

## It seems only luck can save her

By Anne Summers

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**While America is closer than ever to electing its first female president, many women feel betrayed, writes Anne Summers.**



Not catching the fire ... compared with Barack Obama's, Hillary Clinton's speeches seem wooden and workmanlike.

Photo: Reuters/Brian Snyder

There is a story doing the rounds of New York City concerning a tied vote in one of the districts in the Democratic caucus in Nevada a few weeks ago.

It being Las Vegas, a deck was produced and shuffled and the precinct captains were each invited to take a card. Barack Obama's captain drew a 10 of clubs and sat back smiling; then Hillary Clinton's captain took his: the queen of hearts. The former first

lady won the district - and the state. Luck was a lady that night, but Clinton has been on a losing streak ever since.

She has lost the past eight contests in the primary election battles, several by huge margins, and now has at least 100 fewer delegates committed to voting for her at the Democratic convention in Denver, Colorado, in August than her rival, Obama.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Her strategy for winning the nomination was predicated on her attaining an unbeatable margin after the February 5 Super Tuesday contests, where 22 states were up for grabs. Instead, while she won the big ones - New York, New Jersey, California, Massachusetts, Tennessee - Obama took the majority of states, giving him a seemingly unstoppable momentum that has made him the clear frontrunner.

Clinton always expected she would be the star candidate; instead she is fighting for her political life against a charismatic young African-American man who has taken the Democratic Party by storm.

The support he now has is quite extraordinary. When the contest began, Clinton could claim considerable, even majority, support among black voters. That is no longer the case. Perhaps more surprising, however, is the way in which other groups - high-income earners, men, and young people - have flocked to him. Clinton's core supporters are older women and low-income working people. It's Starbucks (where Obama supporters hustle for votes) versus Wal-Mart (where poor people shop and on whose board Clinton once served).

I arrived in the US at the height of the primary season, just three days after New York's. At every dinner party or other gathering I attended in the past week, all of them with white, educated professionals, the majority around the table was invariably for Obama. Clinton supporters were shouted down, the distaste many Obamaites feel for her being transferred to anyone who voted for her. Not only is it not cool to be for Clinton, it is portrayed as being old-fashioned, corrupt even. And this is in New York, her home state, and the city that is supposedly her power base.

Not so long ago, Democrats grumbled how they were "spoiled for choice", feigning consternation that whoever they chose - the woman or the black - would make history. Now the contest has become bitter: families are split, usually along gender and generational lines. Friends barely talk to each other and the resentment and even anger is extraordinary.

Nowhere is this more apparent than with women who support Clinton and who see the victory they barely dared to hope for slipping away. Some will even say that Obama is "presumptuous" to have run now, when he is so young and inexperienced and seemingly incapable of winning the presidential prize, thereby denying the older and patently more experienced Clinton the one shot she has at it.

"There's an older generation of women who feel it's their time," says Wende Jager-Hyman, executive director of the Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership, an organisation founded by the writer Naomi Wolf. "They don't want it taken away from them." She thinks such women will not vote in November if Clinton is not the

candidate. This anger first erupted publicly on February 2, after Senator Teddy Kennedy endorsed Obama - or O'Bama, as some wags started calling him. Whether such an endorsement is worth anything is debatable, but it was a shock for Clinton, who had expected to be supported by the Democratic Party's patriarch. It also enraged many feminists, who recalled the through-gritted-teeth political cover the women's movement has provided over the years to the prodigal Kennedy in return for his legislative support on key women's issues. The gloves soon came off.

Robin Morgan led the charge, pointing out that the younger Kennedys - children of RFK, with whom Obama is admiringly compared - had all endorsed Clinton, whereas the 76-year-old Teddy, along with his niece, JFK's daughter Caroline, had gone for Obama.

"Personally, I'm unimpressed with Caroline's longing for the Return of the Fathers," Morgan wrote. "Unlike the rest of the world, Americans have short memories. Me, I still recall Marilyn Monroe's suicide, and a dead girl named Mary Jo Kopechne in Chappaquiddick."

Morgan, compiler of the inspiring landmark feminist primer *Sisterhood is Powerful* in 1970, had in 1968 written *Goodbye to All That*, a call-to-arms essay that catalogued the sexist attitudes and double standards prevalent at the time. The 2008 reprise of that work, thanks to the internet, ricocheted around the world within hours.

"Goodbye to a campaign where he [Obama] has to pass as white (which whites - especially wealthy ones - adore)," Morgan wrote, "while she has to pass as male (which both men and women demanded of her, and then found unforgivable)".

She also bade farewell to today's double standard: "When a sexist idiot screamed 'Iron my shirt!' at HRC [Hillary Rodham Clinton] it was considered amusing - if some racist idiot had called 'shine my shoes' at BO [Barack Obama], it would've inspired hours of pages of newsprint analysing our national dishonour."

Morgan noted that when John McCain was asked "How do we beat the bitch?" he replied: "Excellent question!" She wondered whether he would have given the same answer if the question had been: "How do we beat the black bastard?"

"Why is it that the 'C' word is everywhere?" one young woman said to me this week. "Yet the 'N' word would not be tolerated."

Roger Stone, a long-time Republican operative, has formed a tax-exempt anti-Clinton political group called Citizens United Not Timid. Google "I hate Hillary" and you are introduced to a blogosphere that seethes with vile and vituperative Hillary detestation, where the C-word is actually the least of it. The threats to her life are frequent, alarming and way beyond any usual political jousting.

But Google "I hate Obama" and you will find content removed from most sites because they contravene laws that ban racial vilification.

Erica Jong, the famous author of *Fear of Flying*, among other books, also entered the fray with a furious defence of Clinton in *The Washington Post* recently and has been inundated with hate mail ever since.

"If Bill defends her, he's a pimp. If he doesn't, he's a creep," Jong wrote this week in a private email. "If Chelsea campaigns, it's cynical. If Obama trots out those cute little girls Michelle gave birth to, he's a family man. If Michelle attacks Hillary, it's news. If Hillary attacks Michelle - well, she can't, because that would be racist."

If Obama becomes the candidate, it is unlikely that the Republicans will feel so constrained. The people who were able to "swiftboat" the war hero John Kerry in 2004 will have little compunction in pandering to the racist sentiments that are so ingrained in American society. Clinton had to sack a campaign aide who pointed out that the Republicans will use Obama's middle name - Hussein - to unscrupulous advantage once the campaign is under way.

There are several factors fuelling the anti-Clinton sentiment among the New York elite. Many, of course, are swept away by Obama's soaring rhetoric. He is a compelling speaker who lifts the spirit and is a charismatic contrast to the dyslexic utterances of the current President, George Bush, and to the wooden, workmanlike speeches of Clinton. But, to date, Obama's orations have been remarkably light when it comes to policy. He promises hope, he pledges a new politics, but he has very little to say about what he would actually do if he became president.

With their strong religious traditions, a great many Americans are susceptible to revivalist-style rhetoric and Obama's speeches are pitched towards that tradition. They also inspire the young generation of supporters who were not born in 1968, when Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the last great political orators, were killed.

Obama is the dream weaver, Clinton is the problem solver. Obama leaves you feeling good, Clinton bores you with details.

This is the danger for her. Obama offers transformative politics, the former editor of a New York political magazine says: older people are inspired and young people are being galvanised in a way not seen since the 1960s. Clinton is merely more of the same.

The yearning for a new form of politics is palpable. "They want a clean slate," says Letty Cottin Pogrebin, a New York writer who has known the Clintons since 1991 and is a strong Hillary supporter - but whose family is split along generational lines and who even finds herself wavering when she listens to Obama.

"Hillary is not getting across who she is," says Pogrebin. "She has to say: I know exactly what to do, who to mobilise to deal with any problem. She has to remind us she is on first-name terms with leaders all around the world. She is ready but she can't seem to tell a story."

After eight years of Bush the country is overwhelmingly ready for change, but a new factor has emerged that is threatening Clinton: call it Clinton fatigue. Many people are

simply sick of the Clintons. Obama offers a chance to make history without the baggage that Clinton is seen to bring with her.

Not so long ago, Bill was seen as Hillary's secret weapon. Now, he is the person who can bring her down - and perhaps already has. It is not just the fear of another "bimbo eruption" - although the Republicans are said to have six of them waiting in the wings - nor his red-faced, finger-jabbing outbursts of anger that have reminded the media of how much they hate him, nor his appearing to play the race card in the South Carolina primary.

No, the turning point for many people I have spoken to was the disclosure in *The New York Times* on January 31 of what has become known as the "Kazakhstan deal".

The article reported a questionable deal involving a \$US131.3 million (\$145.6 million) donation to Bill Clinton's charitable foundation from a Canadian mining magnate whom Clinton accompanied to Kazakhstan in late 2005. They dined with the President, secured the rights to the nation's substantial uranium deposits in a multimillion-dollar transaction that stunned the global nuclear industry, and thereafter Bill Clinton backed the Kazakh President to head an international organisation that monitors elections and supports democracy.

The trouble was, apart from the cosy financial deal and the eye-popping fee for Bill, that the endorsement went against US foreign policy, which has criticised Kazakhstan's poor human rights record, a policy that has been supported by Hillary Clinton.

It was not the first time that a financial deal of Bill's has been at odds with Hillary's political work.

In 2004, Bill was a paid adviser to Dubai on how to handle the political uproar that followed a Dubai company trying to take over a number of American ports. Again, Senator Clinton opposed the deal and, on national security grounds, helped kill it.

Not a good look when you are running for president. Hillary was always problematic, but it is now a liability.

Just a few weeks ago, Hillary Clinton was the presumptive candidate. She seemed unbeatable, with her huge war chest and her political pedigree.

Now that dream is in tatters. She needs big wins in Texas, Ohio and Pennsylvania just to stay in the race. She was relying on her 50/50 strategy (women over 50, people earning less than \$50,000) to get them, but even these groups are now "catching the fire", as going over to Obama is called.

Obama is acting as if he has already won, no longer even engaging Clinton but directing his political fire at McCain.

History may have already passed Clinton by. She will need all the luck that's around to save her now.

