary's presidential campaign as well. The former president was also still a big draw among Democratic donors, and Clinton's campaign had developed a network of large donors known as "Hillraisers," which were donors who not only contributed the maximum legal contribution directly to the Clinton campaign (\$2,300), but also bundled contributions of \$100,000 or more from other donors as well (in effect serving as fundraisers on behalf of the Clinton campaign).<sup>11</sup> But during the first and second quarters of 2007, when each presidential candidate had to report the total money raised to the Federal Election Commission, the Obama campaign had actually out-fundraised Clinton; Obama had raised \$25 million to Clinton's \$20 million for the first quarter of 2007, and \$31 million to Clinton's \$21 million for the second quarter. Not until the third quarter of 2007 did Clinton finally raise more money than Obama—\$22 million to \$19 million, although that still left her trailing \$75 million to \$63 million overall going in to the last few crucial months before the Iowa caucus.<sup>12</sup>

Beyond fundraising, the campaign suffered from numerous other problems throughout 2007 and

into the early months of 2008, from both a strategic and organizational standpoint. While the success of Obama's campaign strategy cannot be understated, and Clinton's campaign can certainly not be assessed in a total vacuum independent of other political actors during the 2008 campaign, key strategic missteps played a significant role in Clinton's failure to capture the Democratic nomination. Certain miscalculations, involving fundraising and mismanagement of campaign funds, ignoring smaller states (particularly those with caucuses as opposed to primary contests), and the campaign's seeming belief in inevitability that Clinton would win the nomination, all played an integral role in the primary contests that Clinton lost. The irony comes in the fact that, before Obama entered the race, many political observers believed the stars to be in alignment for Clinton to become the first woman president, or at the very least, the first woman nominated by a major political party. Clinton had hinted at a presidential run for years, drawing much speculation as early as 2000 when she sought a Senate seat from New York. But by late 2007, those same political stars seemed to be realigning behind Barack Obama as the perfect candidate for that particular moment in political time.

Still, one wonders if a better-run campaign with a more effective strategy would have given Clinton the nomination. In a September 2008 analysis that included internal campaign memos, Joshua Green of *The Atlantic* provided the proof that many had suspected throughout the primary season: that the Clinton campaign had been wracked with personality disputes and mismanagement that led to the "epic meltdown" of what was supposed to be a winning campaign: "...the campaign was not prepared for a lengthy fight; it had an insufficient delegate operation; it squandered vast sums of money; and the candidate herself evinced a paralyzing schizophrenia—one day a shots-'n'-beers brawler, the next a Hallmark Channel mom. Through it all, her staff feuded and bickered, while her husband distracted."<sup>13</sup> Green's analysis shows that despite Clinton's insistence that she had the executive and managerial competence to serve effectively as president, her campaign was poorly managed and the in-fighting often undermined the ability of the campaign to execute the strategies that had been developed. Chief strategist Mark Penn, who had played an integral role in Bill Clinton's reelection campaign in 1996, developed a primary strategy for Clinton based on winning key demographics, a coalition of "Invisible Americans" consisting of women, lower income voters, and registered Democrats (as opposed to the appeal

that Obama had among men, upper income voters, and independents). Women voters were seen as particularly important for Clinton, as was the strategy to highlight images of "leadership" and "strength" while downplaying the "inevitability" factor of Clinton's candidacy (with the goal to contrast Obama's inexperience on the national stage). However, throughout much of 2007, key advisors within the campaign could not settle on an effective strategy to deal with Obama's success, not only in fundraising but in the positive media coverage he was receiving; how to attack Obama without a backlash against Clinton continued to perplex the campaign. In addition, major tactical errors in the campaign message persisted—was Clinton the experienced candidate, or did she better represent change as potentially the first woman president? Was she the former first lady and senator from New York who was comfortable with world leaders, or was she the scrappy, blue-collar champion of working-class voters? And, if Clinton showed a softer side that appealed to women voters, would that fail to attract working class, white male voters whom both she and Obama were fighting for after John Edwards had dropped out of the race? The internal dysfunction among the campaign staff would continue until the end; factions continued to form over strategy (like whether or not Clinton should give a "gender" speech similar to the one Obama delivered on race in March 2008), shake-ups and high-profile firings occurred (most notably that of Mark Penn, who was replaced in April 2008), and leaks from within the campaign about much of the infighting fueled negative media coverage of the mismanagement and indecisiveness of the Clinton campaign.<sup>14</sup> The public dysfunction of the Clinton campaign stood in stark contrast to the discipline of the Obama campaign, which had adopted the mantle "no drama Obama" for itself and its candidate.

Beyond the internal problems within the campaign, the fundraising and money issues persisted for Clinton through the end of the primary contests. While early projections had indicated that the 2008 presidential campaign would be the most expensive on record, with all candidates expected to raise well over \$1 billion, it was Clinton who was expected to break all of the fundraising records.<sup>15</sup> Had it not been for Obama's successful fundraising efforts, particularly from smaller donors through an immensely successful internet-based campaign,<sup>16</sup> Clinton would have broken all fundraising records. Yet, her campaign continued to struggle to keep pace with Obama in terms of money raised, in part due to Clinton's reliance on many large donors who maxed out early in hard money contributions. Both

Clinton and Obama had raised \$20 million each during the fourth quarter of 2007, but the Clinton campaign had not developed a long-term fundraising strategy since advisors assumed that the race would be over after Super Tuesday on February 5th when 23 states would hold their nominating contests. Similarly, no one had anticipated that any other candidate would eclipse Clinton in terms of fundraising, yet Obama's fundraising totals in early 2008 dealt a crippling blow to her campaign; in January, Obama outraised Clinton \$32 million to \$13.5 million, with even higher totals in February of \$55 million for Obama and \$35 million for Clinton.

Having spent \$100 million through only the first contest in Iowa, in which she came in third, the Clinton campaign was broke at a time when it needed money most, forcing Clinton to loan herself \$5 million to stay afloat through Super Tuesday. The lack of funds after Obama's win in Iowa meant that the Clinton campaign could not effectively staff ground operations in states where it needed to compete with Obama. In addition, when Clinton revealed after the Super Tuesday contests that she had lent herself \$5 million, this worked counter to the image she was trying to project going into the big primary states of Ohio, Texas, and Pennsylvania as being able to relate to average, working-class Americans, and also generated stories in the press about the money both Clintons had earned since leaving the White House (both had received large advances for memoirs, and Bill Clinton earned sizable fees for speaking engagements; it also renewed questions over donors to the Clinton Library in Little Rock, Arkansas, whether or not the former president would reveal the list of donors, and whether or not those donors might present a conflict of interest for Hillary as president). When Clinton conceded to Obama and announced the end of her candidacy in June 2008, she had raised a total of \$223 million, had loaned her campaign a total of \$11.4 million, and ended the campaign roughly \$22.5 million in debt.

Money issues during the campaign were also closely tied to another problem that the Clinton team experienced—the lack of an effective “ground game” that could compete with that of the Obama campaign. During the primary season, grass roots organizers and local volunteers can make a big difference in voter education, voter registration, and voter turnout. Sufficient campaign funds also help to pay staff members in various field offices across the country. For the Obama campaign, which was also having tremendous success in tapping into the youth vote (particularly on college campuses),

the “ground game” helped to solidify the Obama 50-state strategy—compete in every state and for every delegate. The Clinton campaign, on the other hand, had a large-state strategy that assumed that their candidate would wrap up the nomination by Super Tuesday with big wins in delegate-rich states like California, New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. And with an

THE LACK OF FUNDS AFTER OBAMA'S WIN IN IOWA MEANT THAT THE CLINTON CAMPAIGN COULD NOT EFFECTIVELY STAFF GROUND OPERATIONS IN STATES WHERE IT NEEDED TO COMPETE WITH OBAMA.

empty campaign coffer in the weeks after the Iowa caucus, the Clinton campaign had an impossible task in readjusting its strategy with limited resources. Also, timing can be everything in politics, and Clinton faced a disadvantage with the Democratic primary and caucus calendar for 2008. Since 1996, many states had participated in what is known as the “frontloading” of the primary season—moving a state contest up earlier on the calendar so a particular state can have a larger say in the nomination process. This caused problems for both parties in 2008, but in particular the Democratic Party, as both Michigan and Florida defied the national party calendar and scheduled their contests prior to Super Tuesday. As a result, each state was initially stripped of its delegates to the national convention as

punishment from the Democratic National Committee (DNC). Most candidates agreed not to campaign in either state, and most also removed their names from the ballots; Clinton, however, left her name on both ballots and after winning the “beauty contest” election in each state (with no serious campaigning or rivals on either ballot), would later try to claim she had won the delegates from both states.<sup>17</sup> In addition, some of the larger states that Clinton would win later on in the spring of 2008, like Ohio, Texas,<sup>18</sup> and Pennsylvania, came too late to alter the outcome as Obama had already built an insurmountable lead in delegates. The calendar and schedule itself raises some important “what if” questions for the Clinton campaign—what would have happened if Ohio, Texas, or Pennsylvania had been on Super Tuesday as opposed to much later on the primary calendar? Or, what if the Democratic Party had held a national



primary, which would have eliminated the momentum Obama was able to build leading up to and after Super Tuesday? Momentum (which is a combination of money raised, media attention, and public opinion polling) is so important to the primary process, and the calendar in 2008 seemed to favor Obama's fifty-state strategy, along with his strategy for winning caucuses, and this left Clinton waiting out the calendar to get to the bigger prizes of larger states later in the primary season.

The primary schedule also speaks directly to the issue of votes versus delegates, and highlights the differing strategies between the Clinton and Obama campaigns. Just like the general election is about winning the Electoral College vote as opposed to the popular vote nationwide, the nomination process for both major parties comes through winning a majority of delegates to the national party convention and not the most votes earned. While each party, and each state, can differ in how it awards delegates after a primary or caucus (some states do a winner-take-all system, while others allocate delegates based on proportional vote schemes), the candidate with a majority of the delegates at the convention will become the party's nominee. Part of the success of Obama's campaign strategy came from focusing on all fifty states, while the failing of Clinton's strategy came in her campaign's "big state" game plan. This also applied to caucuses versus primaries. Part of the momentum that catapulted Obama to the Democratic nomination came from the momentum of not only winning smaller states, and the respective delegates, on Super Tuesday, but also in rattling off eleven straight victories following Super Tuesday, including primaries and caucuses in Louisiana, Maine, Virginia, Maryland, Washington, Wisconsin, and Hawaii. Despite winning the big states of California and New York on Super Tuesday, Clinton would not win another contest until March 4th when she won Ohio and Texas, but Obama had already captured the momentum of the campaign and had taken away the mantle of "fronrunner." Harold Ickes, a top Clinton staffer, alerted the campaign of the delegate issue in late 2007 (that Obama's strategy for winning delegates could pose a problem), but was virtually ignored until it was too late to develop an effective strategy to capture the delegates in smaller states, particularly those with caucuses.<sup>19</sup> After Super Tuesday, Obama had netted a gain of 10 delegates, something the Clinton campaign had not counted on.

To complicate matters even more, Democrats also had what were known as "superdelegates" to contend with. Superdelegates had been around since 1982, and were

a response to the nomination reforms put into place in 1972 (and championed by that year's nominee George McGovern) to turn over the selection process to the rank-and-file party members (the voters). In 1982, following Jimmy Carter's failed bid at reelection in 1980, the Democratic Party decided to take back some of that power from the voters and return it to the party bosses. Superdelegates, then, became important names within the party, like those who held political office in Congress or high-profile state politicians (such as governors), and other notables within the party (like a former president or vice president). Initially, at the start of the primary season, Clinton had a commanding lead among superdelegates who had pledged their support to her candidacy, but after Super Tuesday and the emergence of Obama as frontrunner, unpledged superdelegates slowly began to pledge their support to Obama, while others who had already pledged their support to Clinton switched to Obama once it seemed likely that he would win the nomination. Also during this time, from February through June 2008, various members of the Clinton campaign made public claims that the nominating process, particularly caucuses (which normally have a lower voter turnout) and superdelegates, were "unfair" and "undemocratic," even though the U.S. Constitution does not directly govern how states and/or political parties can select their nominees. As the news media was providing a daily delegate tally, this particular spin from the Clinton campaign added a negative narrative to stories about their candidate by complaining (what some in the press labeled "whining") about the process.

While it is impossible to recap the day-to-day politicking of both the Clinton and Obama campaigns in this article, and while many other arguments can and have been made about what went wrong for Clinton, these specific issues—problems among Clinton campaign staffers, fundraising, the primary calendar, delegates, superdelegates, and a lack of a 50-state strategy—reflect the most concrete reasons that Clinton did not win the Democratic nomination. Given the perceived early strength of her candidacy, part of the story that emerged during the actual primary season seemed to focus on the shared narrative of Obama's success and Clinton's failures, with a sense of disbelief at times that Clinton was not winning the nomination as many people had expected her to do. In hindsight, it is easy to look back and point to the missteps in Clinton's campaign strategy, as the success or failure of any candidacy is impossible to predict with precision. Yet, despite all the media attention and the assumption that Clinton would be the nominee, the procedural aspects

of the nominating contest in awarding delegates, and the strategies developed, transcended the candidates' personalities and images to determine the Democratic nominee, and offers the best explanation of why Clinton lost.

## The Lessons and Legacies of the Clinton Campaign

ELECTING A WOMAN PRESIDENT, WHENEVER IT HAPPENS, WILL REPRESENT BREAKING THROUGH THE ULTIMATE GLASS CEILING IN AMERICAN POLITICS.

The 2008 presidential campaign made history on many levels—Barack Obama's election as the first African-American president, Hillary Clinton as the first truly competitive woman candidate seeking the presidency, and the campaign itself as both the longest and most expensive in U.S. history. For those interested in the broader topic of women in American politics, it was especially fascinating to watch the various twists and turns of Clinton's presidential campaign. Electing a woman president, whenever it

happens, will represent breaking through the ultimate glass ceiling in American politics. There has long been an assumption that a viable woman presidential candidate (that is, a candidate who could legitimately compete in primaries and caucuses and have a real shot at her party's nomination) would help to further break down barriers for women candidates at all levels of government. As such, Clinton's campaign provides an excellent starting point to analyze what progress was made in 2008 toward the cause of electing the first woman president, and if Clinton broke through any of the barriers that women face in the political arena.

For all of the progress made by women in American politics in recent decades, it is both surprising and frustrating to those who have worked to put more women in positions of political power that many barriers still exist. Among the most important barriers are initial candidate recruitment of women and what happens during the "candidate emergence phase" of a campaign (when a person moves from being a potential to an actual candidate). Particularly for higher-level executive offices

like a state governor or president, women are significantly less likely than men to receive encouragement (either from a current or former politician or from a financial supporter) to run for office or to deem themselves qualified to run for office.<sup>20</sup> Women also tend to run for political office later in life than men due to the "double burden" of work and family responsibilities from which many professional women suffer.<sup>21</sup> In addition, women candidates still tend to seek legislative positions more often than executive positions: legislative positions demand a more collaborative, cooperative style of leadership based on consensus building as opposed to executive leadership positions which demand a more male-oriented, unilateral decision-making leadership style.

These higher-level executive positions also usually require a more substantial political resume, and if viable women candidates are entering the political arena later in life than their male counterparts, then the issue of age also becomes a factor. Women tend to have a smaller window of opportunity to seek an office like the presidency based on age—a younger woman in her 40s (and still in her child-bearing and/or child-rearing years) would not be viewed as "seasoned" enough to be president, while an older woman in her late 60s or 70s would appear too grandmotherly and not tough enough for the job. Male presidential candidates have a much larger window of opportunity when it comes to age—Barack Obama's relative youth (47 on election night in 2008) meant that he was somewhat inexperienced but driven, ambitious, and energetic enough for the job, while John McCain (72 on election night in 2008) meant that he was experienced, seasoned, knowledgeable, and mature, even if he was not as energetic as in his younger days. It is difficult to imagine women presidential candidates receiving the same benefit of the doubt at the age of 47 or 72. The age of Alaska Governor Sarah Palin became one of the many related story lines to her vice presidential candidacy in 2008; at 44, she had just given birth to her fifth child and speculation arose over not only whether she could handle the job of vice president while raising five children (four of whom were under the age of 18), but whether or not she would have any more children. Hillary Clinton's age, on the other hand, seemed not to raise any issues: at 60 for most of her campaign, her only child was grown and she had no grandchildren.

Age, along with marital status, image, appearance, and leadership style, are among some of the "unofficial" requirements for the office of the presidency that

continue to plague women candidates. While the only official requirements, according to the U.S. Constitution, include the minimum age of 35, being a natural born U.S. citizen, and having had residency in the U.S. for at least 14 years, many other non-constitutional requirements have become institutionalized in presidential campaigns and in the presidency itself. Primary among those unofficial requirements is the stereotype of male versus female leadership styles—the male style of leadership is considered to be competitive, strong, tough, decisive, and in control, which tends to fit the American political model for successful politicians. Women, on the other hand, are expected, again due to gender stereotypes, to exhibit traits that are cooperative, supportive, understanding, and show a willingness to serve others. Other female characteristics of leadership include using consensus decision-making, viewing power as something to be shared, encouraging productive approaches to conflict, building supportive working environments, and promoting diversity in the workplace.<sup>22</sup> This ties in with the male notion of leadership for the presidency—a successful president must be a strong and decisive commander-in-chief and chief executive; since the presidency “operates on the great man model of leadership,” women have traditionally been defined as the “other” in the executive branch.<sup>23</sup> Since the time of George Washington, Americans have looked to a heroic general to lead the nation, even though the framers of the Constitution intended the president to play a subservient role to Congress in policymaking and war making. One needs to look no further than the 2004 presidential campaign to see how the stereotyped notion of machismo and strong presidential leadership played out, as one of the more prominent narratives to emerge from the campaign considered the question, who was more masculine, George W. Bush or John Kerry?<sup>24</sup>

This notion of leadership style also ties in with image and appearance for women presidential candidates, as a woman running for president must walk a fine line between being too feminine or too masculine, both of which bring with it unhelpful stereotypes. The evolution of Hillary Clinton’s “look” over the years is a perfect example, as her hair and wardrobe have seen many changes, along with intense media scrutiny, since she first appeared on the national stage as the wife of a presidential candidate in 1992. A now-defunct webpage used to chronicle the many hair styles of the former first lady, and the news media has long been obsessed with Clinton’s hair. On the Huffington Post blog, readers can see a slideshow of Clinton’s many

hair styles,<sup>25</sup> and the New York Daily News broke the big news in July 2008 that Clinton had moved to the right—her part, that is, not her politics.<sup>26</sup> Clinton also defeminized herself somewhat when she first ran for the Senate in 2000, a look much different from 1992 when she had long hair, headbands, and bright colored power suits befitting a young, successful female attorney, opting instead for short hair, little makeup, and dark pantsuits. The brighter-colored pantsuits reappeared on the presidential campaign trail beginning in 2007; in fact, pantsuits became a trademark of the Clinton campaign, as the news media became just as fascinated by her clothes choices as her hair styles. Glamour Magazine paid tribute to Clinton’s rainbow of pantsuits in its September 2008 issue, and Clinton herself gave a shout out to the “sisterhood of the traveling pantsuits” (based on the movie “The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants” in 2005) in her speech at the Democratic National Convention in August 2008. These aspects of Clinton’s media coverage match what other women politicians have experienced in recent years, which is attention paid to the topics of “hair, hemlines, and husbands,” along with other negative stereotyping of women and still portraying women candidates as anomalies in the political arena.<sup>27</sup> It is rare that a male candidate receives media attention regarding his attire, his spouse (unless a scandal occurs), or his hair, although the emergence of gray in Obama’s hair has been covered (and considered a positive attribute while on the campaign trail to help him appear more experienced and presidential).<sup>28</sup>

While numerous studies are undoubtedly already underway assessing Clinton’s media coverage during her presidential campaign, particularly regarding the issue of gender bias, an initial assessment of the campaign can be made that suggests gender and Clinton’s status as the first viable female presidential candidate served as a double-edged sword of sorts. On the one hand, her candidacy brought the U.S. extremely close to seeing the first major party nominate a woman, and the historic nature of that accomplishment helped to generate tremendous interest in Clinton’s campaign. On the other hand, as discussed above, Clinton was not immune from some of the same negative stereotyping that has always existed for women politicians. On the historic nature of Clinton’s candidacy and the fact that she is seen as the first “viable” woman candidate, no disrespect is intended to previous major party women presidential candidates, most notably Elizabeth Dole, who sought the Republican nomination in 2000 and did well in the initial pre-primary period in 1999 in terms of polling and media attention. But, like the handful of women who

preceded Dole (including Republican Margaret Chase Smith in 1964 and Democrat Shirley Chisholm in 1972) and the only woman to follow prior to Clinton (Democrat Carol Moseley-Braun in 2004), Clinton became the first woman to win a presidential nominating contest (when she won the New Hampshire primary in January 2008) that also resulted in earning delegates to the national convention.<sup>29</sup> In total, Clinton would win 21 primaries (Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and West Virginia) and one caucus (Nevada)<sup>30</sup> earn 1,896 delegates (out of 4,934 total, with 2,118 needed for the nomination) prior to the Democratic National Convention, and amass a total of 18,046,007 popular votes<sup>31</sup> during the Democratic nomination process. Clinton also helped to recruit new voters to the process with the excitement over the possibility of electing a woman president, and her candidacy proved that working-class, white male voters in states such as Ohio and Pennsylvania would vote for a woman. Perhaps most importantly, after watching Clinton on the campaign trail for 18 months, many Americans grew accustomed to seeing a woman candidate as a serious contender for the White House.

Yet, it is Hillary Clinton herself, and not necessarily her campaign, that raises interesting questions about how to assess the legacy in terms of electing the first woman president. Often, gender did not play as prominent of a role in the campaign as some might have expected it would, as many discussions often revolved around “Hillary Clinton” running for president rather than a woman running for president. Being so well known prior to the start of the campaign, for better or worse, often skewed the entire debate about gender in politics. From the start, Clinton’s campaign emphasized her experience, almost as if she was an incumbent running for president, and that did not leave much room for her campaign to promote her outsider status as a woman. Her belated attempts to claim “if you want real change, then elect a woman,” late in the primary season, might have been more effective if they had been front and center from the start. Clinton’s accomplishments, as noted above, certainly broke important barriers for a woman running for president, yet it is difficult to determine what long-term effect that will have on the potential for the next woman presidential candidate. Clinton was uniquely positioned to run for president in a way that benefitted her alone—as a former first lady, married to one of the best politicians to ever serve as president, with access

to Democratic Party elites, and serving as a U.S. Senator from the third most populous state in the nation is not a resume that is likely to ever emerge again in presidential politics. The name recognition (even the notoriety from Bill Clinton’s various scandals) and access to Washington powerbrokers is what helped to catapult Clinton into her early frontrunner status. That is not to say that she was not qualified to be president, or that she should not have run for the office; however, her path to a presidential campaign is not one that can be easily emulated by future women candidates, so Clinton did not set a broad precedent for how women can prepare to run for the presidency.

BEING SO  
WELL KNOWN  
PRIOR TO THE  
START OF THE  
CAMPAIGN,  
FOR BETTER OR  
WORSE, OFTEN  
SKEWED THE  
ENTIRE DEBATE  
ABOUT GENDER  
IN POLITICS.

Regarding media coverage of a woman presidential candidate, the emerging assessment of Clinton’s portrayal in the news media is a complicated one. For example, an early study of news coverage of the 2007 invisible primary by the Project for Excellence in Journalism showed that Clinton had more coverage than any other candidate in either party, yet 38 percent of that coverage was negative, compared to just 27 percent positive (with the remaining coverage considered neutral).<sup>32</sup> Many charges have been made about gender bias and sexism in campaign coverage, with some high-profile examples of commentators (most notably Chris Matthews, Mike Barnicle, and Pat Buchanan in separate incidents on MSNBC) making questionable comments about Clinton’s campaign regarding gender, and future academic studies will show a better and more detailed picture than the mostly anecdotal evidence available to date. However, it is not a stretch to rely on the anecdotal evidence available to anyone who followed the campaign closely to determine that the gender bias that did exist in news coverage often followed other trends in recent years for other female candidates.<sup>33</sup>

Yet, any study of Clinton’s campaign on this issue may have to stand alone in its findings. For anyone looking for evidence that Clinton was treated unfairly by the press because she is a woman (which undoubtedly exists), that task is going to be complicated by the fact that she is also a Clinton. American voters have never

seen a candidate with such high negatives entering the presidential race, so it becomes difficult to separate the gender factor from the Clinton factor in Clinton's media coverage and in other aspects of her campaign. There was not much that Americans did not already know about the Clintons prior to the campaign, and since much of the knowledge revolved around negativity starting in 1992 and reaching its peak with the Monica Lewinsky scandal and impeachment of Bill Clinton in 1998, Clinton could not wipe the proverbial slate clean once she began running for president. Despite the effort to define herself apart from the negative baggage (both hers and her husbands') from their White House years, those in the press could not wipe their memories clean of all that defines the Clintons either. Part of what defined Clinton and her image in the media stemmed from a lack of credibility on certain issues. While the news media mostly avoided a re-hash of the Lewinsky scandal from 1998 (a story in which Hillary Clinton played a minor, yet mostly sympathetic, role), other issues from her own political past made for regular campaign fodder, such as her failed attempt to spearhead healthcare reform while first lady in 1993-1994, and her role in the Whitewater investigation (which stemmed from a failed real estate investment in Arkansas while Bill Clinton was governor). Some of these issues contributed to Clinton's high negatives coming into the 2008 presidential campaign, and incidents on the campaign trail such as Clinton's inaccurate recall of her trip to Bosnia in 1995 (she claimed that she had been under sniper attack on an airport tarmac, when news footage showed a much different picture) reinforced for some the negatives about Clinton.

Media coverage of the entire 2008 presidential campaign is also unique due to the length of the campaign, the intense interest among Americans in the campaign, and the ever-expanding means of communicating campaign news to those interested (for example, blogging and social networking sites played a prominent role in campaign coverage). While future studies will probably find that Clinton's campaign did not escape some of the usual trends for covering women candidates, the sheer amount of coverage of the presidential campaign in 2008 may dilute the gender-bias findings a bit; the campaign minutia covered non-stop in 2008, including the horse race coverage of the delegate count between Clinton and Obama during the spring of 2008, left less room for stories and/or commentary about more frivolous topics such as Clinton's wardrobe. In addition, as a former first lady, coverage of her husband and daughter, both campaign surrogates and considered

newsworthy in their own right, was certainly different than other women running for office have experienced. It is also important to point out that it is now acceptable, and even expected, for news outlets to cover more "style" issues (as opposed to issues of substance, like policy matters) for all candidates, male or female, than ever before. Examples from coverage in 2007 include the focus on John Edwards' \$400 haircut, and a story in the New York Times on the candidates' eating habits and exercise routines on the campaign trail (with particular attention given to Bill Richardson's struggles with his weight)<sup>34</sup>. This fits the trend in recent years for "soft" versus "hard" news.<sup>35</sup> The news media was also credited with helping to keep Clinton's campaign alive during the spring of 2008 as her options for winning began to seriously dwindle based on the delegate math. Clearly, the news media did not want the campaign to end, as the Obama v. Clinton campaign drama was beneficial to the bottom line of bringing in viewers and readers.<sup>36</sup> Clinton's campaign also benefitted from media coverage beginning in 2005 and throughout 2007 that declared her the presumptive frontrunner and virtually unstoppable in her quest for the nomination.

Clearly, Hillary Clinton as presidential candidate had a love-hate relationship with the news media. While it is easy to point to the ways in which she benefitted from her star power, especially in terms of media attention in the early months of her campaign, determining whether other news coverage had a detrimental effect on her campaign is not as simple a proposition. An interesting question arises over whether or not Clinton is really a good test case to make a clear and clean determination about gender bias in campaign coverage, since some coverage may have been more negatively biased against "Hillary as Hillary" (and wife to Bill Clinton) than Clinton as a woman running for president. Obviously, the two cannot be separated, but it puts the question into a unique context and perspective as scholars continue to assess the 2008 presidential campaign. In all likelihood, not until we see the next woman running for president will we know if real progress has been made on the gender issue in presidential campaign news coverage, or more broadly, how a woman presidential candidate fares in all aspects of the campaign. We do know, however, that despite the barriers that still exist, the Clinton campaign represented the next—and significant—important step of electing the first woman president.

## Waiting for Madam President: Who and When?

Given Clinton's success in the Democratic primary race, even though she failed to capture the nomination, the 2008 presidential campaign provides an excellent

—  
 YOU NEEDED  
 A HEART OF  
 STONE NOT  
 TO BE MOVED  
 BY WATCHING  
 THE JOY  
 THAT SWEEPED  
 AMERICA —  
 BUT YOU  
 NEEDED A  
 HEAD OF  
 STRAW NOT  
 TO WORRY  
 ABOUT JUST  
 HOW OBAMA  
 WOULD  
 SUCCEED.

moment in political time to look at the progress women candidates have made in recent years, as well as to look ahead to consider what the future may hold for women presidential candidates. How much progress has actually been made since 1992, which was dubbed "the year of the woman" in American politics, and what was Clinton's contribution to "the cause" of electing more women to public office as a result of her 2008 presidential campaign?

In 2009, there are 90 women in the U.S. Congress, which is 16.8 percent of the 535 voting members. Of those, 17 women are in the Senate and 73 women are in the House of Representatives. That latter number does not include the three women who serve as non-voting delegates from the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. Nancy Pelosi, a representative from

San Francisco, is also Speaker of the House; she is the first woman to ever hold a leadership position in Congress (first as minority whip, then minority leader, and she became Speaker in January 2007), and as such, she is second in the line of succession for the presidency. Pelosi's ascent to the speakership after the Democratic takeover of Congress in the 2006 midterm elections was a watershed moment for women in American politics. Outside of Washington, at the start of 2009, there were eight women serving as state governors (Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Hawaii, Kansas, Michigan, North Carolina, and Washington).<sup>37</sup> There are also eight women serving as lieutenant governors, and 59 women holding other statewide positions. In total, women hold 23.6 percent of all statewide elected positions. Women also make up

24.3 percent of all state legislative positions, and 11 of the largest 100 cities in America have women mayors.<sup>38</sup>

Since the early 1970s, there has been a steady, albeit somewhat small, increase in the number of women holding elective office in the U.S. For example, in 1979, only 3 percent of the members of Congress were women; that percentage is now nearly 17. Similarly, only 11 percent of statewide positions were held by women, and that number is now 23.6; and only 10 percent of state legislative positions were held by women, and that number is now also more than 24. Each category has steadily increased over the years with the exception of women holding statewide positions, as that number is now down from a high of 27.6 percent in 2001. However, these percentages are fairly low given that women make up 51 percent of the population and 54 percent of voters. Women represent only 14 states in the Senate and 31 in the House.<sup>39</sup> According to the group Equal Voice, which works to help get women elected to more political offices, the U.S. ranks 68th in the world in the number of women in national positions. For those who believe that increased female representation in elected office at all levels in American government is needed for equity and social justice, and for women to have a stronger voice in all policy issues, there remains much work to be done.<sup>40</sup>

Looking ahead to the 2012 and 2016 presidential campaigns, are there any viable women contenders for the White House? A short list of presidential candidates, put together in part by the news media through speculation and the behavior and travel patterns of notable politicians (for example, who is traveling to Iowa and New Hampshire, or speaking at high-profile party events), usually consists of notable members of Congress, governors from larger states, or former or current vice presidents. In the post-Watergate era of American politics, four of the last six presidents elected have been former or current state governors (George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, and Jimmy Carter), a position that allows a presidential candidate to claim executive experience along with a Washington outsider status. While serving as a state governor is certainly not the only path to the White House, the dearth of women who have executive experience—either in politics or business—leaves fewer women on the presidential short list. Through 2009, only 31 women have ever served as governor in 23 states, with only seven currently serving. Of the six largest states in the nation—California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and Pennsylvania—Texas is the only state to have had a woman governor (Miriam

"Ma" Ferguson was elected twice, in 1924 and 1932, and Ann Richards was elected in 1990).<sup>41</sup> Similarly, in the corporate world, few women have ever risen to the level of Chief Executive Officer of major U.S. corporations. In 2009, only 15 women serve as CEOs of Fortune 500 companies (although that number was the highest ever achieved).<sup>42</sup>

In addition, while the women currently serving in the U.S. Senate enjoy high profiles in American politics, the Senate is traditionally not the place to look for a presidential candidate. Barack Obama became the first president elected directly from the Senate since John F. Kennedy's election in 1960, and only the third in U.S. history (the other being Warren Harding, elected in 1920). The lack of women leaders in Congress also tends to keep women off the presidential short list; despite the historic speakership of Nancy Pelosi, she remains the only woman from either political party to ever hold a leadership position in the House of Representatives or the Senate. The assumption that more women are now serving in Congress, or that women have served on the Supreme Court or held important positions such as Secretary of State or Attorney General often miss the bigger picture, and that is that women are still drastically underrepresented within politics and in top positions within corporate America and in the military. All of this ties in with the fact that electing women to executive leadership positions still remains one of the biggest hurdles in American politics. California serves as a prime example. Despite the fact that it is the largest and most diverse state in the nation, has traditionally been viewed as a more liberal-leaning progressive state, and that it was the first state to elect two women as its U.S. senators (Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, both elected in 1992), electing a woman governor has remained an elusive proposition. Feinstein is considered one of the most influential and popular statewide politicians, yet it is important to remember that she lost her race for governor to Pete Wilson in 1990, yet won election as senator while facing the same voters two years later. Certainly, the circumstances of each race were different, but as the former mayor of San Francisco, she had executive experience that should have benefitted her more in her race for governor than senator. Other women have also failed in their bid to become the first governor of California, including Kathleen Brown in 1994 (the daughter of two-term governor Edmund "Pat" Brown, 1959-1967, and sister of two-term governor Jerry Brown, 1975-1983; she lost the general election to Pete Wilson) and Jane Harmon in 1998 (elected to the House of Representatives in 1992, she lost the Democratic

Primary to Gray Davis). Meg Whitman, former CEO of E-Bay and advisor to John McCain during his 2008 presidential campaign, is currently on the short list for potential Republican gubernatorial nominees for 2010. Her moderate political views and executive business experience, particularly given California's current fiscal crisis, make her a strong contender to become California's first woman governor, and if elected, her name would undoubtedly be added to the presidential, or vice presidential, short list for Republicans.

Other than Whitman, which other women politicians are being discussed as possible presidential or vice presidential candidates in the near future? With so much attention focused on electing a woman president, it is important to remember that electing the first woman vice president would also be a significant barrier to break, as 14 vice presidents have gone on to become president, either through succession (following the death or resignation of the president) or election in their own right. In addition, possible women candidates from the Democratic Party are talked about in terms of 2016, since it is not likely that a candidate will emerge to challenge President Obama in the Democratic primaries in 2012 (the last significant challenge to an incumbent president from within his own party came in 1980, with Senator Edward Kennedy beating President Jimmy Carter in several primaries before Carter eventually won the nomination). While no list is definitive, the names of several prominent women politicians often emerge as potential candidates, including Health and Human Services Secretary (and former Kansas governor) Kathleen Sebelius (D), former New Jersey Governor and former head of the Environmental Protection Agency Christine Todd Whitman (R), Connecticut Governor Jodi Rell (R), Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski (R), and Florida Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Shultz (D). Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm is also mentioned as someone who would be on the short list for president if not for the fact that she is not a natural born U.S. citizen (having been born in Canada). While many of her supporters still talk about a Clinton candidacy in 2016, Clinton's own comments about not running again, as well as her age (she would be 68 at the start of 2016), suggest that her chance at becoming president has probably passed.

Perhaps the most notable name of all on the list of possible contenders is former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, the Republican vice presidential nominee in 2008. Despite being regularly referred to as a leading candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 2012,

Palin's future as a presidential candidate may already be diminished. When first announced as McCain's running mate in September 2008, Palin catapulted to instant political celebrity as the first Republican woman to run for vice president and began drawing much larger crowds of supporters than even McCain. Yet, for all of the excitement that her candidacy generated among the base of the Republican Party, she failed to garner the support of independent or cross-over Democratic voters (which the McCain campaign counted on by selecting a woman in an attempt to appeal to former Clinton supporters) due to many of her social conservative views. Despite the desire to elect a woman to the presidency or vice presidency, Democratic pro-choice women voters did not support Palin's candidacy. In addition, she proved to be "not-ready-for-primetime" as a vice presidential candidate due to her lack of political experience (she had been governor for less than two years) and her lack of knowledge about major domestic and international issues. Palin became a flashpoint for feminism during the presidential campaign, fueling discussions about working mothers and family responsibilities as well as the role of both liberal and conservative women in politics; for example, could a socially conservative, pro-life woman such as Palin still be considered a feminist? Much attention was also focused on Palin's appearance and whether or not she was too attractive to be taken seriously as a national candidate. Despite the fact that Palin has emerged as somewhat of an icon in conservative political circles, continues to draw large crowds at Republican gatherings, and remains a top newsmaker (especially on cable news channels), her public image has taken a beating since the campaign ended with constant negative news stories about family issues (including the birth of her first grandchild, born to her unwed teenage daughter) and political problems (including various claims against her for ethics violations in Alaska). Palin also remains a divisive political figure, and overcoming that would be a tall order for any future presidential campaign; in a profile about Palin in the August 2009 issue of *Vanity Fair*, Todd Purdum writes that "Palin is at once the sexiest and the riskiest brand in the Republican Party. . . . Palin is unlike any other national figure in modern American life—neither Anna Nicole Smith nor Margaret Chase Smith but a phenomenon all her own."<sup>43</sup>

Despite one's views about Palin, her vice presidential candidacy did make history and expanded the diversity of women and their ideologies, perspectives, and personal histories on the national stage. However, her presidential prospects have been dimmed even further

since her surprise announcement in July 2009 to resign her position as Alaska governor with nearly 18 months left in her term. Claiming that pending legal investigations (and the subsequent costs of ethics investigations) would distract from the job of governing Alaska, Palin's decision left all but her core supporters, including many prominent Republican voices, questioning her

toughness, resolve, and ability to stick with the job to which she had been elected. The media sensation that Palin has become since first introduced as McCain's running mate in September 2008 also provides an interesting case study about how women candidates are treated once arriving on the national stage. Like Clinton, Palin's relationship with the news media is somewhat unique due to her political persona, her life story, and her political ideology; many more women presidential and vice presidential candidates will need to emerge before a standard can be set when it comes to covering women on the national campaign trail. While Clinton has been regularly demonized by conservative pundits for years, Palin is often idolized as one of the lone bright spots of the Republican Party after its electoral defeat in 2008. The respective families of both candidates also received

WHILE CLINTON HAS BEEN REGULARLY DEMONIZED BY CONSERVATIVE PUNDITS FOR YEARS, PALIN IS OFTEN IDOLIZED AS ONE OF THE LONE BRIGHT SPOTS OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY AFTER ITS ELECTORAL DEFEAT IN 2008.

vastly different treatment in the press; while most in the media have always taken a hands-off approach to Chelsea Clinton (respecting her privacy as first daughter beginning in 1993), and while it is hard to imagine something that voters did not already know about Bill and Hillary Clinton as a couple, Palin put her family (including her pregnant teenage daughter and her special-needs infant son) on full public display during the campaign (yet ironically has also been harshly critical of news media scrutiny of her family since then). No doubt, Palin had, and continues to have, strong appeal to the base of the Republican Party—social conservative, evangelical voters who are pro-life and pro-gun. However, that same appeal leaves Palin an undesirable



choice for independent and moderate voters. Palin did not attract broad support among women outside of the base of the Republican Party, and did not succeed in attracting Clinton primary voters to McCain's campaign in 2008, as she and Clinton had very little in common as politicians beyond the fact that both are women. Despite the many current problems with Palin's image as a White House contender (many are now labeling her as a "quitter" and someone who is still under-prepared in terms of experience and knowledge to run for higher office), it is her narrow appeal within the electorate that handicaps her potential presidential candidacy the most, as presidential candidates must appeal to a broad spectrum of the public in order to succeed. Serving only 2 ½ years of her term as Alaska governor may relegate Palin to nothing more than a political celebrity, and not a future office holder, in the years to come.

## Conclusion

Looking back at the presidential campaign of 2008, one realizes that it may take many more years to fully analyze and assess all aspects of the different candidacies and campaign strategies that emerged. Every four years, it seems that the race for the presidency becomes more complicated and expensive, which demands newer and innovative strategies be developed by the smartest political minds available. How any presidential candidate, male or female, fits into that equation may depend first and foremost on developing a successful and disciplined campaign strategy that matches the political environment in which he or she is running for office. On the list of things that the Obama campaign did right, campaign strategy would certainly be among the top reasons as to why he won the presidency. In addition, as journalist Richard Wolffe writes in his book on the Obama campaign, "What was new was his newness, the fresh political style that tied his story and purpose to his audience."<sup>44</sup> For Clinton, the story of her campaign seems to be told in reverse of that of Obama; not only did the strategy developed for her campaign fail, but despite being the first viable woman candidate to run for the presidency, there was no newness to the Clinton campaign at a time when voters wanted change over experience. Nevertheless, the Clinton campaign serves as an important milestone for women in American politics by achieving many "firsts" on the presidential campaign trail even if the final political glass ceiling remains unbroken. Obama's election by breaking down the race barrier for the White House should be viewed as an encouraging sign toward breaking down

the gender barrier as well; while each has significantly diverse issues attached, America has taken a significant step of redefining the traditional notion of the president by electing someone normally viewed as the "other" and an "outsider" in the political arena. Bringing about that change, and reshaping the American ideal of presidential leadership, has been a slow process, yet Clinton's candidacy showed an unprecedented level of support among American voters to cast a ballot for the first woman president. In the long term, that is perhaps the most important legacy of Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign as it leaves a solid achievement for future women presidential candidates on which to build.

## End Notes

- 1 Many journalists made the comparison based on the 2005 book by Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), about Lincoln's decision to place previous political rivals in his cabinet.
- 2 "Obama Rolls Out National Security Team," CNN, December 1, 2008, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/12/01/transition.wrap/>.
- 3 Six former presidents have held the position of Secretary of State prior to their elections, including Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, Martin Van Buren, and James Buchanan.
- 4 For example, see CBS News, "Ready for a Woman President?" *CBS News Polls*, February 5, 2006, [www.cbsnews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com); Stewart M. Powell, "Poll Finds Readiness for Female President," *Houston Chronicle*, February 20, 2006, p. A1; and Dan Smith, "Voters Think U.S. Ready for Woman as President," *Sacramento Bee*, March 10, 2006, p. A5. In addition, a February 2005 poll by the Siena College Research Institute found that six out of ten voters were ready for a woman president and that 81 percent of those surveyed would vote for a woman president. Potential candidates for 2008 that topped the survey included Clinton, Rice, and Senator Elizabeth Dole (R-NC).
- 5 For example, see Dick Morris and Eileen McGann, *Condi vs. Hillary: The Next Great Presidential Race* (New York: Regan Books, 2005); Susan Estrich, *The Case for Hillary Clinton* (New York: Regan Books, 2005); John Podhoretz, *Can She be Stopped? Hillary Clinton Will Be the Next President of the United States Unless . . .* (New York: Crown Forum, 2006); Dick Morris and Eileen McGann, *Rewriting History* (New York: Regan Books, 2004); R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr. with Mark W. Davis, *Madame Hillary: The Dark Road to the White House* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2004); and Michael A. Bowen, *Hillary! How America's First Woman President Won the White House* (Boston: Branden Books, 2002).
- 6 See "The Ceiling of Political Ambition: A Poll Shows That Hillary Clinton Has the Biggest Mountain to Climb in the Presidential Primaries," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 23, 2006, p. H3.
- 7 Lois Romano, "Beyond the Poll Numbers: Voter Doubts About Clinton," *Washington Post*, July 13, 2006, p. A1."
- 8 Richard Wolffe, *Renegade: The Making of a President* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2009), 53.
- 9 Dan Balz, "Hillary Clinton Opens Presidential Bid: The Former First Lady Enters the Race as Front-Runner for the Democratic Nomination," *Washington Post*, January 21, 2007, p. A1.
- 10 Patrick Healy and Jeff Zeleny, "Clinton Enters '08 Field, Fueling Race for Money," *New York Times*, January 21, 2007, p. 1.
- 11 The concept of "bundling" had become a popular means of fundraising during the 1990s; the incentive for a bundler comes from the access it provides to the candidate (and potentially future office holder) by bringing in large amounts of money, all in legal contributions, to the campaign.
- 12 Patrick Healy, "Clinton Steals Obama's Fundraising Thunder," *New York Times*, October 3, 2007.
- 13 Joshua Green, "The Front-Runner's Fall," *The Atlantic*, September 2008.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 The total amount raised by all presidential candidates in 2008 actually eclipsed the estimate at nearly \$1.7 billion. See the Federal Election Commission website at [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov).
- 16 While Obama raised large and consistent amounts of money from small donors throughout 2008, only 15 percent of the money raised in 2007 came from small donors. See Wolffe, *Renegade*, 74.
- 17 The issue of delegates in both Michigan and Florida would later be resolved by the DNC, prior to the Democratic convention, to allow delegates from both states to be seated at the convention.
- 18 Texas relied on what become popularly known as a "primacaucus" in which delegates were awarded by both a primary vote and a caucus vote. While the news media declared Clinton the winner in Texas based on her win in the overall popular vote, Obama actually won more delegates from the state after the caucus portion of the state's contest.
- 19 See Green.
- 20 For example, see Richard L. Fox and Jennifer L. Lawless, "Entering the Arena? Gender and the Decision to Run for Office," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 48, No. 2, April 2004, pp. 264-280.
- 21 See Erika Falk and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "Changing the Climate of Expectations," in *Anticipating Madam President*, eds. Robert P. Watson and Ann Gordon (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 45-7. See also Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- 22 Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 270-1.
- 23 Georgia Duerst-Lahti, "Reconceiving Theories of Power: Consequences of Masculinism in the Executive Branch," in *The Other Elites*, ed. MaryAnne Borrelli and Janet M. Martin (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 18.
- 24 See Georgia Duerst-Lahti, "Masculinity on the Campaign Trail," in *Rethinking Madam President: Are We Ready for a Woman in the White House?* eds. Lori Cox Han and Caroline Heldman (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007).
- 25 Anya Strzemian, "Hillary Clinton's Hair: The Ups and Downs," *Huffington Post*, available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/13/hillary-clintons-hair-the\\_n\\_174856.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/13/hillary-clintons-hair-the_n_174856.html).
- 26 Bill Hutchinson, "Hillary Clinton's Parting Shot – Her 'Do Goes From Left to Right," *New York Daily News*, July 16, 2008, available at [http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/2008/07/16/2008-07-16\\_hillary\\_clintons\\_parting\\_shot\\_her\\_do\\_go.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/2008/07/16/2008-07-16_hillary_clintons_parting_shot_her_do_go.html).
- 27 For example, see Kim Fridkin Kahn, *The Political Consequences of Being a Woman: How Stereotypes Influence the Conduct and Consequences of Political Campaigns* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Martha Kropf and John A. Boiney, "The Electoral Glass Ceiling? Gender, Visibility, and the News in U.S. Senate Campaigns," *Women and Politics*, 23 (2001): 79-103; Diane J. Heith, "The Lipstick Watch: Media Coverage, Gender, and Presidential Campaigns," in *Anticipating Madam President*, eds. Robert P. Watson and Ann Gordon (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003); and Caroline Heldman, Susan J. Carroll, and Stephanie Olson, "She Brought Only a Skirt": Print

- Media Coverage of Elizabeth Dole's Bid for the Republican Nomination," *Political Communication* 22 (2005): 315-335.
- 28 Many stories appeared both during and after the campaign about the graying of Obama's hair. For example, see "Barack Obama Sporting More Gray Hair," *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 2008, and Lolly Bowean, "Is Barack Obama's Hair Turning Gray?" *Chicago Tribune*, December 23, 2008.
- 29 Democrat Shirley Chisholm won a non-binding "beauty contest" primary in New Jersey in 1972 that awarded no delegates.
- 30 Michigan and Florida were "beauty contests" with no delegates awarded, and Texas included both a primary (which Clinton won) and a caucus (which Obama won). In addition, while Clinton's popular vote victory in New Hampshire was seen as a major comeback after losing the Iowa caucus, she and Obama earned an equal number of delegates in the state. Similarly, while Clinton won the popular vote in Nevada, Obama actually won more delegates (by one).
- 31 An estimate, according to RealClearPolitics.com, since Iowa, Nevada, Maine, and Washington did not release official vote totals.
- 32 Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Joan Shorenstein Center, Harvard University, "The Invisible Primary—Invisible No Longer: A First Look at Coverage of the 2008 Presidential Campaign," October 29, 2007.
- 33 See Katharine Q. Seelye and Julie Bosman, "Media Charged with Sexism in Clinton Coverage," *New York Times*, June 13, 2008.
- 34 Jodi Kantor, "Where the Votes Are, So, Unfortunately, Are All Those Calories," *New York Times*, November 23, 2007, p. A1.
- 35 Soft news is defined as news having no real connection to substantive policy issues, or as the opposite of "hard news" that includes coverage of breaking events or major issues impacting the daily routines of American citizens, and has steadily increased during the past two decades in response to competition within the marketplace. See Thomas E. Patterson, "Doing Well and Doing Good: How Soft News and Critical Journalism Are Shrinking the News Audience and Weakening Democracy—And What News Outlets Can Do About It," The Joan Shorenstein Center for Press, Politics, and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2000.
- 36 For example, see Jim Vandehei and Mike Allen, "Story Behind the Story: The Clinton Myth," *Politico*, March 21, 2008, available at <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0308/9149.html>.
- 37 That number had dropped to six by July 2009. Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius resigned in April 2009 to become Secretary of Health and Human Services, and Alaska Governor Sarah Palin resigned her office at the end of July 2009. In addition, Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano resigned her office in January 2009 to become Secretary of Homeland Security, but was succeeded by another woman, Lieutenant Governor Jan Brewer.
- 38 "Women in Elective Office 2009," Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, available at [http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast\\_facts/levels\\_of\\_office/documents/elective.pdf](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/elective.pdf).

- 39 "Women in the U.S. Congress 2009," Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, available at [http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast\\_facts/levels\\_of\\_office/documents/cong.pdf](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/cong.pdf).
- 40 See Equal Voice at <http://www.equalvoice.org/>.
- 41 "History of Women Governors," Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, available at [http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast\\_facts/levels\\_of\\_office/documents/govhistory.pdf](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/govhistory.pdf).
- 42 Those companies include Kraft Foods, Xerox, PepsiCo, TJX, Dupont, Yahoo, Avon Products, Sara Lee, Rite Aid, Archer Daniels Midland, Reynolds American, Western Union, Wellpoint, Sunoco, and BJ's Wholesale Club.
- 43 Todd S. Purdum, "It Came From Wasilla," *Vanity Fair*, August 2009, 44. Wolfe, 66.
- 44 Wolfe, 66.

## About the author



**Lori Cox Han** is Professor of Political Science at Chapman University in Orange, California. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Southern California. Her major area of emphasis is American government, with research and teaching interests in the presidency, women and politics, media and politics, and political leadership. She is the author or editor of seven books, including: *Rethinking Madam President: Are We Ready for a Woman in the White House?* (Lynne Rienner, 2007); *Governing From Center Stage: White House Communication Strategies During the Television Age of Politics* (Hampton Press, 2001); *Women and American Politics: The Challenges of Political Leadership* (McGraw-Hill, 2007); *The Presidency and the Challenge of Democracy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); and *In the Public Domain: Presidents and the Challenge of Public Leadership* (SUNY Press, 2005). She is also past president of the Presidency Research Group, an organized section of the American Political Science Association devoted to the study of the presidency.

