

Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime Study Guide

Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime by John Heilemann

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Plot Summary

"Game Change" by John Heilemann and Mark Halperin is the story of the 2007 US Presidential primary and general elections. In 2007, the George W. Bush Administration was winding down. The pundits gave the big advantage to whoever the Democratic presidential nominee would be. The country was suffering from Bush fatigue and the wars in the Middle East had lost support. The country was ready for a game change.

Hillary Clinton had wanted to be the US President when her husband Bill Clinton was President. She had thought of herself as a credible candidate and more of an ideologue than her husband who was known for triangulating issues for his own purposes. Hillary had been a US Senator for four years and had promised her constituents that she would serve her full six-year term. In 2004, she had two years to go before her term expired. She was tempted to run because Bush fatigue was already getting a grasp on the country. Her husband urged her to go for it but her daughter told her she should keep her word. She took her daughter's advice. Besides, Bush could be re-elected and then her chance would be over. No, 2004 was out and instead, 2008 would be her year.

In 2007, Illinois State Senator Barack Obama had been nominated as the Democratic candidate for the US Senate. Hillary was impressed with Obama and participated in a number of fund raisers for him. He was easily elected to the US Senate and he often sought out Hillary's advice and counsel. She thought he was an exciting new politico and admired his ability to connect with people. Her savvy husband, known as the best politician in the country, looked at Obama as a threat to Hillary's ambition.

Obama came to national attention when he was given the honor of making the keynote address at the 2004 Democratic Convention. He wowed the delegates and the viewing audience all over the nation. From that point on, Obama was a rock star and immediately there was presidential buzz. Even though Obama had relatively little experience by 2007, he felt he could beat out Hillary and John Edwards in the primary and go on to take the White House.

There was a year-long struggle between Obama and Hillary for the Democratic nomination. They battled through primary after primary. The polls would be up for Hillary one week and up for Obama the next. It was an acrimonious race with bitter invectives slung and received by both sides. There were game changers for each of their presidential campaigns. Some of these events were sought out while some that came their way unexpectedly. As history has already recorded, Barack Obama was victorious in the end and won the nomination.

One of the biggest game changers in the story was the selection by John McCain of Sarah Palin for his running mate as vice president. McCain was suffering in the polls. He was unhappy on the trail, cranky, and always complaining. He told friends he should have never sought the presidency. The campaign concluded that it needed something to shake things up. They needed a game changer that would reset the contest. Although Palin was not properly vetted, she was selected because she was a woman and would



hopefully take female votes from Obama. Palin did shake things up quite a bit but not in all the ways McCain had hoped. In the end, she added to the decline of the campaign. McCain was as much to blame as Palin was. Palin was a "reckless" choice as Vice President Cheney concluded.

Obama won the presidency by a landslide. Although Hillary was a bitter enemy during the primary contest, Obama grew to admire Hillary's strength, decisiveness, and knowledge of foreign and domestic affairs. He offered her the position of Secretary of State. She tried to reject it since she was exhausted and had so many other things to do. But Obama would not take no for an answer. He told her that her country needed her. Hillary found it impossible to say no to her country.

Chapter One: Her Time

Chapter One: Her Time Summary and Analysis

In May 2004, Hillary Clinton attended two fundraisers for State Senator Barack Obama who had won Illinois' Democratic US Senate primary. Clinton returned to Washington and boasted about Obama's speaking skills and charisma. Her aides had never seen her more enthusiastic about a political newcomer. Clinton was one of its most admired and popular members of the Democratic Party. Hillary, now in her fourth year as a US Senator, was more popular than John Kerry, the party's presidential nominee, and even more popular than her husband, the former President.

Clinton had run into many obstacles, defeats, and humiliations during her tenure as first lady but she emerged as a strong and classy woman. After winning the NY race for US Senate, she was paid \$8 million to write her memoir, "Living History," which was a blockbuster and her subsequent book tour was also a great success. It was then that Hillary began to toy with the idea of running for President. She was considered the only Democrat who could defeat George W. Bush in his run for a second term. Publicly she was steadfastly against running but privately she was gathering polls and data to learn what her chances would be in the general election. Although it was green lights all the way, Hillary remained cautious. This was her nature. One huge obstacle to her was that she promised to serve her full six years as senator and not leave it after four years to run for higher office.

Scheduled to attend the Jefferson-Jackson Dinner in Des Moines, Iowa, and deliver the keynote address, Iowa governor and her friend, Tom Vilsack, begged her to run. They needed her to stop Howard Dean who most considered to be a sure loser. She gathered her closest advisers in Chappaqua, New York, including her husband and daughter, Chelsea. Bill and the advisers urged her to run. The only hold out was Chelsea who thought she should keep her word and finish out her senate term. Clinton agreed with her daughter and in the end couldn't break her vow.

Kerry won the nomination and selected Barack Obama to give the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention. President Clinton's address at the convention was considered a triumph but was relegated to a footnote in history when the next night Obama delivered the keynote and was catapulted to the political stratosphere. Hillary thought that in 2008 it would be her turn. She began preparing for a run at the presidency, which she felt would be an easy win for a Democrat after eight years of Bush.



Chapter Two: The Alternative

Chapter Two: The Alternative Summary and Analysis

On February 1, 2005, less than a month after being sworn in as a US Senator, Obama had become a genuine celebrity. Fans greeted him everywhere. He was on the cover of Newsweek and a guest on Meet the Press. Obama admired President Clinton but had some policy issues with him. But Obama liked Hillary from day one and often sought her advice. She told him that success in the Senate depended on hard work and a sublimation of the ego. Also crucial to a good term in the Senate was to never forget the voters who sent him there. Hillary enjoyed taking Obama under her wing but her staff saw him as a political rival - an ambitious one who sought the spotlight.

Obama was considered cocky by some. He was smarter than the average person and average politico and wanted to make sure everyone knew it. Immediately following the keynote address, there was talk of Obama running for president but even his closest advisers thought it was at least eight years off. David Axelrod had been involved in many campaigns for Democratic office seekers and served on Obama's Senate campaign. He admired Obama for his optimism and dynamism. Robert Gibbs another Chicago associate saw Obama as a figure of national stature. Pete Rouse was a former Daschle chief of staff who gravitated to Obama and saw him as someone who was going places.

Obama wanted to work hard like Hillary recommended but he also wanted to raise his national profile. He was receiving literally hundreds of requests for appearances and interviews each week. Obama was frustrated in the Senate. Its pace was too slow and its average membership age too old. He grew tired of the endless debates and what he called "yakking." His family had stayed behind in Chicago and he missed them terribly. Obama began to emerge as a national leader after Katrina struck and he grew depressed and angry over the lack of action by the Bush Administration. He decided to speak at the Florida Democratic Convention in mid-December and try out a stump speech that would cover a myriad of issues. The speech was an overwhelming success and many in the audience prompted him to run for president.

But on Meet the Press later that month he told Tim Russert there was not a chance he would be on the Democratic ticket for the upcoming general election. Obama had finished a new book and would be on tour. Obama was also planning a high profile trip to Africa. Political strategist Anita Dunn was brought on to the Obama team to raise money for his Political Action Committee (PAC) and recruit new contributors. Axelrod's partner, David Plouffe, was recruited for his skill in Internet fund raising. His staff felt he had three future possibilities: become a Senate star, run for Governor in Illinois or run for President in '08. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid sensed that the US Senate wasn't for Obama. He advised him to run for president.



Many high ranking Democrats feared a run by Hillary. She had voted to authorize the Iraq War and her negatives were extremely high. Plus they feared that Bill's many dalliances, which were still occurring, would be exposed by the Republicans. They feared that with Hillary on the top of the ticket they would lose badly in the House and Senate. Many Senate colleagues indicated privately that they'd support Obama but could not give him an early endorsement because of Hillary's ambitions. Bill and Hillary had no idea how disloyal Clinton's fellow Senators were and that the political ground was shifting beneath their feet.



Chapter 3: The Ground Beneath Her Feet

Chapter 3: The Ground Beneath Her Feet Summary and Analysis

Bill had every confidence that Hillary could defeat the Republican opponent. John Edwards who was perceived to be her biggest rival, published an op-ed in the Washington Post apologizing for his vote in support of the Iraq war. Top adviser Mark Penn warned her against a similar move. She had to appear strong and resolute and prove that as a woman she could be a credible Commander in Chief. For five years, Hillary had worked hard to burnish her credentials and hone her image, all the while avoiding scandal and controversy. She worked hard to create a persona that was separate from that of her husband. Hillary showed that she was bipartisan by her frequent outreach to the Republicans.

Despite all her efforts and growing popularity, she was still being attacked from the left for her support of the Iraq War. She was a realist about how she would be treated by the press. Nobody was scrutinized by the media like she was. Many on the left considered her a centrist who was most interested in her own advancement. The New York Times threw another clinker in the mix by planning to publish a story that her marriage was a sham and that Bill was still a skirt chaser and behaved like a bachelor. Representatives for the Clintons were able to get The Times to soften the story.

Although the Times didn't "go there" again, there was plenty of speculation and evidence that Bill was quite the rogue. Hillary's aide, Patti Solis Doyle heard the rumors and was aware of the groundswell of speculation and decided to tell Hillary. She and her staff did the best to diffuse the rumors but they ran upon evidence that Bill was involved in a serious affair with one of the women. Hillary canceled a fundraiser for Senator Claire McCaskill of Missouri who said on Meet the Press that Bill was a great president but wouldn't want her daughter around him. McCaskill also felt that if Hillary headed the ticket, it would not bode well down ticket. McCaskill along with others began to gravitate toward Obama. The whispers about Bill's conduct sent many former supporters off the Hillary bandwagon. Still, Hillary and her closest advisers did not think of Obama as a serious threat. There was one exception in her camp. Bill thought Obama could spell trouble for Hillary.



Chapter 4: Getting to Yes

Chapter 4: Getting to Yes Summary and Analysis

On August 18, 2006, Obama arrived in Cape Town, South Africa. He traveled extensively throughout Africa and was treated like a rock star everywhere he went. Over the next two months, in addition to touring Africa, his latest book, "The Audacity of Hope," would be published and he would participate in a national book tour. During that time, Obama would be making his decision as to whether to run for the presidency. On his travels, he was treated like such an icon he began to think he could have an impact on changing the world.

Back from Africa, Senator Harkin asked Obama to keynote the annual steak fry in Iowa. On Meet the Press, he didn't hesitate to tell Tim Russert that he had reversed his position and might run. Obama's presence was in demand more than ever—sometimes he did four events a day. Obama met with Michelle, Axelrod, Plouffe, Valerie Jarrett and other close advisers in Axelrod's office. They laid out to him just how tough and demanding running would be. Perhaps it was arrogance or naivete, but Obama thought if he won Iowa, he'd win the whole thing. His advisers thought Obama could match Hillary in fund raising. One huge advantage Obama had over Clinton, was that he drew a larger contrast to Bush 43.

Focus groups told the Obama team that there was very little that people found objectionable about him. Neither his race nor his exotic background seemed to present barriers. And there was just something almost undefinable that people liked about him—hope and change? As for Hillary, she was admired and respected but she represented the old guard and summoned up sleazy scandals and the bickering of the '90s. Michelle was not on board. She thought the rock-star image her husband had since the convention speech would fade and he'd be just like any other flavor of the month. She had understandable fears that he would be a target for assassination.

Finally, Michelle was won over. Many of her concerns had been about their daughters. She wanted to make sure they still would have the attention of their father. Also of concern to her were the obvious personal attacks that would inevitably befall them and possibly even the girls. Obama pledged not to participate in the bloodsport of presidential politics and would not attack his opponents on a constant and merciless level.

In December, Obama made a high profile visit to Rick Warren's Saddleback megachurch in California. He also met with billionaire George Soros in New York. He met with General Colin Powell about his views on foreign policy. Powell thought Obama needed more time in the Senate before he made a run. He also met with Tom Daschle who didn't like either of the Clintons—she was an icy prima donna and Bill a narcissist of epic scale. He thought Obama should take them on.



Obama's race was always on his mind but he didn't consider it an impediment to his run. In answer to Michelle, he said the two most important things about taking the oath of office would be that the world would change forever for kids in America who never thought they had a chance. Secondly, the promise of America would be reaffirmed on a global basis. His top advisers were mostly white and didn't feel comfortable bringing up race. Axelrod had been successful in gaining white support for a number of black candidates. And, the reaction to Obama by all races pointed to a broad appeal that transcended race.

At the end of December, Obama told Jarrett that it was a yes. But by January, he was ambivalent again in talks with Axelrod. Obama was competitive but unlike Hillary he wasn't obsessed with being President. He liked his life and his relative anonymity. He could help society in the position he was in. After he confirmed that Al Gore who he admired deeply had no plans to run, his decision was made. He formally launched his campaign on the steps of the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois on February 10, 2007. Obama's pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, was scheduled to give the invocation. However, an article was being published by the Rolling Stone that contained Wright's incendiary remarks about racism. He was pulled from the stage and just asked to say a private prayer with the Obamas. Team Obama knew they had a problem with the Reverend but it wouldn't gain national attention until some time later.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary and Analysis

Hillary met with political operatives from New Hampshire - old friends who gave her pointers on how to win the New Hampshire primary. She hadn't officially announced but she was definitely doing all the groundwork. The rumors she heard about Obama's obvious interest in running and about the attention he was receiving were troublesome to her. Although she was ostensibly moving forward with a presidential run, close advisers knew she too was ambivalent about it. Bill told her if she thought she would be the best president and help the country the most she should run. She thought about it and concluded that she was her party's best bet and soon let her staff know that she had decided in the affirmative.

The team that Hillary gathered was a combination of old Bill Clinton staff members, Hillary Senate staff and brand new additions. Unfortunately, there was a lot of animosity among the staff and it never did congeal into one united entity. Hillary announced on her website, "I'm in...And I'm in to win" (p. 83). Her team agreed that she should be perceived as the front-runner a position that she cherished. Hillary looked at John Edwards as a phony and Obama as not ready for prime time. But Obama really began to get under her skin. Dreamworks founders, David Geffen, Steven Spielberg, and Jeffrey Katzenberg, put their support behind Obama. Maureen Dowd of The New York Times interviewed Geffen and wrote an article about all the ways in which Geffen had become disenchanted with the Clintons - the ease with which they abandoned their own ideology and their self-centered stance on every issue. The article would prove to have a huge impact and reverberate for months. The Hillary camp resented that, in their view, Obama was getting a free ride from the press.

Hillary literally freaked out when campaign donation numbers were revealed where Obama was besting her by millions especially in small donations. Just as discouraging were the first Iowa polls, which showed Edwards 22 points ahead of Hillary and Obama who were tied. Her advisers told her she had to spend more time in Iowa. She hated the state from the scruffy hotels to the anti-war liberals whom she had to pander to. Turmoil within the campaign was at a fever pitch. Spending was out of control. The only people who knew that the campaign was a train wreck were former advisers on the outside and Bill.

By fall, Hillary was still considered the front runner and to her delight, Obama seemed to be fading just as had been predicted. She had bested him in a number of debates and exposed how naïve and green he was on important issues facing the country. She was finally in her stride. She introduced a new health care plan and made the convincing argument that she was most qualified to end the Iraq War and neutralized her differences with Obama on the war. Finally, in the third quarter of 2007, she raised more funds than he did. A national Washington Post poll put her 33 points ahead of Obama. She was garnering all the most important endorsements. Hillary began thinking of vice



presidential candidates and even began a transition team. She was literally picking out chairs for the Oval Office.

In February 2007, Obama had his full-fledged meeting with the entire Obama for President team. He learned that polling showed people liked him but really didn't know him. While Hillary was ahead, there seemed to be a ceiling to her support. Many people were looking for change over experience. Hillary was symbolic of the bitterness of the Clinton years which was a big turnoff for many. Obama was drawing huge crowds in Iowa after his formal announcement. Obama was soaring but soon close scrutiny would reveal his weaknesses. In a joint appearance with the other candidates on health care, Obama was ill-prepared and fell flat while Clinton knocked it out of the park. Obama was disappointed in himself and touched off downcast attitude that continued over the summer to the point that Axelrod and Plouffe thought he was having second thoughts.

The schedule was a killer. He was fatigued and was suffering from a loss of confidence. He didn't like the loss of privacy and he hated to see the stack of 100 plus books each night that he had to autograph for fans. In May, he got Secret Service protection and couldn't ride commercial flights any longer. He missed his wife and kids. For the first time in his life, he was experiencing the feelings of inadequacy. He had set the bar so high with his convention speech, that he was finding it difficult to live up to expectations. Obama's debate performances were not improving. Clinton operatives portrayed him as a weak leader and a military novice and the press began to portray Obama as lightweight. Michelle was concerned about national polls. She thought he was going to lose.

Donors were complaining and getting nervous. His supporters were urging him to go negative on Hillary. Despite everything, Obama was confident he would win Iowa but he knew he had to step up his game. Hillary co-opted his change theme, tweaking it by saying she was change with experience. Obama was third in the Iowa poll and 33 points behind Hillary nationally. Obama concluded he needed a plan to change the game. Team Obama agreed they had to stop Hillary in Iowa. They decided they had to summon up all the worst beliefs about Hillary but had to do so without making it seem that Obama was going negative. He wanted the debate to be about who could change Washington more. Obama took the time to craft a knock-out speech for the upcoming Jefferson-Jackson Dinner in Des Moines. Before the dinner, he accepted an interview request with The New York Times. He purposely made a few comments about Hillary which he knew would be brought up at the next debate. He would soon learn that he had an ally who wanted to sink Hillary more than he did.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary and Analysis

John Edwards knew that Hillary would be the front-runner and was certain that he would be the alternative. He gave no thought at all to Obama. He and his team mocked Hillary and thought one-on-one he would take her. Edwards had been planning his run ever since 2004 when he and Kerry conceded defeat to Bush and Cheney. He was confident he would defeat Hillary in Iowa and go on to be President. After he had been chosen as the VP candidate in 2004, Edwards became arrogant, egotistical and too important for small venues. He loved the Secret Service detail, the chartered jets and especially the big crowds - the people loved him! The formerly nice guy began to be rude to staff and to ignore donors.

Elizabeth Edwards was diagnosed with cancer right before election day 2004. She was a sympathetic figure and was perceived as smart, brave, and loving. Edwards' staff saw her quite differently. To them, she was "an abusive, intrusive, paranoid, condescending crazy woman" (p. 127). The staff wasn't Elizabeth's only target. She referred to John as a "hick" and as her intellectual inferior. John generally tried to mollify or avoid her. In February 2006, Edwards got sexually involved with Rielle Hunter who he had hired as his documentarian after meeting her in a bar.

Everyone assumed that they were having a sexual affair. His aides all advised him to end his association with her, which was both professional and personal. Instead, John became enraged at his campaign manager and fired him. Other key staff members quit. Elizabeth was suspicious of the relationship between her husband and the wacky videographer. He confessed he had sex with Hunter, but only once. Together, Edwards and Elizabeth decided he should go on with his presidential run and that they would work things out. But Hunter had to go for Elizabeth to agree.

In March 2007, Elizabeth's breast cancer had returned and moved to her bones. She could be treated but her condition was incurable. Edwards' aides hoped that her condition would cause him to leave the race but it did not. Elizabeth insisted that he stay in. Hearing that an article was about to be printed in the National Enquirer, Edwards and Elizabeth both contacted Roger Altman, pleading with him not to allow the National Enquirer story about Edwards' affair with Hunter to be published. The magazine was under the umbrella of Evercore Partners, Altman's investment group. He felt bad for them, especially Elizabeth, but he was unable to stop the article. John denied to the press that he even knew the woman. Strangely Edwards was undaunted and thought he would still be president. He formulated a way to defeat Hillary. He and Obama could double-team her and drive her out. He would run at the top of the ticket and Obama could be his VP.

On October 30, a debate was held at Drexel University. What happened that night in Philadelphia changed everything. Edwards was aggressive toward Hillary but Obama



was passive. But after Hillary stole one of his signature lines and mocked him while doing so, Obama was finally engaged. He told her that the Republicans wanted her because they had her and already experienced all the bickering of the '90s. After that the other candidates and moderators all piled on Hillary. She hurt herself when she gave two confused answers to the question of whether illegal immigrants should be granted drivers' licenses. Obama got tough questions like, "What are you going to be for Halloween?" and whether he believed there was life on other planets.

There was a backlash and accusations of sexism that elicited sympathy for Hillary. Then there was a backlash on the backlash. As soon as it got tough, Hillary couldn't take it. She ordered her staff not to ever bring up gender. After all she had to appear strong enough to be Commander-in-Chief. But the damage to Hillary would be lasting.

Hillary's speech at the Jefferson-Jackson dinner focused on fighting the Republicans and not uniting with them. The audience was filled with Obama's loud and avid supporters. His speech was road-tested, practiced, upbeat and forward-looking. He talked about a new Washington as opposed to the old guard. He also said his policies and answers weren't poll-driven and it wasn't his life-long ambition to be president and being president wasn't something he thought he was entitled to - all references to Hillary. When Obama walked off the stage to Stevie Wonder's "Signed, Sealed, Delivered," it was to a thunderous ovation. Just days later, Obama opened up a lead on Hillary and Edwards. She began to pour millions into the state to combat his surge. Hillary snapped at Bill when he tried to tell her she came across as a little snobbish. He deeply resented the press for their hands-off stance on Obama. The press, on the other hand, was eager to leap on any real or perceived misstep by Hillary.

Out of desperation, Hillary decided to go negative. The team drummed up every bit of damaging information they could find about Obama and created TV ads. But when they were focus-group tested, no one liked them. The staff concluded that lowans liked Obama and didn't like Hillary, but they didn't tell her that. She finally did decide to go negative and told a reporter that she had grown tired of Obama's not-so-veiled attacks that now the "fun part starts" (p. 158).



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary and Analysis

Obama was flying high after the J-J dinner speech. His poll numbers were rising against the others. Oprah Winfrey came to Des Moines in December and proclaimed that the world needed Barack Obama. He became an outstanding campaigner—smiling, shaking hands, taking pictures with supporters, laughing and talking with them. Obama insisted on ignoring most of Hillary's attacks which served to diminish her more. Hillary's team stooped very low when they started spreading e-mails that Obama was a Muslim with connections to jihadists—a lie that lives on in some circles. The Clintons themselves talked privately to others about his drug use.

On the eve of the Iowa Caucuses, Bill appeared on Charlie Rose's show and unleashed his pent up feelings about Obama - how the press babied him and how Hillary was much more qualified. Hillary got a boost when she learned that the Iowa Register had endorsed her. Thinking that the momentum was with her, Hillary presented a softer side and eliminated the negative remarks from her speeches. CNN showed her two points up over Obama with just weeks to go.

On December 18, the Enquirer printed a story that named Rielle Hunter as John Edwards' mistress and showed a picture of her obviously very pregnant. The article was entitled, "John Edwards' Love Child." Edwards' campaign was doomed. Obama won, Edwards was a percentage point ahead of Hillary who was third. The Hillary team was up in the air about on how to combat Obama.

Hillary knew she had a lot of ground to cover in New Hampshire where Obama's numbers were rising. Although she had tried to keep Bill in the background in Iowa, in New Hampshire he was front and center. Bill and Hillary appeared to be running together. She appreciated his unparalleled political skills. Hillary felt double-teamed by Obama and Edwards at the debate. She felt Obama treated her in a dismissive manner.

But Obama did get a big bounce out of Iowa and was leading in the latest polls. Obama would probably win in South Carolina with the black vote swinging to him. If she lost New Hampshire and South Carolina, her donations would dry up. Hillary was so jarred by the state of affairs that at a coffee shop meeting with a group of women that morning she teared up at the prospect of the state of the country and all that she wanted to do for it. Her tears were a game changer. Even though Obama had been ahead, by 10 pm, the networks declared Hillary the winner by three points over Obama. Obama remained positive and concluded he'd have to make it through Super Tuesday and that he wouldn't be getting much sleep.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary and Analysis

Hillary called a general staff meeting the day after her win. Hillary should have been riding high from her win instead she was fretful and worried. What was their next move? They were out of money and ideas and had no theme. Hillary wanted to skip South Carolina and Nevada but was advised not to. Bill was fully engaged in every aspect of the campaign. Both Clintons were accused of playing the race card in an article in The New York Times. The article cited Bill's angry diatribe against Obama and a remark by Hillary that some felt took credit away from Martin Luther King in the fight for civil rights. Bill was outraged that the "first black President" as he was called sometimes, would be accused of racism. Bill figured this speculation originated in the Obama camp. The Clinton's fought back with their own smear campaign.

In a newspaper interview Obama said that Ronald Reagan was a transformational type of president but Nixon and Bill Clinton were not. Bill was in a rage, livid that Obama dared to say that Reagan was a better president than he was. Bill was making claims of voter suppression and voter intimidation in Las Vegas by Team Obama. The story probably wasn't true but Bill hoped it did some damage. Hillary won the caucus by 51 to 45 percent. However, Obama wound up with more delegates. Obama knew he had to win South Carolina or he'd be out. He was ahead in the state by a large margin. Team Obama had to figure out how to handle Bill. Obama gave an interview in which he said that he was troubled by the degree that Bill had inserted himself in the campaign.

The debate prior to the South Carolina primary was fiery. Hillary brought up a "slum lord" in Chicago that Obama had some dealings with in the past. She referred to his admiration for Republicans. He said he didn't know if he was running against her or her husband. The campaign decided to make Bill the target of their barbs. Obama got in Bill's head. He blew up at a reporter who asked him what he thought of recent comments by Obama. The campaign tried to reign him in but had no luck. Some in the campaign wondered privately if Bill was trying to sabotage Hillary.

Obama bested Hillary in a landslide of 55 to 27 percent. Just before leaving South Carolina, Bill compared Obama to Jesse Jackson who had won a primary in South Carolina. He was trying to cast Obama as the "black candidate" who like Jackson, had no appeal for white voters. However, this comment backfired on him. Bill spent the next several days defending his comment, insisting there was nothing racist about it.

Caroline and Teddy Kennedy endorsed Obama at the same event. Teddy referred to Obama as John Kennedy's rightful heir. Hillary was devastated. But Hillary won California, New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts despite Teddy's endorsement of Obama on Super Tuesday. Obama won thirteen states to her nine and emerged with a few more delegates. Team Obama was more organized and effective than Hillary's campaign operatives. In January, Obama had raised \$32 million, much of it online, to



Hillary's \$13 million. Hillary had to loan her campaign \$5 million of her own money. On Super Tuesday night, it looked like Obama was on his way to winning the nomination.

Bill was a continuing problem. If Hillary couldn't control him during the campaign, how would she control him in the White House? Finally, they were able to keep him in the office or in small rural venues and away from the big cities and media. On February 19, Plouffe announced that the race was virtually over. There was no way Hillary could catch up with Obama's ever increasing delegate count. Why did Hillary refuse to drop out?

Hillary didn't drop out because she thought Obama wasn't qualified and that the Republicans would squash him in the fall. What Bill said publicly was true—she had to win the Ohio and Texas primaries. Hillary launched an ad that asked who was qualified to answer that emergency 3 am call to the White House. The not so subtle message was that Obama was not qualified. But superdelegates were flocking to Obama and the wild-eyed crowds of admirers were growing larger and louder. Hillary won both primaries and gained a new persona of resilient underdog. Nonetheless, Obama was still in the driver's seat. He had no idea that an old friend would cause him more problems than Camp Hillary could have dreamed of.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary and Analysis

Both Obama and Michelle were tired and frustrated. She missed her kids and Obama wanted the campaign to be over but there was at least three grueling months to go. He was getting tough, intrusive questions from the press because he was the front-runner. As bad as things were, they got worse on March 13, when ABC ran videotapes of his pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright. He disparaged the treatment of blacks and made racist remarks. He implied that America got what it deserved on 9/11. The staff panicked but Obama met the imbroglio head on, appearing on TV to repudiate the pastor's inflammatory words and counter the endless loop of the Wright tape that would be on TV all weekend.

Obama decided to make a major speech on race. It was something he had wanted to do for a while. He delivered the speech entitled, "A More Perfect Union" at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. He denounced Wright's hateful remarks but refused to disown him. Obama's message was that the nation had a long way to go to heal its race problems. The speech was eloquent and effective but the right still piled on him and the left began to wonder if he would be the strongest candidate in the general election.

The last Democratic debate of 2008 was held at the Constitution Center. The moderators of the debate all piled on Obama with questions about Wright, his Chicago slumlord friend Rezko, his terrorist friend William Ayers, his "guns and religion" remark and why he didn't wear an American flag pin on his lapel. He fielded the questions as best he could be he was weary and upset. Hillary waltzed to victory in Pennsylvania. Obama met with his advisers in Chicago. Rouse told him that he needed to take charge of his campaign, become more engaged. Obama told his team that everyone needed to pick up their game, including himself. From then on, the team would have a nightly strategy assessment. It was essential that they win the next two contests - North Carolina and Indiana.

Although Obama's numbers took a hit from the Wright flap, he won North Carolina by 15 points and Clinton only carried Indiana by 1 percent. Although Hillary claimed she was on the way to the White House, Tim Russert of MSNBC summarized it this way: "We now knew who the Democratic nominee is going to be and no one is going to dispute it" (p. 249).

Hillary won West Virginia in May by a huge margin. Hillary was urged to stay on and fight until the end. She didn't want to make a scorched earth exit so she could maintain her reputation and a future in the party. Obama clinched the Democratic nomination on June 3rd. That night, Terry McAullife introduced Hillary at a rally as the next president of the United States. Hillary did not concede and the crowd urged her to go onto the convention. The Obama team was flabbergasted. She had three choices: get out,



negotiate for something or park it - meaning stay in and hope Obama hits a landmine. But she was being perceived in the media as a spoiled sport. To save her reputation, she needed to concede and put her support behind Obama. She made plans for a concession speech. Hillary and Obama met in secret and both agreed that Hillary was not a good choice for vice president. Her concession speech was classy and she put her full support behind Obama.

Team Hillary blamed her loss on the favoritism the press showed Obama while they were out to get her. If Obama lost against McCain, which Hillary thought was a 50-50 possibility, she wanted to figure out a strategy to defend herself because she was sure Obama and the press would blame her.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary and Analysis

Senator John McCain met with his top aids to discuss his presidential run. The fighting between Obama and Clinton was damaging the Democratic party and would work in favor of the Republicans. McCain was a hands-off candidate. He expected his campaign to handle all the details. Getting the nomination wouldn't be a cake-walk because he was perceived as too liberal by some party faithfuls and too willing to compromise with the other side. Many thought his famous temper disqualified him for the presidency. His advocacy of increasing troop strength in Iraq was seen as a negative. The media, who in 2000 had adored him, was now turning on him—picking apart his policies and comments.

Cindy McCain had a bad taste in her mouth from the 2000 campaign and didn't want McCain to run. His team would cringe when he talked about his age and his battle with cancer. "Old and Sick" would not make a good bumper sticker. There was conflict among the campaign. They were disorganized. The budget called for the campaign to raise \$48 million in the first quarter. All that they raised however was \$12.5 million. McCain was not enjoying himself. He was angry and depressed and complained about everything. He felt the press was out to get him. McCain had joined with Ted Kennedy on an immigration bill that conservatives called amnesty. His stance would prove to haunt him. He collected even less money the next quarter and the press characterized his campaign as doomed. Key members of his staff resigned. McCain told close friends he should have never attempted a run. An old friend and Republican strategist told him the only hope he had was to avoid the national press, keep his head down and work hard. There was still a slim chance that McCain could get the nomination.

Rudy Giuliani, former New York mayor, had become the front-runner after McCain's meltdown. But Giuliani was too liberal to get the nomination and former Governor Mitt Romney of Massachusetts or former Senator Fred Thompson seemed more likely to be in contention—although Romney was also seen as a moderate and was not appealing to the right-wing base. Giuliani wasn't a good fit for conservative Iowa or South Carolina and wasn't taking off in New Hampshire. He decided to put all his eggs in the Florida basket. McCain and Giuliani were both seeking the endorsement of the popular Florida governor, Charlie Crist. Giuliani courted Crist and thought he had him in the bag. He planned to start advertising in New Hampshire in November and then fly down to Florida to make a joint appearance with Crist to announce the latter's endorsement of him.

McCain called upon strategist Steve Schmidt to help his dying campaign. Schmidt told him he had to look at it as his campaign. He had nothing left to lose so he should do things the way he wanted to. Since McCain believed in the surge he should take a strong stand and embrace it. He would stand out from the other candidates. Schmidt told him to change the subject from his failing candidacy to something of substance. McCain liked Schmidt's ideas and began to feel more comfortable.

McCain convinced Charlie Crist to remain neutral. When Giuliani learned that Crist wasn't endorsing him, his campaign was virtually doomed. McCain and Democratic Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut were great friends. He asked for his endorsement to help him in the upcoming New Hampshire primary. Lieberman had been the Democratic candidate for VP in 2000. But his avid support of the Iraq War had placed him in opposition with his party. Lieberman decided to support his friend. McCain followed Schmidt's advice - worked hard and kept a low profile. By the end of 2007, McCain was leading in the New Hampshire primary.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary and Analysis

The McCain camp learned that The New York Times was planning to print an article about an affair between McCain and a female lobbyist, Vicki Iseman. The article would also describe McCain's associations with corporate lobbyists. McCain told the editor of The Times that the story was false and convinced the paper to withhold the story for the time being. McCain held town hall meeting after town hall meeting. Romney was reeling from his defeat by Huckabee in Iowa and McCain beat Romney by five points in New Hampshire. It was crucial that McCain win South Carolina. His friend, Senator Lindsay Graham of South Carolina, garnered several important endorsements for him. But if he didn't do well, the donations would stop and he'd be done. Although it was touch and go, McCain pulled out a winner.

It was on to Florida where he would face Romney one-on-one. If he won, the nomination was his. If he lost, the primary season continued. Polls indicated a dead heat. At the last minute, Crist decided to endorse McCain which was the huge boost he needed. The New York Times ran the story about Vicki Iseman. Schmidt engineered a response that not only killed the story once and for all but garnered the support of right-wing Republicans who hated The New York Times. McCain was officially named the Republican nominee on March 4th. He was running even with both Obama and Hillary who were fighting for the Democratic nomination. McCain now had time to regroup, raise money and raise his profile. Still, establishment Republicans were worried. He didn't seem to be catching on and didn't have a clear message. The stark contrast between Obama's speech on the night in June he claimed victory and a speech that McCain made the same night worried his staff. Obama outclassed McCain in delivery, message and in making a connection with the people.

Obama and McCain agreed in two areas that Washington was broken and that they detested each other. McCain had been looking forward to running against Hillary who was a friend of his. He was disappointed when he learned that his competitor would be the young and arrogant Barack Obama who, in his opinion, was a lightweight with no guts. Obama told his staff he'd be humiliated if he lost against McCain. McCain offered his congratulations to Obama and challenged him to frequent townhall joint appearances. Obama had no fears about debating McCain but did not commit to the townhall meetings. He had other priorities. Internal polling showed that Obama was ahead of McCain by five points. McCain was seen as another Bush and Obama was generally seen as a change agent. Obama reversed his decision on public funding. His web operation was bringing in so much money that there really was no choice. He broke his vow to accept public funding.

It was obvious to McCain that Obama's decision to reject public funding and the town hall meetings that McCain suggested confirmed his opinion that he was a phony. The media did not pursue the story of Obama's hypocrisy over public funding. McCain began



to realize what Clinton had known—the press was in the tank for Obama. Schmidt warned McCain that his campaign had to get organized or it could go down as the worst in history. McCain elevated Schmidt's position and things began to improve. Schmidt also limited the loose-lipped McCain's press availability.

Obama toured eight countries in ten days including two war zones. He made a soaring speech in Berlin before 200,000 Europeans. The trip was a huge success. McCain's criticism of the trip made him look envious and mean-spirited. The polls showed Obama up by double digits. Schmidt realized they were fighting against a man who now was the biggest celebrity in the world. They decided to call him just that—a celebrity; the underlying message was that he was a lightweight like Paris Hilton and Britney Spears. The ad backfired on McCain. It was seen as racist, petty and desperate. Obama commented that McCain wanted the people to think of Obama as the "other." The McCain campaign accused Obama of playing the race card.

While Obama didn't want to focus on race, he didn't want to be gun-shy about it. The charge that they were most afraid of was that he was a Muslim and not patriotic. Through a series of ads, including the celeb ad, the McCains were able to paint Obama to some as self-centered and non-patriotic. Obamas negatives were inching up and by August 1st, the polls had him tied with McCain. Obama had three goals: make peace with the Clintons, name a running mate and write a dynamite convention speech.



Chapters 19 and 20

Chapters 19 and 20 Summary and Analysis

Joe Biden decided to make a run for the Presidency in 2008 and thought he was the most qualified among the field. The gaffe-prone Biden made an unintentional racial comment in reference to Obama and dropped out after he earned only one percent of the votes in the Iowa Caucuses. Biden was close to Hillary and liked Obama. He decided to keep his options open and not endorse either candidate. He was interested in both the VP slot and the Secretary of State position. Biden advised her to put Hillary on the ticket. But Biden was Obama's choice from the very beginning.

But Obama was a man of process and he vetted over a dozen candidates. He focused on Hillary to see if there was any way they could share the ticket. But Bill loomed as a real problem. Bill was a former President, Hillary wanted to be President and Obama would be the President. Obama understood the math and concluded that it wouldn't work to have three presidents in the administration. After the lengthy and detailed process of elimination, Biden emerged as his choice.

Biden was well versed in both foreign and domestic issues and policies. Since Biden had been in the Senate for so long, he was a natural to be a liaison for Obama. He was nice, usually cheerful and very popular among his Senate colleagues. On the other hand, he could be an effective attack dog against the opposition. The only issue with Biden was his proclivity to talk too much and make gaffes. Biden vowed that he would control what he said and during the campaign and stay on script.

The Clintons were still a problem. Bill was still bitter and refused to even say that Obama was ready to be President. But Hillary was concerned about her image and began campaigning for Obama. In case he lost, she didn't want to be blamed for not doing enough. Obama steered clear of Bill which irritated the former president but Obama didn't like the comments he made on TV and in the newspaper about him. At the Denver convention, Hillary's speech was well-received and Bill's speech was dazzling. Teddy Kennedy had been diagnosed with terminal brain cancer but made his way to Denver and delivered a speech in support of Obama. Everyone knew it would be his last convention speech.

Obama delivered his speech before 100,000 at Invesco Field, home of the Denver Broncos. It was a magnificent speech that evoked emotion and patriotism. The convention was a triumph and Obama was ready for the next phase of his marathon campaign. The Obama team and the Clintons felt Obama was on his way to victory. There was interest in who McCain pick for his Vice Presidential candidate. When her name came up, Biden said, "Who's Sarah Palin?"

Chapter Twenty: Saracuda



McCain had always wanted to shock the world with his VP selection. But the surprise he had in mind was Joe Lieberman, a Democrat. The campaign decided to keep the selection a secret and announce it the day after Obama's speech to try to take attention away from him. Whoever they picked had to be a game changer. Most of McCain's top advisers supported the choice of Lieberman. But if he went with Lieberman, McCain would have to agree to one term to allay fears that a Democrat would be president if McCain died in office. When asked, Lieberman was surprised but was amenable to the idea. But establishment Republicans were against it and Lieberman was out. A new name was placed on the table—Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska. McCain called her and after she agreed to be vetted was on her way to meet with him.

Palin was a popular governor with right-wing credentials. She was married with five children and had been everything from a beauty queen to a sportscaster. She was known to be fearless and very competitive. The campaign was impressed with her and she seemed to be the answer to their prayers. She was a woman and a maverick—she could make history and could lure female voters. Palin's vetting was quick and not thorough.

Schmidt explained how, if she was chosen, her life would never be the same again. It didn't scare Sarah—she was on board 100 percent. They asked her nothing about her knowledge of domestic and foreign policy. The vetting revealed some political problems in Alaska and a general notion that she was in over her head. Choosing Palin, McCain would get someone who could shake things up although there could potentially be problems because they knew so little about her. It was all up to McCain. He chose Sarah Palin and she accepted.

Political operatives and media alike wanted to know more about her but the campaign frankly didn't know much themselves. The campaign was deluged with questions about Palin—many of them personal. Was her youngest child really her's or was it her unmarried daughter's? Had her husband Todd been arrested for DUI? Did she worship at the Pentecostal church where they spoke tongues? The press began to grow suspicious of Palin's vetting since the campaign seemed to know very little about her. How thoroughly had the woman who could take the place of a seventy-two-year old President with a history of cancer been investigated? The swell of interest from the press brought cries of foul from Schmidt who claimed the press and the lefty blogosphere was out to destroy Palin. But it wasn't just on the left that the criticism about Palin came from it was from the GOP establishment many of whom were stupefied by the choice. Vice President Dick Cheney characterized McCain's choice of Palin as "reckless."

There were three hurdles in front of Palin: the convention speech, her first national interview with ABC and her debate with Joe Biden. Her hotel room was filled with kids, stylists and the experts who were charged with getting her up to snuff on international and domestic affairs. It wasn't long before Schmidt realized that they had a lot of work to do—she knew nothing. Convention participants were wowed by Palin's speech. They wanted to love her and they wanted to show her support against the national press that they felt had been unfair to her. McCain's speech the next night was almost irrelevant.



The story out of the St. Paul convention was Palinmania. McCain's numbers were rising and Obama's were taking a hit—especially among white women. McCain was grinning from ear to ear. The Obamas didn't know how to deal with Palin. As panic spread throughout the Obama camp, it was the always calm and cool candidate who understood how to deal with her. Focus on the top of the ticket, he told his campaign. A week after Palin was put on the ticket, McCain had drawn even with Obama and in some polls a little ahead.



Chapters 21, 22 and 23 and Epilogue

Chapters 21, 22 and 23 and Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Obama met with his campaign team. He was not a happy man. They were playing defense. They all had to do better—including himself. Obama wanted to focus on the economy and draw a contrast between himself and McCain and take the light off Palin. The economy was the most pressing issue. A recession had begun in 2007 caused by the housing bubble and questionable activities on Wall Street. Obama was nurturing relationships with economists and financial experts who warned him that a crash was looming. A huge financial crisis would change the landscape of the campaign.

When Lehman Brothers filed the largest bankruptcy in American history, it set off a worldwide financial panic. The stock market was spiraling down and lost 500 points that day. McCain totally mishandled the crisis, from his inexplicable statement that the fundamentals of the economy were strong to his near panic in racing the Washington to do and as it turned out nothing. While McCain was publicly bumbling the crisis, Obama was learning. Economics had not been his strong suit, but he was a quick study and called on the most knowledgeable economists in the nation to be his counselors. McCain was in touch with the same experts and it was obvious to them that he had no clue about the economy and wasn't open to learning.

The Federal Reserve and economists presented a bail out proposition to the Congress who was warned that if they didn't approve it, the world's economy would be in meltdown. McCain was fearful that if the meltdown did occur, the Republicans would be blamed and his candidacy would be doomed. There was pressure on McCain to take a stance. He decided to make a dramatic move and suspend his campaign, delay the first debate between him and Obama and rush to Washington to hammer out a deal that would solve the matter. He asked Bush to call a meeting of the economists, himself and Obama. The press perceived McCain's actions as a political stunt.

Obama was at the meeting but was distrustful of McCain's motives. He was planning on appearing at the debate whether McCain showed up or not. Obama had met with the Congressional Democrats that day and spoke for them at the meeting. Obama took over the meeting. His in-depth knowledge and understanding of the crisis was obvious. Forty minutes into the meeting, McCain—the man who insisted on the meeting—hadn't said a word.

Obama called on McCain to speak. His brief comments were merely bullet points that described the crisis; he offered no solution. McCain got a blistering from the press and the Democrats and the Republicans stayed mute and did not defend him. McCain announced that he would suspend his suspension and would participate in the debate after all. Obama was calm and effective at the debate and displayed his deep knowledge of foreign affairs. He won point after point against McCain who was ill-



prepared and cranky. He refused to look Obama in the eye. Every poll gave Obama a big win.

The week after the debate, the crash began. Two weeks later, the stock market lost 2,000 points. McCain was right in his fear that the Republicans would be blamed. But what impacted the race more than the collapsing economy, was the performance of the two candidates at the debate. It became the conventional wisdom that Obama was going to win. But in the final month ahead, there would be game changers that no one would have predicted.

Campaign staff member Nicole Wallace was tasked with bringing Palin up to speed on the issues for her interviews with Katie Couric and Charlie Gibson. The three-hour session was frustrating for Wallace. Palin didn't seem to understand the financial crisis and showed no interest in learning. She changed the subject to mundane questions like what was Katie like. The campaign was becoming increasingly alarmed about Palin's character, focus and knowledge. As more issues came up about her past, the campaign realized that she had a tendency to shade the truth. She broke her vow to support all of McCain's policies.

Palin made a few gaffes in the Gibson interview but survived it. Next she had to prep for her debate with Biden. Because there was so much interest in Palin, the campaign agreed to a multi-part interview with Couric. Tina Fey rolled out her first impersonation of Palin. Wallace tried to prep Palin for her interview with Couric but Palin was unresponsive and almost despondent. She messed up her hair and smeared her make up saying she hated how she looked. Wallace got a make-up artist to fix her up on the limo on the way to the interview.

The interview was a disaster. Palin answered tentatively often with strange non-answer answers. Palin went ballistic and blamed the campaign for her poor performance. They made her do the interview. Palin screamed at Wallace and Wallace screamed back. Those assigned to help her prepare for debate, found her almost catatonic and unable to process the information they were trying to feed her. Palin was wilting under the pressure. She regretted accepting the spot on the ticket. The campaign began to question her mental stability.

Schmidt told her she wasn't eating right and not getting enough sleep. That all had to change. She had one bad interview. So what, every politician had them. She did badly because she wasn't prepared. After moving the debate prep from a hotel in New York to McCain's ranch in Sedona, things improved. She was memorizing some of the answers—maybe not understanding the issue but at least able to provide practiced answers. Tina Fey did another skit as Palin. This time she used the exact words that Palin had used. It was a hilarious skit without any need for comedy writers. Palin could not stop calling her opponent "Joe O'Biden" instead of "Joe Biden." They told her to call him "Joe." The Obama campaign was confident of Biden's debate skill and overall knowledge of the issues. But the bar had been set high for him and he was gaffe-prone. Biden was cautioned not to be condescending or patronizing. Biden was able to hold his tongue against Palin's rabbit hole answers and Palin did not make a fool of herself.



Afterward, she celebrated with the campaign that she had survived it. She was ready to win the election.

Palin became a willing attack dog against Obama. She used the line that he was palling around with terrorists because of his brief association years before with William Ayers who committed an act of domestic violence after Obama lost contact with him. Investigations by reporters had cleared Obama of any nefarious association with Ayers but Palin kept the slur in all of her speeches. Palin continued to be a thorn in the side of the campaign. She insisted on traveling with her large family which caused a logistics nightmare. She had gone from depressed and desolate to control freak. Palin bugged the staff for petty things and wouldn't take no for an answer. She insisted on vetting politicians and strategists that she had to deal with herself—by Googling them. The campaign felt it was obvious that she was preparing herself for a presidential run in 2012. No matter what efforts were made to improve Palin's image, the image that crystallized of her before the American public was Tina Fey's impersonation of her and the Katie Couric interview.

Biden caused a stir when he bragged to some reporters that he was more qualified to be president than Obama. A distance grew between Obama and Biden. The campaign saw to it that Biden had only limited contact with the press. He began to resent the way he was being treated. He then made a series of gaffes that made him look goofy. Palin's performance overshadowed Biden's gaffe. There was more worry about her mental state. She would sit and refuse to answer advisers when asked questions. She had another dismal interview with NBC. CNN reported that \$150,000 had been spent on clothes for her and her family. She was called a diva and a whack job. The campaign was divided—half still had faith in her and other half couldn't stand the sight of her. Leaks about the internal conflicts made it to the media which enraged McCain.

Perhaps Palin was failing but the campaign had failed her too. They expected too much and didn't allow her time or space to get a grasp on the seismic shift that had changed her life forever. Senior staff members were haunted by the reality that Palin was unfit for high office. If the polls turned around and McCain somehow eked out a victory, they planned to advise McCain to make Palin's role a strictly ceremonial one. They felt guilty about what they had done to the country by fostering the possibility of a President Palin if McCain died in office.

The polling showed that Obama was way ahead and indicated a potential electoral landslide. If McCain was disappointed in Palin he never publicly displayed it. He blamed her problems on the press. The next debates with Obama went no better than the first. Obama was declared the winner in each by great margins. McCain started to hint at the possibility that Obama was a Manchurian candidate. After all not much was known about him. At McCain rallies, angry audience members called Obama "terrorist" and "socialist." Both candidates had been seeking Colin Powell's endorsement. Powell stayed neutral for much of the campaign but began to resent the way McCain was portraying Obama and for choosing Palin as a running mate. On an appearance on Meet the Press just before the election, Powell endorsed Obama.



Just before the election, Obama's grandmother died. Although she had been ill and wasn't expected to live, he was still very grieved by her passing. He had hoped she'd make it to see him elected. He had been close to his grandmother and the emotion showed on the usually stoic Obama. In his last speech before the election, he said to the crowd, "Let's go change the world" (p. 427).

Obama was elected with 53 percent of the popular vote. On the day after his election, he met with Biden and close staff members. He was leaning heavily toward Hillary Clinton for his Secretary of State. Some staff members didn't think she was a good choice because she had been a competitor—almost an enemy—and would have her own agenda. But Obama saw her as strong, smart and decisive. The "Bill" factor was still an issue. Hillary met with Obama in Chicago the following week and he made it obvious that she was his first choice for Secretary of State.

Clinton's first instinct was to turn it down but that would be difficult. Everyone, including Bill, encouraged Hillary to accept the position. After five days, Clinton decided to decline the offer. She didn't like the prospect of the constant travel and the disruption of her life. She was also concerned about her campaign debt and wanted to focus on paying that off by soliciting donations from her supporters and others.

Hillary told Obama she was exhausted and that she had to take care of her campaign debt. She also told him he wouldn't want the circus that would come with her being named in such an important role. Obama wouldn't take no for an answer. Her country needed her, he told her. The two had never been so open and honest with each other before. Obama told her to sleep on it. The next day she called to say she would accept the position of Secretary of State after all. At last the two were on the same side.



Characters

Barack Obama

Barack Obama was elected as the junior US Senator from Illinois in 2004. No one at that time, be it politico or pundit, would have even suggested that he would be running for the presidency of the United States just three short years later. Obama had been an obscure state senator prior to gaining national office. Although many senators and representatives spend years even decades without gaining much notice, there was something dynamic about the smiling and gangly young African-American that set him apart from his senatorial colleagues.

The nation was soon exposed to the Obama charm and allure when he was chosen to give the keynote address at the 2004 Democratic Presidential Convention. He captivated the delegates in attendance and an entire nation that watched. His words were soaring and his delivery was emotional and heart-felt. There was something special about Barack Obama. Obama was a rock star from that night on and political buzz soon followed.

Obama who was young and energetic quickly found the pace of the US Senate slower than a turtle's. It was difficult for him to bear the unending and tedious "yakking" of the senators - some of whom were old enough to be his grandparents. The Senate Majority Leader Reid was observant enough to notice that the US Senate wasn't the place for this dynamic young politician. He counseled him, advising him to seek the presidency.

Reid wasn't the only person who was urging him to run. He literally heard it everywhere he went. He began putting out feelers and learned that people liked him and didn't seem to focus negatively on his race or exotic background. Obama felt confident he could beat out Hillary Clinton in the primaries and gain the nomination. Even though very young and very inexperienced, Obama had no doubts about his ability to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of Commander-in-Chief.

Obama was right about beating out Clinton but it was a much tougher and more protracted undertaking than he ever imagined. But, as history has already recorded, he was victorious and went on to face and defeat the Republican nominee, John McCain, and become the 44th President of the United States.

Hillary Clinton

Hillary Clinton was the junior US Senator from New York State in 2004 when she began to seriously consider running for president. She had served four years of her six-year term and had vowed to her constituents that she would keep her commitment. But she was tempted. Her husband, Bill Clinton, urged her to do it. Her daughter, Chelsea, told her she should keep her word. She listened to her daughter's advice. She had time.



George W. Bush was favored to win re-election anyway. His second term would end in 2008 and then it would be her turn.

Hillary was impressed with Barack Obama, the young African-American junior US Senator from Illinois who had just been elected. She had been so impressed with him that she participated in several fundraisers for him. Obama was asked to give the keynote address at the Democratic convention in 2004. He wowed everyone and became an instant rock star. Hillary admired him but her savvy husband felt he could wind up being a threat to her ambition to advance to the oval office.

When Hillary was considering the 2008 run, she heard the buzz that Obama was considering it as well. She remembered her husband's warning that Obama was a threat and began to get a little concerned. He had such a way of speaking and connecting with people. While Hillary was more knowledgeable about domestic and foreign affairs, she was shy and not the greatest of communicators. Many people, including the press, thought of her as snobbish and icy cold.

But Hillary had wanted to run for president for so long that she wasn't going to let this young upstart get in her way. He was the flavor of the month and his sizzle would burn out. The protracted battle for the nomination lasting more than a year showcased Hillary's tenacity, intelligence, ambition and strength. Lesser women and men could not have endured all the "slings and arrows" that she had to take.

Obama had observed those same traits in Hillary, the woman he had been in a life-or-death battle for far longer than either of them ever would have thought. It was her values and character and abilities that led Obama, the newly elected President, to offer her the Secretary of State position. She tried to turn it down but Obama knew how to get his way. He told her that her country needed her. Hillary was a sucker for her country—she could never say no to her country.

John McCain

John McCain was the Republican nominee for US President in the 2008 race. His primary campaign had a lot of ups and downs but he eventually defeated all his competitors but lost to Barack Obama in the general election.

Sarah Palin

Sarah Palin was the Republican nominee for US Vice President in the 2008 race. When selected as the nominee, she was the Governor of Alaska.

Joe Biden

Joe Biden had presidential aspirations himself in 2008. But his appeal never caught on and dropped out of the race. He was Obama's first choice for Vice President.



Bill Clinton

Bill Clinton is the 43rd President of the United States and Hillary Clinton's husband. Bill inserted himself into his wife's campaign, which proved to have both positive and negative results.

John Edwards

John Edwards was running for President in 2008 in the Democratic primaries. He was very ambitious but personal scandals destroyed his campaign.

Michelle Obama

Michelle Obama is Barack Obama's wife. She didn't think her husband had a chance of winning the nomination at first - much less the presidency. She also feared that he would be a target for assassination.

Steve Schmidt

Steve Schmidt was hired by McCain to turn his failing campaign around. Schmidt did his best but after Palin was selected, things got worse. He realized after just a few days around Palin that she "didn't know anything."

David Plouffe and David Axelrod

The two Davids headed Barack Obama's campaign. They were both smart, savvy, experienced, and helped lead Obama to victory.



Objects/Places

Illinois

Barack Obama was an Illinois state senator who won the Democratic primary for US Senator. He went on to win the Senate seat, which began his path to the presidency.

New York

Hillary Clinton was the junior US Senator from New York in 2004 when she first considered running for president. But she hadn't served her full six-year term and decided that it would be her turn to run for the presidency in 2008.

Washington, D.C.

The principals in the story were all US Senators who served in Washington, D.C. They were all also seeking the US presidency which office, of course, is also located in D.C.

Boston, MA

The 2004 Democratic National Convention was held at the Fleet Center Auditorium in Boston, MA. It was where Obama came to national attention when he gave the keynote address.

St. Paul, MN

The 2008 Republican National Convention was held in St. Paul, MN. It was where Sarah Palin was introduced to the country. She wowed the delegates and nation with her speech but unfortunately it was the highlight of her bid for national office.

Alaska

Sarah Palin was selected by John McCain to be his 2008 running mate in his bid for the presidency. Palin was the Governor of Alaska at the time of her selection.

Invesco Field

Barack Obama accepted the Democratic nomination for the US presidency before a crowd of 100,000 at Invesco Field in Denver, CO.



Africa

After Obama decided to run for the US presidency, he toured Africa where he was treated like a rock star and began to gain international recognition.

Berlin

After Obama accepted the Democratic nomination for US president, he toured Europe and gave an address before 200,000 people in Berlin. After gaining much attention for his soaring speech, the McCain Campaign tried to label him as a lightweight celebrity like Paris Hilton.

Sedona, Arizona

Sarah Palin was in meltdown when preparing for her debate with Joe Biden. The prep team had started their work in a New York City hotel. John McCain thought she'd feel more comfortable at his ranch in Sedona, Arizona, so the prep team was moved there.



Themes

Game Changers

The book, "Game Change" delivers as advertised. The premise of the book is how change agents impacted the course of the 2008 presidential campaign. These "game changers" are the stars of the narrative and clearly demonstrate how they virtually changed US history.

The first game changer that is addressed in the book is the one that laid the groundwork for the possibility of the election to the presidency of a young, relatively unknown and inexperienced African-American politician. In 2007, the administration of President George W. Bush was winding down. The country was not only exasperated with the nation's involvement in foreign wars, overall Bush fatigue was taking over the country. They were ready for hope and change and they were ready for the game to change. Enter Barack Obama whose persona presented the biggest game changer the country could have imagined.

What could have lifted a young, inexperienced, and rather obscure African-American politician to national prominence with enough resultant energy to propel him to seek the most powerful position on earth? What changed the game for Obama and the nation was his being selected to give the keynote address at the 2004 Democratic Presidential Convention. With that speech, he changed the entire landscape of American politics. His soaring words and dramatic and emotional delivery caught the attention of an entire nation that was eager and even hungry for big change. This young gifted orator that offered that possibility. Had Obama not given that address, we may well be reading a story about President Hillary Clinton or President John McCain.

When John McCain, the scruffy old war hero who was a legendary war hero, found himself opposing the young dynamo for the office of the president, he knew he was outclassed in many ways. He understood that he needed a dramatic change to his campaign to even have a chance - something that would really shake the election up and take the focus off Obama and onto his own campaign. McCain didn't have the charisma to do this himself and decided it would be his choice of running mate who could be the game changer and salvage his campaign.

McCain first thought of selecting a Democrat, Senator Joe Lieberman, as his running mate. But a trial balloon indicated that adding his friend Joe would definitely shake up his campaign but would do more harm than good. A new name was placed on that table. Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska was presented as a possibility. McCain's instincts were right that Sarah Palin was a game changer. However, she changed things in ways that McCain and his political operatives could have only imagined in their nightmares. The lesson learned by McCain was that game changers do not always present change the leads to positive results.



Ambition

Those who read "Game Change" cannot fail to notice that there is one trait that is common among politicians no matter what side of the ideological spectrum they are on. That trait is ambition. The concept of considering oneself as a credible nominee for the presidency is mind-boggling. Since everyone has flaws, skeletons in their closets, and at least some measure of self-doubt, the one trait that one must possess to override all those cautionary thoughts that inevitably pop up in one's mind is ambition.

"Game Change" is a study in ambition. The level and depth of ambition is different in each figure in this book which highlights arguably the most ambitious pursuit in the world. Barack Obama had been a state senator in Illinois before he was elected to the Senate in 2004. By 2007, he was confident that he was ready to be President. Just as with anyone, it is difficult to pinpoint why a person has the kind of self-confidence and ambition it takes to embark on such a heady venture. Obama was full of energy. He hated the US Senate. It was full of people who "yakked" all day and most of those people were way older than he was. He needed to be challenged and to feel like he was really doing something for his country. His self-assured confidence and ambition led him to seek the presidency.

It was Hillary Clinton's ambition to be president from the time her husband, Bill Clinton, held the office. Some say she had that ambition from the time she was a little girl. Hillary's self-worth came from hard work and dedication. She studied domestic and foreign policies and kept herself well-versed on all the issues. She hard worked hard, kept her nose to the grindstone, and had earned it. Besides, she had been humiliated by her husband's philandering and there was a notion that it was her turn.

For McCain, he had wanted to be president from the time he lost the nomination to George W. Bush in 2000. McCain was a legendary figure - a Navy pilot and POW who had been tortured by the Viet Cong. He was a war hero and long-time Senator. He was a "maverick" and relished the occasions when he disagreed with his party and publicly crossed them. His ambition, too, came from a sense of entitlement. He had suffered for his country. He was a brave hero. If he didn't know all the issues very well, the nation should give him a pass.

Sarah Palin was a competitive person. Once she was thrown into the mega-spotlight of presidential politics, she loved it. But Palin could not stand up to the pressure of what it meant to campaign. Yet, she wanted to win more than anything. She had mostly easy successes in her life and was never required to know very much. Her ambition stemmed from being spoiled and her experience of usually getting her way. She wanted to get her way and become the US Vice President but didn't want to have to work very hard for it. Palin was intelligent enough to know, somewhere deep inside, that she was not qualified. But qualifications didn't matter to her. All that mattered was what she wanted.

The Media

In these days of Cable TV that goes 24/7 and the Internet that is always at most people's fingertips, one would be naïve to think that today's media has no impact on the nation's political scene. As soon as a politician misspeaks or is involved in a scandal, the story is instantly being transmitted around the nation and the world. It is understandable that many people collapse under the pressure and stress from the constant questioning, monitoring and sometimes badgering by the press.

In "Game Change," the story of the 2008 presidential election, the press played a huge role in the way the election turned out. At least the principals certainly thought so. The most obvious and dramatic example of this was the impact the press had on Sarah Palin. Although Palin was a governor and accustomed to some level of press scrutiny, presidential politics was a whole new ballgame for her. When interviewing Palin, Charlie Gibson kept pressing her for her opinion of the Bush Doctrine. It was obvious that the person running for the Vice Presidency had no idea what the Bush Doctrine was. The interview was aired on ABC for the nation and world to see.

On CBS, Katie Couric repeatedly asked Palin a simple question about what newspapers she read everyday. Palin inexplicably had no answer. Later, when pressed by Couric about why she could make the claim of having dealt with Russia, her answer was so comical that Saturday Night Live used her exact words in a comedy skit in which Tina Fey played Palin. As Heilemann and Halperin concluded, the Couric interview and the Tina Fey skit sealed Palin's image forever for the American people.

Many politicians, especially conservatives, claim that the mainstream media is liberal and plays favorites. While Hillary Clinton wasn't a conservative, she and Bill Clinton felt the sting of the media's favoritism for Obama. They felt that the media was soft on Obama when questionable parts of his past were exposed but largely ignored. The Clintons had fought the press for years. During the 2008 race, Clinton felt scrutinized and criticized by the press for every move she made while Obama remained unscathed by any misstep that he made. McCain agreed with the Clintons and felt that the press was out to get him to ensure that Obama would emerge victorious.

The press is protected by the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech. With that freedom, the press is in a powerful position and plays a large and vital role in America's politics and therefore in its history.



Style

Perspective

"Game Change" by John Heilemann and Mark Halperin, is written in the third-person narrative. Both of the authors are reporters and political analysts. Therefore, the book is a combination of the reporting of actual facts and interviews as well as opinion based on the authors' experiences as professional analysts. There appears to be no particular slant or preconceived notions in the telling of the story of the 2008 Presidential Election. All of the four main figures in the book are described as having attributes as well as flaws. The story that emerges in "Game Change" is based on hundreds of interviews of people who were privy to the inner-workings of the campaigns.

The authors have a long career in the field of journalism and have earned their bona fides in political reporting. John Heilemann is the national political reporter and columnist for New York Magazine. He is an award winning journalist and author. Among the books he has written is "Pride Before the Fall: The Trails of Bill Gates and the End of the Microsoft Era." Mark Halperin is editor-at-large and senior political analyst for Time Magazine. He is the author of several political books including "The Undecided Voter's Guide to the Next President." Both journalists are political analysts for MSNBC.

Tone

"Game Change" by John Heilemann and Mark Halperin is written in the factual tone of a news report with flourishes of editorial opinion. The style is not surprising since the authors are both experienced and very successful political reporters and analysts. The story of the 2007 presidential election is told in a narrative that is seemingly void of partisan bias.

The authors are not only accomplished writers and reporters, they are both veteran political analysts so quite naturally their reporting includes factual accounts, observations and conclusions. Heilemann and Halperin carefully craft their narrative of the progression and evolution of the three campaigns, those of Obama, Clinton and McCain, against the backdrop of crises points and cliffhangers that resulted in game changers which, throughout the story, proved to alter the course of the entire presidential campaign.

The always complicated and mercurial nature of presidential politics is presented in a surprisingly clear and understandable manner. Even those readers who are not familiar with the drama and intricacies of the 2008 primary season and general election, will be able to grasp and appreciate the difficulties of the journey one embarks upon when pursuing the most powerful position on earth. The authors cut through the minutia and detail and present a story that is compelling and fast-paced and as intriguing as any novel.



Structure

"Game Change" by John Heilemann and Mark Halperin is divided into three main parts. Part I, Obama and the Clintons, contains fourteen chapters and covers the lead up to the Democratic presidential primary, the primary battle, and finally, Obama's capture of the nomination. Part II, McCain and Palin, contains three chapters. This section focuses on the selection of Sarah Palin for the Republican Vice Presidential nomination and the struggles that Palin and the Campaign suffered through after the selection. Part III, The Race of a Lifetime, contains six chapters and describes the presidential race in 2008 between the Democratic candidates, Barack Obama and Joe Biden, and the Republican candidates, John McCain and Sarah Palin. The section ends with the election of President Barack Obama.

An epilogue entitled, Together at Last, describes the aftermath of the election. Obama's choice for Secretary of State was his former opponent Hillary Clinton. Other sections include, an Author's Notes, a Prologue, and an Index.

The name of the book, "Game Change," figures into the structure of the book in that for many of the crises that face the Presidential campaigns of 2004, the principals were always looking for a "game changer" that would give them the advantage over their opponent. Or, an unexpected game changer would come out of the blue and alter the course of the presidential race. The authors often use cliffhangers at the conclusions of their chapters by hinting at the notion that a game changer was either in the works or would be hitting the candidates without warning.

Quotes

"For more than a decade she [Hillary Clinton] had been in the spotlight and under the microscope ceaselessly and often miserably, and in the process came to dwell on a rarefied plane in the national consciousness: beloved and detested, applauded and denounced, famous and infamous, but never ignored." (Chapter 1, page 14)

"[Mark Penn] contended that the biggest hurdle Hillary would have to surmount if she ran for president was the doubt that a woman was capable of being commander in chief. At all times she had to project strength, resolution, rough-and-readiness—and do absolutely nothing that signaled squishiness." (Chapter 2, page 40)

"Hillary had no intention of saying she was sorry. 'I don't have anything to apologize for, she thought. You want me to apologize for the fact that the president is an idiot?'" (Chapter 3, page 45)

"Now, spontaneously and quite unexpectedly, he found himself speaking passionately about what it would mean to women in black churches who had worked so long and so hard to see their kids grow up safe and have big dreams in inner-city communities." (Chapter 4, page 71)

"The Iowa homestretch was drawing near, and he [Obama] believed that on his present trajectory, he was headed for a respectable second place. And I ain't running, he thought to be a respectable second. He needed a plan to change the dynamic. He needed a plan to change the game." (Chapter 6, page 118)

"When Obama walked offstage to Stevie Wonder's 'Signed, Sealed, Delivered,' the ovation was thunderous. His supporters raised the rafters with their cries of 'Fire up! Ready to Go!'" (Chapter 8, page 152)

"'I come tonight with a very, very full heart,' Hillary began. 'Over the last week, I listened to you, and in the process, I found my own voice.'" (Chapter 10, page 190)

"'The world is changing. The old ways will not do. It's time for a new generation of leadership.' So it is with Barack Obama. He has lit a spark of hope amid the fierce urgency of now." (Chapter 12, page 219)

"Although we weren't able to shatter that hardest, highest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it's got about eighteen million cracks in it. And the light is shining through like never before, filling us all with the hope and the sure knowledge that the path will be a little easier next time." (Chapter 14, page 263)

"If I lost the nomination to Hillary, I can hold my head up. But If I lose the general election to John McCain, I'll be run out of town on a rail." (Chapter 18, page 326)

"A woman has two sons; one goes off to sea, the other becomes vice president; neither I s heard from again." (Chapter 19, page 335)

"At the moment, though, she stood there on stage, perched atop a pair of ruby-red heels, looking less like Eliza Doolittle than Dorothy: the girl swept up in the cyclone, lifted out of her black-and-white world and deposited in a Technicolor Oz. (Chapter 20, page 373)



Topics for Discussion

What position did Barack Obama hold before he was elected to the United States Senate? How did he come to national attention?

When did Hillary begin to think about running for the presidency? What did she feel stood in her way? What advice to she get from her husband and daughter about running in 2004?

What scandal doomed John Edwards' campaign? What position did he seek from whoever won the election? Was it either Obama or Clinton? Why was it a foolish ambition?

Why did McCain want to choose Joe Lieberman as his vice presidential running mate? What were the obstacles in choosing him?

Why did McCain wind up choosing Sarah Palin? What were the drawbacks from this selection? What mistakes did the McCain Campaign make in processing and selecting her?

How did both the Clintons and John McCain characterize the press' treatment of Barack Obama? How did the press treat the Clintons and McCain? How did they treat Palin?

Why did the McCain Campaign begin to think that Palin was a poor choice? What two events defined Sarah Palin before the American public? What are the ramifications of selecting someone who is not qualified to be the Vice Presidential candidate?