

Barack Obama: How an 'Unknown' Senator Became President of the USA

Written by Robert McGuigan Burns

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ROBERT MCGUIGAN BURNS, DEC 12 2014

Introduction

In early November 2008, American politics underwent a historic change. A change that will be remembered as the year an African American was first elected President of the United States of America. From a country that revered established political zeitgeists such as the Kennedys and the Clintons, the arrival of Barack Hussein Obama signalled a change in not only American politics but also in American voting patterns. The campaign that Obama ran in 2008, powered by 'hope' in the lead up to the Presidential election is to be considered as nothing less than spectacular. Obama was to win the Presidency with the largest margin of victory of any Democratic candidate in history. His victory signalled a cultural and political shift similar to Regan's landslide victory in 1980, which had been near inconceivable four years before (Nagourney, 2008).

In 2004, few Americans had ever heard of Obama, let alone considered voting for him. This was not the first case in US history of a so called 'outsider' becoming President, for the young and catholic John F Kennedy had beaten Richard Nixon in the 1960 Presidential election. However Obama's African American descent in a country that only saw the Civil Rights movement achieve equality in the 1960s and 1970s, paired with his limited experience of national politics made his election more remarkable. The prevalent belief that Hilary Clinton would head the Democrat's bid for presidency in 2004 further emphasises the unforeseen nature of Obama's victory, and makes the question of what happened in those four years that transformed Obama from an unknown to President of the United States even more salient.

This dissertation will explore the four years to Obama's election as President in three chapters. The chapters will be ordered in chronological order and will offer a focused analysis of the four year period. In my first chapter The first chapter will explore events from July 2004 to February 2007. An understanding of these years is vital to understanding how Obama developed into a serious contender for the Democratic nomination. In particular, it will focus on his Keynote Address to the 2004 Democratic Convention and the 2006 Midterm elections, and will lay a strong foundation for the analysis of how Obama beat Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator John McCain in later chapters.

The second chapter will progress from February 2007, shortly after Obama's announcement that he had entered the presidential race. This chapter will end following Obama accepting the Democratic nomination in August 2008. This period was pivotal to Obama's campaign, for it was during this time that he faced his toughest opponent, Hilary Clinton. Considering the 2006 Midterm elections, which saw the Democrats take a commanding hold of the House and the Senate, and the general unpopularity of President Bush, Obama's victory in August 2008 can be seen as equally, if not more important than the Presidential elections, as for most the question was not whether the new President would be Republican or Democratic, but whether America would inaugurate its first female or African American president.

The third and final chapter will analyse the three months leading up to election in November. The impact of McCain's selection of running mate Sarah Palin and that of the financial crisis of 2008 upon the campaign trail and the election

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itself will be of particular importance. The dissertation will end with a conclusion that will summarise and the analysis of the previous chapters and globally contextualise the election to bring out its importance.

The structure of this dissertation is built around an intrinsic case study of Barack Obama. It will be centred on his rise in popularity in a short period of time that not only led to him winning the presidential nomination of the Democratic party but also the presidential election in 2008. An intrinsic case study is the study of a case (e.g., person, specific group, occupation, department, organization) where the case itself is of primary interest in the exploration. The exploration is driven by a desire to know more about the uniqueness of the case rather than to build theory or how the case represents other cases (Grandy, 2010: pp 500).

CHAPTER ONE: Why Obama?

This chapter will firstly offer a contextual explanation of Obama, documenting his career path from his first entry into State politics in Illinois in 1995 to his announcement that he was to run for the Presidency in 2007. The analysis of this period will elucidate why he chose to run for the Presidency. The later focus of this chapter is an analysis of two landmark moments during this time period, the Keynote Address in 2004 to the Democratic Convention and the Midterm elections in 2006 that ultimately led to Obama deciding he would enter the race.

The distinctive nature of the race for the Democratic nomination was ensured as early as 2002, when Hillary Clinton expressed her interest in running, for no woman had ever won the party's nomination (Dowd, 2002), though it would only be with Obama's decision to run that the race would become unprecedented. When one considers the history of the Democratic party, Clinton's decision to run for nomination can be seen as providing Obama with an advantage, whilst there had been a small number of female politicians, notably Patricia Schroeder who had entered the primaries prior to Clinton, these female candidates had never posed a substantial threat to male competitors, let alone won a primary.

In wake of the results of the *Virginia Slim* national Carol Mueller noted that voters were less willing to back women for the presidency and vice presidency as women were perceived to be "...less competent to handle traditional male issues..." (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993: pp 505). Therefore the primaries had historically favoured the male candidate; even male African American politician Jesse Jackson found success in the 1984 primaries, winning five, although his bid for the Presidency would ultimately fail in 1984 and again in 1988. Whilst unsuccessful himself, Jackson's earlier bids for nomination can be seen as having enabled a new generation of African American politicians, much like Obama.

Barack Obama: A Contextualisation

Barack Obama was born on the 4th August 1961 in Honolulu, the State capital of Hawaii; his father was from Kenya, and his mother from Kansas. He was raised with the help of his maternal grandparents. After finishing High School he would study at Columbia University in New York before later going to gain a law degree from Harvard University. It was at Harvard that, somewhat portentously, Obama became the first African American President of the *Harvard Review*. Moreover, Obama's co-workers, notably John Owens, were already noting Obama's presence and power early in his career. In a *Boston Globe* article from 1990, Owens described: "...this guy (Obama) sounds like he's president of the country already..." (Matchan, 1990). Obama chose to decline a high paying corporate law job in favour of a small civil rights firm and continue his work in the community, later entering politics (Bacon, 2005: pp 60).

During this period Obama would become submersed in local politics. In 1995 at the age of 34 he was invited by Alice L. Palmer to run for her seat in the Illinois State legislature. Obama accepted the offer and joined the race to become a member of the Illinois State Senate for the 13th District. He would win the election, taking 82 % of the vote (CDP, 1996). Upon re-election in November of 1998 not only was he unopposed in the primary, he also increased his majority by 7% to an impressive 89% to win a full four year term (ISBE, 1998). During his time in the Illinois State

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Legislature, Obama developed a reputation for bipartisanship, most notably winning support for a law requiring police to videotape capital-crime interrogations (Bacon, 2005: pp 61). From an early stage in his career we can see that he was looking to work hard to achieve something for himself by reaching out across the aisle to secure his objectives.

However, 1999 saw an Icarian decision almost end Obama's political career. In 1999 Obama announced that he would run against the long serving US Democratic Congressman, Bobby Rush, in the primaries. Shortly after, Obama commissioned his first poll only to discover his opponent's approval rating hovered at around 70% whilst his own was as low as 8%. As Obama describes it himself, "...less than halfway into the campaign I knew I was going to lose..." (Obama, 2006: pp 106). Obama went on to lose the primary with a two to one vote margin in favour of Rush. However Obama was to return to the State legislature and win re-election in 2002. In politics, Obama wrote, there is no second place. However there are second acts, as would become progressively clearer in the following years. (Obama, 2006: pp 108 & Horsley, 2012).

2004 Keynote Address

On the 27th July 2004, Obama delivered the Keynote Address at the Democratic Convention at a packed Boston Convention Centre, becoming only the third African American to deliver such a speech at a major political party convention. The convention has been described as 'the day America met Barack Obama' (Leopold, 2008). Obama himself recalls in *The Audacity of Hope* of how "...The process by which I was selected as the keynote speaker remains something of a mystery to me..." (Obama, 2006: pp 29). Yet in March 2004, having taken an impressive 52% share of the vote, which was, and still is, nearly unheard of in a seven candidate primary, Obama became the Democratic candidate for the United States Senate (Davey, 2004). In the wake of this impressive result, Obama was to gain the valuable endorsement of Senator Jon Corzine of New Jersey, chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. Corzine somewhat pragmatically described Obama as one of the "...easier candidates..." to raise money for, adding that Obama Washington one of the "...most interesting and capable individuals that is running this time, if not in any election..." (ibid). Corzine's encouraging comments are representative of the party's attitude to Obama; being an 'easier' candidate to raise money for is, rightly or wrongly, a trait that holds significant weight in American politics.

This victory pushed Obama into the political spotlight. Whilst campaigning in Illinois during the Democratic Presidential primary in the state, John Kerry was to meet Obama. As Kerry recalls, he came away from the meeting with a strong impression of Obama, feeling that he "...should be one of the faces of our party now, not years from now..." (Bernstien, 2007). An article in the *New Republic* describes how Obama was selected over some better-known names by Kerry's close advisors, including his campaign manager Mary Cahill and adviser Robert Shrum. The Kerry think-tank thought he would "...help attract minority voters; Obama was also youthful, likeable and energetic..." qualities that the Kerry campaign desperately needed to display (Olopade, 2008). This serves to highlight the importance of Obama's persona (notably the impression made upon Kerry and the wide range of demographics that Obama connected with) in his selection to give the Keynote Address in 2004.

The Keynote Address electrified the nation and introduced Americans to the man who would become President. On the morning of the 27th July the *Philadelphia Daily News* had run an article by reporter William Bunch asking, "...Who the heck is this guy..." (Bunch: 2004: pp 3). Despite these inauspicious comments, Obama, the candidate who had once been described by David Plouffe as the "...candidate with no chance, no money and the funny name..." coolly and calmly delivered his statement of intent and overnight became a star (Plouffe, 2009: pp 8). In his lyrical speech we witness Obama romanticising the American dream of old, the ideas of the "...freedom and opportunity..." which sent the audience into hysteria as they hung on his every word (Obama, 2004). What is so clever about this speech is its declaration that it is "...hope..." and the "...insistence on small miracles..." that unites Americans, not the "...red states and the blue states...red states for republicans, blue states for Democrats..." that divide them (ibid & Bacon, 2005: pp 60). He went on to eloquently affirm how there is "...not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America — there is the United States of America..." a powerful statement renewing American hope and faith which was to have a profound effect on the audience (ibid).

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The Senate

In the aftermath of his Keynote Address, Obama would witness his life turn upside down as he became dubbed the so called 'rock-star' of the Democratic Party (Smith, 2004). It was the 'rock-star' of the party that would easily win his election in November 2004, taking a 70% share of the vote to comfortably become the third African American Senator since Reconstruction in the 1860's (Toner, 2004). In January 2005, Obama was sworn in as a United States Senator for the first time. This period in the Senate was key to his future successes, as he would be judged on his time there by the voting public. Obama's early voting records show that out of a possible six hundred and twenty nine votes he was to only miss eleven (Govtrack: 2014). Yet although this is a good voting record, it was not unprecedented, for example Senator Ken Salazar, who was elected to the Senate at the same time as Obama. This distinctly average voting record would not have concerned Obama at the time, for at this point he still had "...no intention of running for President in 2008..." and simply sought secure establishment in the Senate (Wolffe, 2009: pp 39). However this mind-set would soon change.

Why Did Obama Enter the Race?

The focus of this chapter is the three year period between 2004 and 2007. Throughout this period Obama changed as a man and a politician. He went from an unknown Illinois State Senator to announcing his candidacy for the 2008 Presidential Election. In analysing how he became President in four short years, it is important to understand why Obama decided to run. The two most important moments during the three year period were the 2004 Democratic Convention and the 2006 Midterm Elections. These events, and their aftermath saw the American voting public and press begin to ask whether this young Senator could be their next President.

The importance of the Keynote Address is that it set Obama aside. It set him aside from other traditional African American politicians. Obama understood the need to represent a new era of politics. Through his speech he conveyed to the audience the importance of America to once again uniting: "...We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the Stars and Stripes, all of us defending the United States of America..." (Obama, 2004). From reports it is clear that Obama appealed to an audience of mixed racial and economic backgrounds. In particular he appealed to whites, a demographic group that historically African American politicians have struggled to appeal to. Through references to President Lincoln at the start of his Address, and later references to Jefferson in relation to the Declaration of Independence, using Jefferson as a standard, Obama was able to distance himself from tradition and break the mould of African American politicians, who "...have not cited those words without sarcasm and qualification for many years, if ever..." (Malcomson, 2004: pp 5). By quoting the Founding Fathers of the country with admiringly, rather than facetiously, Obama appealed to the white audience.

Al Sharpton's speech at the DNC in 2004 illustrates the contrasts between the two different generations of African American politicians. Sharpton spoke to his audience about the failings of Lincoln, the Civil Rights movement and the reparations owed to African Americans. Citing how President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, after which there was a commitment to give 40 acres and a mule, he went on to say "...That's where the argument, to this day, of reparations starts. We never got the 40 acres..." (Sharpton, 2004). Sharpton focused on the trauma of African Americans explicitly in front of a mainly white audience, failing to take into account that they could well be feeling the aftershock of their own traumas. Though somewhat extremely, Sharpton epitomises the traditional view of the African American politician. Obama, who is very much part of the new generation of African American politicians, reflects an ability to integrate competing visions of reality, instead of placing himself within a black tradition (Frank, 2005: pp 577).

Obama's decision to distance himself from the black tradition in his Address was key to his success. Instead he chose to cite his unusual racial and cultural backgrounds in his Address, enabling himself to come across as diverse. It allowed the audience, in particular the working class audience, to perceive Obama differently. It allowed him to appeal to white voters. Typically many working class voters would be wary of African American candidates, feeling that they promote black interests at the expense of their own interests. Yet Obama discussed traditional Democratic issues like jobs, health care, and education, just like a white candidate would, and this gave him mass appeal (Franks, 2005: pp 578 & Atwater, 2007: pp 124). Over the course of an hour Obama had gone from an unknown

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Illinois state legislator running for the Senate to the party's hot ticket (Malcomson: 2004: pp 5). The Keynote Address is important to understanding how Obama became President, because this is where he was able to show the nation that he was different, which played a large part in making him so universally likeable and interesting. As United States Representative Arthur Davis put it "...When Obama runs for the White House, he will run not as a candidate for blacks. He has the capacity to run as a candidate for everyone..." (Nachman, 2010: pp 79). And thus many people of diverse backgrounds across the country began consider whether Obama might become their President.

In addition to Obama's Keynote Address, the result of the Midterm elections in 2006 is also important. In a sense the announcement of Obama's candidacy in February 2007 was unprecedented on a number of levels. For instance, he was the only African American in the United States Senate at the time. Moreover he had only been a Senator for two years. Therefore many would argue that Obama had far too little experience of national politics to be able to launch a credible campaign for the Presidency, particularly in comparison to previous contenders (Clayton, 2007: pp 51). Yet by 2006 the idea of Obama running for President had gained a hint of plausibility, as the political playing field had been seen to shift dramatically, and so had the mood of the country. For example, President Bush was deeply unpopular and would see his popularity slip to 33% (Gallup, 2014), whilst only 31% of polled Americans believed that their country was heading in the right direction (Polling Report, 2014). Iraq, the economy, divisiveness in Washington and the erosion of America's moral-leadership around the world had sent both the President's and the Republican Party's stock plummeting, as approval ratings were frequently among the lowest on record (Plouffe, 2009: pp 9). This played a large part in securing a resounding victory for Democrats in the midterm elections, where they won the House for the first time in twelve years as well as enough Senate races to control that chamber for only the second time in twelve years. The 2006 election had swept many Republicans from office, and this change had left voters hungry for more change. Without this hunger for change the idea of an Obama candidacy would arguably not have taken off.

As journalist John Jackson noted, it was at this point that "...Obama had clearly become a national figure with a significant national reputation quite apart from whatever his legislative record in the Senate might ultimately prove to be..." (Jackson, 2006: pp 25). This indicates that after the success of the Keynote Address in 2004 and the success of Obama's second book tour, although many people didn't know much about his political career he was still well liked. A poll conducted by *Newsweek* in 2006 found that when Americans were asked if their party were to nominate an African American for president would they vote for them, an astounding 93% said that they would, whilst only 55% of Americans said that they were ready to elect a female president (*Newsweek*, 2006). Signs were showing that America was ready for change, due to disenfranchisement with ideological bankruptcy, and not necessarily the incompetence of President Bush. This is why Obama announced his candidacy in 2007.

The 2006 election had shown that America was ready for change. Obama was very much still the outsider, yet this would end up benefiting Obama more. Whilst trailing Clinton in October 2006 by 11 points, with John Edwards close on his heels, there was still a small chance (CNN Poll 27, 2006: pp 6). Obama had to strike whilst the iron was hot. If he was not to run in 2008 he would have to wait four to eight years before being able to challenge for the Presidency and by then he may not have been as popular or relevant. That is why after the 2006 midterms Obama was to meet with a proposed team and his family in Chicago to decide whether he should run.

The main focus of this chapter has been to introduce Obama, most importantly highlighting two key moments within the early stages of the four year period. The 2004 DNC address and the 2006 midterm elections serve this purpose well as they are both very much starting points. The 2004 DNC address introduced Obama to the world and saw him and begin to gain his attraction. The 2006 Midterm elections were another beginning as Obama began to decide that he should run for president. In the second chapter I will be analysing how the Obama campaign was able to overcome the Clinton campaign.

CHAPTER TWO: The Road to the 2008 Democratic Party Convention

The aim of this chapter is an analysis of how Obama, 'the outsider', was to secure victory over Clinton, the candidate

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with experience. It will explore the Obama Phenomenon and how Obama was able to take advantage of grassroots campaigning as well as low level fundraising to reduce the gap with Clinton in the early stages of the campaign. Later, it will look at the importance of 'change' against 'experience' and Obama's early victory in the Iowa caucus, and later defeat in the New Hampshire primary. The contest between Clinton and Obama during the 2008 Democratic Party primaries not only produced record voter turnout numbers but fuelled a voter mobilisation movement (CSAE, 2008). The high turnout reflected the excitement generated by each of the candidates, with one vying to be the first African American President and the other the first female President (McVeigh, 2011: pp 47). The campaign trail would see each of the candidates push each other well beyond the limit to achieve victory.

The Obama Phenomenon

One of the main areas that would seemingly separate the two candidates, and arguably one of the most important over the course of the Democratic primaries was the branding of Obama. The success of the Obama brand can be identified as one of the reasons that Obama was to beat Clinton. Keith Reinhard, chairman emeritus of *DDB Worldwide* clarified that Barack Obama is three things you want in a brand "...new...different and attractive..." and this is as good as it got with Obama (McGrit, 2008: pp 2). Social psychologists have recognized a link between appearance and impression formation. Upon meeting or seeing someone, within seconds we have already formed a conclusion about the people or person, simply based on their physical and most importantly facial appearance (Johns & Shepard, 2007: pp 435). Psychologist, Alexander Todorov argues that this link also applies in politics, as voter will make decisions "...based solely on the facial appearance of political candidates and with no prior knowledge about the person..." (Todorov, 2005: pp 1623). The differences and contrast between the candidates become apparent almost immediately (Figure Two), Obama offers a striking contrast to Clinton, a woman who at the time was in her late fifties; In fact, she was made to appear more youthful, in an attempt to appeal to the younger vote, a demographic that both candidates would heavily target.

Obama was 'new', Obama was 'different' and Obama was 'attractive' which made it seemingly effortless to build a powerful brand around him. In 2008, *Advertising Age* selected 'Brand Obama' as their marketer of the year, proclaiming that Obama "...was a brand big enough to be anything to anyone yet had an intimate-enough feel to inspire advocacy that raised funds at record breaking levels..." (The Global Report, 2008). On the face of it this is true, as the campaign was able to use the Obama brand to surge into not only the United States but the world's consciousness. The use of the internet played a large role in this, researchers found that between 1996 and 2007 the number of Americas that used the Internet to find out about campaign new rose from 2% to 26% whilst the use of newspapers as a source fell from 49% to 30% (Schlozman, 2010: pp 489). Therefore by Obamas application of a grassroots brand interlinked with social media Obama was able to become very much the candidate of the people. With skilled use of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, BarackOBama.com and many more, to connect with the young vote in particular the eighteen to twenty nine age group as 42% of this demographic reported to use the internet as their source for campaign news (Pew Research, 2010: pp 2).

Through innovative use of the internet, Obama's campaign was able to install the idea that "...everyone is included, and the movement is actually a conversation to which everybody is invited..." (Zavattaro, 2010: pp 123 & McGirt, 2008: pp 5). Obama's campaign team were thus able to create a new type of presidential identity. By taking advantage of social media resources available to them, Obama was able to get ahead of Clinton during the primaries by tapping into the Web 2.0 generation (Rawsthorn, 2008). This is where the Obama campaign were able to be strategic and smart, constantly making sure their message of change was being heard where people were already assembled.

From the start Obamas campaign had to move fast to catch up with Clinton's campaign, and through a strong branding campaign Obama was able to apply political pressure upon Clinton to level the playing field. By the end of the first quarter of 2007, the impact of the online grassroots campaign base was beginning to show, with over 450,000 people having signed up to the Obama campaign online (Plouffe, 2009: pp 47). Furthermore, any doubts as to whether Obama would be able to stand toe to toe with Clinton were crushed when Obama's campaign was reported to have raised \$25 million in the first quarter of the year, only one million less than Clinton, whereby the Obama campaign reported raising \$6.9 million using the Internet, in contrast to the \$4.2 million raised by the Clinton

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campaign, showing the new importance of the internet as a medium to attracting donors (Zeleny & Healy, 2007).

Although Clinton had raised more capital than Obama, which was expected, what was not expected was the amount the Obama campaign would raise. This was due to Obama's grassroots campaign, which saw the low-dollar contributions pour in at an astounding rate, as the campaign received donations from 100,000 people, half of whom contributed through the Internet, including thousands who gave \$25. This showed Obama's campaign to be not only credible but disciplined, and served to show the appeal of the Obama candidacy. It transcended race, it ran deeper than the vagaries of daily campaigning, and it represented a generational and cultural shift occurring during this time. By the end of the 2008 presidential election, by primarily using the Internet rather than traditional resources, the campaign raised \$750 million from over three million contributors, with the average contribution being less than \$200 (CFI, 2008).

A February 2007 *Associated Press* poll had put Clinton ahead of Obama with a 41% lead to 17%, with John Edwards close behind at 16%. However by the end of the month Clinton's lead was to have been reduced from 36% to 24% and Edwards to 12% (Balz & Cohen, 2007). Here the shift in trend can be identified over the course of February, largely due to the strength of Obama's online campaign and the growth of African American support for Obama. An earlier poll had seen African America favour Clinton 60% to 20%, however a later poll would put Obama ahead at 44% to Clintons 33% (Stockly, 2008: pp 38), thereby showing the power of the Obama brand as through the medium of the internet Obama was able to prove that he was a real threat.

The Iowa Caucus & New Hampshire Primary

The importance of the 2008 Democratic Primaries can be seen on two levels, the first being that it was the first time since 1928 that no incumbent president or vice president was in the race for the Democratic nomination. In addition, a record thirty seven states were to hold their nomination contests before the month of March, making it the most compressed and "...front loaded primary calendar..." in election history (Stockley, 2008: pp 33). The significance of any party's nomination process is such that, unlike a general election where voters make their decisions based on party identification, issue positions and candidate evaluations, social-demographic factors such as gender, race, age and class play a significant part (Abramson, 2007: pp 107). Therefore the victor is going to have to bridge these gaps to secure the nomination. It was by bridging these gaps that Obama was able to secure the nomination in 2008.

From the first days, the Obama campaign was a hybrid of corporate management and community organising, drawing half its drive from an executive boardroom and half from the street politics of its young staff (Wolffe: 2009: pp 75). Upon entering the primaries it became clear that the real choice in this election would lie between conventional Washington thinking that prizes posture and positing and real change in the form of Obama that put judgement and honesty first (Luce, 2007). By positioning Clinton as the candidate with 'experience', Mike Penn, the chief strategist of the Clinton campaign was to make a serious faux-pas. Having Clinton as the candidate with 'experience' did not suggest that Clinton was an advocate for change, at a time when 68% of Americas felt their country was headed in the wrong direction (NPR, 2008: pp 4).

It this idea of direction that Obama was able to play upon, by 2007 over 60% of the country felt that the Iraqi war had been a mistake, Obama who had been one of the first politicians to oppose the war, "...I do not oppose war....I oppose dump wars...", whilst for Clinton her senate vote for war would remain a handicap (Gallup, 2014 & Obama 2012). This allowed Obama to group Clinton with the Bush administration, implying a vote for Clinton, would be a vote in the wrong direction. It was this demand for a change in direction that Obama was to embody, with a core element of Obama's rhetoric of change being based on hope and inspiration. The Clinton message of 'experience' appeared tired and diluted.

It was to be differences like this that were to separate the two candidates. In Iowa, 44% of Democrats were supporting Clinton. However, what is just as striking is the support that came from voters who were not Democrats. More than one third of all of Obama's supporters (35.6%) were not Democrats; whilst Edwards (24%) and Clinton (21%) were to attract much lower levels of support from non-Democrats (Redlawsk, 2008: pp 132). Although it is clear that Obama was rightfully the Democrat who had the most appeal to voters outside the Democrat party, unless

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these supporters were to register with the party they would not be able to help Obama in this contest. However these numbers can be interpreted as positive, as if Obama was to clinch the nomination it would be these disgruntled Republican votes that could help Obama to win the general election.

Nevertheless, Obama's saving grace in the Iowa caucus was to be education, where a difference in education was why Obama was able to beat Clinton. In the state of Iowa roughly one third of registered Democrats finish their education at the age of eighteen having left high school, whilst just over 39% attend further education (college/education). Here we have an indicator of how Obama won Iowa. As Redlawsk points out, it is "...those who say they will caucus are better educated as nearly half hold a college degree..." (Redlawsk, 2008: pp 133). Clinton was seen to be leading amongst registered Democrats with levels of support at 44%, but 41% of supporters came from the lowest education levels. 49% of Obama's supporters held college degrees in contrast to only 24% who did not. And so one can understand why Clinton, although she was to hold the greatest amount of support, was not the leading candidate amongst caucus attendees (ibid). This is paramount, as Obama held the greater support amongst caucus attendees, gaining support among the most educated and wealthy Democrats, as well as the young and those opposed to the Iraq war. This would motivate and encouraged swing voters along with voters who rarely came to the polls to hand Obama a nine point victory in early January 2008.

Obama's victory in Iowa can be identified as a keep moment in his career, as through the campaign finance, IT and social networking Obama was able to reduce the impressive lead that Clinton had at the start of the campaign. It appeared that Obama's campaign had very much "...revolutionised citizen participation..." as Obama had the "...capability to communicate complex ideas – not 30 second sound bites that mean little..." (Norquay: 2008: pp 58 & Kaiser, 2008). As Plouffe noted, it was "...directly exposing the voters to Obama that had been the key..." to victory in the Iowa caucus (Plouffe, 2009: pp 138). His vision was vague enough to attract a diverse range of followers that were seeking various kinds of change. Supporters were able to have faith in the idea that almost anything was possible. This range of supporters would let the Obama campaign actively to encourage broad participation. (Bligh, 2009: pp 485).

The last Democratic candidate to win the Iowa caucus that did not go on to win the Democratic nomination was Tom Harkin in 1992. Therefore the Obama campaign was in a strong position entering the New Hampshire primary. However it was here that Obama would face his greatest setback as Clinton was to clinch victory taking 39.1% of the vote to Obama's 36.5% (McVeigh, 2011: pp 49). Although Obama lost the primary, a potential flaw in Clinton's campaign can be highlighted. The first of which being that 55% of voters felt that Obama could bring about needed change and secondly 53% of voters felt Obama had the best chance of winning in November (NYT, 2008). It could be argued that Clinton only won because of the sympathy of voters, given the day before polling she was to break down in tears on the campaign trail Clinton's, which led to the mobilisation of the core Democratic vote that at this time had placed their faith in Clinton. As although she was doing well with the 'core' democratic vote, but she trailed Obama among independents, and polls were already signalling that Obama was most likely to win the election next November (NYT, 2008).

Further weaknesses in the Clinton candidacy can be seen in the fact that Clinton is almost universally despised by Republicans, and described in one article as a "...tax-raising, socialised-health-care-loving peacenik feminazi..." Obama still had appeal to nonpartisan voters. It was going to be hard in future competitions for Clinton to match Obama in this demographic as some voters were simply uncomfortable with the dynastic implications of her candidacy (Klein, 2007: pp 46 & Nelson, 2010: pp 12). Therefore this failure can be seen as beneficial for Obama as "...failure gave him the time to correct himself and his organisation and it gave voters the time to see if he was for real..." (Wolffe, 2009: pp 136). This was significant and Obama's early failures became part of his defensive shield, a tool that would help him to victory.

How Obama Beat Clinton

Ultimately the 2008 Democratic Party primaries reflected a David vs Goliath contest. On one side you had David (Obama) and on the other you had Goliath (Clinton). One of the core strengths of Obama's campaign was its structure. The reason for such strength lay in the team assembled by Obama. Clinton had selected lobbyist insider

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Mark Penn, the man responsible for basing Clinton's candidacy on 'experience'. Obama chose political professionals, professionals who were committed to progressive values, not the "...politics of anything goes..." (Obama, 2004). By having such renowned political strategists as David Plouffe, David Axelrod, Steve Hildebrand and Paul Tewes, the campaign was able to build a strong foundation of trust. This contrasts with Clinton staffers and consultants whose infighting and division ate away at the Clinton campaign, exposing its weaknesses, whilst Obama was insistent there was to be no drama within his campaign.

Planning was also an essential component in Obama's victory. By having such a strong team of political strategists at his disposal the campaign managed to master some of the most arcane rules in politics. They out-manoeuvred and out spent Clinton, the candidate that had every advantage at the start of the contest. As Democratic strategist Tad Devine notes, "...without a doubt, their understanding of the nominating process was one of the keys to their success..." when comparing the two campaigns it is clear that Obama's approached the contest at a strategic level whilst the Clinton campaign simply did not (Ohlemacher, 2008). It almost appears, when scrutinising the Clinton campaign, that there was never any plan B, to fall back on.

Ultimately, gender was to also play a role in why Clinton was to lose to Obama. One gets the impression that America was far more ready for an African American President than a women president. A poll once asked voters if their party were to nominate an African American for president would they vote for them, an astounding 93% said that they would, whilst only 55% of Americans said that they were ready to elect a female president (Newsweek, 2006). As Gloria Steinem highlights, "...gender is probably the most restricting force in American life..." gender was to be defining factor that restricted Clinton (Steinem, 2008). Although she came very close, Obama was to secure the Democratic Nomination, having run a better campaign, with a better message, a message of change.

CHAPTER THREE: The Race to the White House

The focus of this chapter is to explore the three month period in the lead up to the 2008 presidential election. This chapter seeks to evaluate the dynamics of external factors that were to affect the Obama campaign, affirming whether they were to affect Obama's candidacy in a negative or a positive way, in particular McCain's appointment of Sarah Palin as his running mate and the influence of the 2008 financial crisis. These are important to analyse as they were both to affect the outcome of the election. Therefore the later focus of this chapter is to explore the results of the election and how they reflect the significance of the achievement of Obama's rise to the White House, seemingly concluding my analysis of how a State Senator became President of the United State in four years.

Running Mates

In the 2008 presidential election both the Republican and the Democratic candidate were to make interesting choices in their selection of running mates. Although it is regarded that

Vice presidential candidates have no influences or no impact on a campaign; in 2008 this was not to be the case (Romero, 2001: pp 454). Obama selected Joe Biden, a six term senator from Delaware, best known for his expertise on foreign affairs. Although Biden was a veteran of the Senate, having being elected in 1973, Obama's choice in Biden, was "...critical..." in the preamble before the start of the winter campaign (Nagourney & Zeleny, 2008). Much as Kennedy selected LBJ as his running mate in an attempt to counterweight his own unpopularity in the southern states, Obama's selection of Biden shows Obama's own understanding of his weaknesses with regard to foreign policy. Governor Sebelius points out that Biden's "...extensive experience dealing with the foreign policy issues..." made him exactly the sort of candidate Obama needed on the ticket to help counter attack on Obama's lack of experience in foreign policy (Sebelius, 2008). Yet Obama's selection also highlighted a deeper strength, Obama was not afraid to have strong people around him to help lead.

In contrast, McCain was to court the shock factor in choosing his running mate, Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin; this was the first time that a female candidate had been placed on the Republican ticket. On the surface, the selection of

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Palin was to be widely received as 'bold', leaving us to ask, if McCain felt that such a bold move was necessary, why did he not select a better known candidate? As a poll conducted by *Gallup* on the 30th August 2008 showed, seven out of ten Americans had never heard of Palin (Newport, 2008). It was not as if McCain was short of options, particularly when choosing an apparently 'bold' running mate. For instance, McCain could have selected better known candidates like Louisiana governor Bobby Jindal or even reached over the partisan divide and selected Democrat turned Independent Joe Lieberman if he wanted to make a 'bold' selection (Knuckey, 2012: pp 275). For that reason there must have been something McCain saw in Palin that others did not.

Retrospectively the qualities that McCain saw in Palin are apparent. Firstly the selection can be seen as an attempt to steal the thunder from the Democrats, in the wake of Obama accepting the Democratic nomination. Following the announcement McCain was to see a surge in several polls, one showing McCain to have taken a lead of '48%' to '45%' from Obama (Gallup, 2008). Palin's selection could also be seen as an attempt to capitalise on any lingering resentment that supporters of Clinton felt toward the Obama campaign. Furthermore, McCain urgently needed to persuade swing voters in the election that he was willing to take on the Republican establishment (Grunwald & Newton-Small, 2008). For that reason McCain's selection can be perceived as an attempt to show that he was a different kind of Republican (Knuckey, 2012: pp 275). However the positive effect of Palin would shortly become the negative 'Palin effect'.

McCain's obscure choice of Palin could be interpreted as an attempt to shake off the Bush legacy that had become a burden to his campaign, a burden that Dan Balz predicted would weigh McCain down all the way "...to the finish line..." of the election (Balz, 2008). On the other hand the selection of Palin leads us to question the apparent recklessness of McCain's campaign, as undoubtedly the edge McCain had over Obama was experience. With this being the case, why select a politician who had only served as governor one month longer than Obama had been running for President? It simply does not make sense, and appears more of a political stunt than a sound reasoned decision. In an election which was always going to be decided by the independents and swing voters, selecting Palin as his running mate meant McCain was to completely undermine his core argument of Obama's inexperience, especially in the wake of Biden being selected Obama's running mate.

Analysing the effect that Palin was to have on McCain's campaign, the negatives outweigh the positives. In the latter stages of the contest McCain's campaign appeared aimless, coming across as a chaotic operation, made worse by poor choices made at key moments. In a *Newsweek* article Julian Zelizer points out "...their first mistake was picking Gov. Sarah Palin..." as she simply failed to substantially expand McCain's electoral chances amongst self-described conservatives (Zelizer, 2008 & Howard, 2008). Palin's brand of small town America, her love of the National Rifle Association and bigoted opinions simply sent wavering Democrats, independents and moderate Republicans scurrying to Obama (Ellis, Hillygus & Nie, 2010: pp 583). McCain's selection of Palin earned his candidacy a short term boost in the polls, much like Mondale had experienced in 1984 with his selection of Geraldine Ferraro. In both cases, growing awareness of the vice-presidential candidate's weak credentials eventually undermined their appeal and Palin's popularity was to plummet (Nelson, 2010: pp 17). It was ultimately McCain's choice in Palin that would cost him almost "...2% of the final vote share...", so it is clear to see that his 'bold' move was not to pay off. Dan Balz's prediction was to be true, as Palin was to weigh McCain down all the way to the finish line.

The Financial Crisis of 2008

The 2008 election would ultimately be won on the economy. When voters cast their ballots in November 2008, nearly "...60% stated that the economy was their foremost concern..." (Scotto, 2010: pp 547). Throughout elections, in countries like the United Kingdom and the United States, there is by and large widespread public consensus on the aims of public policy. The classic example is the economy, as just about everyone supports the aims of a vibrant economy characterised by low rates of inflation, unemployment and growth (Scotto, 2010: pp 545). The result of the 2008 election in America reflected a nation that had the state of the economy on its mind. Walter Lippmann draws light to the idea that, "...to support the 'ins' when things are going well; and to support the 'outs' when they seem to be going badly...is the essence of popular government..." (Lippmann, 1925: pp 126 & Ellis, 2010: pp 583). In this election Obama played upon this idea. In 2003 the United States economic growth in terms of GDP was just under 4%, and during his peak, polls suggested that nine out of ten Americans favoured President Bush (Izzo, 2013 & Gallup,

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2009). This is why President Bush was able to secure a second term as President in 2004, as things were going well.

On the other hand by 2008, the country was headed into recession, the economy was in turmoil and growth in terms GDP had sunk as low as -3.8%, unemployment was almost at 10% and President Bush had become the most unpopular President in history (Izzo, 2013). And so Lippmann's point is relative in terms of understanding how Obama won the 2008 election. In 2008 the 'out' Obama was able to harness the negativity toward the 'ins' to win the election. It was Obama's approach to the financial crisis that struck the American market in 2008 and that was to once again show him to be the stronger candidate. The economic crisis of 2008, was "...the most wrenching since the end of the Second World War..." as described by former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan (Drum, 2008). In the space of a week in September Merrill Lynch was bought out, Lehman Brothers filed bankruptcy, AIG was loaned \$85 billion dollars in emergency funds and the Bush administration asked Congress for new powers to execute a bailout plan that could cost taxpayers billions to buy toxic debt and bad mortgages (Bligh & Kohles. 2009: pp 486).

The Obama campaign could have never anticipated the crisis. The timing of the crisis worked in Obama's favour, as the electorate went into the presidential election with the opportunity for a new leader. Michael Porter notes, the economic crisis of 2008 showed that Americans were living in "...an age of anxiety...in which...many Americans fear for their future...and success has come with deep insecurities..." therefore one can argue it was Obama's approach to the crisis and his calls for America to "...come together and renew a spirit of sacrifice..." that was to reassure and show the country his presidential qualities and that he was the right man for the job, whose message of 'Change we can believe in' was to resonate within the electorate (Obama, 2008. Drum, 2008. Bligh & Kohles. 2009: pp 487). Whilst in contrast, his less vibrant opponent, McCain who has often been described as "...ill-suited to lecterns..." and had a reputation as "...not a great orator..." struggled to connect with his audience when talking about the economy served to further drawing attention to gap in quality between the two candidates (Leibovich, 2008). As Shamir and Howell point out "...numerous opportunities to re-frame and change existing interpretations, suggest new solutions to existing problems and infuse a new spirit..." (Shamir & Howell, 1999: pp 273).

In a surprise move, McCain suspended his campaign to return to Washington to vote on the Rescue Package... At first it was not clear if this was a genuine attempt to solve the crisis or more of a political manoeuvre, by the candidate who had once been quoted to have said, "...the issue of economy is not something I've understood as well as I should...", regardless the move hurt McCain (McCain, 2008). At first McCain had a surge in the polls putting him level with Obama on 46%, as the days passed it became more apparent that McCain's decision to suspend his campaign was a political manoeuvre (Gallup, 2008 & Lizza, 2008). The apparent 'political manoeuvre' lead the electorate to question the clarity of McCain's judgement, the move showed McCain as 'erratic' and out of touch, further showing his lack of presidential qualities, leading the electorate to once again ask the question of whether McCain could be trusted to handle a crisis, economic or otherwise (Kornblut, 2008). A poll released a few days after McCain's announcement showed that Obama had moved ahead by nine points from close dead heat two weeks before (Halloran, 2008). In the run into the Election Day McCain was not to make up the ground he had lost, as McCain struggled to install confidence among voters that he was right candidate for the task at hand. By the time of the third debate in October, it was clear that McCain was falling behind.

In a time where America needed a strong leader to step up and take control, Obama was able to connect with the electorate on a personal level during this time of uncertainty to reassure the American people brighter days are ahead. In contrast economic mismanagement and political success rarely go hand in hand; McCain's handling of the 2008 economic crisis was very much the tipping point in this presidential contest, as McCain struggled to put himself forward as the better candidate for the presidency.

The Election

On the 4th November 2008, the American electorate was to elect the first African American president. Although most polls had predicted that Obama was to win the election few predicted the extent of the victory. Having fought such a hard primary contest against Clinton, McCain simply turned out to be a much less rigorous match. Over sixty million people were to vote for Obama, making him the first Democratic candidate to win a majority of the popular vote since

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Jimmy Carter in 1976 and the first Northern Democrat to win a majority of both votes and states since Roosevelt in 1944. More over Obama was to achieve 305 Electoral College votes, the highest of any candidate since President Clinton in 1996, who took 379 Electoral College votes.

Obamas victory in 2008 simply personified the change that America was ready for. It can be argued that Obama beat McCain because Obama was simply a stronger candidate. Obama's single campaign message of 'change' had more appeal at a time when eight out of ten Americans felt the country was headed in the wrong direction (Feldman, 2008). This created a major problem for McCain, as there was the general negative consensus toward Presidents Bush. McCain struggled to separate himself for the Bush Administration, although it did not help that McCain had voted with President 90% of the time, allowing Obama to easily position himself as anti-Bush, once again creating appeal to disenfranchised Republicans and Independents (Feldman, 2008). The strongest sign of voter concern in this election was the 80% who said the country was on the wrong track. Among this large group of voters, Obama beat McCain by a convincing margin of 62-36 percent (Feldman, 2008).

Upon analysing the results of the 2008 Presidential election it is clear to see that race proved to be no obstacle for Obama. Obama was not to fall victim to the 'Wilder effect' or 'Bradley effect', in which white voters would tell pollsters they planned to vote for the ethnic minority candidate, but, when it came to actually casting their ballot, they would vote for the white candidate (Brunell, 2009: pp 323). For instance, in 1989 Virginia candidate Douglas Wilder enjoyed a 15% point lead two weeks before the election, yet he only won by 6000 votes (Hopkins, 2009: pp 769). The results in 2008 clearly demonstrate a shift in attitudes away from the 'Wilder & Bradley' effect, as Obama won 44% of the white vote. Obama was to do particularly well among white voters who were younger than thirty, earning 54% of their support (Nelson, 2010: pp 17). Considering between 1968 and 2004, an average of 39% of white voters had supported Democratic candidates for president suggests that changing racial attitudes, Obamas deftness, Republican missteps and the economic crisis meant that real issues had more of a place than racial bias in 2008 (Harwood, 2008).

Furthermore among minority voters, Obama secured 95% of the black vote, up from Kerry's 88% share in 2004, this was important for Obama as black turnout also increased in 2008 from 11% to 13%. Obama also secured 66% of the Latino vote; a thirteen point increase from 2004 (Nelson, 2010: pp 17). In contrast, McCain struggled to do well in the 2008 election. Over the course of the contest favourability was something that McCain was to struggle to get to grips with. Ultimately when it came to Election Day the main factors that were to affect McCain's favourability were concerns about the economy and McCain's age. At the time McCain was seventy two years old and exits reflected that 39% of voters said that age had been a factor in their decision, and 66% of them had voted for Obama (CNN, 2008 & Nelson, 2010: pp 17). Furthermore, it was to be the selection of Palin that was to once again affect voters judgement of McCain, as considering his age and the lack of confidence voters had in Palin, who was judged unqualified to 'be president if necessary' by 60% to 38% margin one can understand why Obama was to win the 2008 election (Nelson, 2010: pp 17). Furthermore McCain was not too successful in assuring voters that he was the better candidate to handle the economic crisis, as Obama took two-thirds of the votes of people who said that the nation's economy was poor, and almost 60 % of voters who were worried that the economy would affect them and their families (Feldman, 2008).

The election results exhibited a obvious shift in voter sentiment from the two previous contests; Obama increased the Democratic vote by ten million, a 17% increase over Kerry. (Pomper, 2010: pp 46). Elis points out that in many ways it was a "...predictable election outcome..." because at almost every occasion Obama was to stand well above McCain; in choosing his running mate, in outspending McCain by a ratio of four to one and in his approach to the finical crisis, Obama was able to convince the electorate that he was simply the better candidate for the job (Elis, Hillygus & Nie, 2010: pp 582).

Conclusion

On the surface, the fact that over the course of four years Barack Obama was to go from State Senate to President of the United States is a tremendous achievement. In 2004 Obama was just an obscure State Senator, barely a "...blip..." on America's political radar (Lister, 2008). Yet at 11:00pm on the 4th of November 2008, Obama was

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declared the forty-fourth president of the United States. This signalled a victory of hope over fear, and a “...new beginning for the country and the world...” (Plouffe, 2009: pp 374). Over the course of this analysis, the case in how Obama was able to accomplish this tremendous achievement has been addressed. By using Obama 2004 Keynote Address as the starting point, one was able to gain an understanding of how Obama emerged onto the political scene, drawing light on why Obama would later decide to run for President. However it is through the analysis of how Obama was able to overcome Clinton that we are able to gain an understanding of the strength of Obama.

Throughout the democratic primary Obama went from strength to strength. Clinton was the obvious favourite but the relatively unknown Obama employed strong campaigning techniques which saw a heavy reliance on the internet and social media to project his message on to a younger and more diverse voting public. In just three years his campaign raised \$750 million from over three million contributors. This large figure from a relatively unknown senator from Illinois highlights the Obama effect and the extent of his reach to a wider population.

Instead of letting his relative political infancy blight his brand, Obama was also able to use his position as the new candidate to his advantage. As Reagan had once underestimated Kennedy’s “youth and inexperience”, Obama through his message of “hope” and strong drive for social change was able to brand himself as the candidate to back. Just as he hadn’t come from a old Democratic dynasty, his position as the new candidate gave him a credible edge as the man needed to put America back on track. Obama was the clean-break candidate. The efficiency with which he ran his campaign, the timing of the economic crisis and the lack of a strong Republican opponent meant that with hope on his side, Obama was able to sweep into victory.

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Figure One – Obama speech during the 2008 Democratic Convention http://www.minnpost.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/article_detail/images/articles/barack-obama-2008-excel-speech.jpg (Last Accessed 10/04/2014)

Figure Two – Obama & Clinton During the 2007 New Hampshire Primary Debate <http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-dDu5jssJZv0/UJoqK8OcQBI/AAAAAABGjA/RpB8FJXt720/s640/16.JPG> (Last Accessed: 09/04/2014)

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