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(Review) Almost Madam President, Why Hillary Clinton “Won” in 2008, by Nichola D. Gutgold, and (Review) Hillary Clinton’s Race for the White House, Gender Politics and the Media on the Campaign Trail, by Regina G. Lawrence and Melody Rose

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**Comments**

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for a graduate course, although its dense research and extensive theoretical discussion would put it out of reach of most undergraduates.

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***Almost Madam President: Why Hillary Clinton “Won” in 2008.*** By Nichola D. Gutgold. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. 2009. 119 pp. \$26.95.

***Hillary Clinton’s Race for the White House: Gender Politics and the Media on the Campaign Trail.*** By Regina G. Lawrence and Melody Rose. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 2010. 277 pp. \$26.50.

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Although generations of political scientists have predicted and dissected presidential elections, the centrality of identity politics — and particularly of gender and race — to the 2008 races obliges members of the profession to take new approaches to these seemingly familiar events. Of course, gender and race have always been integral to these contests, but past examinations of masculinity and whiteness, among other norms, have routinely been limited or marginalized, options that are now foreclosed by the electoral accomplishments of Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama. This attentiveness to change, and to the ways in which candidates, journalists, and the public respond to change, is the shared theme of these two volumes on the 2008 presidential campaign of Hillary Rodham Clinton.

In *Almost Madam President*, Nichola Gutgold employs a narrative approach, analyzing the communications of the Clinton campaign, the media responses, and the campaign counterstrategies by telling the “rhetorical story” of Hillary Clinton in the 2008 primary season. Gutgold finds the candidate extraordinary — Clinton is the first viable woman presidential candidate to appear in every primary and caucus — and argues that her campaign sets a political standard for the future, revealing

the accessibility and the inaccessibility of the presidency to women. In addition to this historical assessment, Gutgold analyzes Clinton's campaign communications. She concludes that Clinton often employed a "feminine style as a communicator," seeking to empower her listeners while stressing her own experience and readiness to lead.

A critical reader will observe that these are strategies embraced by all candidates who prioritize voter mobilization. Gutgold maintains, however, that the Clinton campaign embraced this strategy as part of an effort to frame the candidate's identity in order to counter gender bias and sexism. Confronting increased criticism from her Democratic opponents, Clinton had to craft a message that was affirming (never defensive), tough (yet not hypermasculine), and caring (to exhibit feminine attributes). On this and numerous other occasions, Gutgold concludes, Clinton achieved an unprecedented level of "rhetorical elasticity." The media, however, remained consistently critical and oppositional. Among the "major media moments" that the author examines are the bursts of coverage associated with Clinton's necklines, with her laugh (the "Clinton Cackle"), and with her husband's campaigning. Concluding that personality, not policy, predominated throughout the primary season, she presents both old and new media as engaging in personalized attacks.

For Gutgold, the campaign's achievements are registered through its contestation of every primary and caucus and by winning votes. Yet she supplements voter and delegate counts with descriptive statistics drawn from a range of new media sources, including YouTube and Facebook, adding a new dimension to her communications analysis. Although she is careful to acknowledge the distinctions among print, broadcast, and electronic media, Gutgold concludes that the consistencies in the coverage — often ranging only from gender bias to sexism — are marked. And Clinton's campaign strategies effected little change in its tone or content.

In *Hillary Clinton's Race for the White House*, Regina G. Lawrence and Melody Rose analyze the media coverage of the Clinton campaign in terms of campaign politics. They argue that three forces shaped the candidate's coverage, namely, society's enduring gender ideologies, long-standing media norms and routines, and press responses to and relationships with Clinton, forged throughout her years as a first lady and a U.S. Senator. Though all three influences are considered, the authors focus on the first two — their interest lies in distinguishing and delineating the effects of gender on the Clinton candidacy. (Clinton's past media relations and

rhetorical strategies are often considered in order to determine the extent to which one can generalize from her case.) For Lawrence and Rose, then, the 2008 Clinton campaign provides the opportunity to test prescriptions developed by women and politics scholars who have studied countless women's campaigns for state and national office.

As evidence, the authors cite candidate remarks; print, broadcast, and electronic media coverage; and interviews with staff members from the Clinton campaign. They trace shifts in the campaign's gender cues and messages and describe how campaign decision makers perceived those changes. The interview data are intriguing, especially since there are strong denials that the campaign implemented a gender-aware media strategy. In fact, gender messages altered as advisors gained or lost influence, and as the campaign encountered electoral difficulties. From October 2007 through January 2008, the campaign incorporated feminine messaging favored by Mandy Grunwald into its "equality-based narrative" (p. 118). Losses in Iowa, on Super Tuesday, and in subsequent primaries led to the substitution of what the authors describe as a "testosterone blitzkrieg" by March, complete with "tough-talk surrogates [dispatched] to regender the campaign along traditionally male lines" (p. 129). Charges of inconsistency were sidestepped by the campaign's constant reliance on a "competence-and-experience theme" (p. 130).

Assessing media coverage, Lawrence and Rose provide some comparative study of John McCain, Barack Obama, and Sarah Palin. Conducting a quantitative and qualitative analysis of coverage provided by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the national nightly news broadcasts of the three major networks, the authors conclude that Clinton achieved parity in the amount of coverage, but she received higher proportions of negative coverage. This was due in significant part to her status as a front-runner. Some past forms of gender-biased coverage such as dwelling on the emotional state of the woman candidate, for instance, were absent. What was very much in evidence were occasions when sexist speech (by Rush Limbaugh, among others) or gender-biased statements (from the McCain or Obama campaigns) passed with little mention. Racist speech, in contrast, received close and critical coverage, which often disadvantaged Clinton. Steps taken by Clinton to shape her coverage were only marginally effective — they either reinforced Obama's message (her experience placing her among the incumbents who gave impetus to his call for change) or failed to overturn established story lines (her decision to

campaign through the primary season being framed as evidence of her overweening ambition).

These reflective analyses of Hillary Rodham Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign lay a foundation for classroom study at the undergraduate and graduate level, and for continuing research by communications scholars, historians, and political scientists. As this work unfolds, intersectional analysis will carry particular significance. We have only just begun to comprehend the significance of Clinton as a white woman who came of age during the antiwar and women's rights movements, in a politically competitive relationship with Obama, a biracial man connected to the African diaspora of the twentieth century. Currently, dichotomous comparisons of gender versus race remain the norm, oversimplifying the candidates' self-presentations and the public's judgments. And yet to the extent that we fail to respect intersectional realities and complexities in our work, we present flawed assessments of campaigning and governing in the United States. Gutgold, Lawrence, and Rose provide a strong start on the challenging and extraordinarily important task of uncovering the power of identity in politics.

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