



SOUTH DAKOTA  
WANTS OPEN PRIMARIES  
PAGE 1



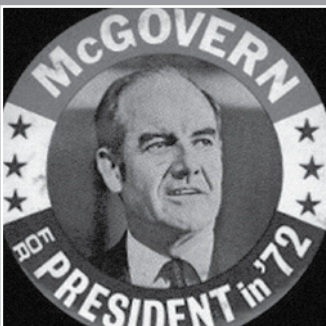
A NEW BOOK  
BY DOUG SCHOEN  
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BLACK AMERICA  
ANSWERS  
PAGE 16



TYRA COHEN BUILDS  
IN NORTH CAROLINA  
PAGE 36



PLAYING BY THE RULES  
PAGE 25

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**Isn't this the Rainbow  
We've Been Waiting For?**

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a white rectangular sign. The sign features the YouTube logo, which consists of the word 'You' in a bold, sans-serif font, followed by 'Tube' inside a rounded rectangle that mimics the play button icon. The background is a rough, grey, textured surface, possibly concrete or stone.

Vol. 5, No. 1    \$6.95





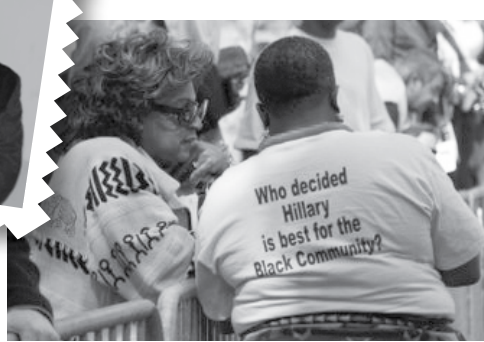
## The NEO Launch Party



*South Dakota  
Voice of Independents*



*Rock The Debates'  
Leaders Get Their Awards*



*Harlem Upsets  
The Clinton  
Bandwagon*

## EDITOR'S NOTE

The culture of the independent movement has not permeated the American mainstream in the way, for example, that **SpongeBob** or **Brangelina** have. Not to worry. Avant-garde theatre, music and fashion first appear in out-of-the-way performance spaces or on the streets, often taking decades to filter through to Broadway or *Dancing with the Stars*. Likewise, the independent movement is creating its own outside-the-box culture in a variety of venues as we develop into a mainstream force.

There is probably no more edgy American political/cultural performance than wearing a tee shirt. We had some great ones this political season. In South Dakota, which held one of the final primaries in the Democratic line-up, independents were barred from voting but wanted to make a point. **Kim Wright** of **South Dakota Voice of Independents** and family members put their plight out there in plain English.

And at the start of the primary season, before a single vote had been cast, independent **Lenora Fulani**

raised questions about the black political establishment's wholesale backing of **Hillary Clinton** without a public debate on the **Obama** option, asking "Who Decided Hillary is Best for the Black Community?" She put her question on a bright yellow tee that became a bestselling item from Harlem to Bedford-Stuyvesant. Today it's a collector's item.

And then there were the awards ceremonies. No red carpets and flashbulbs, but **Robert Sullentrop** of Missouri and **Larry Reinsch** of Iowa, both co-founders of **Rock the Debates**, received **Anti-Corruption Awards** at an event sponsored by the **Independence Party of New York City** that was packed with independents. And in the publishing world, launch parties are a must. We had one for the last issue of the *Neo* – where contributing writer **Matt Meiners** and I posed for photos with a portrait of our first president.

Hope you enjoy this issue. We independents are grappling with the best ways to exercise our developing power and we're having a good time doing it...

*Jacqueline Salit*

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# Arizona Legislators Pull a Fast One, Independents Gear Up for Next Round

In 1998 the citizens of Arizona, using the mechanism of Initiative and Referendum, said Yes to amending their state constitution, so as to open virtually all of its primaries to independent and unaffiliated voters as well as registrants in third parties that do not hold primaries. But Proposition 103, which was approved by more than 60% of those voting, did not apply to presidential preference elections, as presidential primaries are called here; they remain closed to this day. When it comes to nominating presidential candidates, some powerful state legislators appear determined to keep Arizona's 725,000 independents – 27% of the electorate – locked out of the process. The story of SB1015, one of three bills that would have opened up the presidential primaries, shows how they're going about it.

SB1015 sailed through the state senate earlier this year. But when it got to the House Judiciary Committee, the chairman, Republican Eddie Farnsworth, attached a "strike everything" amendment that succeeded in gutting every word of the bill's open primary language.

In a telephone conversation with Scott Brannon, a founder of Grand Canyon Independent Voters (GCIV) from Payson, Farnsworth had made it clear that he didn't intend to allow either SB1015 or one of the other open primary bills then in the works to be heard by his committee. "He told me that if independents want to disenfranchise ourselves, it was our choice," Brannon remembers.

A few days later, in a conversation with another legislator, Brannon was pleasantly surprised, if a

little skeptical, when he was told that in fact SB1015 was on the committee's agenda. It turned out, however, that the "agenda" was the chopping block. The other open primary bill, SB1405, which had also made it through the senate, met the same fate at the hands of Farnsworth's committee. The Judiciary Committee chairman did not respond to several requests from the *Neo* for his comments.

Although his conversation with Farnsworth had been cordial, Brannon calls the legislative sleight of hand "a shell game."

GCIV's main goal from now until the fall, Brannon says, is to build their coalition: "We had people calling in and emailing their representatives about the bill, but we didn't have enough. We want to get a rundown of where every legislator stands, and contact them. We want to find out what new candidates are running and to send them a survey so we know who we want to work with. Our first priority is opening the primaries, and to do that we need more supporters. Independents are motivated to get involved right now."

Geannie Schroeder of Show Low, another founding member of GCIV, blames Farnsworth for doing in both bills, and stalling a third that originated in the House. Semi-retired, Schroeder – along with her husband – is a lifelong Democrat who re-registered as an independent out of sheer frustration – "We just feel that the two-party system no longer works." She too is eager to reach out to other independents in the state: "I think that once we get some supporters, it's going to grow a lot faster than what we thought at first." NEO

# Idaho Independents Fight to Keep Primaries Open



Taking aim at an attempt by a group of Republicans to close Idaho's historically open primaries to independents, Mitch Campbell, founder of the American Independent Movement of Idaho (AIM), writes in an op-ed piece published by the Twin Falls *Times-News*: "...why is a political party's constitutional right of 'freedom of association' more important than every American's constitutional right to vote for the candidate of his or her choice in every election?"

On April 11 the chairman of the Republican Party of Idaho filed a lawsuit against the secretary of state, a fellow Republican, to compel the implementation of a closed primary system in Idaho, where there is currently nonpartisan registration and nonpartisan primaries. If the closed primary advocates succeed, those who registered independent – expected to comprise at least one-third of the electorate – would be barred from voting in party primaries for the first time since statehood was achieved in 1890. Consequently, Campbell, AIM, and a group of Idaho independent voters will ask the court to allow them to join the suit as intervenors to oppose the Republican attempt to rewrite electoral law.

"If the Republican Party plaintiffs are successful, Idaho would be compelled to initiate a system of partisan registration and independents would be barred from participating in the primary process," wrote attorney Harry Kresky, general counsel to the Committee for a Unified Independent Party, part of the group of intervenors, in a recent letter to the state deputy attorney general. "Plaintiffs are, in effect, asking the court to require each and every voter in Idaho to affiliate with a political party or be deprived of full participation in the electoral process. Independents in Idaho and in many other states view such a development with great concern and consider it an attempt to infringe on their voting rights and freedom of political expression."

Some of Idaho's leading Republicans are unhappy with the lawsuit. "Idaho is traditionally independent," says Republican State Senator Bart Davis, the majority leader. "They're traditionally conservative, but they're independent folks. I think it's healthy to respect that in-

dependence and allow those good people to participate as they have historically." He noted that the Republicans occupy every statewide office and dominate the legislature, so from his point of view the system is hardly broken: "I'm having a hard time understanding why my party wants to fix it."

The Democratic Party, which includes any voter willing to pledge that he or she will cast a vote for the Democratic nominee in November to participate in its party-financed caucuses and a subsequent primary, has proclaimed its opposition.

"They certainly have a constitutional right to free association," acknowledges State Senator Kate Kelly, the minority caucus chair, referring to the Republican Party. "But if they want a closed primary, they should be paying for it. The second part is a privacy issue. In a state like Idaho, which is heavily Republican, having to publicly declare a party before you can vote virtually disenfranchises Democrats and independents because of the potential political, religious, and employment-related damage they could incur."

Keith Allred, who heads up Idaho's nonpartisan The Common Interest, worked with elected officials to come up with a legislative compromise that would have left the primary door open to independents; it did not succeed, but he remains optimistic. "How we see it here in Idaho is that this is about privileging parties over voters...I'm pretty confident that we're going to win, ultimately. I don't believe we're going to end up with closed primaries."

With opposing factions of the Republican Party vying for control of the state organization, open primaries are a wedge issue. Supporters of maintaining the current nonpartisan system eked out a 199-192 victory at the party's state convention in Boise on June 12. But that vote is simply a recommendation; it is up to the party's central committee to decide whether to press forward with the lawsuit.

"This is about democracy versus political power," Campbell says. "And independents have to lead the way." NEO

*Photo: Mitch Campbell of the American Independent Movement of Idaho.*



# Missouri Independents Teach State Legislators a Lesson

---

Missouri State Senator Gary Nodler, a Republican, was jolted in 2006 when Kim Wright, his independent opponent, received more than 36% of the vote in the general election. Once safely back in his seat, Nodler's first order of business in 2007 was to provide himself and his colleagues with an insurance policy in the form of legislation to protect them from such threats; he introduced a bill requiring all candidates for state office to file at the same time, thereby putting independents – who do not run in party primaries, but submit petition signatures, to gain a place on the November ballot – at a severe disadvantage. State Senator Delbert Scott, a fellow Republican who chairs the Financial, Governmental Organizations, and Elections Committee, had gotten a similar scare in 2006 when his independent challenger came away with nearly 43% of the vote; he was a co-sponsor of the bill.

Nodler dismisses the suggestion that he was shaken by Wright's hefty share of the vote two years ago, noting that he was reelected in a "landslide." But that experience did reveal a flaw in Missouri election law, he says, because it violates the 14th Amendment by discriminating against candidates with a party affiliation; his bill – which eventually fell by the wayside – was intended to close the "loophole" rather than discriminate against independents. In any case, says Nodler, "most frequently independent candidates aren't independent at all. They're 'designer' Democrats and 'designer' Republicans – stalking horses who aren't trying to win but are falsely claiming to be independent in order to pull away votes from the party they want to defeat."

Nodler's accusation that she was really a Democrat is not news to Kim Wright. "He refused to have an open discussion with me on the issues because he said

I was not a 'legitimate' candidate. No one can figure out independents. Clearly, people who subscribe to party politics can't understand the concept of being independent of a political party. They can't grasp the concept of being free of a party line. Does a person have roots in the Democratic Party or the Republican Party? Absolutely. Does that mean you have to identify with it? Vote for it? No."

Early this year Rep. Theodore Hoskins, a Democrat, brought an embellished version of the Nodler bill to the Special Committee for Urban Education, which he chairs; his committee duly gave Hoskins' HB1310 a "Do Pass" stamp. On March 31 it was the turn of Scott's Senate committee to hear testimony on the bill, which would move the filing deadline for independents up from July to March.

Barbara Woodruff, a co-founder and the chair of Show Me Independents, traveled down from her home in St. Charles to the state capital in Jefferson City to testify against HB1310 before both the House and the Senate committees. "I educated them," Woodruff says. In particular, she explains, she informed the lawmakers of a 1983 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court that March 20 was too early for independent presidential petition deadlines. "All this bill does is stifle potential independent candidates and ensure that many major party candidates will run unopposed," Woodruff argued.

Downed, the bill did not make it out to the House floor for a vote before the current session ended. Richard Winger, the publisher of *Ballot Access News* and one of the country's leading authorities on all matters electoral, is of the opinion that legislators may decide to attach it to another bill and "throw it into the courts" to resolve. NEO



## New Hampshire Independents Ask “What’s In a Name?”

**W**hen you register to vote in New Hampshire, you have three choices: Republican, Democrat, or undeclared. Leaders of New Hampshire’s Committee for an Independent Voice (NH-CIV) object to this last characterization of 44% of the state’s voters; early in 2007 Betty Ward began lobbying legislators to change “undeclared” to “independent.”

Ward says it’s a matter of political identity: “I’m not ‘undeclared,’ a ‘swinger,’ or ‘undecided.’ I’m an independent,” says the Goffstown schoolteacher, who was taken aback when, months after her initial email blitz, State Senator Maggie Hassan, a Democrat, responded with an invitation for Ward to discuss the matter with her in person. “I was intrigued by the question, *Why are we called ‘undeclared’ and not independents?*” Hassan says.

After listening to what Ward had to say, Hassan suggested that she contact Senator Peter Burling, the deputy majority leader and chairman of the Election Law and Internal Affairs Committee. Ward duly followed up on the suggestion, but did not hear anything until last September, when his assistant called to say that Burling was planning to introduce a bill that would require the state to call independent voters what they are.

A public hearing on SB485 was held in January. Ward and NH-CIV’s Russ Ouellette, a management consultant, both testified in person, and the CIV’s Donna Richards submitted her testimony in writing. But a few weeks later SB485 was deemed “inexpedient to legislate,” done in by the senators’ apparent fear that they might be opening the door to the formation of an independent party.

During the course of their testimony the members of Burling’s committee “became engaged and curious,” says Ouellette. “I think they were really interested in what we had to say. Then they started talking about it as a party. We tried to tell them that it wasn’t but...

anything that might affect their party, they’re going to be afraid of it...”

“I think it’s a very interesting concept, which is hard to solve politically,” comments Maggie Hassan, who is not a member of the Election Law Committee but has kept her ear to the ground. Her concern, she explains, is not the specter of a third party, but what she takes to be a contradiction: “Part of what you’re dealing with is the fact that many people who consider themselves independents also want to participate in party primaries, which are in fact run by political parties and not the state. There’s always some consternation on the part of political parties about the participation of people who say they are not only unaffiliated with a party but never want to be affiliated. As a policymaker, I may not be able to achieve both those goals.”

Still, Ouellette is optimistic: “What I got excited about is that the dialogue began. We were talking about what it meant to be independent, the different definitions of independent, the misconception that it means being in the middle. Now we can talk to [Burling] about next year, maybe have a public forum, invite him to attend. It was a win, the fact that we got there, and that there was some interest.”

“We’re not going away,” Richards adds, noting that NH-CIV is also in touch with the secretary of state in connection with the “independent” designation. “The more we bring it up, the more legislators will realize that we’re a real portion of the electorate, with real concerns, that we’re real constituents...If there were more elected officials listening to the independent electorate, maybe more legislators would be empowered to act independently rather than along partisan lines.”

Ward, too, is glad that the conversation has begun – even if, in the best of all possible worlds, there wouldn’t be any political labels at all. “To be honest,” she says, “I’d rather just be ‘V,’ for voter.” **NEO**

*Photo: Betty Ward, Russ Ouellette, and Andre Gibeau of NH-CIV.*

# Bubble, Bubble, Toil and Trouble



**T**he state of California allows political parties to decide who may vote in their primaries. Which is how it happens that while Republican Party primaries are members-only affairs, the Democratic Party has an open door policy toward independent – “decline to state” – voters. But if you’re one of the 189,000 independents in Los Angeles County who went to the polls on Super Tuesday, the chances are 50-50 that your vote didn’t get counted the first time around. What went wrong? In addition to requesting a nonpartisan ballot, you had to ink a small blank circle known as a “declaration” bubble at the top of the ballot indicating whether you wanted to vote in the Democrats’ primary or the American Independent Party primary; then you had to ink the bubble next to the name of your chosen candidate. Poll workers were supposed to point the declaration bubble out to you; if you left it blank your presidential preference was ignored by the electronic scanner.

The nonpartisan Courage Campaign had gotten wind of the potential “bubble trouble” on the Friday before Super Tuesday. On Sunday, a Courage Campaign attorney reached the Los Angeles registrar-recorder and informed him of the situation, and a last-minute effort was set in motion to “train” poll workers to tell voters what they needed to know.

Only a few hours into Super Tuesday it became apparent that the effort hadn’t worked, and the Courage Campaign hurriedly put together a press conference to call attention to the brewing fiasco. But it was only after the Campaign subsequently threatened the city with a lawsuit that the county Board of Supervisors directed officials to count the approximately 95,000 previously voided ballots.

“Given that the administration of elections is part of a partisan system, this kind of problem is practically inevitable,” says longtime independent activist Jim Mangia, the founder of IndependentMovement.org, who appeared at the press conference along with Eric Garcetti, the president of the L.A. City Council and a state co-chair for Barack Obama’s presidential campaign, three other City Council members from both

major parties, and representatives of Common Cause, the NAACP and the League of Women Voters. “The political parties, responding to pressure from independents, open up their primaries, but they’re not prepared to handle our participation,” Mangia continues. “They obviously don’t get it. Whether what happened was just a bureaucratic mess-up, or the result of an attitude – *We don’t have to count those votes* – doesn’t really matter.”

Attorney Elizabeth Debreu argues that the problem began when she, like tens of thousands of other independent voters, received a sample ballot in the mail that did not look like the real thing: “The sample ballot didn’t reflect what our choices would be on the ballot we received at the polls,” she recalls. “To somebody who is not involved in politics, or drafting ballots for a living,” she adds, the rigamarole of the bubbles “was yet another barrier.” But it had nothing to do with a plot, says Debreu. “At an institutional level, there was simply confusion. They have to re-think entirely how a crossover ballot can work.”

Eric Garcetti doesn’t take comfort in assuming that no diabolical scheme was afoot: “It’s even more troubling that it was the lack of thought rather than somebody’s devious thought,” says the City Council president. “We should be making voting easier for everybody and reducing impediments rather than creating them. A partisan mindset helps divide people into neater and cleaner categories than they actually are. The Democratic Party opens its primaries, which is an important first step – the Republican Party doesn’t even do that – but then it imposes conditions. It becomes extremely difficult to fulfill the obligations of the partisan system and invite new voters, independent voters, disenfranchised voters, disillusioned voters, to participate. There’s an inherent tension between them.”

Mangia adds a word to the wise: “Independents are angry enough at the two parties for the way that they’ve been excluded from the political process. It’s not very smart to antagonize and frustrate them any more than they already are.” **NEO**

*Photo: Independent leader Jim Mangia.*



# Political Terrain Shifts in Texas as Independents Gain Ground

Americans may have been momentarily confused, but not all that surprised, when they learned that the Democratic Party of Texas holds a primary *and* caucuses to select a presidential nominee; in most states there's one or the other, but it made a sort of sense that in our second largest there would be both. The results of the March 4 "two-step" were more noteworthy: Hillary Clinton won the primary, 51% to Barack Obama's 47%, but he won the caucuses, 56% to her 44%, and walked away with more pledged delegates, 99 to Clinton's 94. Exit polls indicated that among independent voters Clinton was outpolled by Obama, who was endorsed by Independent Texans (IT) and its iconoclastic founder, Linda Curtis.

"Barack Obama has gained more recognition for independent voters than any single political leader since Ross Perot, despite being a Democrat!" she says. "What will happen, in terms of real change, after the election depends on what we – independents – do, no matter who wins. I think Obama is the only one who has some understanding of that fact, which might be a no-brainer to us but is apparently missed by all those brilliant pundits we watch on Sunday mornings."

"Obama has a lot of voters who are hard to characterize," says Paul Burka, senior executive editor of the widely read *Texas Monthly*. "People have characterized them as independents. A lot of them are cynical about politics and see in Obama a chance to change whatever it is they don't like about politics. They're with Obama but they can very easily be disillusioned. I think Hillary would do very badly in Texas. People who like Obama would not support her, and I think she would be a strong motivator of Republicans."

Harvey Kronberg, publisher and editor of *The Quorum Report*, a nonpartisan newsletter focusing on Texas politics and government, agrees with Burka that the traditionally Republican Lone Star State is unlikely



"We call ourselves 'Bubbas for Obama!' Our job now is to keep building bridges – non-tolled, of course! – between them and black voters."

*Linda Curtis*  
*Independent Texans*

*Photo: Linda Curtis of Independent Texans.*

to be in play this November. Still, he says, it is “not as strongly presumptively Republican as it was even four years ago” and predicts “the closest race in 20 years... The Republican majority in Texas has been constituted [in part] by ‘independents.’ The indications are that they are far more up for grabs than they ever have been before.” Kronberg calls the Obama campaign’s recent launching of a voter registration drive in Texas “audacious,” a signal to the Republicans that the probable Democratic nominee is “not writing Texas off.”

Two years ago 300,000 Texans signed petitions to put two independent candidates for governor on the ballot; Carole Strayhorn and singer/songwriter/novelist/humorist Kinky Friedman, who was also once a columnist at *Texas Monthly*, received a combined total of 1.3 million votes in the 2006 general election. “That’s not that long ago,” says Linda Curtis, who was a key player in the Strayhorn campaign and had worked doggedly to get Strayhorn and Friedman to join forces. “Those voters are still out there, and they’re still independent,” Curtis continues. “We’re calling them. By 2009 we hope to be positioned to draft a major independent to run for governor.”

The collective political wisdom in Texas suggests that Strayhorn will not enter another gubernatorial fray. Friedman, who described himself as a “bad loser” after the 2006 election, has said that he plans to run as a Democrat; *Texas Monthly*’s Burka believes that his former colleague is “a lot less appealing” ever since he abandoned his “iconoclast” persona during the 2006 campaign for that of a conventional candidate, complete with position papers. “You’re seeing some realignment in Texas,” Burka adds. “Not so much toward the Democrats but away from the Republicans – people who regard themselves as independents.” These Texans, he says, “have a distaste for ideology. Much of the concern about Iraq is not simply about whether the war is moral or not, but the reason for going to war was not based on policy objectives but ideological bias.”

“Independents’ power is growing,” Curtis says. “Consultants are looking at numbers and issues, and they’re figuring out that they need to talk with us. Obama figured it out in 19 open primary states. They see the power of independents, because Obama made it real. People who are running for office are coming to us.”

Among them is Joe Jaworski. A former city councilman in Galveston, his tenure brought to a close by term limits, the well-funded Jaworski is running for the Texas state senate from District 11. Projecting himself as an independent Democrat, he is seeking IT’s endorsement.

“He’s started pursuing us,” Curtis reports. “He knows that he can’t win in that district without independents. I told him that what indies want, besides recognition, and reforms like Initiative and Referendum, is serious opposition to the Trans-Texas Corridor.”

The 4000 mile-long, 1200 foot-wide toll road is the Texas section of the proposed mega-highway – a crucial piece of the NAFTA master plan – that would start at Mexican ports (where Chinese goods whose ultimate destination is in North America are already being trans-shipped) and make its way north, devouring small farms, manufacturing jobs and local tax dollars as it goes.

“It will hurt everyone in Texas who drives or eats,” Curtis says bluntly. Independent Texans is calling for a congressional investigation into the political corruption, wedded to multinational profiteering, that has given birth to the Corridor. “This is our where-the-rubber-meets-the-road issue,” she explains. “It’s why we need political reform.”

Earlier this year Curtis attended a series of hearings on the Corridor that were held throughout East Texas. “That’s where ‘bubbas’ – rural, mostly white, conservative working class Texans – were getting the shaft from Governor Perry and the Texas Department of Transportation with their schemes to seize East Texans’ land and heritage,” the fiery IT founder charges. The wildly unpopular Republican governor, a major booster of the Corridor, won a second term in 2006 with 39% of the vote; without term limits to rein him in, he has recently announced that he will run for reelection in 2009. Harvey Kronberg believes that Rick Perry’s support for the TTC is one reason that independents “no longer feel at home in the Republican Party.” Meanwhile, says Curtis, “some Democratic leaders are getting smart, like the Republicans used to be – they’re coming to see that if they want to win elections they have to partner in some way with the independents. The Democratic Party is another matter. I suspect they’re where they’ve always been at, which is ‘independents don’t exist.’”

In 2006, independents succeeded in joining the Corridor issue to what Curtis calls the “independent revolt”: approximately 612,000 “bubbas” in east and central Texas voted for Strayhorn or Friedman, both of whom had strenuously opposed the monster road. “These Texans were, and still are, desperate for someone who will fight for them and their way of life,” she argues. “Many pleasantly surprised us as Obama-positive. We call ourselves ‘Bubbas for Obama!’ Our job now is to keep building bridges – non-tolled, of course! – between them and black voters.” NEO

# Is the Senator Leading a Movement, or Just an Interesting Campaign?

## The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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Richard Halicks

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*Following the Democratic primaries on Super Tuesday in early February, it was clear that Barack Obama had held his own against the vaunted Clinton machine. In this excerpt from a longer article in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Richard Halicks considers whether Obama's emerging strength constituted "an actual movement" or was "just an interesting political campaign."*

February 10, 2008 — After he'd fought Hillary Clinton to something resembling a draw on Super Tuesday, Barack Obama stood on his home soil of Illinois and declared: "Our time has come. Our movement is real. And change is coming to America."

Obama's "movement" might still founder under the disciplined assault of Hillary Clinton's campaign. But until that time, it is powered in large part by the inexhaustible idealism of young American voters, who are turning out in extraordinary numbers in the Democratic primaries. In Georgia, for example, people 18 to 29 as a percentage of all voters increased from 11 percent in the 2004 primary to 17 percent last week. The increase was typical of other primary states, and in nearly all cases, the majority of that younger vote went to Obama.

"It looks a bit like 1972," said Thomas Patterson, professor of government and the press at Harvard's Shorenstein Center and author of *The Vanishing Voter* (2002). The year before, in the midst of the Vietnam War, the states had ratified the 26th Amendment, lowering the voting age to 18. "There was nearly 50 percent turnout among young voters," Patterson said of the '72 election. "We've never been back to that level before, but we could get there this time."



So. Is Obama's candidacy an actual movement or just an interesting political campaign? Movements, of course, usually form around ideas, not people. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of the towering figures of the 20th century, but the movement he led was even greater than he was.

Still, many of the young people backing Obama aren't just supporters. They're believers.

"I've seen it among young kids," said John Geer, political science professor at Vanderbilt University. "And I'm not talking about 18-year-olds. I'm talking about 10-year-olds. They like Barack. Maybe not for very reasonable reasons — they're 10. But there's interest there as well, and it's really quite amazing."

Scholars who have studied U.S. movements suggest that Obama is, indeed, part of a movement, but one that he didn't start.

This "movement" began with the country itself. The founders had a narrow notion of citizenship — as the preserve of white male landowners. But that notion rapidly evolved.

"The abolitionists were the first generation to conceptualize what it meant to be an American in the modern sense of the word; that to be an American meant to be rich, poor, black, white, male, female," said Omar H. Ali, assistant professor of history at Towson University, near Baltimore. "They had a new vision of the founding documents, to extend the notion of all men being created equal to all people being created equal. Those are really the founding fathers and mothers of our country."

This impulse toward democracy, toward fairness for all, has animated many movements in American history — the Populists, whose presidential candidate won a million votes in 1892; the Progressives, who advocated an activist government to remedy social ills, in the early 1900s; and certainly the civil rights movement of the mid-20th century.

Ali, author of the forthcoming *In the Balance of Power: Independent Black Politics and Third-Party Movements in the United States* (Ohio University Press, 2008), believes that Obama has tapped into the same rich vein that produced the Populists, the Progressives and the civil rights movement.

"The thing that is most captivating about Obama is that he's speaking in nonpartisan terms," he said. "He's not speaking solely as a Democrat. He's speaking as an American who wants to rally fellow Americans around something wider, bigger, more hopeful."

## FUELED BY INDEPENDENTS

Jackie Salit, editor of *The Neo-Independent* magazine and *independentvoting.org*, concurs that Obama is tapping into a movement that is much larger than himself. But, seen through her lens, that movement is of independent voters.

She notes that independents comprise between 35 and 40 percent of American voters, and that their numbers continue to grow.

"You look for signs that new kinds of partnerships are emerging and becoming viable in the mainstream," Salit said. "And to me, one of the very interesting partnerships that is emerging is what I would call the black and independents alliance."

"Obama is the spokesperson for it. He is the candidate around whom this has galvanized. He does have a feel — and I think independents respond very strongly to this — for why it is that so many people are not Democrats or Republicans."

In this key respect, Salit maintains, Obama is starkly different from Clinton.

"She comes out of a different tradition. She's a core-constituency Democrat; I don't think she has a feel for or, frankly, a respect for the fact that so many people have a distaste for party politics. I think she likes party politics. She and her husband have built a career on it."

Salit notes that Obama and Republican John McCain — the latter has clinched his campaign, while the former could still lose his — are both popular among independents. McCain's identification with the war in Iraq has hurt him with independent voters, she said, but his own independent streak is still appealing to many Americans.

"Given McCain does have a history of appeal to independent voters, that makes it all the more important for Democrats to select a candidate who can coalesce with those voters," she said. NEO

*Richard Halicks is a staff writer for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.*

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# A Woman of Faith: Author, Activist, Christian Marcia Ford Speaks Out

Phyllis Goldberg

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**I**n the Preface to *We the Purple: Faith, Politics, and the Independent Voter*, Marcia Ford describes herself as “every partisan politician’s worst nightmare – a registered independent. Wildly unpredictable in my voting habits over the last three decades and more, I have cast ballots for Democrats, Republicans, independents, and assorted loose cannons. I have also cast ballots against Democrats, Republicans, independents, and assorted loose cannons,” she explains. “People like me have come to be known as purple voters – neither Republican red nor Democratic blue...”

Purple, Ford’s 20th book, is a carefully researched and thoughtful look at independent voters from the perspective of a born-again political activist and evangelical Christian with unorthodox opinions and an irreverent style who delights in skewering the conventional wisdom. Here she is, rejecting the assumption that independents who vote for Democrats (or Republicans) are “really” Democrats (or Republicans):

*My reaction to the [2006] midterm results went like this: I was glad that the balance of power shifted; the party in power on November 7 had for years displayed an unconscionable measure of arrogance, and they needed to be ousted. But was I euphoric that it was the Democrats who clearly won the day? Not really. Bear in mind that to me, the fact that the lawmakers who needed to be voted out were all Republicans and that those who would take their seats were Democrats was purely a technicality.*

Purple is full of intriguing portraits of independent activists, anecdotes, and analysis, but it is Marcia Ford’s voice – the voice of someone passionately engaged with her faith, and with the world – that you hear after you put down her book. In April, Neo depu-

ty editor Phyllis Goldberg spoke with *We the Purple’s* author, who makes her home in Colorado, about how she sees both.

**NEO:** How do you see the connection between your religious beliefs and your political views?

**MF:** First, if you’re a person of faith, you have no choice but to bring your faith into your politics. By that I don’t mean having an automatic position on a few so-called “values” issues. I feel like my faith gives me a moral perspective on every issue – poverty, health care, corporate control of Congress. The amount of money spent on campaigns, the win-at-all-costs approach to elections, are the antithesis of my moral worldview.

I believe very strongly in the concept of hope – and that has nothing to do with Obama. I wrote a book on hope before I knew who Barack Obama was! My faith makes me more hopeful about politics, and about the possibility that we – America – can be better than we are today. If I didn’t have that hope I’d be bitter, angry.

My faith gives me a different perspective on government. I believe in the concept of servant-hood, which is fundamental to the entire body of Scripture, both the Old Testament and the New. I believe that the Founding Fathers wanted to create a servant government. Throughout the founding documents there’s evidence that the government was founded to serve the population.

**NEO:** Where did you grow up?

**MF:** I was born in Florida. My parents moved to New Jersey when I was an infant. I grew up in Millville, an industrial town in south Jersey. My father owned a produce market. My mother worked as a seamstress, and a waitress.



*Marcia Ford's journey (clockwise from upper left): on her wedding day, in kindergarten, in high school, honeymooning and today.*

**NEO:** What role did religion play in the life of your family?

**MF:** My father had had a very bad experience with the church. His attitude was that churchgoers were hypocrites, and that pastors had cushy jobs because they only had to work an hour a week. My mother was very devout. She took us to whatever church was within walking distance of where we lived, because she didn't drive. But she made sure that the churches we went to had lots of activities for kids. During the time that I was growing up my mother had some kind of spiritual reawakening. It was obvious that religion was her joy. I was a cynical teenager, but she didn't judge me. She prayed for me. Knowing that I was loved in that way meant a lot to me.

**NEO:** Were your parents politically active?

**MF:** No!! Not at all. My father was probably as cynical about politics as he was about church. I don't remem-

ber ever hearing my mother say anything about politics. I don't even know if they ever voted.

**NEO:** What brought you back to religion?

**MF:** During college – this was the Sixties – I had become part of the counterculture. Around my junior year I sort of hit rock bottom. I really felt like God wouldn't have me. It took a biker preacher to convince me that I was okay with God and that God was okay with me. A few years later I became involved with a Christian commune, a hippie version of church. Eventually I joined an evangelical church and became totally immersed in church life. Church became my life.

**NEO:** What impact did the rise of the Moral Majority have on you and your church?

**MF:** I was in a non-denominational evangelical church that totally bought into the whole thing. In its infancy, this was not such a bad thing. We – evangelicals –



thought of ourselves as the underdog. We were. Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson were speaking up for us. In the beginning we were just grateful. Now I think maybe we should have stayed the underdog. I've come to see the harm that can come from power. As they started to gain political power, many of us got nervous. We were being required to walk in lockstep with them, and we objected. It's one thing to have your faith inform your political views. But here were these religious leaders going around telling the rest of the world how to live.

It turned out that we had good reason to be nervous. When my church became partisan, part of the whole Moral Majority mindset, I would hear things coming out of my pastor's mouth that I knew he didn't believe. He had bought into this *you-have-to-buy-the-whole-package, you-can't-just-pick-and-choose* thing. I saw that so often – mostly with the religious Right, but also in mainline and more liberal churches. There was no room for flexibility or spontaneity: *You're either with us or against us*. When George Bush said that a few years ago about the war on terror, every evangelical ear perked up. We had heard it before. We knew what he meant, and we knew he was talking to us, in our language.

**NEO:** How did you come to be an independent?

**MF:** I really wasn't very political after the Vietnam War. I had voted for [George] McGovern, and opposed the war. When I became a reporter and began covering politics, even on a local level, I felt that my credibility and integrity were at stake if I were at all partisan. So I adopted an independent mindset. I actually became non-political – I lost interest in politics – in part because the political stuff in the church left me cold. But around 2000, 2001, I began to come out of the closet as an independent. Prior to the 2004 election I belonged to a church that was Republican...every sermon during election season was political. I also attended a small group in another church, which was split right down the middle, and nearly fell apart completely. Because I belonged to the Republican church, everyone in the second church figured that I must be a Republican – although I wasn't. Meanwhile I had begun attending a prayer center that held silent retreats, which I loved. One night the silence was lifted and we were allowed to talk during dinner. The conversation was all about John Kerry, and it was simply assumed that everyone present must be a Democrat – although I wasn't. I realized how partisanship was affecting my spiritual life. I was living in Florida at the time, and I was basically without a church...I dropped out. I didn't talk about politics with anyone. I felt that politics had ruined my church life.

Eventually I found CUIP\* by googling “independent

politics.” I knew that I was totally not a partisan person. I knew that the system had to change before anything else could change. And I discovered that I wasn't alone...there were other people who were also independents, and their way of thinking was like mine.

**NEO:** What are your views on the “choice vs. life” debate – women's right to choose versus the right to life from the moment of conception?

**MF:** I have witnessed the after-effects of abortion. I think it's one of the saddest situations that we have in our country – that it's so easy, that it's used as a means of birth control. I think it's an issue that we have to approach with compassion. Look at the women, and the men, who are affected. There are fathers who have no say in what happens to their child. I don't look at this as a legislative issue. It's difficult and complicated. We should not have as many abortions as we do.

I have a real problem with the abortion debate because it seems to come to the forefront every four years, at election time – although not so much in this election, thankfully. The typical attitude is *you're either for us or against us*. It's used to distract the electorate from the fact that Congress and the president aren't doing their jobs – to steer our attention in a different direction from the war in Iraq, poverty, health care...I don't think *Roe v. Wade* is going to be overturned. So let's move on, let's move forward.

**NEO:** In the book, you note that indies are “quietly shaking up the political landscape.” Please elaborate.

**MF:** Thanks in large part to CUIP – and to the Internet – independent activists are networking like never before. One of the ways we're shaking up the political landscape is by focusing on what we agree on, such as the need for political and electoral reform, rather than wasting our time fighting over social issues that we'll never agree on or insisting that all independents need to support a specific candidate. We're getting things done because we're keeping each other informed and supporting each other; the nationwide support by independents of the New Hampshire independents' recent legislative battle is an excellent example of that.

I purposely use the word “quietly” because we're not, as Jon Stewart once said on *The Daily Show*, the kind of people who would take to the streets with our fists raised in the air, shouting “Be reasonable!” Sometimes I feel like all our hopes and dreams for an effective government can be reduced to those two words: be reasonable. We should add those words to every oath of office. **NEO**

\*Committee for a Unified Independent Party

# Former Hopeful Lenora Fulani Among Those Thrilled as Obama Becomes First Black Nominee

**BlackAmericaWeb.com**

**Jackie Jones and Sherrel Wheeler Stewart**



June 4, 2008 — Roger Wilkins has seen a lot of history in his 76 years.

The nephew of the late NAACP executive director Roy Wilkins, a lawyer and civil rights activist in his own right and an assistant U.S. attorney general in Lyndon Johnson's administration, spent his first 12 years of life in segregated communities in Kansas City, MO and in Harlem.

It was the kind of segregation, "in which race was just thrown into your face every day, powerful messages that said that you were no good, you weren't born any good and you would never be any good," he said.

"The suggestion that a black person would become president in my lifetime never crossed my mind because it couldn't," Wilkins said.

Now it can.

On Tuesday, Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois became the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, the first black man to do so and a strong candidate to do what was once unthinkable: become the nation's first black president.

And Obama basked in that historic moment.

"Millions of voices have been heard. And because of what you said — because you decided that change must come to Washington; because you believed that this year must be different than all the rest; because you chose to listen not to your doubts or fears," he told an audience in St. Paul, MN, announcing his victory, "but to your greatest hopes and highest aspirations, tonight we mark the end of one historic journey with the beginning of another — a journey that will bring a new and better day to America."

"The historic significance of this is that the nod has to be given to the American people, and I mean all of us: White, black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, everybody — because this is a country which really does have some written-down principle from the Declaration of Independence...to the Constitution that in itself created the sense that American citizens had the right and responsibility to make the place better than they found it," Wilkins told *BlackAmericaWeb.com*.

Rep. Shirley Chisholm (1972), the Revs. Jesse Jackson (1984, 1988) and Al Sharpton (2004), former Sen. Carol Moseley Braun (2004) and Republican Alan Keyes (2000, 2004, 2008) all tossed their hats in the ring previously, but until this year, very few people ever thought the leading candidates for the highest office in the land would include a black person.

Moseley Braun sought the Democratic nomination for president in 2004, but this year, she is staying clear of the process. "I am not a politician. I am not commenting on politics," she told *BlackAmericaWeb.com*. "I am focusing on my organic foods business and on healthy living."

In February 2007, however, she had these words for Obama: "You've got to chart your own course. It will not be the same as it was for me, for Jesse or for Shirley Chisholm," she said. "(Obama) has to get through the early primaries. That is where the political class is most engaged. If you are embraced, you do well."

"Shirley Chisholm and Jesse (Jackson) were kind of the foreparents of what we're seeing now. Chisholm was this black woman from Brooklyn who could stand up and say, I can run for president of the United States. Shirley didn't win, but she set some people to thinking," said Wilkins, who was a senior adviser to Jesse Jackson

*Photo: Lenora Fulani and supporters at the African American Day Parade, NYC.*

in his first campaign and who recently retired as the Clarence J. Robinson Professor of History and American Culture at George Mason University in Virginia.

“As a senior adviser to Jesse in ’84, I thought Jesse was a terrific teaching vehicle because he’s just as smart as they come, and I thought a serious run by Jesse would be a lesson to black people and white people that black people are smart enough to be president. And he did that,” Wilkins said.

Jackson was traveling in Tanzania and could not be reached for comment. But in 2007, the longtime civil rights leader said of Obama, “he has to address issues that relate to people and help change the course of America and its role in the world.

“When I was running, I was running for change,” Jackson told *BlackAmericaWeb.com*. “I was hoping I could win, but what I really wanted to do was to change the national debate.”

So did political reformer Lenora Fulani.

“When Americans choose a president, we are making a statement about the person we select. But at certain times in history, we are also making a statement about ourselves. In my opinion, 2008 is that kind of election. I

think the American people – black, Latino, white, immigrant, poor, middle class and rich, are not only looking for a change in the White House. We want to change the way we relate to one another,” Fulani said Tuesday.

“When I ran for president as an independent in 1988 and became the first African American and first female to gain admission to the presidential ballot in all 50 states, I was not running a campaign to win,” Fulani told *BlackAmericaWeb.com* in an email. “The chances of a radical black female activist and developmental psychologist being elected president were somewhere between zero and none. I was running to build and to lay a foundation for an independent movement. In that campaign, I saw that Americans from all walks of life and from all communities were beginning to question the old categories, the old paradigms and the old-style of partisan politics.

“I think Barack Obama’s achievements are historic,” Fulani said, “not simply because he is about to become a major party nominee, but because he tapped into that deep desire that people have to create something new in American politics. The black community has been – and will continue to be – a major force in that creative process.”

— Continued on page 35

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## The Rise of the Black Independent

by Dr. Lenora Fulani

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The following is an excerpt from a forthcoming article

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South Carolina was to be the Clinton firewall with black voters. The Clinton campaign put black political operatives on payroll and projected itself into the black churches. Pastors and deacons circulated the seemingly scriptural idea that this was “Hillary’s Time.”

Wayne Griffin, a black elected official in Greer, a small businessman and a longtime independent who chairs the South Carolina Independence Party, heard the Clinton rumblings and thought the odds were in her favor. But as an independent Griffin was repelled by the Clintonian style of politics. He decided to set up the first committee of its kind – Independents for Obama – and as South Carolina is an open primary

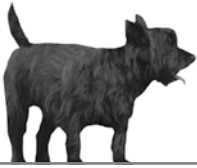
state, began to popularize the idea that Obama’s call to “turn the page” fit with independents’ desire to overcome partisanship and reform the political system. He ran radio commercials promoting his endorsement, receiving hundreds of supportive phone calls in response.

But it wasn’t until black support for Obama – driven by independents and insurgents – began to creep up that the Clintons were forced to come out swinging. Bill Clinton called Obama’s campaign “the biggest fairy tale I’ve ever heard” and repeatedly reminded reporters that Jesse Jackson had won South Carolina twice – suggesting that a black non-contender could easily

— Continued on page 35



# Is This The Rainbow We've Been Waiting For?



Jacqueline Salit



I've been an organizer of political independents for 30 years. The idea that independents are emerging "game changers" in American politics was not in fashion for most of that time. Back in 1980, I campaigned for a black independent running for Congress in Brooklyn in a district that was majority minority. The incumbent, a Democrat, was white. (The era of Democratic Party racial paternalism had not yet drawn to a close.)

My candidate lost the election. No surprise there. Most everyone in Brooklyn – black or white – voted for Democrats. That same year, John Anderson, an Illinois congressman who split from the Republican Party, ran for president as an independent and polled 7% of the vote. Barry Commoner, the popular environmental scientist, ran for president on a Citizens Party/Consumer Party ticket and polled a quarter of a percent. Gus Hall, chairman of the Communist Party, ran too, the third of his four tries.

On that 1980 Election Day in Brooklyn it poured down rain in what seemed like biblical proportions. The campaign workers were drenched, body and soul – the latter because the candidate, the head of a minority construction workers organization, had taken off, presumably for warmer, drier climes, that very day. But we hung in because ours was a lofty goal – building a community base for an independent political movement. The candidate was more of a convenience than a necessity, and a good thing, too, because this candidate was about as reliable as a pair of pantyhose "guaranteed not to run." He was supposed to, but didn't. The stockings invariably do.

We sat in our overly large campaign office overlooking a grim and grey Flatbush Avenue and tallied up election results phoned in from the field. I glanced over at the small black and white TV set shoved into a corner behind boxes of unused literature. The results of the national election were pouring in. I remember noting that Anderson, Commoner and Hall rated bare-



ly a mention. I'm sure I took some perverse comfort in that fact, politically incorrect though it may have been. After all, my campaign barely registered with the candidate, let alone with the media. But I was too busy to muster up any requisite solidarity and returned to the task at hand.

Looking up at the little TV again a half hour later, I saw that Ronald Reagan had been elected president. I immediately flashed on two things. First, that the Democratic Party was in shambles, along with the progressive movement that, coming out of the turbulent 1960s, had struggled to develop mainstream political power. Reagan's hard core conservatism had eclipsed them. Second, I remember realizing that it didn't make a bit of difference that our candidate might be sunning himself on some Caribbean island. Because we – my colleagues and I – had begun a decades-long experiment in molding an independent political movement from the bottom up. Where would that lead? We had no real idea. We just knew that traditional political progressivism was stone cold dead.

It would have been difficult, actually impossible, for anyone at that point to see that the coming 30-year project of rebuilding the Democratic Party and the 30-year project of establishing the independent movement as a beachhead for a new progressivism would run on parallel tracks until they converged at the combustible crossroads of the 2008 presidential election. History doesn't often tell you what it's going to do. But meet up they did.



## II

Here's a curious feature of the 2008 presidential election season. It started out in early 2007 with a major league hullabaloo over the possibility of a significant independent presidential candidacy. There was the ceaseless media fanfare over whether or not New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg, who re-registered as an independent last July, was going to decide to run and spend a billion dollars on an independent campaign. He didn't. And there was Unity08, the project designed by Beltway veterans Doug Bailey, Gerald Rafshoon and Hamilton Jordan.

Unity08 hoped to acquire ballot lines in 30+ states, recruit ten million dissatisfied Democrats and Republicans, together with independents, to participate in a virtual nominating process. Thereby a Unity ticket, a combo of a Democrat, Republican and/or an

independent, would be chosen, ballot access completed in the remaining states and the ticket would go on to capture the White House. Unity08 fell well short of its goals, in part, its founders say, because of a Federal Election Commission ruling limiting the size of contributions it could accept. They all but closed their doors in January when Bailey and Rafshoon left to form an equally ill-fated Draft Bloomberg Committee.



Jordan, the architect of Jimmy Carter's 1976 rise to the presidency who died of cancer in May at the age of 63, reflected on the Unity08 effort in remarks at the Atlanta Press Club earlier this year. He acknowledged that Unity08's plans to spawn a third-party presidential candidacy were played out. "I saw a perfect storm of events," he said. But with John McCain and Barack Obama the expected major party nominees, Jordan reflected, "I think the oxygen for an independent candidacy or third-party movement basically is gone now."

I never met Jordan but I did come to know Doug Bailey a bit over the course of several meetings in the early stages of the Unity08 process. Unity's philosophy, not uncommon in some quarters of the independent movement, was that the power of dissatisfied partisans and independent voters lies at the "center," in other words, in the rejection of ideological "extremes" and in their embrace of the politics of moderation. By restoring moderation via a centrist independent ticket, Unity08 believed the party system could be rehabilitated.

The Unity08 strategy mesmerized the media but not the populace. And while the FEC ruling did hurt its fundraising, there were other reasons Unity did not take hold. Public dissatisfaction with government and the political process is a response to the partisan elites in Washington – Republican and Democrat – who protect special interests rather than solve problems. It is not about the search for moderation or rehabilitation. When gas is \$4 a gallon or your kid is going to a lousy school, you don't exactly feel "moderate" about it.

For some analysts and political actors, the fact that independents have previously split our support between Republicans and Democrats in presidential elections (e.g. in 2004 independents split 49/48 between Kerry and Bush) means that we are at the center. How that qualifies as evidence of centrism, rather than as evidence that independents have spanned the political spectrum from right to left, is a mystery to me. Beginning with the 2006 midterm elections, however, independents began to develop more of a consensus view and split 59/37 for

## December 20, 2007: CNN Coverage of the New Hampshire Primaries

***CNN: Democratic presidential hopeful Senator Barack Obama is taking aim at people like Russ Ouellette, an independent who's supporting Obama. Obama is trying to win over more people like him by promising to reform ethics in Washington. And he's sending a signal to independents that he can reach across the political aisle.***



***OBAMA: If there's a Republican out there who is the best person for any particular cabinet position or any administrative agency that's going to make a difference, then I will make that appointment...***

Democratic congressional candidates. The pivotal issue was the war in Iraq, and independents had turned against the war. As CNN's William Schneider commented: "We haven't seen that big a vote for one party among independents since exit polling began about 30 years ago. In previous elections...the swing voters have divided evenly, so who cares?"

Neither Bloomberg nor Unity08 captured the imagination of most independents, a necessary precondition for launching a successful "third way" presidential bid. But independents have been a force in the presidential process nonetheless. Gravitating in a progressive direction, and "lifting up" candidates arguing for a new politic and a new direction for the country, independents shaped the primary season in some startling ways. Approximately 65% of independents who voted in open primary or open caucus states chose to vote in the Democratic rather than the Republican contests. But most conspicuous is the fact that Barack Obama attracted substantial support from independents and

would not be the Democratic Party nominee but for the backing of an estimated 57% of independent voters who cast ballots in the Democratic Party contests where non-aligned voters were allowed to vote.

How does this translate in terms of the contest between Obama and Hillary Clinton? Obama's margin in the popular vote was 281,370 out of a total of almost 33 million cast. If all primaries and caucuses had excluded independents, Senator Clinton would have led in the popular vote (not counting Florida or Michigan) by 373,910.<sup>1</sup>

Independents also had a decisive impact on the Republican side. John McCain's near miraculous regeneration was made possible by a slingshot effect after New Hampshire, an open primary state where he had roots among the 44% of the electorate who are independents. He pulled enough of those votes to jump to the head of the Republican pack. Ron Paul ran strongly with independents throughout the primary season, in no small part because of his outspoken opposition to the Iraq war. McCain's capacity to attract large scale support from independents in the general election is doubtful, in light of his support for the war and his closeness to Bush.

1. This impact analysis of independent voters is based on exit poll data furnished to the media by Edison Research Associates. The data is available on major political websites (e.g., CNNPolitics.com, MSNBC.com). Pollsters asked a statistically valid sample of presidential primary voters: "No matter how you voted today, do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an independent or something else." Data were compiled on what percentage of the participants in the primary self identified themselves as "independent or something else" and for which candidate they voted. The above analysis is an arithmetic extrapolation of this data, computed in the states whose Democratic presidential primary was open to independents.



**OUELLETTE:** *And that's great. But I don't think being independent means just reaching across to Republicans.*

**OBAMA:** *Why...well, that includes independents. I mean, independents even better.*



### III

Winston Churchill once famously described Franklin Delano Roosevelt's decision to join Britain on the battlefield against Hitler and the Nazis thusly: "You can always count on Americans to do the right thing," Churchill said, "after they've tried everything else." I might be tempted to say something similar about the Democratic Party's plan to relate to independents (depending of course, on what it does).

In 2004, the Democrats tried mightily to win the presidential election for John Kerry by energizing and mobilizing their core constituencies. The lessons from the brutal loss of Ohio were not lost on the Obama camp. Would-be kingmaker George Soros poured millions of his billions into ACT (Americans Coming Together) to bring out organized labor and other traditionally Democratic urban voters for Kerry, only to be eclipsed by Karl Rove's suburban/exurban vote pulling machine.

In 2008 Hillary and Bill, partisans to the end, were blind to the need to move "outside the box," so they never saw that the Obama strategy to round up delegates in the "red" caucus states would put them at a severe disadvantage – one from which they never recovered. They also underes-

timated the extent to which independents would come to influence Obama and shape his anti-Washington, we-need-reform, it's-time-for-a-change message, a message that helped him bond with a majority of this crucial group of voters.

That bonding was not one-sided, meaning that the 30-year project of up-from-the-bottom independent organizing had grown sufficiently to give independents the capacity to articulate a reform vision and leverage their position. Locally based, nationally linked independent voter groups engaged the presidential candidates from the earliest moments of the primary and caucus season. Their message was clear – independents want our own voice, we are not merely swing voters, we have an agenda for political reform and we want the presidential candidates to recognize that and to recognize us. The New Hampshire Committee for an Independent Voice, American Independent Movement of Idaho, Massachusetts' Coalition of Independent Voters, California's *IndependentVoice.org*, Independent Texans, North Carolina Independents for Change, the Alabama Independent Movement, the South Carolina Independence Party, Georgia iMove, Independent Pennsylvanians, South Dakota Voice of Independents, and many more such groups, branded themselves as the emerging spokespersons for the larger movement







of independents. Many of them backed Obama and campaigned to bring out an independent vote in the open primary and caucus states.

Barack Obama is the Democratic nominee and if he is elected president of the United States, it will be because the Democrats broke out of their partisan isolationism *and* because independents materialized a sufficient level of political self-determination to become recognizable, if minor (still very minor), players in the major party game.

But a new dynamic sets up a new acid test. For as surely as the Democratic Party had to turn to independents to navigate its way back to power, it will also look to absorb the nascent independent movement as soon as it gets the chance. In short order, the mettle and the tactical acuity of the independent movement will be tested.

#### IV



It was the summer of 1980, just a few months before the election when my congressional candidate would disappear, as would the Democrats' hold on the White House. Someone – I don't remember who – had given me a floor pass to the Democratic Party National Convention at Madison Square Garden. The atmosphere was strained the day I went. Jimmy Carter survived a challenge from Ted Kennedy and became the party's nominee, but many Democrats were already predicting that the weakened incumbent would not survive the Reagan assault in November. Somewhere in between speeches and balloting, I ran into Stanley Friedman, boss of the Democratic organization in the Bronx.

I had crossed paths with Friedman a year earlier in 1979, when he had skipped over the senior black state senator, Joe Galiber, in his choice for Bronx borough president. There was a vacancy because the incumbent had been sent to jail. A white loyalist had gotten the party nod (it was, as I said, still the era of racial paternalism) and Galiber was in the mood for a fight. He approached a union of welfare recipients – the New York City Unemployed and Welfare Council – about supporting his insurgent bid against the Friedman candidate in the primary. The Council had close ties to the fledgling independent movement and a deal was struck: we independents would back Galiber against his own party machine; then, win or lose the primary, Galiber would run as an independent in the general election.

Friedman's candidate won the Democratic primary, Galiber continued his run as an independent and

came in second, carrying the South and Central Bronx, which was largely black and Hispanic. The Democratic organization held onto the seat. But it was rattled by the strength of the new alliance between black and Latino voters and independents.

When I saw Friedman at the Garden, he was suave and urbane in a local kingpin sort of way. After a hesitant handshake (at the time party bosses were just learning how to shake a woman's hand) he made me an offer. "Why don't you join with us?" he asked me. "Why don't you become a Democrat? You've made your point. Now you can be a serious player."

I smiled (I was just learning how to smile when talking to The Establishment) and replied, "No thanks, Stanley. We're going to hang in with independent politics a little longer." "OK," he shrugged, and went off to find a crony. I think it was the first time I truly understood that party bosses really don't like it when people are independent and they can't control them. Incidentally, Friedman ended up going to jail, too, for his involvement in some crazy scheme involving parking meters.

This long forgotten scene came back to me recently as I was thinking about the political blowback that invariably accompanies any expression of political power by independents. It's no accident that top New York Democrats (including, fittingly enough, Hillary Clinton) and some Republicans conspired to take control of the New York City Independence Party after its progressive local leaders put Michael Bloomberg in City Hall. Nor is it a coincidence that the Idaho Republican Party has gone to court in an effort to impose a closed primary system on voters in Idaho – a state which has always maintained a nonpartisan system – at a moment when independents have begun to use open primaries to exercise influence.

When Barack Obama becomes his party's official nominee and if he is elected President of the United States, he also becomes the head of the Democratic Party. He will set the tone for the country and for his party. And he will also set the tone for how his party relates to the independent political movement. Will the path be one of coalition? Of cooptation? Of coercion?

Independents are coming slowly, but measurably, to discover our own power. Most of us will vote for Obama in November. We'll celebrate his victory, if he wins. But when the inaugural confetti is all swept away (do they use confetti in January?) and the politics of hope are settled in at the White House, we'll have to ask ourselves a question. Is this the Rainbow we've been waiting for? **NEO**



# Independents and the Iraq War

David Belmont

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“**T**he independents are controlling the action.”  
– John McLaughlin, *The McLaughlin Group*,  
November 12, 2006

While not the first category of voters to oppose the war in Iraq, independent voters' opposition to U.S. policy in Iraq has been instrumental in changing the debate and in pushing the Democratic Party leadership to recalibrate its position.

A majority of rank-and-file Democrats expressed opposition to the American presence in Iraq within six months of the initial invasion on March 20, 2003. In a national poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in July/August 2003, Democrats said, 54%-39%, that going to war was the “wrong decision.” At this time, according to Pew, independents by 59% to 35% said that the war was the “right decision.”

In October of 2002 Democratic members of Congress had voted overwhelmingly to authorize the use of force in Iraq. They continued to voice support for the war while quibbling with the Bush administration over how it should be conducted. But Howard Dean, popular with rank-and-file Democrats and with progressive independents for opposing the Bush policy, mounted an aggressive bid for the presidential

*Washington Post* political reporters Dana Milbank and Claudia Deane wrote in June 2005: “The drop in Bush’s approval ratings on fighting terrorism came disproportionately from political independents.”

nomination in 2003/2004. After Dean surged to front-runner status, he was undone by party leaders who felt that the Democrats would not prevail with an anti-war candidate. Independents overall, while less enthusiastic about the Iraq adventure, had not yet turned fully against it.

The nomination of pro-war candidate John Kerry, despite the fact that 93% of the Democratic convention delegates were anti-war, underscored the disconnect between the party establishment and its base. This disconnect would become fertile soil for a primary bid by Barack Obama, who many felt had overshadowed Kerry at the Democrats' nominating convention in Boston in 2004 with his passionately anti-partisan address. But anti-war sentiment among the Democrats' rank and file alone would not suffice to bring about a course correction by the party.

Independents' support for the Iraq war, which began to erode during the first half of 2005, first became evident in a series of *Washington Post* polls on Bush's approval ratings on fighting terrorism. Having failed to discover weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the Bush administration had re-cast it as the new front in the War on Terror. In March of 2005, 63% of independents approved of Bush's efforts in combating terrorism. By April his approval numbers dropped to 54%. In May, only 40% of independents gave him good marks. A serious reconsideration of the war and the Bush administration's case that it made America safer was underway among independents. Citing the findings, *Washington Post* political reporters Dana Milbank and Claudia Deane wrote in June 2005: "The drop in Bush's approval ratings on fighting terrorism came disproportionately from political independents."

In July of 2005, a Pew Research poll showed independent voters tilting "negative about the decision to go to war by a 53%-43% margin." At the same time, 57% believed the U.S. would "probably or definitely succeed at establishing a stable democracy in Iraq" while 38% of independents thought "failure is likely." Still, at that point in the summer of 2005, independents were split on the issue of whether America should keep troops in Iraq. Forty-nine percent believed the U.S. should stay. Forty-seven percent wanted to bring the troops home. But clearly independents' attitudes toward the war were shifting. For Democratic politicians up for reelection in 2006, that meant they could speak more forcefully against the conflict and openly suggest timetables for withdrawal. The Democrats began to trans-

form themselves into the party of peace for the 2006 midterm congressional elections and independents responded.

Exit polling conducted by Edison Media Research indicated that the war in Iraq was the key issue in the 2006 elections and that independents were the constituency that gave the Democrats control of Congress. Nationally, independents broke 59%-37% for Democratic congressional candidates, giving Democrats control of the House of Representatives for the first time since 1994. CNN's William Schneider commented on the independent shift: "This year they really had their revenge."

But revenge is not always sweet. In a September 2007 *Washington Post* poll, only 24% of independents approved of Congress' performance, a significantly lower approval rating than even that of self-identified liberal Democrats (34%).

Anti-war independents impacted dramatically in the early presidential primaries, up to and including those held on Super Tuesday, February 5. According to exit poll data, in states that had open primaries over 60% of self-identified independents chose to vote in the Democratic primary, the lion's share of their votes going to Barack Obama, the most outspoken critic of the war among the Democratic candidates believed to have a serious shot at the presidency. Independents who chose to vote on the Republican side made their presence felt too, as anti-war Republican Ron Paul consistently garnered indie support in double digit percentages, including 29% and 51% in Iowa and Nevada, respectively.

A majority of independents continue to oppose U.S. Iraq war policy. In a recent Gallup poll released on April 8, 61% of independents supported setting a timetable for troop withdrawal, only 37% felt that the surge of U.S. troops had made the situation in Iraq better, and 63% agreed that the "U.S. made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq." NEO

*David Belmont is a ballot access expert and chief statistician for the Committee for a Unified Independent Party.*

*The research for this article was done by Lauren Ross.*

# How the Democrats Democratized, Some Delegates Became “Super,” and Independents Chose the Democratic Nominee

Matt Meiners

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**T**he Democratic Party is poised to complete its nomination process and Barack Obama will become the party's standard bearer. The story of how it happened is a bit complex. It harkens back to George McGovern and the now famous 1968 Democratic National Convention; to Ted Kennedy and his bid for the Democratic nomination in 1980. It has to do with an endless parade of nomination battles and convention fights and rule changing commissions. It is a story of the unintended consequences of allowing rank-and-file voters to choose a nominee. And, it is, in the end, the story of the rise of the independent voter in American politics, including their extraordinary influence on this year's Democratic nominating process itself.

## AN INCOMPLETE HISTORY OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY 1912-2006

To follow the path from the 1968 Chicago convention to this year's Democratic nomination contest requires a look at the party's history – a tale of a political party's fall from near absolute power and its subsequent efforts to regain that power.

During the 40 years spanning Woodrow Wilson's election in 1912 to the end of Harry Truman's second term in 1952, the Democratic Party had a near stranglehold on the office of the presidency. The election in 1952 of war hero Dwight D. Eisenhower, a Republican, as president was more of a personal triumph than a political realignment. Though the Democratic Party process was, ironically, an undemocratic one, dominated by state party insiders and committees, it had nonetheless produced nominees like Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson, who effected positive change in the nation and saw the party through from triumph to triumph.

By 1964, however, this system was showing signs of strain. Due in large part to the changing dynamics of the American electorate, wrought by the social reforms the Democrats had championed (though not necessarily conceived), the Democratic Party began to face an increasingly divided base of support.

In 1964, the year the Civil Rights Act was passed, the Democratic Party of Mississippi chose an all-white “Jim Crow” delegation to attend the national party convention. Black Democrats fought back and, along with sympathetic whites, drew a line in the sand. They formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), held a primary, and sent a mixed race delegation to the convention in Baltimore, where they challenged the official state party delegation as racist. The Credentials Committee refused to seat the unofficial, integrated delegation, but President Johnson, hoping to avoid the appearance of siding with segregationists, offered a compromise – two “at large” seats and the promise that an integrated delegation would be seated at the 1968 convention – which the MFDP rejected. The fight set in motion a back and forth between party elites and the rank and file that would last to the present day.

The 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago seated a mixed Mississippi delegation, but the position of the Democratic Party had become tenuous. Johnson’s unexpected withdrawal from the race, and the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, had left the country in turmoil and the party riven by internal divisions, largely over U.S. policy in Vietnam. As mayhem and violence broke out outside the convention, the nomination was handed to party man Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, who had not won a single primary that season. The anti-war wing of the party was incensed. Alabama Governor George Wallace, a segregationist, bolted the Democratic Party to make an independent bid, and the presidency went to Republican Richard Nixon. It was a stinging defeat

for the Democrats and it left the already wounded party in disarray.

In response to the chaos of the 1968 convention, the Democrats empaneled a committee to review the situation. Headed by South Dakota Senator George McGovern and Minnesota Congressman Donald Fraser, the commission was charged with examining the existing delegate selection rules and recommending changes aimed at broadening rank-and-file participation. Some architects of the new delegate selection process argued it was the best way of containing the unrest in and around the party.

Among the changes proposed and accepted over

time were affirmative action guidelines to ensure diverse and representative delegations, open and transparent procedures for the selection of delegates, and recommendations for proportional representation, with a 20% primary vote threshold for the awarding of delegates. By democratizing the delegate selection process Democrats hoped to build a wider base of support to retake the White House.

Though McGovern, using the new rules he helped to write, did win the Democratic nomination in 1972, the party’s broader base was hopelessly fragmented. That fragmentation, combined with a “slow-down” by major Democratic Party insiders in which labor and other core constituencies refused to pull votes for the candidate, sent him down to a spectacular defeat and Nixon was handed a second term. But the new national party rules continued to change the landscape as many state parties, in response to the requirements for open and transparent processes, adopted primary elections instead of caucuses, which were increasingly viewed as undemocratic.

In 1976 Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter, an outsider to national party elites, benefited from the McGovern-Fraser rules and the subsequent proliferation of primaries to win the Democratic nomination. Affirmative





action quotas injected women and minorities into the process, and empowered these new “identity” or “interest” groupings, often to the detriment of traditional bastions of Democratic support: organized labor and the city and state machines. In spite of the tensions within it, this new coalition propelled Carter to victory in November over the weak Republican incumbent, Gerald Ford, who succeeded Nixon after the scandals of Watergate.

To some, the Carter win seemed to validate the new delegate selection rules. But four years of recession, inflation, energy crises, real and perceived incompetence, and the international humiliation of the Iranian hostage crisis, crippled Carter going into the 1980 election. Insider Democrats knew that re-nominating Carter would mean electoral disaster in November, and the party establishment, led by Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy, was determined to prevent that disaster at all costs. Though he lacked the votes coming into the 1980 convention, Kennedy fought to change the rules so as to allow delegates pledged to Carter to reconsider, in the name of the party, and vote for Kennedy himself on the first ballot. The Kennedy play was unsuccessful, Carter was renominated, and the Democrats went down to defeat against Ronald Reagan in November.

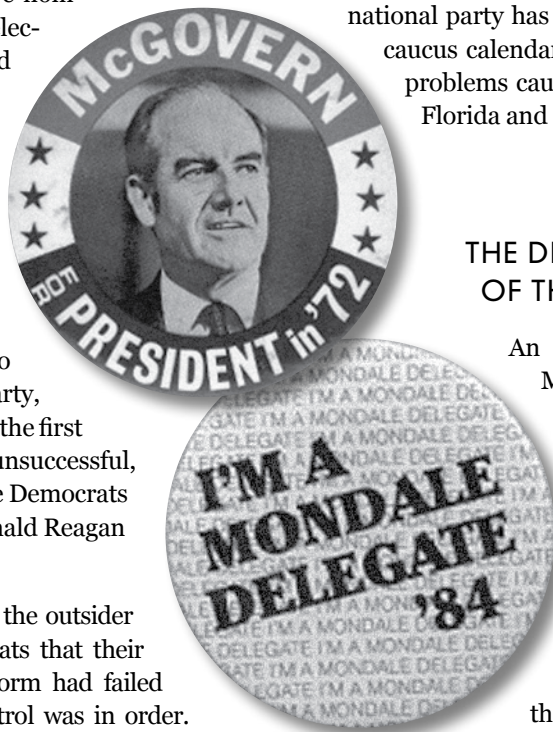
The loss of the presidency by the outsider Carter convinced many Democrats that their experiment with democratic reform had failed and a return to more party control was in order. Carter’s vice president, Walter Mondale, together with the dogged Kennedy, proposed another commission to revise the rules, choosing North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt as chairman. The Hunt Commission decided that, in the quest for greater diversity and increased participation, the McGovern-Fraser Commission had gone too far in reducing the role of party leaders and political insiders, who, they believed, better understood the strategic electoral interests of the party.

Among their proposals was the creation of a class of unpledged delegates, drawn from the ranks of the party elders, activists and elected officials, to counterbalance the populist tendencies of the rank-and-file party membership. It was thought that this balance would, by serving as a counterweight to a volatile electorate, produce

more electable candidates while still satisfying the desire most Democrats had to keep their rules democratic.

The new unpledged, or “super” delegates, played their debut role in the 1984 primary, when insurgent candidacies by Gary Hart and Jesse Jackson threatened to yield another outsider nominee over party man and rule-giver Walter Mondale. Mondale ended the primary season 40 or so delegates short of a majority. But by the time of the convention he had secured the support of enough of the “superdelegates” he himself had helped to create to win the nomination on the first ballot.

From 1984 to today the Democratic delegate selection rules have remained largely unchanged, even as the national party has had to wrestle with its primary and caucus calendar and cobble together resolutions to problems caused by disobedient state parties like Florida and Michigan.



## THE DIVIDED PARTY AND THE RISE OF THE INDEPENDENT VOTER

An upshot of the rules instituted by McGovern and Fraser was the shift away from choosing convention delegates through party-run caucuses and toward state-run primary elections. New party requirements for “open and transparent” delegate selection processes pushed state parties to shift to primaries. It is, after all, far easier to show the national party that your state’s process is open and transparent if you hold a publicly supervised election and award delegates based on the results. Thus, many state parties ceded the responsibility of running Democratic Party nominating contests to the states themselves.

When this shift took place, it had two main effects. First, it further institutionalized the two major political parties as quasi-governmental organizations. Holding *state-run* primaries, rather than *party-run* caucuses for delegate selection lent the imprimatur of the state to a party process. That conflation of politics and government can have negative effects on the quality of both, and independents and nonpartisans have growing concerns about this trend. Second, the shift away from caucuses and toward primaries opened the door, in states

The Democratic Party has been, in some respects, at odds with itself, and independents have taken advantage of this fact. The McGovern-Fraser reforms cleared the way for state-run primaries, many of which allow independents to vote.

with existing “open primary” laws, to participation by non-party members, i.e. unaffiliated independents.

There are several different types of “open primaries” and they all came into play as the McGovern-Fraser rules became institutionalized. Open primaries, those in which any voter can vote in the party primary of their choice, take place in states where there is no partisan registration. Citizens simply register to vote, with no designation of any kind. As Democrats in these open primary states shifted from caucuses to primaries, independents were automatically admitted. (It is worth noting that no state has changed from partisan registration to nonpartisan registration since Michigan made the switch in the 1930s. Only two states, Rhode Island and Utah, have changed from nonpartisan to partisan registration in the past 50 years, although Idaho Republicans are pushing for a shift now.)

States with partisan registration *can* choose to hold what are called “semi-closed” primaries in which one or both major parties *invite* unaffiliated voters to participate. The first such invitation was made by the Republican Party in Connecticut in 1984. The Democratic Party sought to block the initiative and in

1986 the case went to the Supreme Court, which upheld the rights of parties to open their primaries without addressing the issue of whether independents had a right to demand inclusion.

The unresolved issue of the right of independents to demand inclusion has only become more important over time. In the 1960s and 1970s, the number of “unaffiliated” voters in partisan registration states was at about the 5% level, but started to grow in the 1980s. By 1992, it had reached 18.3% nationally and is currently at 24.8%.

Initially, the McGovern rules only led to the creation of eight new primaries, though over time that number grew. In 1968, before the McGovern rules were in place, only 13 states held party primaries. By the next presidential cycle, the number was 21. By 1980, the total had jumped to 36 and hit a high point of 43 in 2000. In 2008, 40 states held presidential primaries, and roughly 60% of these allowed independents to vote.

It is this growing involvement of independents in open presidential primaries that has brought the Democrats to where they are today. Independents have done something unprecedented: they have, literally, decided the Democratic nomination by giving Barack Obama his competitive edge. Subtract the votes of all the independents who voted in this season’s Democratic primaries, Hillary Clinton would be well ahead in the popular vote and the likely nominee. Independent voters, leveraging the Democrats’ own delegate selection rules, became the “deciders” in this year’s primary elections.

The Democratic Party has been, in some respects, at odds with itself, and independents have taken advantage of this fact. The McGovern-Fraser reforms cleared the way for state-run primaries, many of which allow independents to vote. The Mondale-Kennedy-Hart counter-reforms were aimed at stabilizing the party and enhancing the power of party elites. On the one hand, the party has adjusted to greater voter participation and popular control. On the other hand the party desires a strong central organization and party control. In the midst of this tug-of-war, independents, in the greatest of all unintended consequences, have become the unlikely kingmakers. NEO

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## Declaring Independence

### *The Beginning of the End of the Two-Party System*

by Douglas E. Schoen

Random House, 240 pp.

Declarations about political independence are a dime a dozen these days, including from some pretty lofty places. Tom Friedman of the *New York Times* opined that an independent presidential candidate “might be able to drive a bus right up the middle of the U.S. political scene today – lose the far left and the far right – and still maybe, just maybe, win a three-way election.” Alan Greenspan, former chairman of the Federal Reserve System, observed “a vast untended center from which a well-financed independent presidential candidate is likely to emerge in 2008 or, if not then, in 2012.”

Douglas Schoen, a top tier political consultant (Bill Clinton, Jon Corzine, Mike Bloomberg), also projected the viability of an independent presidential bid in 2008 in his book *Declaring Independence: The Beginning of the End of the Two-Party System*. But unlike the pop prognosticators, he understands this is not a top-down phenomenon. Schoen is decidedly different from those who perceive us independents (40% of the country) as doing nothing but waiting for a billionaire savior. He has serious respect for independent voters and for those trying to shape a viable independent political movement into a force for progressive, post-partisan change.

Schoen has worked with and learned from the independent movement. He reports on real independents who are neither famous nor rich; real organizations without sanction or money from major party operatives or foundations; and real fights for political reforms that explicitly empower independents. “The networks of independent organizers already in place,” he writes, “would surprise most people, especially those who are confirmed Republicans and Democrats.”

Schoen takes pains to document the work of Independent Texans, the New Hampshire Committee for an Independent Voice, the Independence Party of South Carolina, *IndependentVoice.org* in California, the Minnesota Independence Party and others working on the ground to leverage the power of independents. He presents the work of Rock the Debates, a coalition of independents and third

party leaders, hammering at the restrictive nature of presidential debates and says bluntly: “The Commission on Presidential Debates will have to revise its playbook.” Schoen recognizes that there is a real independent political movement, complete with its own players, its own paradigms, successes, failures, and language.

The book’s only “wrong note” is the notion that independents are centrists. Schoen argues that America is “fundamentally a nation of moderates who want nonpartisan solutions to serious problems.” Not so. We are a nation of nonpartisans who want pragmatic solutions to serious problems.

A non-centrist approach to independent organizing, mapped out by political strategist Fred Newman, has provided the philosophical and practical framework for much of the on-the-ground organizing Schoen documents. Newman has observed that a people who achieved their independence by fighting a revolutionary war and then a bloody civil war to preserve the union and end slavery can hardly be called a “nation of moderates.” And his concept that the left/center/right paradigm is obsolete is popular among independent activists.

Ultimately, Schoen’s *Declaring Independence* rests on an important insight: “The level of dissatisfaction impacts directly and immediately on the overall functioning and, indeed, legitimacy of our system of government.” In this he may turn out to be prescient. Independents participated in record numbers to maximum effect in the presidential season, not as centrists, but as anti-establishmentarians. They chose the Democratic and Republican presidential nominees and will choose the winner in November. The disaffected made themselves stakeholders in this election and as the organized networks of independents grow, they will be in a position to demand more from those whose political fortunes they made. Schoen grasps this new political reality more than most. That alone makes this intriguing palm-sized book well worth the read. NEO

Jacqueline Salit



# Supreme Court Opens the Door to Restructuring Primary Elections

Phil Keisling and Harry Kresky

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**O**n March 18 the U.S. Supreme Court, in a resounding 7-2 decision, opened the door to a fundamental reorganization of our electoral process, breaking with a series of recent decisions that placed the rights of political parties before the rights of voters. In *Washington State Grange v. Washington Republican Party*, the Court rejected a party challenge to a state voter-passed initiative that would allow all voters, regardless of party affiliation or non-affiliation, to choose which two candidates they want to advance to a runoff election for state offices. Candidates would be permitted to list their party preference on the ballot.

This decision would allow independent voters to play the same decisive role in state elections that they have played in this year's presidential primary campaign. Along with African Americans, independents have been the engine that propelled Barack Obama into the frontrunner position. On the Republican side they gave John McCain a distinct advantage over the rest of the field.

Most importantly, they have been the catalyst for a potential new majority coalition that could take the country beyond the hyper-partisan and identity-based politics that have dominated for the past 50 years.

Unquestionably, this phenomenon is rooted in cultural and generational changes. And a restructuring of

the presidential primary process in many states has allowed these changes to impact dramatically. This year 33 states have conducted some form of open primary or caucus in which independent voters could meaningfully participate.

An important dialogue is taking place among independents and leaders in the two parties who want to broaden and deepen this process. In Oregon a coalitional effort between Democratic and Republican Party reformers and leaders of the independent movement is poised to build on the Washington success and enact an "open primary" law in Oregon.

The Oregon initiative, which submitted over 92,000 signatures to the secretary of state on May 24 for qualification to the November 2008 ballot, would abolish the party primary system similar to those that elect U.S. Senators, Congress members, governors, state legislators and other key offices in most of the 50 states. A December, 2007 poll shows Oregon voters favoring this reform by a 66%-20% margin.

It's not only in the party primary elections that the "politics of the passionate periphery" hold sway; they inevitably bleed over into how we govern ourselves once the election is over. While there are certainly exceptions, candidates in contested Republican primary elections keenly understand what issues most reso-



nate among the party faithful. (Think abortion, gays, guns, and knee-jerk opposition to taxes, government, and immigration reform.) Democrats have their own shibboleths. (Again, think abortion, gays, guns – and automatic support for public employee unions, trial attorneys and other powerful groups.) How many Democrats are willing to engage the teachers' union on issues such as tenure and meaningful performance evaluation, much less suggest there might be possible merit to ideas like school vouchers?

Abysmally low voter turnout – in most states, between 5% and 25% of all registered voters – is the norm in party primaries, which further amplifies the shrillest of partisan voices. Oregon's 2006 primary saw a 39% turnout – perhaps the nation's highest – and the median age of those voting was nearly 60!

The Oregon "One Ballot" open primary is a step beyond the arrangement the parties have permitted and even promoted in this year's presidential race. It wouldn't just let registered independents walk into the polls on Election Day, and decide which party ballot to pick and which party to declare allegiance to, even temporarily. It would let *every* voter – regardless of party affiliation, or lack thereof – vote for *any* candidate, again regardless of the candidate's registration. The top two candidates – once again, regardless of party affiliation – would then advance to the November general election.

What would it mean to broaden the primary process beyond the hyper-partisans who tend to dominate party primaries at the state level? Likely far less attention to divisive, wedge issues and "zig-zagging" as candidates navigate the very different voters in each election. It would mean giving voters a chance to develop our electoral system – from being simply a mechanism for determining which partisan will be elected to each office, to a more meaningful civic forum that can focus on our biggest challenges: a reconsideration of the position of the U.S. in the world today; ending poverty; fixing our dysfunctional health care system.

At the most practical political level, an open primary sets the stage for new electoral coalitions. Independents and reform-minded Democrats, Republicans and other party members can create common ground to forge new approaches and solutions to some of our most persistent challenges. One glaring example: the dismaying state of our public schools and the persistent achievement gap between white and minority students.

Not surprisingly, political parties, major and minor, have fought tooth and nail against such open primaries in non-presidential elections. They convinced lower federal courts to strike down open primary efforts, including the one approved by Washington State voters. Their argument boiled down to this: as legally constituted "private organizations," their "rights of association" are violated if a registered or self-affiliated "Democrat," say, ends up advancing to November because of the votes of registered independents or (gasp!) even Republicans.

In the *Washington Grange* decision, authored by Justice Clarence Thomas (who teamed with Justices Breyer, Ginsberg, Stevens and Souter, the Court's most liberal members), the Supreme Court rejected the traditional party rights argument that insufficiently distinguishes the legitimate role of parties – as associations of persons seeking to advance a particular agenda – and the dominant role the major parties have been allowed to play in our electoral and governing systems.

Justice Thomas found that an open primary did not significantly burden legitimate associational rights. The parties remain free to campaign for the candidates they prefer. However – and this is key – they are not constitutionally entitled to compel citizens to accept a system that perpetuates partisan control of elections and, in turn, partisan control of the governmental process itself.

No doubt some party officials will continue to litigate to ensure that the implementation of open primary systems is more to their liking. Justices Alito and Roberts left the door open when they concurred in the result, but urged that the Court revisit the issue once the Washington process has begun to operate.

We are heartened that Justice Thomas and his colleagues apparently heeded the wisdom of George Washington, who cautioned in his farewell address "against the baneful effects of the spirit of party generally...It exists under different shapes in all governments, more or less stifled, controlled, or repressed; but in those of the popular form it is seen in its greatest rankness and is truly their worst enemy." NEO

*Phil Keisling, a Democrat, is the former secretary of state of Oregon and a leader in the drive to enact an open primary initiative in his state ([www.oneballot.com](http://www.oneballot.com)).*

*Harry Kresky, an independent, is a New York City attorney and counsel to [independentvoting.org](http://independentvoting.org).*

# Talk/Talk

*On Sundays Neo editor Jacqueline Salit and Fred Newman, political strategist and postmodern philosopher, watch the morning TV talk shows and talk them over afterward, which is where Talk/Talk gets its name.\* Here are excerpts from the conversation they had after watching The Chris Matthews Show and This Week with George Stephanopoulos on June 8.*

\*The most recent *Talk/Talk* is available every week on [www.independentvoting.org](http://www.independentvoting.org). An archive of previous transcripts is also located on the website. For more information on Dr. Fred Newman visit [FredNewmanphd.com](http://FredNewmanphd.com).

# New Guard Politics

June 8, 2008

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**SALIT:** This is the week that Barack Obama clinched the Democratic nomination and Hillary Clinton conceded, throwing her support, as expected, behind him. The talk shows today focused on different constituencies and sub-constituencies and how you get this one and how you get that one and so on. But there was surprisingly little discussion about the changes that the Democratic Party itself is going through.

**NEWMAN:** You're surprised about how little talk there was about that?

**SALIT:** Yes.

**NEWMAN:** They don't see it that way.

**SALIT:** OK. Do you see it that way? That the Democratic Party is going through a change?

**NEWMAN:** Yes. It is.

**SALIT:** What is the change, do you think? In the broadest terms, what's going on?

**NEWMAN:** In the broadest terms, the old guard got older and they're being replaced, gradually, by a new guard. And the new guard won this campaign. The two were close to having parity. Clinton had, if not the quantitative advantage, at least a heavy duty establishment advantage. But that wasn't enough to hold back the new guard. At a basic level, that's the story. Hillary represented the old guard, Barack represented the new guard.

**SALIT:** What are the politics of the new guard? What makes them the new guard other than generational differences?

**NEWMAN:** That's really the primary difference. I don't think there are big differences on issues. In some ironic sense, there couldn't be because the old guard's biggest problem, and the reason there's an opening for a new guard, is that the old guard failed to enact the basic Democratic principles and positions.

**SALIT:** Like health care, jobs, a new foreign policy.

**NEWMAN:** Yes. So the new guard has that to hang on to. Originally stimulated by Iraq, and now by the economic downturn, it's a moment of opportunity for the Democrats and they wind up with a solid candidate – indeed someone much better than anybody expected.

**SALIT:** Is it in Obama's interest to put Hillary on the ticket?

**NEWMAN:** I don't think so. If your primary victory is largely generational, why would you blow that in the general election?

**SALIT:** Yes, you've got to reinforce your core message, not undercut it. Do you see any real problem over the long term in being able to unify the Democratic Party behind an Obama ticket?

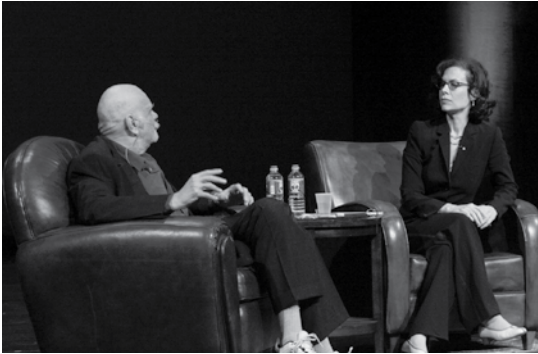
**NEWMAN:** No. There is no issue there.

**SALIT:** The debate now turns to Obama vs. McCain and the general election campaign. McCain's play is to distance himself from Bush. McCain says: *The only thing I have in common with George Bush is that I support the tax cuts and I'll keep the tax cuts going. But I've gone up against my party. I've gone up against them on immigration, on torture, on energy independence, etc.* So, says the McCain campaign, name me one example of Obama going up against the orthodoxy of his own party.

**NEWMAN:** He got the nomination.

**SALIT:** Good answer.

**NEWMAN:** If you're running a generational change campaign, that's the only credential that you can have. And it's the only one that you need. You haven't been in power, so how do you have a resume of bucking your party? No, Obama took on his own party establishment and won.



“If you’re running a generational change campaign, that’s the only credential that you can have. And it’s the only one that you need.”

**SALIT:** On Tuesday night, when Obama claimed the Democratic nomination, he devoted a section of his speech to talking about McCain’s reputation as an independent. He says we haven’t seen any evidence of that independence for the last x number of years. If you examine the polling that shows independents currently split between Obama and McCain, you derive a simple truth: if McCain can’t hold and grow his popularity with independents, he’s dead. He’s simply not viable. The Republican Party brand is so corrupted and so tarnished that it can’t carry him to victory. So he’s going to run hard for the independents. Obama has gotten broad support from independents and he intends to fight for that vote in the general election. What you have now is a situation where the leading Republican in the country and the leading Democrat in the country are both going to be getting a lot of air time defining what it is to be independent, what it is for a politician to be independent, what it is for an American to be independent, what it is for a voter to be independent, and so forth. At the same time, we’ve been working very hard to define *ourselves* and to define the things that *we* believe in: political reform, change in the political process, a new culture of conversation and coalition, a black voter and independent voter alliance. The independent movement has moved in a more progressive direction and we’ve been very actively defining ourselves as a political force. Now we’re going to be up against hundreds of millions of dollars and very, very powerful institutions, all of which are going to be devoting their energy to defining us, for their purposes. How do we begin to think about this?

**NEWMAN:** It comes down to what we mean by being an independent. McCain is projecting that he’s independent of the Bush-allied Republican Party. Obama is projecting that he’s independent of the old guard Democratic Party. The independents need to be projecting that we’re independent of both parties, because we are. Then the question that’s raised is: given that we’re independent of both, who advances our cause better, McCain or Obama? Then it’s about making political demands, particularly on Obama because independents have been more inclined to him. That’s strategically what our campaign has to look like. And we’ll see how successful we are and, by virtue of that, we’ll see how successful Obama’s going to be in November.

**SALIT:** Thanks, Fred. NEO



Obama Becomes First Black Nominee  
*continued from page 17*

In St. Paul, Obama spoke of his ability to bring together people of differing views.

"In our country, I have found that this cooperation happens not because we agree on everything, but because behind all the labels and false divisions and categories that define us; beyond all the petty bickering and point-scoring in Washington, Americans are a decent, generous, compassionate people, united by common challenges and common hopes. And every so often, there are moments which call on that fundamental goodness to make this country great again," he said.

Obama also noted the record-breaking turnouts at primary after primary during the campaign season.

"You did it because you know in your hearts that at this moment – a moment that will define a generation – we cannot afford to keep doing what we've been doing. We owe our children a better future. We owe our country a better future."

"June 3, 2008 will go down as a watershed moment in U.S. history from a social and political perspective as Barack Obama becomes the first African American

presidential nominee for any major political party," college student Jarell Mason said in a posting on the National Association of Black Journalists listserve. "Maybe this will be a sign of things to come when young people will look at political figures or those in higher academia as role models as opposed to their athletic/entertainer counterparts."

Mason told *BlackAmericaWeb.com* he is a junior communications studies major at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro and expects to graduate in 2009.

"As a college student and soon-to-be first-generation college graduate," he said, "I'm excited for what Obama brings to the table, which is an endless buffet of hope and a glass full of change, which will be overflowing once November comes." NEO

*Jackie Jones is a staff writer for BlackAmericaWeb.com*

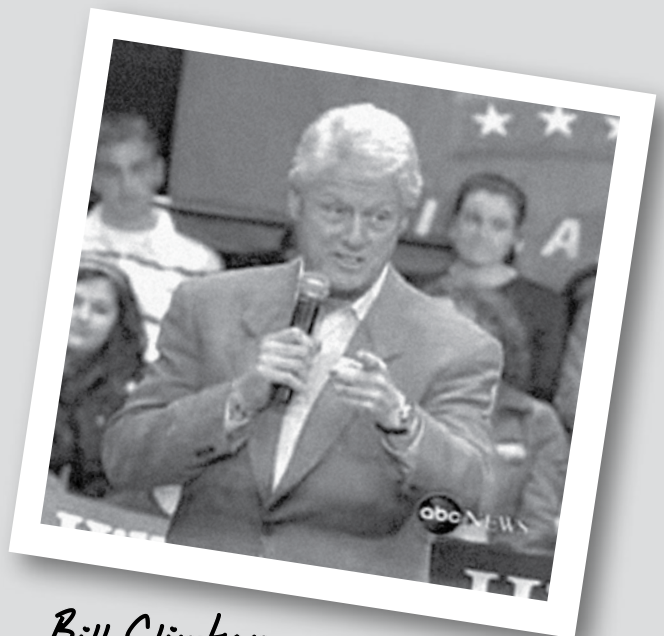
*Sherrel Wheeler Stewart is a freelance writer for BlackAmericaWeb.com*

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The Rise of the Black Independent  
*continued from page 17*

carry the state. Here were the Clintons playing the race card, demeaning a political vision based on hope, and insulting voters in the process. The response was thunderous rejection. Obama won the South Carolina primary handily. He polled 78% of the black vote. It was a shot heard round the world. The Clinton firewall had collapsed. More importantly, the quality and character of the black electorate was clearly changing.

After South Carolina, exit polling picked up a new trend for the first time in a number of Super Tuesday states. In Massachusetts 33% of black voters who cast ballots in the Democratic primary self-identified as independents. In Missouri it was 18%. In Connecticut the number was 22%, in California 14%, in New Jersey 13%, in Tennessee 17%. Among black independents, the support for Obama appears to have been astronomical. For example, in Georgia, where 12% of all African American voters in the Democratic primary were independents, 97% of those cast ballots for Obama. NEO



*Bill Clinton  
telling his fairy tale!*

*Tyra C. Cohen*

## Time to Take the Lead

North Carolina's May 6 Democratic primary may turn out to have been the defining event of the party's long-drawn-out 2008 nomination process. Barack Obama's resounding 14-point victory over Hillary Clinton – 56% to her 42% – instantly restored his momentum while marking what one analyst called “the beginning of the end” of the Clinton era. He'd won by a landslide among African Americans. And he polled an unexpectedly strong 45% of the independent vote – independents tend to vote more conservatively in North Carolina. Tyra Cohen was elated.

Six weeks earlier she had gone to an Obama organizing meeting in Fayetteville and, after listening carefully to the plan for getting out the vote, had asked: “What about independents?” A man in the audience stood up and told her: *You have to be a registered Republican or Democrat in order for your vote to count.* But Cohen knew better, North Carolina being an open primary state. “That's when I knew that I had to take the lead,” she recalls. “I decided to form North Carolina Independents for Change.”

Cohen, currently completing a Master's degree in public health, hit the ground running. Talking to people “wherever they were” – in her local beauty salon, at parties, on the street – she reminded independents that they could vote in the upcoming primaries, encouraged them to vote for Obama, and invited them to join her in building the independent movement.

In the week before the primaries Cohen took to the airwaves in a series of radio ads. On KISS 107.7 and WZFX in Fayetteville, WNNL in Raleigh, WCHL in Chapel Hill, WBAV and WLNK in Charlotte, and WZTK in Winston-Salem, she urged independents to vote for the “one candidate fighting against the partisan *and* racial divide – Barack Obama...He's echoing what independents believe. We need radical reform of the political system, not the compromises and negativity of the past. That's why we're North Carolina Independents for Change.”

\*

Tyra Cohen's political education began in the neighborhood barber shop in Chicago Heights, a suburb on

the south side of Chicago, where her youngest brother got his haircuts. While she waited for him, the teenager listened closely to the

conversations about local politics that filled the air. “I believe that politics is in everything we do,” Cohen says now. “You have to participate in the process and develop an understanding so that you can contribute to changing the political dynamics.”

Cohen left Chicago Heights right after her high school graduation, joining the army to get an education. Ten years later, having served as a nurse and an emergency room specialist, she left the military, deciding to put down roots in Fayetteville. It was 1992, and – except for a five-year sojourn in Washington, DC – she's been there ever since.

Active in various political campaigns, a tireless contributor to local newspapers, in the late '90s Cohen became the co-host of a call-in radio show with a political focus; listening to everyone else express their opinions, Cohen says, she came to the realization that she “was definitely an independent.” Her co-host, an African American Republican, encouraged her to attend the Reform Party national convention, which was being held that year – 1998 – in nearby Atlanta. Cohen went, mostly for the fun of the trip, only to find herself intrigued by the impassioned pandemonium that spilled out into the hotel lobby. “This is democracy!” she remembers saying to herself. For the next several years she would return to subsequent conventions as a delegate, allying herself with the activists in Reform's progressive wing.

Now, primaries over, Cohen is looking toward the future of North Carolina Independents for Change: “I want to continue the conversation with other independents here – to understand what we have and don't have and what we need to change – and to connect them with our bigger movement. I want us to put our brick down in building the movement nationally.” **NEO**

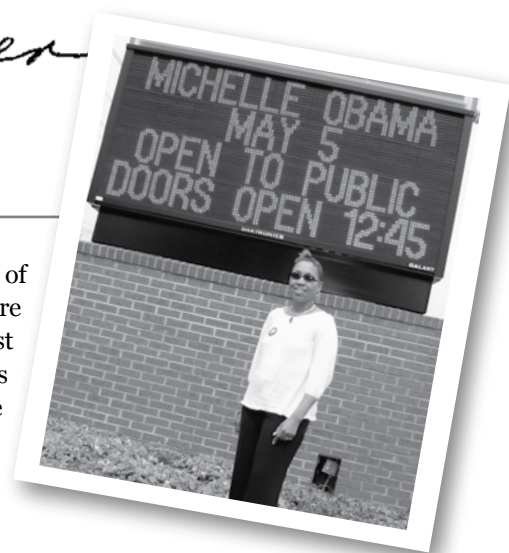


Photo: Tyra Cohen attends Michelle Obama rally.

