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**Obamaworld versus Hillaryland**

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**The contenders are battling over the soul of the Democratic Party**

Illustration by Kevin Kallaughner

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JOHN EDWARDS has been saying since 2004 that there are two Americas—the America of the rich and privileged and the America of the poor and put-upon. The results of March 4th proved that there are also two Democratic Parties.

A famous political distinction exists between “wine-track” and “beer-track” Democrats. Wine-track Democrats have traditionally supported reform-minded liberals such as Gary Hart and Paul Tsongas. Beer-track Democrats have preferred more practical-minded pols. Walter Mondale famously hammered the nail into Gary Hart's coffin when he stole a line from a hamburger advertisement and asked “Where's the beef?”

Part of Bill Clinton's genius was to bring the wine-drinkers and beer-drinkers together. This was, after all, a man who went to Yale and Oxford but who grew up the child of a widow in the backwoods of Arkansas. Yet this year's Democratic primaries have burst the party asunder once again.

Obamaworld is a universe of liberal professionals and young people—plus blacks from all economic segments. Hillaryland, by contrast, is a place of working-class voters, particularly working-class women, and the old. These are people who occupy not just different economies but also different cultures. How many white Obama voters eat in Cracker Barrel or Bob Evans? And how many Clinton voters have a taste for sushi?

These groups could hardly have a more different view of politics. Mr Obama's supporters are, mostly, the liberal version of “values voters”. They are intensely worried about America's past sins and its current woeful image in the world. They regard Mr Obama as a “transformational” leader—a man who can, with one sweep of his hand, wipe away the sins of the Bush years and summon up the best in their country.

Mrs Clinton's supporters, by contrast, are kitchen-table voters. They wear jackets emblazoned with the logos of their unions. They work with their hands or stand on their feet all day. They have seen their living standards stagnate for years, and they are worried about paying their bills rather than saving their political souls.

This helps to explain one of the biggest puzzles in the campaign—the fact that momentum is so fleeting. During Mr Obama's 11-state winning streak it looked as though he was eating into Mrs Clinton's core support in the white working class. He did reasonably well with that group in the Potomac states (Maryland and Virginia) and extraordinarily well with them in Wisconsin. He also secured endorsements from important unions. But Ohio has reversed that. White working-class voters are simply not quite comfortable with what Mr Obama is selling.

The battle for the Democratic Party is so bitter because it is a battle over culture. Mrs Clinton's supporters look at Mr Obama's and see latte-drinking elitists. Mr Obama's supporters look at Mrs Clinton's and smell all sorts of ancestral sins, not least racism. The two groups neither like nor respect each other.

There are actually good reasons for irritation on both sides. The Obamaites are not just otherworldly. They are also weirdly cultish. All the vague talk of “hope” and “change” is grating enough. But many Obamamaniacs want something even vaguer than this—they want political redemption.

It is certainly impressive to see 20,000 people queuing for hours to see a politician. But should they worship their man with such wide-eyed intensity? And should they shout “Yes we can” with such unbridled enthusiasm? The slogan, after all, reminds any parent of “Bob the Builder”, a cartoon for toddlers, and Mr Obama himself rejected it as naff when it was first suggested to him. His supporters are rather like high-school nerds who surround the coolest kid in the class in the hope of looking cool themselves.

But there are also good reasons to be irritated with Mrs Clinton's beer-track Democrats. Blue-collar workers have certainly had a hard time of it. The Cleveland rustbelt is a decaying monument to good jobs that have been shipped abroad or mechanised out of existence. But one of the tragedies of this campaign is that both Mr Obama and Mrs Clinton have decided to ignore Bill Clinton's message—that the only way that America can remain competitive is to prepare people for new jobs rather than cling on to old ones—and instead engage in a silly competition to see who can bash NAFTA hardest.

## **Brains, not brawn**

The final reason why the battle between the rival supporters will tear the Democratic Party apart is that the balance of power within the party is shifting. Mrs Clinton's Democrats have dominated the party since Franklin Roosevelt's time. They have hired a few eggheads to do the maths. But they have never let them get the upper hand. And they have repeatedly seen off challenges by “new class” Democrats. This year's election is arguably their last stand.

Economic change is relentlessly shrinking their base: manufacturing jobs are in decline at a time when brain-working jobs are expanding. And Mr Obama has shifted an important proportion of the old Democratic alliance—black Americans—to his column. He is also bringing large numbers of college-educated young people into the party who have little in common with old-style Democrats. One of the ironies of the current campaign is that Mrs Clinton's chief strategist, Mark Penn, has been one of the loudest voices on the left arguing that the party's future lies with brain rather than brawn. He must now be fervently hoping that he is wrong.

The great challenge for the Democratic Party in November will be to put this coalition back together. But the bitter fight in the months to come will widen the already gaping divide. John McCain could not be better positioned to pick up the pieces.

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