

It's not gender - memo to my friends
(On the Issue of Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, Presidential Hopefuls of the
Democratic Party)

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Women in this country have not forgotten how women were and are still discriminated against. To many, Mrs. Hillary Clinton is The Gender Hope. Many of my sisters and friends from the African continent and the Diaspora are of the same mind set. They berate me, sometimes using very harsh words, for not having a passion for gender and for what men do to women. I do have a passion for gender and I can prove it but that is not the issue here. However, I must admit that I differ with many of them on the issue of what men do to women. To a large extent in this day and age, a person can do to another person how much that person allows. There are laws and regulations, groups and organizations out there to help. I don't want to forget gender oppression but I don't care much for a fixation on it. It should not control my life or tell me not to scrutinize gendered people. We lose the battle with a fixation on ONLY gender oppression. It is divisive. Men and women have fought together and still do. Men too are oppressed; it depends on many factors such as class, race, ability, not just gender.

I have followed and admired the rise of Hillary Clinton and I respect what she stands for, but she confused many of us with her support of the invasion of Iraq at a time that majority of people in this country and the world, including the United Nations, did not support it. Where is the gender opinion that ascribes 'peace' to women? That's it for those who prescribe and ascribe feminine traits! That she appears to be changing now because of politics is more confusing.

When we talk about individuals in leadership positions such as the presidency, we need to think about qualities. Women who have risen to the presidency in the world have not done so because of gender - Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain, Golda Meier of Israel, Indira Gandhi of India, and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia to name a few. They inspired leadership and were able to galvanize the support of opposing and/or multiple interest groups.

Two years ago when my nephew told me about Barack Obama, I said "what?" When my students began to bring up the same name, I had to pay more attention. Over the years, it had been difficult to get them to appreciate that they are vectors of change, so I was pleased to see that someone has not only got them to appreciate it but also got them to become active agents of political change. This has been seen as unprecedented in US history. What was responsible for this? Barack Obama. To have been able to use his ability as a youth organizer to mobilize people of this country, to me, is one of the greatest feats of this period. It is fundamental to democracy because democracy does not want to leave anybody behind. And YES the speech thing. From JFK to Mahatma Gandhi to Martin Luther King Jr. and Mandela, democracy has always relied on inspiring leaders.

On the issue of Management - Management draws from your ability to use your personal resources and the resources that are available to you. America has excellent resources, both human and otherwise, but we need a leader who is able to tap the best without fear. This is the stuff of a Commander-in-Chief. Which of the presidential hopefuls has the charisma to inspire your trust? Which one has shown the ability to draw human and other resources? Which one has risen from 'unknown factor' to the frontline position? To super transparent fund-raiser who has nothing to hide? This leader has the skills for getting this nation out of its economic quandary. He is Barack Obama.

From the position of my folks, poor women from the other side of town, I look at people for what they have to offer to my folks and America at this time of depression when many find it difficult to have enough heat in their houses. Who has been in my situation and who has shown the empathy for my situation? Who spoke up for immigrants when all others were afraid? Who is not afraid to look at the enemy in the eye and talk TO him as we did successfully in North Korea? Who is willing to dialogue with enemies at this age that there are too many wars? At this time that America wants peaceful resolution to conflicts rather than war? I personally don't want our men and women to be sent to unwarranted wars?

Obama's willingness to dialogue with enemies is appealing. Leaders of the world are mostly young people. Young people are the shakers and movers of this global technological world. In this country, young people are attracted to Obama's youthfulness, sincerity, and passion for changing the old game of hatred and negativity. Young people can relate to Obama. They have not yet been corrupted by negativism. The future belongs to young people and old people who need change to spice up their life. I see Obama as an opportunity to revitalize the polity to greater heights.

Without prejudice to those wives who claim their husbands' experience as theirs, may I ask how one determines which of the husband's experience to claim and which one to ignore? If you are the wife of a doctor/surgeon and you claim to be a doctor/surgeon because of that, why won't you claim both the successful surgical operations and the deaths as well? If someone had luncheons and shook hands with presidents, does that make that person a president? No president of the United States had the experience of being president of the US the first time he contested. No Senator had the experience of being a senator before s/he became a senator and yet they claim to do their jobs satisfactorily.

I agree that "Obama has interjected freshness and vigor to politics. He has infused innervating enthusiasm and brought the healing balm of unity, breaking all thresholds of divisiveness. That is what America needs now; a stable invigorated expectant and confident polity that will give teeth to their president. The effect of Obamamania is supremely positive and dynamic and it is the catalyst that America needs to carry all the citizens along in these trying times of threatening economic recession and global terrorism. Obama has revolutionized politics in America."