

Conceding to Hillary Clinton

By Rosie McCobb

Well, she finally did it.

Over three days have passed since Senator Barack Obama's delegate count surpassed the number needed to clinch the Democratic nomination, and during that time, there has been much speculation as to why Hillary Clinton had not yet officially ended her campaign. To her supporters, it was a grueling time of agonizing over the fact that Clinton's popular vote numbers were higher - by some accounts - than Obama's. To her detractors, it was an equally grueling time of noting that Clinton seemed to be refusing to accept reality, and was hogging the spotlight for herself, when she should be graciously stepping aside in order to give Senator Obama the attention and momentum that will be needed to wage a campaign against John McCain.

As an Obama supporter, I myself was thrilled - and even dumfounded - that he reached the delegate count needed to claim the Democratic nomination. But, because I have been closely watching and listening to this campaign since the first primary back in January - going so far as refusing to make plans on any night that a debate was scheduled on CNN or MSNBC, or a primary election was being covered and tallied on a Tuesday night - I have to admit, even I found it hard to let go of the Democratic primary election season. I have been at peace with my support for Obama, and regularly disappointed in, and even disgusted by, some of the negative campaign tactics employed by Team Clinton, as well as some of her most ridiculous fabrications (such as the time she said she was under sniper fire when she arrived at an airport in Bosnia, when in actuality, she had strolled across the tarmac with none-other than has-been comedian, Sinbad). But, there is indeed something about Hillary Clinton that is hard to ignore.

Watching her concession speech today at the National Building Museum in Washington, DC, I finally figured out what that something is. Similar to Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton has managed to achieve something I would have never thought possible in my lifetime: she has made attending political rallies, and being passionate about American politics, into something akin to getting tickets to a must-see concert. For me, this is nothing less than shocking. Growing up in the 1970's and 1980's, and being - for a time - obsessed with the 1960's (the music, the social climate, the civil rights movement, and the general passion that people seemed to have for everything that, at that time, really mattered), my biggest complaint as a teenager in 1983 or '84 was that life was "so boring" in comparison to the 1960's. Though there was indeed a recession going on in the '80s, to a teenager like me living in rural Massachusetts, everything seemed to be

chugging along, without much conflict. In my small world, I was able to get a part-time job no problem, I could afford to buy gas for my car, I was doing well in school, and even as a "female of the species" I did not feel particularly hindered by my gender. I honestly felt gypped that I had not been born earlier, so that I could have been present, and participating in, all of the amazing events happening in the United States during the 1960's. Sure, there was Iran-Contra, but that was going on when I was in the 6th grade, when the concept of "current events" was reduced to simple signifiers like Tony Orlando and Dawn's ubiquitous hit "Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'Round the Old Oak Tree." And yes, the Gulf War came into being by the time I was in college, but because I - and many other Americans - were barely, if at all, effected on a personal level by these events, they just sort of wafted through my consciousness, taking a back seat to my pre-occupation with writing papers, finishing college, and becoming involved with the underground indie rock, punk rock, and hip hop music scenes.

So fast-forwarding to 2008, and watching Hillary Clinton make her concession speech, I was amazed at how far I, as a conscious, politically-engaged person, have come - but also how drastically different the United States is today, in comparison to what seemed like a relatively stable time during the 1980's and 1990's. As much as I find some of Hillary's tactics to be reprehensible, I have to admit that seeing a woman in the position of almost becoming the President is huge. Gone are the days when I felt like my being female had little effect on my - and other women's - lives. As an adult, I have witnessed such flagrant displays of sexism that I am constantly reminded of the fact that the past "ideal woman" - relegated to being only the helper and assistant to men and their offspring - really wasn't that far in our collective past. Clinton spoke eloquently, and at some length, about this in her speech. As a woman, I cannot help but be grateful, as well as conscious of the fact that this woman - love her or hate her - has great oratory skills, and is capable of grabbing the attention and devotion of millions of people.

In her concession speech, she thankfully took her own "breaking the glass ceiling" a step further, and alluded to the fact that if women want their rights to be respected, and their ability to make greater progress fostered, they should campaign for Barack Obama and fight to get a Democratic president elected. It seems to have by-passed many Clinton supporters - older women, especially - that if they go out and cast a spite vote for John McCain, they are actually turning back the clock on any progress that has been made during the Democratic primaries. Anyone who would be so petty as to vote against Obama, because they are disappointed that Clinton lost the nomination, should go lock themselves in a room, surf the Internet, conduct some research, and do some deep thinking about the real

differences between voting for a Democrat and voting for John McCain. I do wish Hillary had spelled this out even more - and I hope she will in the coming weeks - because above and beyond any personal preferences, there is a stark difference between the Democratic and Republican agendas.

On a personal level, I am cognizant of the fact that all my teenage yearning for the opportunity to be part of an important time in United States history, and participate in a social and political movement, has come to fruition during a time period that in many ways, seems far more messed up and difficult to navigate than the 1960's. I am no longer an idealistic 20 year-old, who has oodles of time and energy to devote to whatever cause seems interesting and worthy on any given day; I am almost 40 years old, with the life responsibilities and waning energy to match. However, the perspective I have gained in the past 20 years means that it's impossible for me to easily shrug off the collective anxiety and disappointment that has built up around me in this country in the past 8 years; my own life, and ability to prosper, has everything to do with what's going on around me. That, I think, is why even though I was not a Hillary Clinton supporter, I was riveted by her concession speech today, and wondering how she might contribute to getting all of us out of this mess we're in. I know it's "just politics," but even scripted words at a concession rally have the power to sway people into action, and if there's one thing we can all agree on, I think it's that social and political complacency needs to be a thing of the past.

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