

Why Hillary Won

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What would Shakespeare's Jack Cade say after the New Hampshire Democratic primary? Maybe the demagogue in "Henry VI" would call for the pollsters to be killed first, not the lawyers. The opinion researchers find themselves in a difficult place after most predicted a big Obama sweep. It's not their fault. The dirty secret is it is hard to accurately poll a primary. The unpredictability of who will turn out and what the mix of voters will be makes polling a primary election like reading chicken entrails — ugly, smelly and not very enlightening. Our media culture endows polls — especially exit polls — with scientific precision they simply don't have.

But more interesting than dissecting the pollsters is dissecting the election returns, precinct by precinct. Sen. Hillary Clinton won working-class neighborhoods and less-affluent rural areas. Sen. Barack Obama won the college towns and the gentrified neighborhoods of more affluent communities. Put another way, Mrs. Clinton won the beer drinkers, Mr. Obama the white wine crowd. And there are more beer drinkers than wine swillers in the Democratic Party. Mrs. Clinton won a narrow victory in New Hampshire for four reasons.

1) First, her campaign made a smart decision at its start to target women Democrats, especially single women. It has been made part of the warp and woof of her campaign everywhere. This focus didn't pay off in Iowa, but it did in New Hampshire.

2) Second, she had two powerful personal moments. The first came in the ABC debate on Saturday, when WMUR TV's Scott Spradling asked why voters were "hesitating on the likeability issue, where they seem to like Barack Obama more." Mrs. Clinton's self-deprecating response — "Well, that hurts my feelings" — was followed by a playful "But I'll try to go on." You couldn't help but smile. It reminded Democrats what they occasionally like about her. Then Mr. Obama followed with a needless and dismissive, "You're likable enough, Hillary." Her remarks helped wash away the memory of her angry replies to attacks at the debate's start. His trash talking was an unattractive carryover from his days playing pickup basketball at Harvard, and capped a mediocre night.

The other personal moment came on Monday, when a woman in Portsmouth asked her "how do you do it?" Mrs. Clinton's emotional reply was powerful and warm. Voters rarely see her in such a spontaneous moment. It was humanizing and appealing. And unlike her often contrived and calculated attempts to appear down-to-earth, this was real.

3) Third, the Clintons began — at first not very artfully — to raise questions about the fitness for the Oval Office of a first-term senator with no real accomplishments

or experience. Former President Bill Clinton hit a nerve by drawing attention to Mr. Obama's conflicting statements on Iraq. There's more — and more powerful — material available. Mr. Obama has failed to rise to leadership on a single major issue in the Senate. In the Illinois legislature, he had a habit of ducking major issues, voting "present" on bills important to many Democratic interest groups, like abortion-rights and gun-control advocates. He is often lazy, given to misstatements and exaggerations and, when he doesn't know the answer, too ready to try to bluff his way through. For someone who talks about a new, positive style of politics and pledges to be true to his word, Mr. Obama too often practices the old style of politics, saying one thing and doing another. He won't escape criticism on all this easily. But the messenger and the message need to be better before the Clintons can get all this across. Hitting Mr. Obama on his elementary school essays won't cut it.

4) The fourth and biggest reason why Mrs. Clinton won two nights ago is that, while Mr. Obama can draw on the deep doubts of many Democrats about Mrs. Clinton, he can't close out the argument. Mr. Obama is an inspiring figure playing a historical role, but that's not enough to push aside the former First Lady and senator from New York. She's an historic figure, too. When it comes to making the case against Mrs. Clinton, Mr. Obama comes across as a vitamin-starved Adlai Stevenson. His rhetoric, while eloquent and moving at times, has been too often light as air.

Mr. Obama began to find his voice at the Iowa Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner, when he took four deliberate swipes at the Clintons. He called for Democrats to tackle problems "that had festered long before" President Bush, "problems that we've talked about year after year after year after year." He dismissed the Clinton style of campaigning and governing, saying "Triangulating and poll-driven positions . . . just won't do." He attacked Mrs. Clinton on Iraq, torture and her opposition to direct presidential talks with Syria and Iran. Then he rejected a new Clinton era by saying, "I don't want to spend the next year or the next four years re-fighting the same fights that we had in the 1990s." It deftly, if often indirectly, played on the deep concerns of Democrats who look at the Clinton era as a time of decline for their party and unfulfilled potential for their cause.

But rather than sharpen and build on this message of contrast and change, Mr. Obama chose soaring rhetoric and inspirational rallies. While his speeches galvanized true believers at his events, his words were neither filling nor sustaining for New Hampshire Democrats concerned about the Clintons and looking for a substantive alternative.

And Mr. Obama, in his own way, is often as calculating as Mrs. Clinton. For example, he was the only candidate, Democratic or Republican, to use a teleprompter to deliver his Iowa and New Hampshire election-night speeches. It gave his speeches a quality and clarity that other candidates, speaking from notes or the heart, failed to achieve. But what he gained in polish, he lost in connection.

The Democratic candidates left New Hampshire not liking each other. Mrs. Clinton, in particular, lets her feelings show. In her victory speech, as she listed her competitors, she put Mr. Obama at the tail end, behind Dennis Kucinich. Ouch!

Now the Democratic contest will go on through at least “Super Tuesday” — Feb. 5. Mrs. Clinton is likely to win the Democratic beauty contest in Michigan on Jan. 15. But with no delegates at stake, it will have little impact.

Despite Sen. Harry Reid’s son serving as her Nevada chairman, she’s likely to lose that state’s caucuses on Jan. 19. Then comes South Carolina on Jan. 26, where half the Democratic voters are likely to be African-American and Mr. Obama the probable victor. That means Florida on the 29th looms very large. The outcome of the contest in the Sunshine State is likely to have a disproportionate impact on the 23 contests on Super Tuesday.

With so many states voting on Super Tuesday, no candidate will have enough money, time or energy to cover all the contests. Burning in a single television ad in every Super Tuesday state will cost nearly \$16 million.

Instead, candidates will pick states where they have a better chance to win and, by doing so, lock down more delegates. They will spend their time in cities with local TV and print coverage that reaches the biggest number of targeted voters possible. And they will spend their limited dollars on TV stations that deliver the largest number of likely supporters at the least cost. Memphis, for example, may be a smart buy, with its stations reaching western Tennessee and eastern Arkansas, both Feb. 5 states. Fargo, which reaches North Dakota and Minnesota, may be another effective buy.

At the end of Super Tuesday, it won’t be just who won the most states, but who has the most delegates. In both parties, party elders and voters in later contests across the country will want to start consolidating behind a candidate.

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