

CHAPTER 11

TEXAS AND OHIO

In the weeks prior to the Texas and Ohio Democratic presidential primaries in 2008, the major political analysts and columnists began writing Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign obituary. As Barack Obama cruised through his post-Super-Duper Tuesday string of caucuses and primary victories, the news media launched a variety of "Obama's got it won" stories.

Hillary Clinton's strategy had been wrong from the start, or so the collective wisdom of the political pundits argued. She began running as the "inevitable" winner of the nomination, taking moderate positions designed to help her win the general election in November rather than the liberal positions needed to win low-turnout presidential caucuses in January and February. When she finally woke-up to the nature of Barack Obama's assault from the left, she shifted to the left herself, but then she sounded like a "me-too" candidate following Obama's lead.

The Clinton campaign also was faulted for misreading the mood of Democratic voters. Hillary Clinton appeared to be offering a return to traditional Democratic Party values such as more government programs to solve the nation's economic and social problems. What voters wanted, it turned out, was a complete "change" in policy, as so dramatically proposed by Barack Obama, that looked totally forward and never backward.

Another error on Hillary Clinton's part, according to the political wizards, was presenting herself as a very tough woman candidate, indistinguishable from a man. Her "moment" of near-tears prior to the New Hampshire primary, however, revealed that one of her major strengths was her strong appeal to women voters, particularly older women voters.

The Hillary Clinton campaign relied on her husband, former-President Bill Clinton, to use his popularity with African-Americans to shore up the black vote for Hillary Clinton in southern state primaries. In the first southern state primary, South Carolina, the obituary writers noted, Bill Clinton overplayed his hand, seemed to be playing the race card, and actually drove African-American voters into Barack Obama's camp rather than his wife's. "The big dog got off the porch" became the standard cliché for describing Bill Clinton's bumbling away of the black vote

in South Carolina and other southern states.

Most damaging of all, the Hillary Clinton campaign assumed that the race would be over on Super-Duper Tuesday and spent all its money accordingly. The result was, although Hillary Clinton did well on Super-Duper Tuesday, she did not knock Barack Obama out of the race. Her campaign was left with little money and no strategy for winning the string of caucuses and primaries scheduled in the first few weeks after Super-Duper Tuesday. The end result was a devastating string of caucuses and primary losses to Obama that wiped out Hillary Clinton's momentum from winning on Super-Duper Tuesday.

As the Hillary Clinton campaign limped from one mishap to another, internal bickering broke out over who was to blame for the strategic mistakes and the mixed-up spending priorities. The disarray at Clinton headquarters, which seeped into the news, stood in sharp contrast to the well-oiled machine humming right along that was the Obama campaign. The problems were particularly highlighted when the Clinton campaign changed campaign managers.

That was the situation as the nation prepared for the Texas and Ohio presidential primaries on Tuesday, March 4, 2008. Barack Obama was firmly in the lead, both in terms of momentum and pledged delegate votes, for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination. As far as much of the press was concerned, the Hillary Clinton campaign was on life support and not likely to survive too much longer.

TEXAS

Texas has always been big, but recent population growth has made the Lone Star State one of the most populous states in the nation, with almost 25 million residents and more moving in all the time.

Texas is a very interesting state politically. In one sense, it is a southern state. It seceded from the United States and fought on the side of the South in the Civil War. Similar to other southern states, Texas has a significant population of African-American voters. Eastern Texas particularly has that Deep South ethos and is often compared to the state of Mississippi.

The Lone Star State, however, is also a western state. The "panhandle" region up around Amarillo in the northwest corner of the state is cowboy country, as are many other parts of Texas. The "Old West"

tradition, with giant cattle ranches and a history of colorful cattle drives, is a big part of the Texas mystique.

There is yet another Texas. The Rio Grande, the great river that constitutes the southern boundary of Texas with Mexico, extends from the city of El Paso in the western part of the state to Brownsville in the southeast. Along the north side of the river, the Texas side, are large concentrations of Hispanic voters, many with their ethnic roots in Mexico. Hispanic Texas extends north from the Rio Grande Valley to Interstate Highway 10, which runs from El Paso to San Antonio to Houston.

With both its large African-American and Hispanic populations, Texas is one of the most diverse states in the United States. "It's like running a national campaign," Garry Mauro, Hillary Clinton's Texas state director, told the *New York Times*. "There are no similarities between Amarillo and Brownsville and Beaumont and Texarkana and El Paso and Austin and Houston and Dallas. These are very separate demographic groups with very diverse interests."

Many political observers looked at Texas and saw Barack Obama as having a good chance of doing well there. As in other southern states, the large black population could be counted as solidly in the Obama camp. Well-educated and upscale white Democrats in two of the state's largest metropolitan areas, Dallas and Houston, were likely targets for Obama's famous promises of "change" and "reducing partisan rancor." One city in Texas, the sophisticated state capital of Austin, was said to be over-the-top for Obama. Also aiding Obama was that independent voters, who had strongly favored Obama in earlier primaries, could decide on election day to vote in the Texas Democratic presidential primary if they wanted to.

Hillary Clinton, however, had her assets where Texas was concerned. Back in 1972, when George McGovern was the Democratic nominee for president running on an anti-Vietnam War platform, both Bill and Hillary Clinton had been campaign organizers for McGovern in the state of Texas. The two of them made many valuable political connections in the state at that time. They renewed and relied on those contacts for Hillary Clinton's run for president in 2008.

Then, in the 1980s, Bill Clinton had been governor, and Hillary had been first lady, of the nearby state of Arkansas. In 1992, when Bill Clinton was running for the Democratic nomination for president, a victory in the Texas Democratic presidential primary, coupled with an equally big win in Florida, was key to Bill Clinton winning the nomination and, eventually, the presidency.

As the 2008 Texas presidential primary election day loomed closer, the big question-mark in the political pundits' minds was the Hispanic vote. Hillary Clinton did very well with Hispanic voters in the Nevada caucuses in mid-January and with Hispanic voters in California on Super-Duper Tuesday in February. In California, Hispanic voters cast a surprising 30 percent of the primary vote, and there were predictions that Hispanics might constitute 40 percent of the Democratic primary vote in Texas.

There was some hope in the Obama camp, however, that Obama's string of caucuses and primary victories coming into Texas might be swaying some Hispanic voters in his direction. The Obama forces played up the point that Obama, an African-American, was from a minority community and thus had much in common with the Hispanic minority in Texas.

One aspect of the Clinton strategy in Texas was to make it clear that, if Hillary Clinton did not win the Texas primary, her campaign for the Democratic nomination for president would be over. Her husband, former-President Bill Clinton, told a rally in Beaumont that Texas was a do-or-die state for his wife. "If she wins Texas," Bill Clinton said, "I think she will be the nominee. If you don't deliver for her, then I don't think she can be."

Garry Mauro, the Clinton campaign state director, emphasized that Hillary Clinton had to win Texas to demonstrate that she was the candidate who could carry the populous states needed for a Democratic victory in November. "You've got to carry a big diverse state if you want to be the nominee of the Democratic Party," he said. "Obama has not done that yet."

The early polls were favoring Barack Obama. Hillary Clinton started

out with a big lead in the polls in Texas, but that lead narrowed steadily as primary election day neared. On the eve of the voting, most polls in Texas showed Obama even with Clinton or slightly ahead.

OHIO

Ohio is half the size of Texas, with 11.5 million residents compared to almost 24 million in Texas, but Ohio is considered a key state nonetheless. It is one of the ten most-populous states in the United States, and it is a tightly-contested battleground state in the general presidential election in November.

Ohio is mired in the rust belt, that strip of worn-out industrial states stretching from Illinois to Massachusetts that is saddled with old, technologically-obsolete factory buildings and is losing blue-collar jobs to cheap-labor manufacturing plants overseas. The unemployment rate is one percent above the national average, and two of Ohio's big cities, Cleveland and Cincinnati, are among the poorest in the nation. Ohio thus contains many old-style working-class Democrats, the kind that had been the strongest supporters of Hillary Clinton in previous primaries and caucuses.

Hillary Clinton therefore pitched her campaign in Ohio directly at blue-collar Democrats, many of them members of labor unions. During a visit to a General Motors automobile plant in Warren, Ohio, she attacked Barack Obama for giving beautiful speeches but not being able to deliver on the lavish promises in them. "Speeches don't put food on the table," she charged. "Speeches don't fill up your tank or fill your prescription, or do anything about that stack of bills that keeps you up at night."

She concluded: "My opponent gives speeches. I offer solutions."

The contest between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama in Ohio attracted nowhere near the attention the race in Texas did. The main reason was Texas looked as though Obama might win it while Ohio was regarded by most observers as solid for Clinton. The eyes of the nation thus were on Texas rather than Ohio on Tuesday, March 4, 2008.

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When the votes were counted, Hillary Clinton won both the Texas

and Ohio primaries. Instantly the Clinton campaign for president, which was regarded by many observers as near collapse, was surging with new life.

In the early 20th Century, in the era of silent movies, there was a movie heroine named Pauline. She was the major character in a weekly serial, a movie “short subject” about 15-minutes long that played at the theater once a week and then was continued the following week. At the end of each segment, Pauline would always be in dire straits, close to death. She would be chained to a log about to be sawed in half at the saw mill, or she would be tied to the railroad tracks with the train coming. Then, miraculously, the following week, as the movie serial resumed, she would effect a hair’s-breadth escape and resume her adventures. A 1950s movie, “The Perils of Pauline,” retold the story of the silent screen heroin who always managed, at the last second, to escape certain disaster.

After her victories in Texas and Ohio, Hillary Clinton could be referred to as the “Perils of Pauline” candidate. Three times she had faced certain defeat, and three times she had managed to avoid it. The first time was when, after losing to Barack Obama in Iowa, she defied all the polls and scored a comfortable victory in New Hampshire. The second time was when, after being beaten by Barack Obama in South Carolina, she won a large number of populous states, such as California, New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, on Super-Duper Tuesday. The third time was when, after losing a string of post-Super-Duper Tuesday caucuses and primaries to Barack Obama, she garnered significant victories in Texas and Ohio.

The exit polls in Texas and Ohio revealed the depth of Hillary Clinton’s twin victories. In Texas, she ran very strongly among Hispanic voters. In Ohio, she clobbered Obama among Catholic voters, a traditional support group for the Democratic Party, by 63 percent to 36 percent. She demonstrated her appeal to working-class Democrats by beating Obama by 14 points among Ohioans earning less than \$50,000 annually.

As expected, Barack Obama’s strongest support was among African-American voters. He won 84 percent of black votes in Texas and an

even-bigger 87 percent of black votes in Ohio.

Suddenly it was clear the Democratic Party was splitting along gender, race, age, and class lines over the Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama candidacies. Identity politics was coming to dominate the Democratic presidential nomination contest.

Hillary Clinton was getting the votes of white women. Barack Obama was getting the support of African-American voters. Hispanic voters were solidly in Hillary Clinton's camp. Older voters favored Hillary Clinton, while Barack Obama was the rock-star hero of younger voters. Working-class blue-collar Democrats preferred Hillary Clinton. Upper-class well-educated white voters were enthusiastic about Barack Obama.

The situation was summed up by Chris Lehane, a Democratic operative. Barack Obama was winning the "Starbucks Democrats," who had money and good educations. Hillary Clinton was getting the votes of "Dunkin' Donuts Democrats," who had blue-collar jobs and carried union cards in their wallets.

The irony about these demographic chasms opening up in the Democratic Party was that the various groups were united on virtually all other questions except whom they wanted to be the Democratic nominee for president. The issue differences between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were minor, and virtually all Democrats were solidly together in opposing the policies of the Bush administration. There were no serious philosophical or policy divisions in the Democratic Party, and yet the party was flying apart over choosing a presidential candidate for 2008.

There also was an ideological split developing. The more liberal and progressive Democratic voters were, the more likely they supported Barack Obama. The more moderate they were, the greater the chance they were for Hillary Clinton.

Another fact stood out following Hillary Clinton's twin triumphs in Texas and Ohio. Hillary Clinton was mainly winning presidential *primaries* in populous states that tended to vote Democratic in the general election. These states were mainly located in the populous northeastern quadrant of the United States, but also included California, the most populous state in the nation, and Florida, a populous state in the South.

These states, crucial to Democratic Party hopes of winning the presidential election against the Republicans in November, could be referred to as “Quad-Cali-Fla.”

Barack Obama, on the other hand, was mainly piling up delegates in precinct *caucuses* in less populous states, many of which voted Republican in the general election in November. In contrast to presidential primaries, caucuses usually had very low turnouts and tended to attract the more left-wing activists in the Democratic Party. Examples of normally-Republican states where Obama scored big victories in caucuses were Idaho, Nebraska, and Utah.

In terms of the Electoral College, that constitutionally-mandated body that actually elects the president of the United States, Hillary Clinton clearly was besting Barack Obama. After her twin triumphs in Texas and Ohio, she had won states with a total of 263 electoral votes whereas Obama had only carried states with 193 electoral votes.

Clinton was doing particularly well in the most loyally-Democratic states in presidential elections. Obama triumphed in Minnesota, Washington, Wisconsin, and his home state of Illinois. These states cast a total of 51 electoral votes in the November general election. Clinton, on the other hand, won in California, Michigan, New Jersey, and her home state of New York. These states cast 118 electoral votes in presidential elections, more than twice as many electoral votes as the the strongly Democratic states carried by Obama.

“Battleground” states are the swing states that shift from one party to the other and thus determine the winners in presidential elections. In the battleground states, Hillary Clinton also was well ahead of Barack Obama. She beat him in both Florida and Ohio, two states which had been critical to the Republicans narrowly winning the presidency in 2000 and 2004.

Hillary Clinton supporters began arguing that, with her record of victories in presidential *primaries* in populous states with large electoral votes, Hillary Clinton was the candidate with the best chance of winning in November. Barack Obama supporters countered that, with his pattern of winning presidential *caucuses* in Republican states, Barack Obama

would be able to carry a number of normally-Republican states for the Democrats on general election day.

The Democrats suddenly faced a grim reality once Hillary Clinton won the Texas and Ohio primaries. In the remaining caucuses and primaries, about ten or so, neither Hillary Clinton nor Barack Obama could sew up enough delegate votes to win the Democratic nomination for president. Unless some dramatic event intervened, the Democrats would go into their national convention in Denver in August not knowing who the nominee was going to be. There was a real prospect that the Democrats might have a “brokered” convention, where deals made with delegates while the convention was in session might be what determined the eventual winner.

Many Democratic party officials and officeholders were disturbed at the prospect of the Clinton-Obama battle lasting through the remainder of the presidential caucuses and primaries and then into the summer and on into the national convention in late August. This long period of campaigning, with the two candidates constantly hurling attacks at each other, might seriously damage the eventual winner and set the stage for a Republican victory in November. Such an endless nomination campaign also would consume a vast amount of Democratic campaign contributions, stealing dollars that might better be used against the Republican nominee in the fall campaign.

No one had any workable ideas for ending the nomination stalemate that had gripped the Democratic Party after Texas and Ohio. The party fight would not be over until either Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama voluntarily withdrew from the race, and neither candidate was likely to do that. There was a brief period when Barack Obama supporters dropped hints that Hillary Clinton should get out of the race because Obama had a small lead in convention delegates. Unfortunately for Obama, that was interpreted by many observers as a male candidate trying to coerce a female candidate into deferring to a man.

There followed a flurry of newspaper columns urging Hillary Clinton to stay in the race, many of them written by women. The Obama camp stopped giving hints that she should drop out of the race. A brokered

convention began looking inevitable.