

# Hillary's history?

[Published: Monday 2, June 2008 - 15:56]

Barring a dramatic reversal of fortune that would rank among the greatest political comebacks in US history, most pundits believe that Hillary Clinton will raise the inevitable white flag of surrender sometime after the last Democratic primaries tomorrow.

Conceding defeat will no doubt be a bitter moment for a candidate who just six months ago seemed a lock to win the Democratic crown and become the party's first female standard bearer in the presidential sweepstakes.

If, and when, Clinton's campaign finally crashes, the punditocracy will be left to sift through the wreckage for causes. And there'll be no shortage of culprits.

Was Hillary Clinton, in tandem with advisers and strategists, the architect of her own demise?

Or was she simply outplayed by a more clever and more energetic opponent?

And is there any merit to Clinton's periodic musings that her campaign was undermined and disadvantaged by sexist media coverage?

Debbie Walsh, the director of the New Jersey-based Center for American Women and Politics, said that many factors contributed to Clinton's inability to vanquish Obama.

Firstly, she said, Clinton squandered much of her then-hefty campaign war chest on a strategy of delivering a knock-out blow to Obama during February's Super Tuesday showdowns.

"When that assumption didn't happen, they didn't seem to have a plan B," said Walsh.

Walsh said that Clinton did what many women candidates for office do, " which is to be very well-prepared, and to know a lot about every issue and to have a plan for everything.

"But this was a year when that really wasn't what was capturing the imagination of voters.

"What was capturing the imagination of voters was this big-picture concept of change.

"And Obama had it, he tapped into that. And she was always seen to be playing catch-up around that issue."

Marie Wilson, president of The White House Project, a New York city-based group that is working to advance women's leadership in all aspects of society, also thinks that Clinton underestimated Obama from the get-go. " The timing, and the strategy and the tactics, were not a fit for what actually happened, for the actual reality of Obama entering the race," said Wilson.

She said that the Clinton campaign, and many other people inside and outside of politics "underestimated the appeal of his message, and who he was appealing to —

these young people — at this time in the life of America. "

Wilson also cited the Clinton camp's go-for-broke Super Tuesday strategy as a major blunder.

"And, of course, what went wrong from the very beginning was that Obama had put together a team and an organising effort that was the best organising effort that the Democratic Party has ever seen," said Wilson.

"A lot of it had to do with her opponent, who was a charismatic leader with a message of change," she said, "and before that, she would have been the change, her gender.

"But he became change, and this country is really ready for change."

But is there any merit to Clinton's contention that a swooning Press corps afforded 'soft-glow' coverage to Obama, while consistently unflattering coverage of Clinton was permeated with an undercurrent of sexism?

"I think that what's happened in this campaign is that it has opened up the persistence of sexism in American life and culture," said Marie Wilson. "That's a good thing. Because we act as if that's not here in this country. And it is.

"We're getting beyond it, but at the same time we're not. And we're at a crucial time in that area of the worrying of men about the roles of women.

"So it opened up the sexism that was there.

"And I don't know exactly the role that it played," she added. " There is so much confusion whether it was sexism or her role as a Clinton. We're just starting to sort it out. I think it played some role, but I don't know what role.

"And I'm inclined to say that gender played both for her and against her in different places."

Debbie Walsh found the media's sexism "quite disturbing".

"I think you really saw it on cable news programs, where you saw a jocular thing of guys sitting around a table talking about her and using language that was as if this was a joke," she said. Walsh noted that during the course of the primary season, Chris Mathews of MSNBC referred to Clinton as a 'She-Devil', while Tucker Carlson of the same network once said that whenever he sees Hillary Clinton on television "I involuntarily cross my legs."

On another occasion, comedian Penn Jillette attributed Obama's February victories to Black History month, before adding that Clinton's March wins occurred because it was "white b\*\*ch month".

"This is the kind of language that is being used, and it's seen as funny, as a joke and appropriate to talk about her in these terms, in a gender way," said Walsh.

Walsh said that sexist attitudes towards Clinton were abundant, even in places like airport gift shops.

"In airports you see these nutcrackers that are being sold, where you put the nut between her legs and crack the nut.

"Racism and sexism have no place in this discourse. But the sexism that showed up was seen as a joke," she said.

To add insult to injury, Walsh said, when Clinton raised the issue, "it was portrayed that she was being whiney, that she should stop being whiney. Or, if she then reached out to women, saying 'let's make history' she was seen as playing the gender card, and that was wrong too".

However, Walsh cautioned against attributing all of Clinton's political woes to sexism.

She said: "Was that the reason that the campaign went the way it went? Probably not.

"But it does speak volumes about where we are in this country in the sort of discourse around women candidates."

Still, Walsh added, the gains that Clinton made for women in America can't be overstated.

"There is no doubt that in this election, clearly there was a sense here that the American voter was ready to elect a woman to be president of the United States. This was not a blow-out. This was a race that was very close.

"It's an amazing year to watch for American politics when you have, on the Democratic side, a tremendous array of candidates, very strong candidates, and the two that are left standing in the end are an African-American man and a woman.

"I think it's really telling that when it came time for voters to go in and pull the lever, an awful lot of them pulled the lever for a woman candidate."

Marie Wilson agreed that, even in defeat, Hillary Clinton broke the gender glass ceiling surrounding the highest office in the land.

"Win, lose or draw, she has changed everything," commented Wilson.

"She has changed everything for women's possibilities for leadership, for the presidency. Now we won't have to do any more polling about, 'Do you think a woman can be the president?'

"And it's really opened the door for a lot of women at the local level.

"You have more and more women who were really quite inspired by watching her."

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