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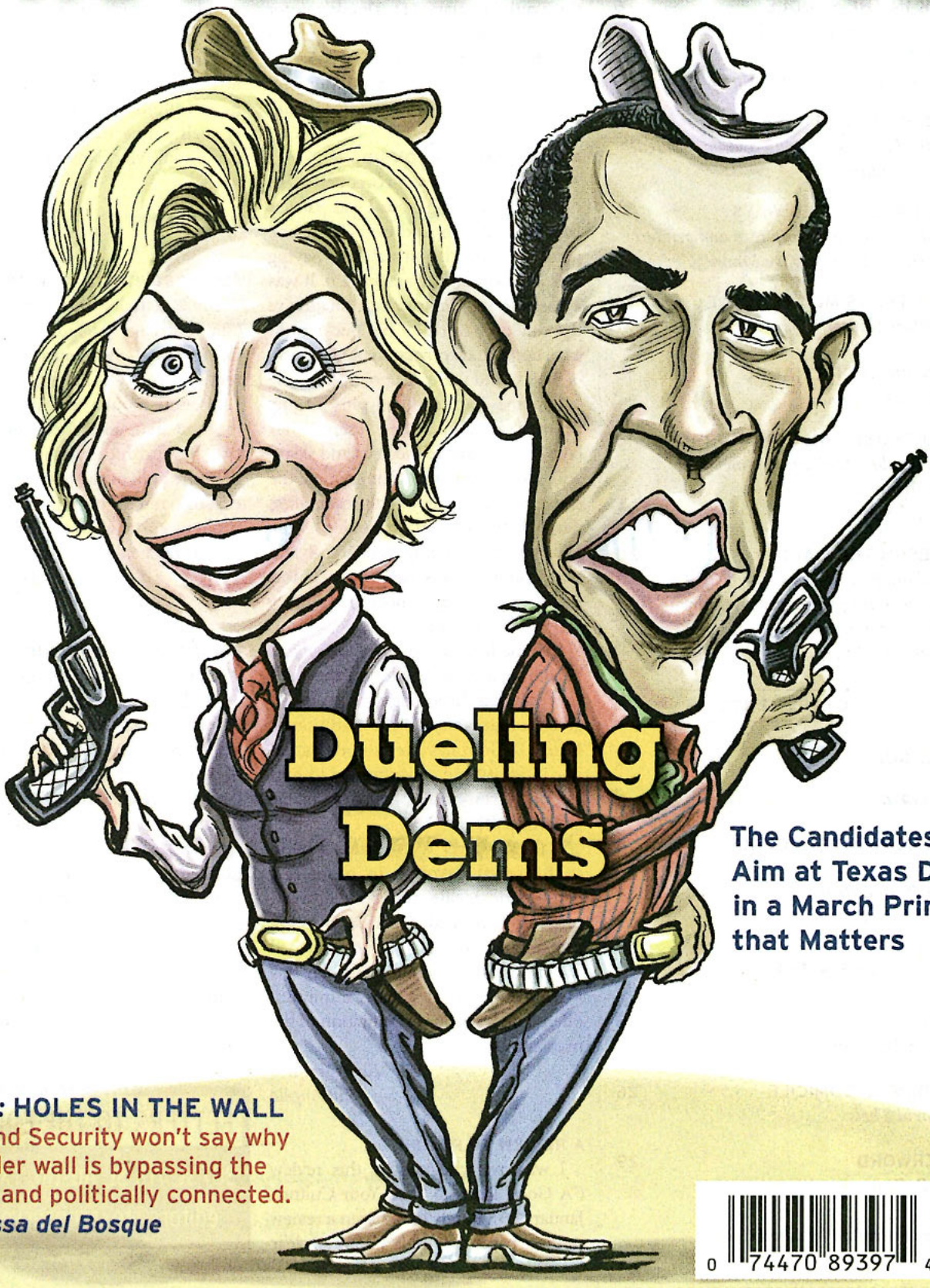
# The Texas Observer



## Dueling Dems

The Candidates Take Aim at Texas Delegates in a March Primary that Matters

***INSIDE:* HOLES IN THE WALL**

Homeland Security won't say why the border wall is bypassing the wealthy and politically connected.

***by Melissa del Bosque***

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FEBRUARY 22, 2008

# The Texas Observer

FEATURES



DEPARTMENTS



BOOKS & THE CULTURE



*Cover illustration by Chad Crowe*

# Dialogue

### SING IT, SISTER

The world needs more Tom Palaimas and Willie Nelsons ("Alive and Singing the Truth," January 11). Thank you for having the courage to write and publish this during our lifetimes.

*Susan Morrison*
*via e-mail*

### A CANDIDATE TO CONSIDER

Finished my cover-to-cover perusal of the "Primaries '08" issue. I was particularly pleased with Andrew Wheat's fine piece of research journalism, "Saving Speaker Craddick" (January 25). It was a classic *Texas Observer* examination of the shadowy world of big bucks influence upon, and corruption of, the world of Texas (and national) politics.

For the half century-plus of my devoted attention, the *Observer* has consistently exposed secrecy and sleaze and corruption and championed the cause of responsible, representative democracy. So, why, I wonder, is the *Observer* not singing the praise and the promise of the candidacy of Ray McMurrey in the Democratic primary race for U.S. Senate?

I think him to be fully capable of becoming a great senator, in the tradition of Ralph Yarborough, or an equally great congressman in the tradition of Henry B. Gonzales. He exhibits incredible integrity and commitment to honest, open, responsive, and responsible government.

If the *Observer* is to remain true to its historical devotion to promoting democratic ideals and good government in Texas and America, I cannot understand why it has not grasped the potential of a candidate like Ray McMurrey and, at a bare minimum, offered up a serious examination of the man and his views.

*Tom Camfield*
*San Angelo*

### A REVIEW TO RELISH

I was overwhelmed by this review ("A Good Place to Shed Your Culture," January 25). Rarely have I seen a review in these pages that finds a book so clearly bigger than its subject. Your reviewer Josh Rosenblatt obviously found a soul mate in this author and could read his mind, and perhaps even complete a few of the author's unfinished thoughts. Rosenblatt is eloquent, perceptive, and at times understated when we know he is withholding very high praise. It is such a fine essay to read and relish. Thank you. Now on to the book itself ...

*Catherine Tensing*
*via e-mail*

### SLOW GROWTH TO A TRICKLE

Great article; thorough research ("Full Stream Ahead," February 8). County land use control is the only real answer to this dilemma. And if the Legislature would be willing for once to grant that, and tweak some legislative stewardship laws for the LCRA, then the bulk of the over-building and expansion in the beautiful Hill Country could be curtailed in a reasonable manner for the benefit of Austin's future.

*D.B. Goodson*
*via e-mail*

### LOAN SHARKS CIRCLING

Thank you for mentioning the credit card debt problems in your article ("Borrowed Trouble," January 25). The whole mortgage fiasco is an evolution of what the credit card companies learned several years ago. "60 Minutes" did two shows about spiraling interest rates and fees, but it seems that nobody noticed. I appreciate Michigan Sen. Carl Levin, who is constantly trying to legislate regulations to put a halt to this loan-sharking. Is there no one in the whole state of Texas who understands consumer protection anymore?

*Wallis Parnelle*
*via e-mail*

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS
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# Let the People's Voice Be Heard

We Texans who revel in the sport of politics have much to be thankful for this year. For the first time in two decades, Texas matters in presidential primary politics. Big time.

Everyone, especially Texans, had become used to Texas' being ignored when it came to presidential politics.

Briefly, during the last session of the Texas Legislature, the powers that be under the pink cast-iron dome flirted with becoming relevant in the presidential selection process. The House voted overwhelmingly (in a rare, truly bipartisan effort) to move up our primaries from March 4th to February 5th, joining 24 other states vying for status and influence just in case the races were not yet over by Super Tuesday.

Sen. Robert Duncan (R-Lubbock)—and 10 of his colleagues who chose to impose the Senate's rule requiring two-thirds of the 31-member body to bring up any bill—blocked a similar measure approved in committee. At the time, Duncan said he opposed the change mainly because it would "be a severe hardship" on county election officials.

He also told the *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal* last spring: "I think you are going to see five or six people in both primaries, and hopefully by next March it should be down to one or two. Texas will have a real opportunity to make a real choice at that point in time and have some influence, as opposed to this cluster of candidates that is out there on both sides of both parties."

What is that about blind pigs and acorns?

Who knew that, defying the conventional wisdom of the moment, Sen. Duncan gave Texas the first opportunity in a generation to be a player in selecting at least the Democratic nominee, through a complicated and arcane process that involves a combination of a primary, caucuses, and free-agent powerbrokers called superdelegates?

In this issue, we report on the process and provide a forum for Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama to make their personal, first-person pitches to Texas Democratic primary voters.

We also have an analysis by our sometimes-critic, Republican activist Royal Masset, of the likely scenario for the Republican primary and the impact a McCain era may have on the Texas GOP.

The presidential primary/caucus process was obviously conceived by the party that Will Rogers referred to when he said, "I belong to no organized party. I am a Democrat."

Regardless of who wins the Democratic presidential primary here, it is almost certain to be close, distributing a good share of delegates to each candidate and probably assuring that neither has—nor will obtain—the 2,025 delegates required for the nomination in Denver this summer.

It is those powerbrokers, the superdelegates, who warrant our special attention. They are free agents, able to commit to whomever they want, regardless of the vote in their district or state. They can switch their allegiance on a whim or in response to fear or favor.

Although there are those who will argue that the 796 superdelegates—Democratic members of the U.S. House and Senate, governors, members of the Democratic National Committee, and other ex-officio party leaders—exist to moderate the "ideological activists," the fact of the matter is that they constitute the most undemocratic aspect of the nomination process.

Yet those superdelegates could decide for all of us who the next president of the United States will be.

Superdelegate Donna Brazile, who ran Al Gore's campaign in 2000, has said, "If 795 of my colleagues decide this election, I will quit the Democratic Party."

We agree. Let the people speak...and let their votes count in 2008, as unfortunately they did not in 2000. ■

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# Union Brawls & Down-Ballot Dispatches

**THE UNION BRAND** Conventional wisdom is taking a beating this primary. Texas Democrats don't matter in presidential contests, they said. They do this year. Unions are obsolete in the Lone Star State, they said. Not when it comes to the March 4 presidential primary.

While many expect that the most political activity by a union outside of the Iowa caucus this Democratic presidential primary season will occur in Ohio, Texas could well be third in importance. A number of unions have parachuted organizers into the state to mobilize their memberships on behalf of either Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama. The two current heavyweights in this fight are the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) for Clinton and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) for Obama.

In some ways, the campaign is an extension of an historic conflict between the two. SEIU has a reputation for aggressive organizing; AFSCME has complained that its rival union has tried to poach its members. In 2005, they signed a two-year pact that, according to AFSCME, forbade either side from "raiding, decertifying or otherwise interfering with existing representation rights of our members."

AFSCME may have as many as 100 organizers fanning out around Texas, according to one union source. The pressure is on AFSCME president Gerald McEntee to deliver a victory for Clinton and silence the rumbling within his own ranks over past mistakes. In 2004, AFSCME invested resources and gave a high-profile endorsement to Howard Dean. After the infamous scream and the implosion of the Dean candidacy, McEntee told *The New York Times* he thought Dean was "nuts."

Expect AFSCME to be in overdrive for Clinton throughout the campaign. Joining AFSCME for Team Clinton will be the American Federation of Teachers, the National Association of Letter Carriers, the Sheet Metal Workers International Association, and the machinists, bricklayers, and painters. Together they represent approximately 90,000 members in Texas.

National SEIU formally endorsed Obama as the *Observer* went to press. The union has locals in Houston, San Antonio, and the Rio Grande Valley. A SEIU spokesperson said they didn't know how many organizers would be on the ground yet, but that the campaign would involve media as well as grassroots efforts, including activities by members in the Justice for Janitors campaign in Houston.

The Metroplex could be the biggest labor battleground in the state. A Texas Credit Union League poll showed Democrats in the Dallas-Fort Worth area split between the two candidates. The Obama campaign has opened three offices in the area.

**CLUTCHING COATTAILS** It was not lost on politicos in the Rio Grande Valley that state Rep. Aaron Peña was the first to announce Hillary Clinton's arrival to the area. Peña says that he has raised money for the Clintons in the past and has known them for years. He is also close to former land commissioner Garry Mauro, who had lined up early endorsements in the Valley for the New York senator. Peña says that since Clinton didn't have anyone on the ground, he filled in, but took a back seat once her campaign became more established.

Peña needs all the boost he can get from Clinton's support and star power in his grudge rematch with challenger Eddie Saenz to represent District 40. Saenz has also endorsed Clinton and boasts that four out of five mayors in the district have endorsed him. He believes that the high turnout expected in the primary will benefit him. "Our theme is change and a new direction, and this is helping me out," he says.

The incumbent, Peña, counterintuitively, is painting Saenz as part of a political machine. He says higher turnout will help him overcome those "who are paid to vote."

When they last locked horns in the 2004 primary, Saenz hit Peña from the right for not getting enough done. Peña painted his opponent as a closet Republican. Then the incumbent signed on with Republican Speaker Tom Craddick. Now, Saenz, an engineer and successful businessman, has attacked Peña for being too close to leadership. "He has become what he accused me of being," Saenz says. "Austin is trying to dictate rather than us going up to Austin and trying to get what we need."

Saenz is already pointing to the campaign cash his opponent has received from Republican contributors outside the district. "I don't believe the House of Representatives ought to be a millionaires' club," says Peña. "I have to take money where I can."

**HARDSCRABBLE HOUSTON** Loyalties are funny things. One of the most competitive Democratic races this primary is for House District 140. Incumbent Kevin Bailey, a longtime liberal, has supported Republican Speaker Tom Craddick. He's a charter member of the so-called Craddick Ds. Plenty of money from Craddick's corporate cronies has found its way to Bailey. Last session Bailey managed to get a key labor provision passed into law that is giving unions their first shot at collective bargaining for municipal workers in Houston. The unions are promising to return the favor and provide manpower for his re-election.

The Texas Trial Lawyers have backed his opponent, a young up-and-comer born and raised in the district named Armando Walle. "[The trial lawyers] let me know in May that if I didn't vote to take Craddick out I'd have an opponent," Bailey says.

Walle previously worked for the area's Democratic Congressman Gene Green, who grew disgusted with Bailey when the representative failed to show for a key vote on a controversial mid-decade congressional redistricting plan. Walle accuses Bailey of missing more than 300 votes.

The district is more than 70 percent Latino and records some of the lowest turnouts in the state. It's expected that the surge in interest in the presidential primary, including efforts by the unions to turn out Latinos for Sen. Hillary Clinton, will help Walle.

In addition to the pioneering collective bargaining provision, Bailey touts his role in bringing water and sewer service for the first time to several neighborhoods in his district, as well as new sidewalks and more money for crime prevention. Walle hammers him on his tacit support for a Republican agenda that has cost children health insurance and underfunded schools. "[Voters] know leadership in Austin has failed them and my opponent has been propping up the leadership."

Bailey casts his support for Craddick in terms of pragmatism. "I am trying to get the best deal I can for people until Democrats are in the majority," he says.

**SCHOOL IS OUT** After several weeks of daring U.S. Senate candidate Rick Noriega, 50, to a debate, his Democratic rival for the seat, Ray McMurrey, finally got his wish on February 13.

It was about 45 minutes into their debate on the UT campus before Noriega mentioned McMurrey. Instead, Noriega stuck to talking points blasting the Republican incumbent, Sen. John Cornyn, treating the occasion as a practice run for a general election debate.

McMurrey, 42, a Corpus Christi teacher, presented himself as the candidate for change. He modeled himself after former U.S. Sen. Ralph Yarborough, a champion of civil rights and Great Society legislation. "I am a citizen candidate that is running against politics as usual," said McMurrey.

Noriega's debating skills were stilted at best. The state representative wandered off into the rhetorical wilderness at times, finding his way back only when speaking about his extensive military experience. McMurrey seemed like a debating whiz in comparison. But then, McMurrey makes his living speaking in front of people (he teaches government at a high school).

The debate centered on eight questions, ranging from when to leave Iraq to health care reform. A lieutenant colonel in the Texas Army National Guard, Noriega fought in Afghanistan and helped with aid operations in Houston after Katrina. The audience cheered wildly after he answered a question about his timeline for the Iraq war: "Not one more drop of American blood is going to alter Iraq," he said. Noriega promised to work toward bringing back the troops in stages, but did not specify a timetable.

McMurrey received his share of applause when he said he would advocate bringing 10,000 to 15,000 troops home every month for the next 15 months. Despite scoring some debating points, McMurrey doesn't have Noriega's grassroots support and political résumé. As of mid-February, McMurrey had no political endorsements and only $16,000 in his campaign account. Noriega, a member of the Texas House of Representatives since 1999, has slogged through political events and appearances for the past year. He has also received more than 150 endorsements from national and state Democratic groups and legislators. Now if his presentation could only live up to his résumé.

**PICTURE THIS** New Mexico took nine days to count its presidential primary ballots. Texans are nervously looking to their neighboring state and wondering what record voter turnout will portend here. While it might not be as bad as the Land of Enchantment mark our words: There will be trouble on March 4. And bet on the problems adding further fuel to the fight over a proposed voter ID law that would require people to show photo identification before voting.

A nine-hour, special midterm meeting of the House Elections Committee held on January 26 already demonstrated that Texas Republicans and Democrats are digging in for another party-line battle over voter ID in 2009. Since the end of the last session, when a voter ID bill narrowly died in the Senate, supporters have been rounding up election fraud anecdotes from county clerks and district attorneys around the state to back up their case. Tyler Republican Rep. Leo Berman's committee showcased some of that work. And once again Democratic Reps. Rafael Anchia of Dallas and Lon Burnam of Fort Worth pointed out there was little evidence of fraud at polling places (most problems involved mail-in ballot scams or vote-harvesting at registration).

Always politely ignored in the public debate is the nationwide GOP push for voter ID, which many suspect is coming from the top of the hierarchical party. While Texas Republicans never shied away from turning voting mechanisms to their favor (Picasso would love the 2003 redistricting map's proportions), our little state is just one among many where alleged voter fraud suddenly has politicians hot and bothered.

A Supreme Court decision on an Indiana voter ID law—tougher even than proposals by Berman and Terrell Republican Rep. Betty Brown—is expected this summer. While those against the photo ID mandate point to the law's potential to disenfranchise legal voters, the court is considering whether people must have already been denied their right to vote before they can challenge the law.

The one sign of possible progress at the committee hearing was a proposal to let voters submit a signature verification if they don't have an ID. Anchia, who's leading the Democratic charge against voter ID, called it an interesting proposal, but worried that signature-backup in a House bill could easily be stripped later in the process. "We'd need assurances from the Senate to ensure it would come back without voter-suppression amendments," he said after the meeting. ■

# Back in the Saddle

## Why (*and how*) Texas will matter in March.

By FORREST WILDER & DAVE MANN

Twenty years have passed since a Texas primary played a significant role in anointing a presidential candidate. The last time was in 1988, when Michael Dukakis, Richard Gephardt, Al Gore, and Jesse Jackson locked horns in a four-way fight. Because of the state's March 4 primary, we matter again: Democratic hopefuls Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama are looking to Texas and its 228 delegates to put them within spitting distance of the tin cup.

The Obama and Clinton campaigns, volunteers, and voters are dusting off the rulebooks and learning, or relearning, the peculiar ins and outs of how Texas selects Democratic presidential candidates. Unique in the nation, Texas hosts a primary *and* a caucus, both of which allocate delegates. In essence, Texans get the opportunity to vote for their candidate of choice twice, and we don't even have to be dead to do it.

This hybrid system, which the Obama camp has taken to calling the "Texas Two-Step," is governed by a maze of jury-rigged rules, and navigating them will likely look about as graceful as a plow horse on ice skates. A total of 228 delegates are in play. Thirty-five of these are so-called superdelegates, party apparatchiks assured of seats at August's national convention in Denver. These delegates are deemed "super" because unlike pledged delegates, who arrive at the national convention locked into their choice, the supers can support whichever candidate they choose and can change their minds, for any reason, at any time, up to and including during the convention.

Texas' superdelegates comprise the state party's chair and vice chair, 13 Democratic congressmen, 10 members of the Democratic National Committee, five "add-on" delegates drawn from various Democratic constituencies, and three superdelegates to be named at the state party convention in June. For the first time in recent memory, they're poised to make all the difference.

The national party elite crafted the superdelegate rules in 1980 to wrest some control over the nomination process from the unpredictable masses. Reforms in the 1970s had moved nomination fights out from the smoky backrooms of decades past, with changes ensuring that the majority of national convention delegates were pledged to back the candidate who won their state's primary. But that process became a little *too* democratic in 1980, when Massachusetts Sen. Ted Kennedy's primary challenge to sitting Democratic president Jimmy Carter bitterly divided the party.

After that debacle, party leaders decided to designate 20 percent of primary delegates as "super." The goal was to buttress support for establishment candidates, and the maneuver worked perfectly four years later when the newly designated superdelegates helped establishment front-runner Walter Mondale fend off upstart primary challenger Gary Hart. (Mondale went on to lose 49 states, failing spectacularly to support the presumption of establishmentarian wisdom).

In the 24 years since, superdelegates have gone largely unnoticed, content to line up behind whatever Democratic candidate romped most convincingly through the early primaries. Despite that recent obscurity, the Clinton campaign has made superdelegates part of its strategy since at least last year. As the early frontrunner, Clinton scooped up endorsements from many of the nation's 796 superdelegates.

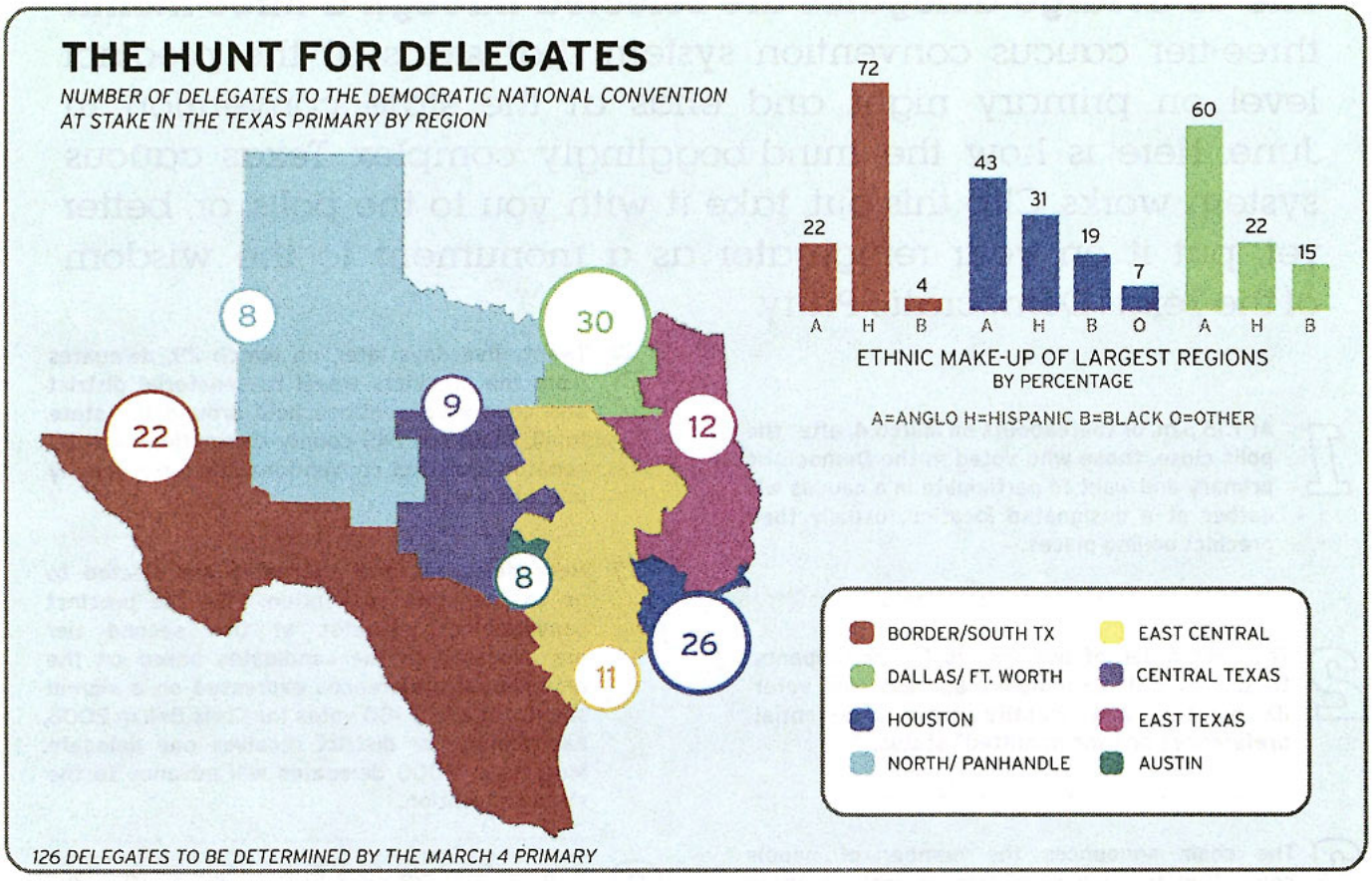
David Holmes, a Democratic National Committee member and Texas superdelegate, told the *Observer* the Clinton team began wooing him last May by taking him out to dinner when they were in town, among other persuasive endearments.

"The reason Hillary has more superdelegates is because she took no one for granted," Holmes said. "[Obama] didn't court me."

After Super Tuesday's split decision, it became apparent that neither campaign would likely win enough delegates in the remaining primaries to secure the nomination. That scenario gives superdelegates a heavy hand in the nomination endgame. They may well make the difference, either by pushing the leading candidate over the top, or by pulling a trailing candidate from behind. The Obama campaign, which belatedly recognized the importance of superdelegates, has boosted its lobbying and used its perceived momentum to sway some superdelegates who had previously supported Clinton.

As of early February, CNN estimated that Clinton held a 224-135 superdelegate lead (out of 796 total), but precise numbers are difficult to pin down because superdelegates can shift their allegiance on a whim, never mind a dinner date. A solid majority of superdelegates nationwide remains undecided, at least publicly.

In Texas, superdelegates have followed the same trend: Clinton bolted to an early lead, though most remain officially




undecided. In early February, the *Observer* called all 32 named Texas superdelegates. Nine said they support Clinton; five backed Obama. The remaining 18 either claimed indecision or didn't respond. Several congressional superdelegates, including Waco's Chet Edwards and San Antonio's Ciro Rodriguez, said they would stay out of the race until all primaries have been completed and the voters have expressed their preferences. Others had no problem making their views known. Congressman Henry Cuellar of Laredo joined Clinton's camp early last year, when she was the clear front-runner, and has held fundraisers for the New York senator.

"She's got the most experience in office," said Norma Fisher Flores, a DNC member and superdelegate pledged to Clinton. "I think she's wonderful."

Obama has mobilized support as well. San Antonio Congressman Charlie Gonzalez endorsed the Illinois senator in mid-February. "After too many years of partisan, divisive politics, his victory will spark the beginning of a new kind of politics in America," Gonzalez said in a press release.

A complete and accurate accounting of Texas' superdelegates probably won't be possible until just before the Democratic national convention in August.

Another 126 garden-variety "primary-sourced" delegates *will* be decided March 4, but this delegate cache too is apportioned in an idiosyncratic fashion. Each of Texas' 31 state senate districts is assigned a number of delegates based on the number of votes received by John Kerry in 2004 and Democratic gubernatorial candidate Chris Bell in 2006. Senate districts that turned out the vote are rewarded with a greater number of delegates than those that sat on their duffs. At the extremes, the nearly Democrat-free Panhandle Senate District 31 has only two delegates at stake, while District 14, home to state Sen. Kirk Watson and liberal Travis County, has eight.

Adding to the confusion, an additional 67 delegates will be chosen by a three-tier caucus convention system that could alternately be described as a three-month endurance race. Of those 67, 25 slots are reserved for pledged party and elected officials who will be picked at the state convention but will vote based on the outcome of the caucuses. The remaining 42 are "at-large" slots, open to any Democrat willing to slog through the process.

Each precinct is assigned a number of delegates based on the number of votes received in that precinct for Chris Bell. Fifty percent of the 87,356 precinct-level delegates are concentrated in Harris, Dallas, Travis, Tarrant, and Bexar Counties.

The caucus action begins at the precinct level on the night of March 4, and then moves to county/senatorial district-level conventions on March 29, and then to the Texas Democratic Party State Convention in early June. Each step winnows the field of delegates until the state convention's end, when 67 are left standing.

**The 42 at-large delegates are selected through a three-month,** three-tier caucus convention system that starts at the precinct level on primary night and ends at the state convention in June. Here is how the mind-bogglingly complex Texas caucus system works. Clip this out, take it with you to the polls, or, better yet, put it on your refrigerator as a monument to the wisdom of the Texas Democratic Party.

1 At 7:15 p.m. or thereabouts on March 4, after the polls close, those who voted in the Democratic primary and want to participate in a caucus will gather at a designated location, usually their precinct polling places.

2 The first order of business is for participants to sign in with their name, address, and voter ID number, and identify their presidential preferences or "uncommitted" status.

3 The chair announces the number of people committed to each candidate, as well as those "uncommitted." (Each precinct receives one delegate for every 15 votes for Chris Bell in 2006.) Now, someone with a math degree calculates the number of precinct delegates allocated to each candidate. For example, if the precinct is entitled to 10 delegates and 60 people sign in for Hillary Clinton and 40 for Barack Obama, that precinct will send six Clinton delegates and four Obama delegates to the senatorial district convention. Note: A candidate must meet a certain threshold (calculated using the Party's "E-Z Math Formula to Determine Threshold") of supporters to have a "viable" caucus.

4 Individuals committed to a particular candidate break into separate caucuses to vote on who gets to attend the senatorial district convention as delegates or alternates. Individuals may nominate themselves or others.

5 This concludes the presidential portion of the precinct convention. Participants may now vote on resolutions or committee reports, or hit the nearest bar.

6 Twenty-five days later, on March 29, delegates from the precincts travel to senatorial district and county conventions held around the state. In all, there are 245 county conventions and 30 senatorial district conventions, the latter mostly in urban areas.

7 Here delegates and alternates are elected to go to the state convention. Like the precinct conventions, delegates at this second tier are allocated to the candidates based on the presidential preferences expressed on a sign-in sheet. For every 180 votes for Chris Bell in 2006, each county or district receives one delegate. More than 7,000 delegates will advance to the state convention.

8 A week later, on June 6, the state convention—the third tier of the caucus process—commences in Austin. Delegates from the counties and senatorial districts participate in a "written poll" to register their presidential preferences. As in the precinct and county/senatorial district conventions, candidates receive a proportional allocation of the vote based on the preferences expressed in the written poll. A candidate must achieve 15 percent of the delegate votes to be eligible to send delegates to the national convention.

9 The next day, on June 7, the 42 at-large delegates and six alternates are selected by a nominations committee from a pool of nominees to go to the Democratic National Convention Denver in August.

10 To win a slot at the national convention as one of the 42 Texas at-large delegates, individuals must file statements of candidacy by May 21. Selection takes place at the convention, under the rules of an affirmative action plan that keeps a certain number of slots open for minority groups, including the disabled; African-Americans; Hispanics; Asian-Americans; Native Americans; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons; and youth.

Caucuses tend to reward campaigns that can mobilize disciplined and highly motivated voters. Obama, in particular, has proven adept at harnessing grassroots energy to seize the levers of caucus control in state after state, winning 10 of 11 caucuses so far. For her part, Clinton may rely on union member supporters to vote for her at the caucus level.

Precinct caucuses in normal election years are relatively uneventful affairs, attended by few but the party faithful. This year, though, the system will be tested by an influx of new voters and candidates eager to lock up delegates at the precinct conventions.

According to Ian Davis, coordinator of Texans for Obama, "This will be the largest voter turnout ever in the state of Texas. The county election [officials] aren't prepared for this; the Texas Democratic Party isn't ready for this. Nobody is ready for this."

Consequently, the potential for caucus confusion or worse is significant. For starters, the March 4 precinct conventions can't begin until the last regular precinct ballot is cast. With record turnout expected, long lines could delay the start of caucuses in some precincts by hours. In just one Harris County precinct, which presents an unusually long ballot this year, Harris County Democratic Party volunteer Leif Hatlen expects 2,000 primary voters. But heavy turnout won't be the only hurdle to an efficient caucus. There's also enormous complexity.

"It's a Byzantine process," said Glen Maxey, a former state representative from Austin and caucus expert.

Ed Martin, an old Democratic hand, describes a recent DNC conference call he was on. "The biggest concern they're getting from the campaigns is the potential for mischief," Martin said.

Democrats are vague on the specifics of what irregularities might arise, but one potential problem area is the manner in which delegates are awarded to candidates in the precinct conventions. When voters arrive at the caucus they sign in with their name, address, voter ID number and presidential preference. They will then be checked against voter rolls to make sure they voted in the Democratic primary for that precinct. Then delegates are divvied up based on each candidate's share of sign-in-sheet supporters. Even insiders are confused about the system's nuances and potential loopholes.

"You can literally sign people in who aren't there," Davis told the *Observer*. "... It's just ripe for abuse."

Texas Democratic Party communications director Hector Nieto insists that only those who are present can be counted, but that message clearly hasn't reached everyone.

Nieto said his office is training county chairs in the process, coordinating with the campaigns, and planning to deploy field staff statewide to monitor the caucuses. "We're confident that we'll have a smooth caucus process," Nieto said.

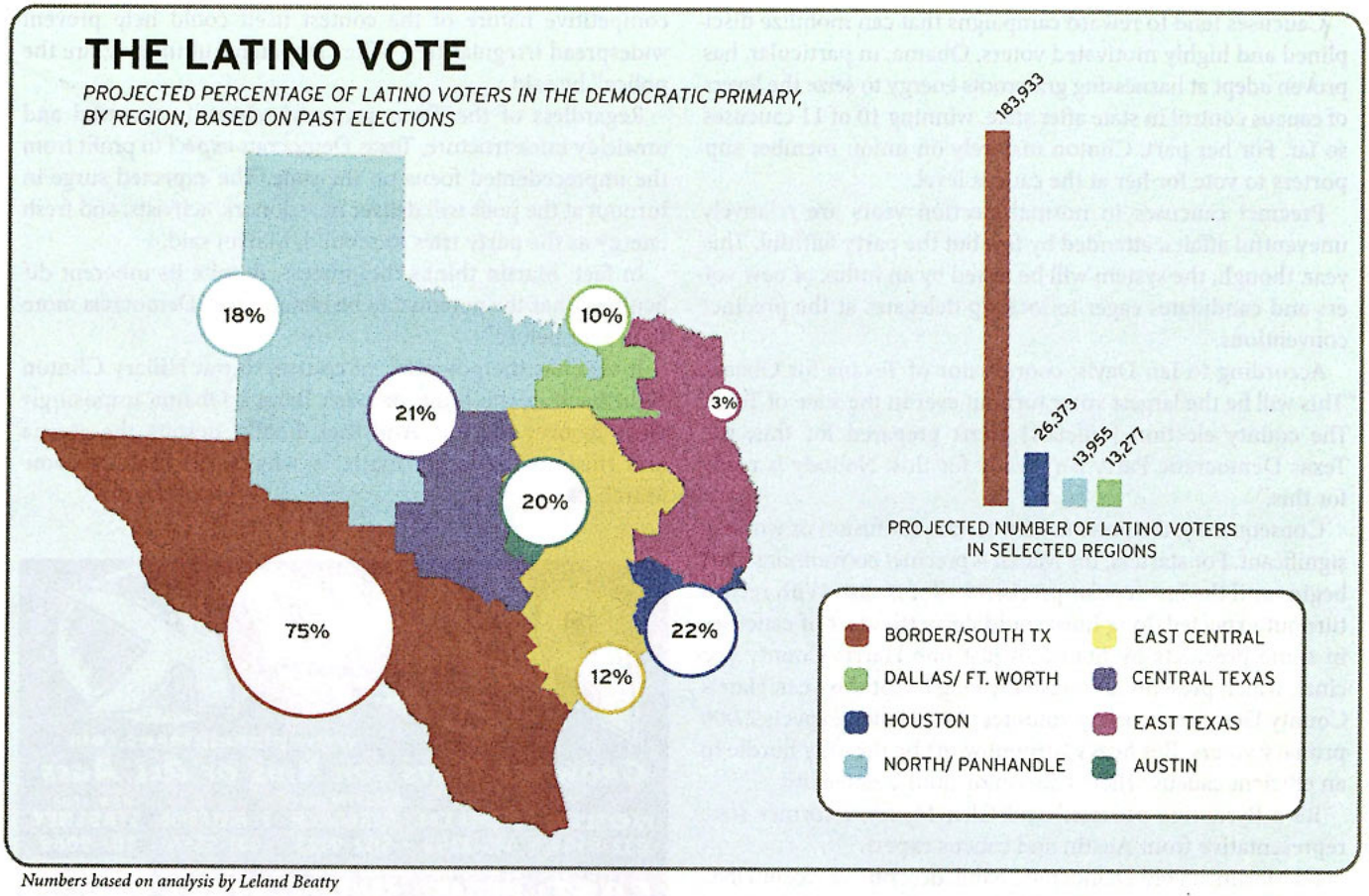
But with more than 8,000 precincts in the state, it will be impossible to place independent monitors everywhere. Davis, of Texans for Obama, is encouraging Obama supporters to take video cameras to the polls. "I want to shine a big flashlight on this [process] so nothing under the table happens," he said.

Party insider Martin is less worried, arguing that the highly competitive nature of the contest itself could help prevent widespread irregularities. "The campaigns, ultimately, are the police," he said.

Regardless of the Texas primary's absurdly involved and unwieldy infrastructure, Texas Democrats expect to profit from the unprecedented focus on the state. The expected surge in turnout at the polls will deliver new donors, activists, and fresh energy as the party tries to rebuild, Martin said.

In fact, Martin thinks the process, despite its inherent difficulties, "has the potential to be beneficial to Democrats more than ever before."

It also has the potential, of course, to put Hillary Clinton right back in the hunt, or push Barack Obama imposingly close to over the top. And that, finally, despite the arcana and the moving-target math, is why Texas matters come March. ■




*Numbers based on analysis by Leland Beatty*

# Voto por Voto

## Will Latino voters stand and be counted?

By DAVE MANN

It seems every election in Texas is accompanied by big talk from political pundits that, at long last, the slumbering Latino vote will become a decisive force at the ballot box. So far, it's been more promise than reality.

But this year may finally be different. No, really. The campaigns for Democrats Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have streamed into Texas ahead of the state's critical primary on March 4. Both campaigns are convinced that the Latino vote, which will likely comprise a third of the Democratic primary electorate, will be the key to Texas.

For Clinton, the calculus is simple. The Latino vote has been an indispensable segment of her coalition. She carried that vote in Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico. In California on February 5, Latinos probably saved Clinton's candidacy by delivering a critical win in the nation's largest state. Despite polls showing Obama surging ahead there, Clinton secured an impressive 10-point victory. Latinos made up 30 percent of the vote, a record turnout, and 67 percent went for Clinton, according to exit polls.

The Clinton campaign hopes to duplicate that scenario in Texas. Much of the credit for the Latino turnout in California went to Clinton's field director, Mike Trujillo, a former staffer for Los Angeles Mayor and Clinton supporter Antonio Villaraigosa. Clinton sent Trujillo to Texas to rerun the California playbook.

Moreover, the Clintons have a long history in South Texas, dating to the early 1970s, when Hillary helped register Latino voters along the border for the McGovern campaign. She and Bill are friends with some of South Texas' best-known politicians, including former San Antonio Mayor Henry Cisneros.

Garry Mauro, the longtime Clinton friend who's working on her Texas campaign, has helped with the Clintons' appeal to Latinos in the past. In fall 1992, Mauro, then-land commissioner, designed a South Texas strategy that forced George H.W. Bush to invest money in the state he called home.

Even Obama's supporters concede that Clinton has considerable appeal among Latinos. "That Clinton name still has a lot of currency, and Bill Clinton especially is still very much well

**Both campaigns are convinced that the Latino vote will be the key to victory in Texas.**

liked among Latinos in Texas," said Rafael Anchia, a Dallas state representative who's helping the Obama campaign reach out to Latino voters. The question is not whether Clinton will poll well with Latinos, but how well.

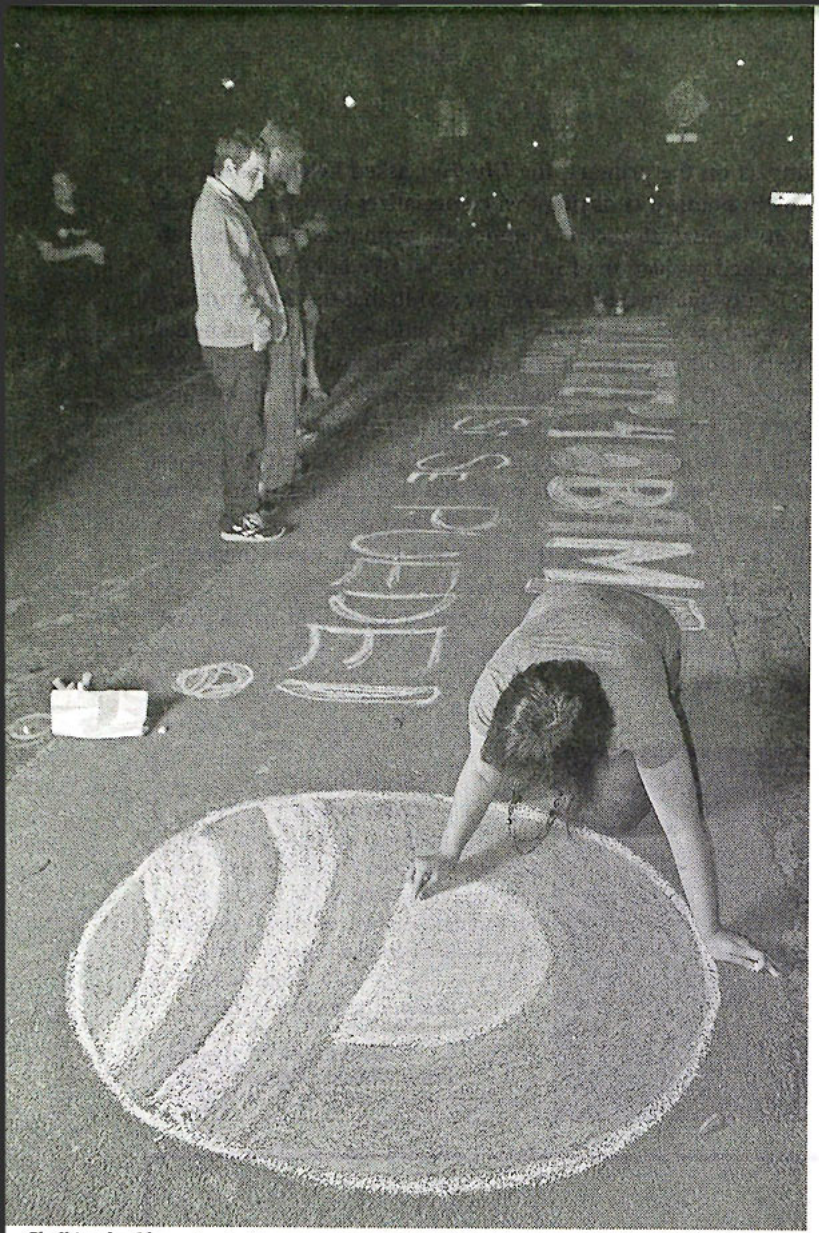
To have any chance of winning in Texas, Obama will probably have to keep Clinton's share of the Latino vote under 60 percent. His camp believes he can nibble away at Clinton's edge in the weeks before primary day. Anchia said that voters in general like Obama more as they get to know him. Obama ads have debuted on Spanish language radio and television stations.

Anchia says the campaign believes that while older Latinos may remain loyal to Clinton, the younger Latino voters in Houston, Dallas and San Antonio will flock to Obama, who's proven popular with the youth vote. Several young Latino state representatives from urban areas have endorsed him, including Anchia, Trey Martinez Fischer (San Antonio), Norma Chavez (El Paso), Ana Hernandez (Houston), and Eddie Lucio III (Brownsville). And Anchia points out that North Texas has more Latinos than South Texas.

The question is how many of those urban Latinos can vote and will vote in the Democratic primary. Those numbers are difficult to discern — after all, voters don't mark their ethnicity on the ballot. In an effort to understand the potential Latino impact on the primary, the *Observer* asked Leland Beatty, an Austin political consultant who specializes in voter identification, to analyze recent Democratic primaries and make an educated projection of Latino turnout [see graphic page 10].

Beatty qualified his analysis by saying that the 2008 primary may attract so many voters that it could be difficult to model. It's possible the Democratic primary turnout will be double that of 2004. With so many new voters flooding the polling stations, predicting how many will be Latino and how many will be African-American is tough. Based on past primaries, Beatty's computer models projected that Latinos would comprise 31 percent of the vote. The largest group lives in South Texas, where the more than 183,000 Latino voters make up more than 75 percent of the electorate.

The Latino vote will be the story to watch and could determine who wins the most important Texas primary in two decades. ■



*Chalking for Obama in Austin* *Photo by Daniel Carter*

# New Days vs. Old Ways

## Could the age gap trump race and gender?

By FORREST WILDER & DAVE MANN

Every exit poll conducted to date in the presidential primary race between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama indicates a generation gap separates the two candidates. Obama attracts an overwhelming number of voters age 18 to 30; Clinton dominates the over-60 set. This trend holds in states as diverse as South Carolina—which Obama carried by 28 points, but where Clinton still outpolled him among seniors, 40-32 percent—and California, where Clinton won handily, but Obama tied her among the youth vote. In Virginia on February 12, Obama routed Clinton by 29 points. In the process, he trumped her in nearly every voter group, including women and Latinos by large margins. Clinton was competitive, according to exit polls, in only one category: voters 60 and up.

The reasons behind this split have almost nothing to do with the candidates' ideology. They have virtually identical voting records and policy proposals. How each candidate packages those positions—how they sell themselves—is vastly different. Clinton, 60, would continue a 16-year run of baby boom leaders. A Clinton speech is packaged pragmatism: a list of the problems she sees in the country and the way she wants to solve them. She's selling experience and competence.

Obama, 46, would be the first president from the post-boomer generation, whose politics weren't forged in the 1960s and the fights over the Vietnam War. An Obama speech is an appeal not just for "change," but to join a movement. In his addresses, he always recalls the accomplishments of the so-called greatest generation during World War II and the baby boomers in the 1960s, then he proclaims that now is "our moment," "our [generation's]" turn to make its mark. As he put it the night of Super Tuesday, "Our time has come." He is explicit about his hope to "change the world."

Is it any wonder, then, that older voters would support the candidate who scoffs at lofty talk of changing the world and who instead pitches practicality? Or that young voters would flock to the candidate who taps their idealism?

At first glance, this appeal to youth would appear to be a perilous strategy, since young people don't vote in the numbers that older people do. And yet in this primary season, that historical pattern has been broken. With encouragement from the Obama campaign, young people have turned out in record numbers.

"Obama not only put faith into us, he put resources into us. He believed in us," said 20-year-old Nick Hudson, from Willis, north of Houston, the volunteer state director for Students for Barack Obama.

Volunteer student organizers, with help from the campaign, have put together 27 Students for Barack Obama chapters at Texas colleges and high schools, including groups at Texas A&M-College Station, SMU, and Baylor University. Hudson said he used social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook to identify and reach out to students at far-flung campuses. (There's also a Toddlers for Obama group; we imagine a press release in crayon will be forthcoming.)

Clinton campus groups in Texas seem to be few. Deirdre


*The Clinton campaign comes to San Antonio.* *Photo by Dave Mann*

Murphy, the Texas spokesperson for Hillary Clinton, refused to disclose the number of campus groups supporting the New York senator. "I just don't think we're going to talk about the numbers, but I think it's safe to say we have a really strong network with chapters on many campuses," Murphy said.

"When [Obama] talked about America, we saw reason to hope again," said Bryan Mathew, the UT-Austin chapter coordinator for Students for Barack Obama.

Young Obama enthusiasts repeatedly talk about bypassing the struggles and preoccupations of the baby boomers, exemplified in their mind by the Clintons. While most said they would vote for Clinton if she becomes the nominee, few said they would actively campaign for her.

"I think Hillary is bogged down in the fights of the baby boomer generation," argued Dylan Moench, a 33-year-old Austin attorney, during a break from phone-banking. "There's a sense that we're ready for a generational shift."

There are exceptions to the generation gap, of course. Some older voters avidly support Obama, and there are young voters working for Clinton, but the exceptions seem to prove the rule. On a Tuesday night in mid-February, Mark Noble and Liane Ngin, both 22, held a phone bank event for Clinton in their North Austin apartment. The turnout was sparse. Only a handful of twenty-somethings showed up. Sitting at their dining room table, the recent University of Texas graduates were chagrined that so few folks were there. They invited their friends, except "[e]veryone I know is supporting Obama," Ngin said. "Otherwise they'd be here."

The next night, at a Clinton rally at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, the older folks were out in force. Seated in the front row clutching blue "Hillary for President" signs were Alice Cipriani, Brenda Calderon Bennett, and Otilia V. Lozano. The women had come to the speech together. Cipriani and Lozano will both turn 80 this October. They plan to celebrate together with a "birthday club" of 17 older women. They all like Obama but find him too inexperienced. "There's no comparison," Cipriani said. "He's too young. He's got a lot to learn. She's the better candidate. We're old, but we're backing her up 100 percent."

Lozano, a former teacher, smiled at the enthusiasm of the younger voters. "It's the cool thing," she said. "They're just following the crowd." Lozano finds Obama's rhetoric a little naive. "I don't know that he has what it takes to get things done in Washington. She knows her way around Congress. Obama can say, 'I'll fix Washington.' I don't think so!"

Another Clinton supporter, Patrick Garcia, 52, said older Democrats are more set in their ways. They know Clinton well. They trust her, especially on the issue of health care. Garcia runs a laundry business in San Antonio and finds it increasingly costly to provide health insurance to his employees. "The [Clinton] name has been around longer," he said. "The diehards are the older Democrats. They don't change. They don't jump ship."

If Obama wins the nomination, the generation gap may be even more stark in a general election race against the 71-year-old Republican John McCain. The 25 years separating the candidates would be the largest age difference in the history of American presidential elections. And the question will become will the passions of the youth continue into the fall? ■

# What Texas Means to Me

by SEN. HILLARY CLINTON

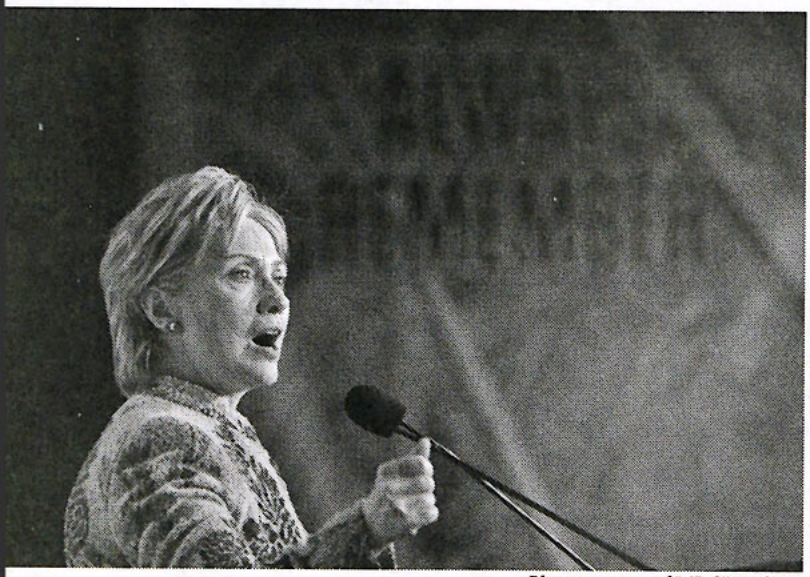


*Photo courtesy of WDCPIX.COM*

Just the thought of writing about "what Texas means to me" brings a smile to my face. My first job in politics was in Texas, and it remains one of the best I've ever had. It was 1972, and I took a job heading up the Democratic Party's voter-registration drive in Texas. Bill and I lived in Austin—then still a sleepy little town—where he helped run the George McGovern campaign in the state. I quickly fell in love with the strong character of Texans and their determination to take on the things others think are too hard—a spirit I'm now trying to bring to my own campaign.

I spent most of my time that year driving throughout South Texas registering primarily Hispanic voters, as well as African Americans and young people. Alongside union organizers and Hispanic leaders like Franklin Garcia, I went door to door through border towns looking for every new voter. When the voter registration period was over, I moved to San Antonio to work for the campaign there.

That campaign, of course, didn't turn out as we had hoped, but the personal rewards couldn't have been greater. I was immersed in Texas' culture and met a wonderful group of idealistic and committed political organizers, whose friendships have lasted a lifetime. Many of them, like Raul Yzaguirre and George McGovern himself, are supporting me today because 36 years ago we were in the trenches together trying to change the world. And we still are.

Going door to door in Texas gave me the privilege of meeting people face to face and really listening to their concerns. It's harder to make that same personal connection as a national candidate, but that's what I've been trying to do in this campaign.

For the past year, I've been in the homes and workplaces, churches and community centers of America, listening to the voices of the American people. And I've heard from so many people who are struggling in this economy.

People who work the day shift and the night shift but still can't make ends meet. People who whisper to me about the mortgages they can't afford, medical bills that wiped out their savings, and tuition bills that cut short their children's dreams. Moms and dads who want the world for their children—and young people who deserve a world of opportunity.

After seven years of a president who's listened only to the special interests, the American people need a fighter and a champion on their behalf. A president who will take on our toughest problems and deliver solutions.

That's another thing I've learned from Texas—the importance of determined leaders with courage and conviction, leaders like my heroes Barbara Jordan and Ann Richards. Ann was a dear friend of mine, and it is difficult to be in Texas this year without her. But I'm carrying in my heart a simple conviction—this one's for Ann. We're going to fight for a Texas-sized agenda that would make her proud.

As president, I'll fight for an economy that works for everyone—not just those at the top. An economy where prosperity is shared and we create good jobs that stay right here in America. I'll address the housing crisis with a plan to freeze foreclosures, so Americans can keep their homes and their families intact. And I'm the only candidate—in either party—who has a health care plan that will cover every single man, woman, and child in this country—no one left out.

We'll pass comprehensive immigration reform that is true to our traditions as a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws. We'll honor our commitment to our troops, because when a young man or woman signs up to serve our country, we sign up to serve them, too.

And we'll restore America's standing in the world by ending the war in Iraq, reaching out to our allies, and confronting our shared challenges—from global terrorism to global warming to global epidemics.

Together, we can take back our country and start solving our problems. But we know the Republicans won't give up the White House without a fight. So let me be clear: If I'm our nominee, no one will swift-boat this country's future. For 16 years, they've thrown everything you can imagine at me. I've been vetted and tested, and I've beaten them in two landslide elections. I'm ready to do it again.

Thirty-six years ago, our friends used to get together at Scholz Garten in Austin to sit outside and talk politics. I never imagined then that I would be back in Texas one day as a candidate for president in my own right. But I'm so glad that I am. I will listen to the voices of Texans throughout my campaign, and I'll bring those voices and Texas' can-do spirit with me to the White House. ■

# Standing for Change

by SEN. BARRACK OBAMA

This is a defining moment. At a time when our nation is at war and our American dream is slipping away, we cannot settle for the status quo. Texas has always shown what can be achieved when we reach for what's possible. In this election, Texans can stand for change.

I have spent over two decades working for change from the bottom up. I fought for jobs as an organizer on the streets of Chicago. As a civil rights lawyer, I stood up for people who were denied opportunity at work or justice at the voting booth. I reduced the influence of money in politics, expanded health care, and gave a tax cut to working people as a state senator. And when I got to Washington, I helped pass the most far-reaching ethics reform since Watergate.

I chose to run for president because I believed that the magnitude of our challenges had outgrown the ability of our broken politics to solve them. We cannot afford four more years of the same divisive fights in Washington that are more about scoring points than solving problems. We're not going to make progress with a system dominated by special interests and poll-tested positions. It's time to turn the page.

It's time to reduce the power of lobbyists and restore fairness by giving a tax cut to working Americans, struggling homeowners and seniors. It's time to invest in 21st century infrastructure to create jobs, safeguard our security, and connect our communities. It's time to make health care affordable for every American, and to pass comprehensive immigration reform that embraces our legacy as a nation of laws and immigrants.

To deliver on the promise of a world-class education, I'll invest in universal, high-quality early childhood education, give our teachers more pay and support, and make sure they're not just teaching to a test. And to make sure you can get a college education without being saddled with debt, I'll give an annual $4,000 tuition tax credit to every American who needs a hand, provided they carry out community service or national service.

Texans know we need less tough talk and more sound judgment on national security. We can't afford the same politics of fear that tells Democrats that the only way to look tough is to talk, act, and vote like Bush-McCain Republicans. When I am president, I will end a war in Iraq that I opposed from the start and give our troops and military families the support they have earned. I will finish the fight in Afghanistan, and reject the false choice between security and civil liberties.

In this election, it is time to stand for change.

This has been our message since the beginning of this campaign, and it's the message we will carry across Texas. Because the American people are ready to move past the division and distraction; we are ready to rally behind a common purpose. That's why we've brought in new voters, inspired record turnout, and built a coalition of Democrats, Independents and Republicans that stretches across regions and races.

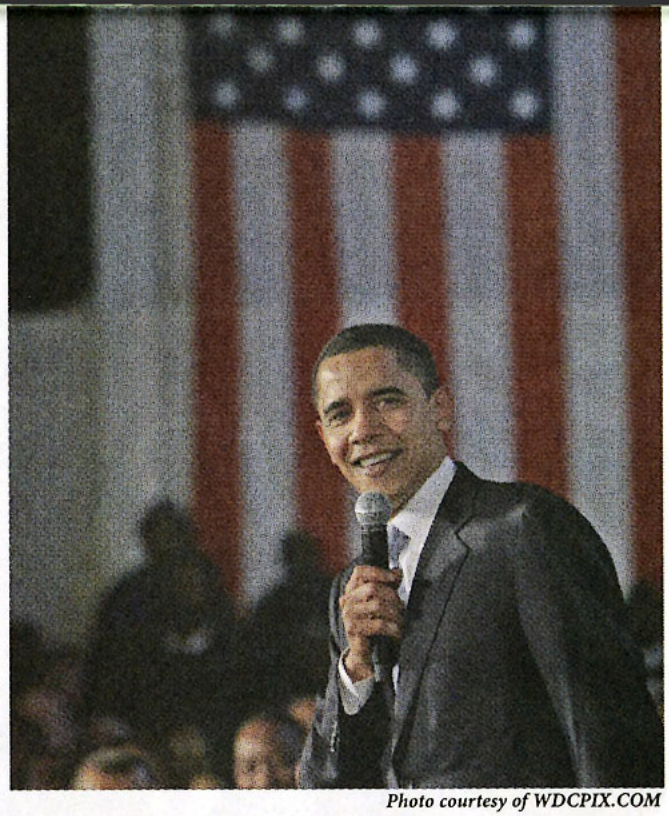


*Photo courtesy of WDCPIX.COM*

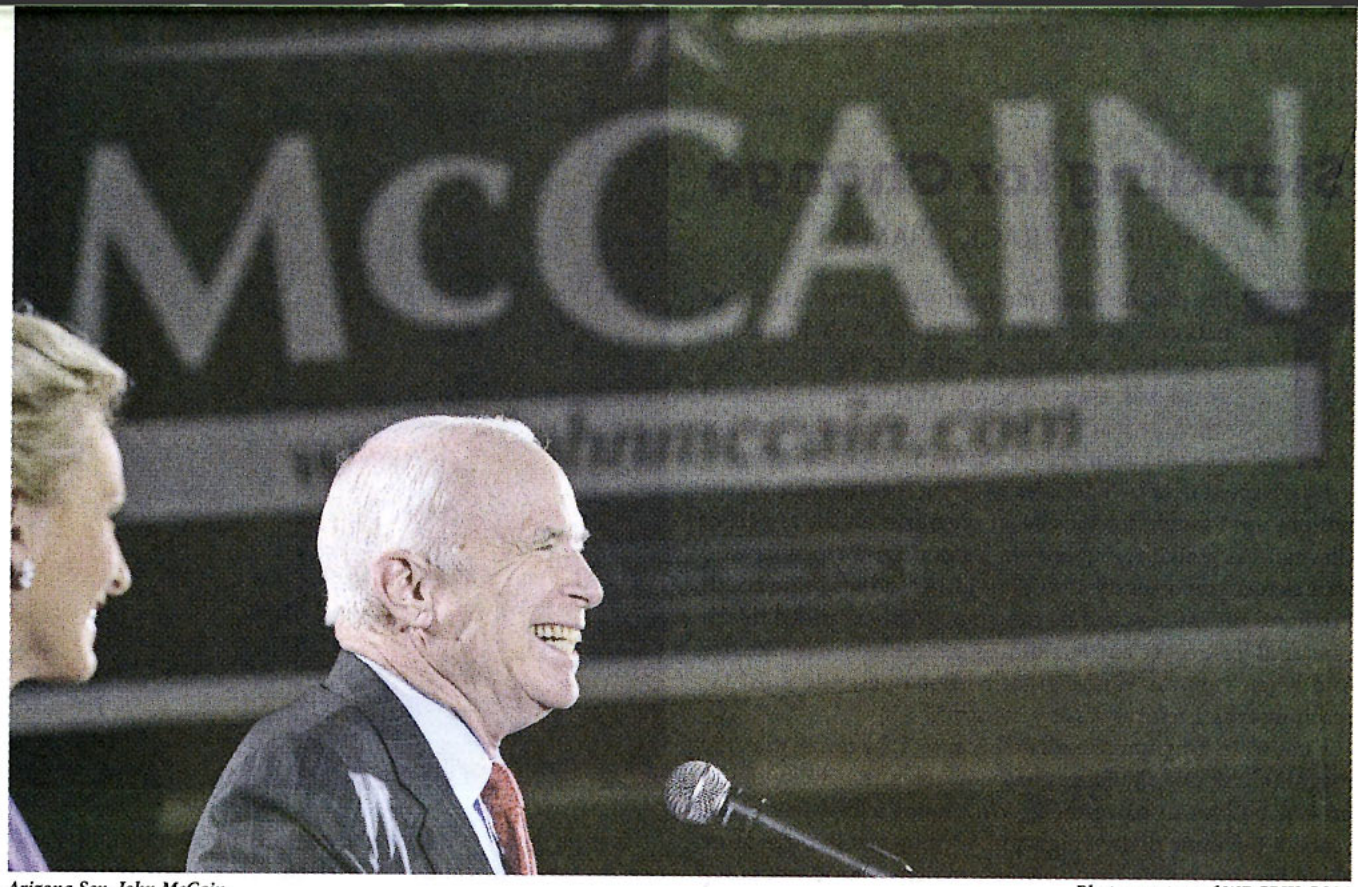
Here in Texas, you have shown what the Democratic Party can do when it stands for a clean break from the divisive, special-interest-driven politics of the past. After more than a decade of Republican gains—culminating in a cynical redistricting scheme backed by a flood of questionable campaign money—Democrats have mounted a resurgence, picking up seats in the Texas House and the U.S. House.

I saw this enthusiasm firsthand when I was invited to Texas to campaign for Democrats in 2006, and when we drew over 20,000 people at a rally in Austin last February. Democrats are poised to be the party of the future in Texas.

The choice in this primary is clear. I don't want to keep playing on the same electoral map where Democrats write off states like Texas, and presidential candidates compete here in the primaries but are nowhere to be found in November. I don't defend a system in which lobbyists fund campaigns, because I haven't taken a dime from Washington lobbyists. I don't want to refight the battles of the 1990s, or be a drag on down-ballot Democrats. This election, at this moment, is about the past versus the future.

What better place than Texas to choose tomorrow? Here, in a state so rich in diversity, we can turn the page on the old racial and ethnic divides that have plagued our politics. Here, in a state that stands for what's possible in America, we can choose to take this country in a new direction. And here, in a state where Democrats stand for reform that can make a real difference in people's lives, you can continue a Democratic resurgence by joining a campaign for change that stretches across red states and blue states.

If you vote for me on March 4, you will choose a politics of possibility over the politics of the past. You can send the cynics who say that we can't make this change a message that the next chapter in American history will start with three simple words that sum up the spirit of this state and our nation: Yes we can. ■




*Arizona Sen. John McCain* *Photo courtesy of WDCPIX.COM*

# The Republican Conundrum

## What would a McCain win mean for Texas Republicans?

By ROYAL MASSET

The first thing to understand about Texas is that unlike any other state, even California, we operate like several separate states. Almost every part of Texas has a unique culture. There is no such thing as a campaign plan for all of Texas. Every campaign must do things differently in each region of the state. Every region has its own type of leaders. Dallas Republican leaders are very formal. West Texas Republican leaders all wear boots. The diversity tends to cut down on surprises. We will never wake up to find Jesse "The Body" Ventura elected as our governor. Voters within a given media market might go berserk and "send a message," but it's unlikely different regions would send the same message.

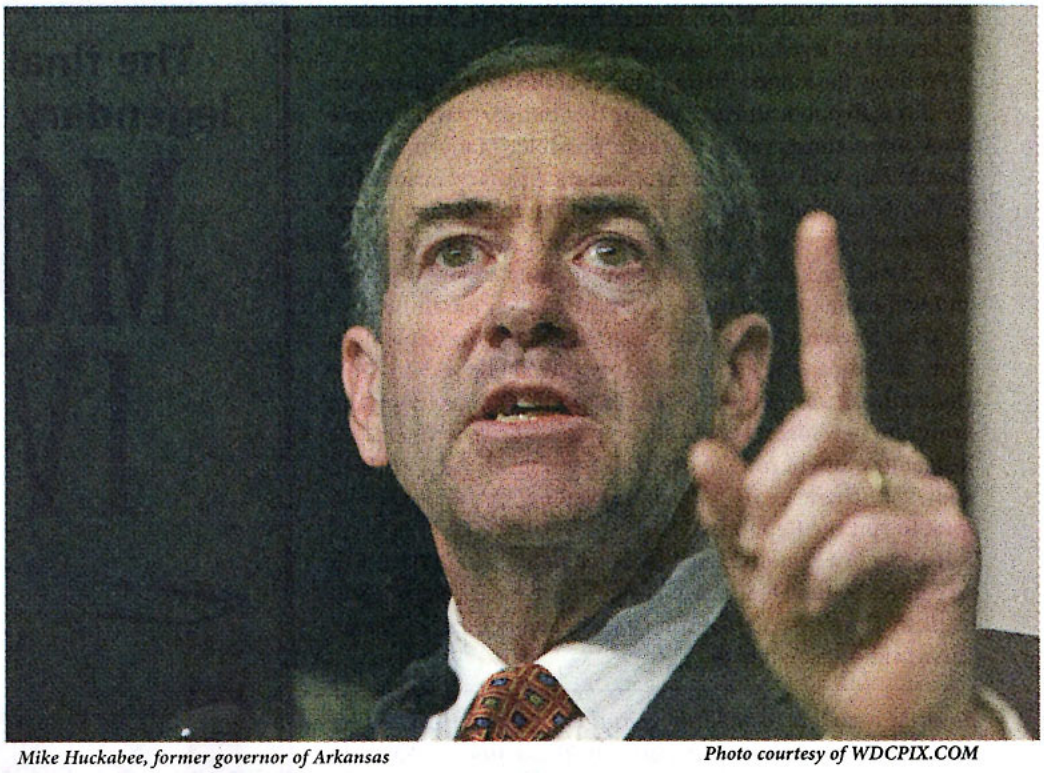
Geography and the culture it helps to engender impact elections. In broad terms, geography determines how people create wealth, which determines how they relate to government. People who live in hilly areas tend to be independent and averse to government. Cultures that grew around river bottoms tend to believe in government since their prosperity depends on cooperation.

If you correlate how much each county voted for secession in 1861 with how Democratic that county voted in 1984, you would find a very high correlation. East Texans voted almost 99 percent for secession and were still solidly Democratic in 1984. The Hill Country, mostly settled by Germans, was the only part of Texas to oppose secession; it's still the most Republican area of the state. Midwesterners who didn't give a hoot about the South settled the Metroplex. This area was evenly split on secession. Still, because it had no Southern roots, Dallas was able to become the first Republican urban stronghold in Texas.

I expect the effect of geography and culture on voter preference will be made clear by how well Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee does in different regions of the state. The Republican Party of Texas was not part of this Southern culture. Heck, Republicans occupied Texas during Reconstruction, and for almost 100 years Republicans couldn't win races in Texas. As best as I can determine, after the 1964 election Republicans held only six seats in Texas: a Congressional seat in Dallas, a lone state House seat in Midland (which was taken over two years later by Tom Craddick, who is still there and thinks he has to fight the entire world), and four local seats, compared to the more than 4,000 held by Democrats at the time.

Although East Texas today is mostly Republican, it still

has many pockets of yellow dog Democrats. This will be Huckabee's base in Texas. He should take most of East Texas and some of rural North Texas. Southerners settled the Red River as far west as the Panhandle. Unfortunately for Huckabee, the rest of Texas is Southern in spirit only. Most Texas Republicans are Yankees, like I am, who want to fit in so much that we become Southerners and cowboys who learn to speak Texan. We live in upper middle-class developments with names like Circle C Ranch, in counties like Collin, Montgomery and Williamson. In fact, thanks to the ubiquity of cars and highways, and the ability to telecommute, Republican newcomers in search of the rural life are now swamping many rural areas.



*Mike Huckabee, former governor of Arkansas* *Photo courtesy of WDCPIX.COM*

Ironically, while Republican voting strength is gaining in rural and suburban areas, we are losing our urban vote. Part of this is culture. People who live in urban areas depend on government. They have special problems with education, crime, transportation and job creation and believe in help from government.

I suspect McCain will heavily win the suburban Republican vote, and the state. Huckabee does not resonate with suburban Republicans who will make up about half of our primary vote. They don't love McCain but they are familiar with him and don't fear him. He is a known variable. The one area of uncertainty is caused by the allocation of delegates. We are called a winner–take-all state, but that's misleading. If a candidate wins in each of our 32 congressional districts he will get all 140 of our delegates.

But because of how diverse Texas is, it is almost impossible to win in every congressional district. Three delegates represent each district. This leads to a paradox shared by many other states. Texas has 13 congressional districts held by Democrats. Most Democratic congressional districts are in South Texas or large urban areas, yet the few Republicans who vote in those primaries elect the same three delegates to the national convention, as do the 50,000-plus Republican voters who vote in strong Republican districts. A smart candidate will figure out how to mine Republican delegates from heavy Democratic areas. This will work against Huckabee, since these areas lack the communication systems that would enable him to contact voters and win votes. I expect McCain to carry Texas with 55 percent of the vote and to win 125 of the 140 national delegates.

Now and into the future, the breakdown of both parties' communication is a major factor in transferring power away from the established parties. When I first entered politics in 1968, both parties were strong. This is no longer true. Today parties make news only when they screw up. When is the last time the press or TV ran a story based on what a party leader said? Probably less than one percent of all voters could name a party chairman.

This isn't because party leaders have become incompetent. It is because Internet blogs, radio talk shows and cable TV's non-stop political analysis have almost totally replaced traditional forms of party communication. That's a real problem, because getting recognition on the new media requires great drama and emotion. These outlets aren't interested in problem solving, which is too boring for talk shows. Many Republicans do not understand that Rush, Hannity, O'Reilly, et al. are entertainers whose job is to make money, which they do by generating unrelenting controversy. The organizing that used to be done by the party is largely done by private groups outside the formal party structure.

Presidential elections are very different from off-year elections. I would estimate that 70 percent of the legislative seats picked up by Republicans from Democrats over the last 40 years came during presidential election years. The reason is that in off-year elections the turnout is lower and most voters tend to know and like the incumbents. In presidential elections about 50 percent more voters will turn out than in off years. These 50 percent are casting votes for a president but usually fill out the entire ballot just because they are there. They usually know nothing about the local incumbents. So their votes will at best be based on ideology and at worst simply be cast on a

straight party basis. When Reagan won in 1984, Republicans picked up 17 legislative house seats.

Probably the longest-lasting impact of the 2008 primaries on the Texas Republican Party will be that our party will become even more conservative, if that's possible. Many moderate Republicans will vote in the Democratic primary. Leadership in the Republican Party of Texas will be determined by the motivated voters who show up at precinct meetings after the polls close. Huckabee supporters will dominate those meetings and will ultimately dominate the state convention in June.

I don't foresee a McCain candidacy changing the Republican Party of Texas, any more than, say, Bob Dole did in 1996. Dole at least was well liked. McCain ignites no passions and brings no new ideas; he will attract almost no new voters. We Reaganites fought to take over the Republican Party in 1976 and 1980. There are no McCainites waiting in the wings who want to run the Republican Party.

If there is a major change in Texas politics in 2008 it will be caused by the Democrats. Even I have been chagrined to learn that my 13-year-old son Ernesto favors Barack Obama. The world is changing. ■

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*Royal Masset is a Republican consultant based in Austin. He worked for the Republican Party of Texas from 1983 until 1999 mostly as Political Director. In 1996 he received the* Campaigns and Elections *Magazine Rising Star Award, the highest award given to political consultants, for helping to elect 3,000 Republicans.*

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# Holes in the Wall

## Homeland Security won't say why the border wall is bypassing the wealthy and politically connected.

Story By MELISSA del BOSQUE
Photos By BEN BRIONES

*Brownsville homeowner Eloisa Tamez*

As the U.S. Department of Homeland Security marches down the Texas border serving condemnation lawsuits to frightened landowners, Brownsville resident Eloisa Tamez, 72, has one simple question. She would like to know why her land is being targeted for destruction by a border wall, while a nearby golf course and resort remain untouched.

Tamez, a nursing director at the University of Texas at Brownsville, is one of the last of the Spanish land grant heirs in Cameron County. Her ancestors once owned 12,000 acres. In the 1930s, the federal government took more than half of her inherited land, without paying a cent, to build flood levees.

Now Homeland Security wants to put an 18-foot steel and concrete wall through what remains.

While the border wall will go through her backyard and effectively destroy her home, it will stop at the edge of the River Bend Resort and golf course, a popular Winter Texan retreat two miles down the road. The wall starts up again on the other side of the resort.

"It has a golf course and all of the amenities," Tamez says. "There are no plans to build a wall there. If the wall is so important for security, then why are we skipping parts?"

Along the border, preliminary plans for fencing seem to target landowners of modest means and cities and public institutions such as the University of Texas at Brownsville, which rely on the federal government to pay their bills.

A visit to the River Bend Resort in late January reveals row after row of RVs and trailers with license plates from chilly northern U.S. states and Canadian provinces. At the edge of a lush, green golf course, a Winter Texan from Canada enjoys the mild, South Texas winter and the landscaped ponds, where white egrets pause to contemplate golf carts whizzing past. The woman, who declines to give her name, recounts that illegal immigrants had crossed the golf course once while she was teeing off. They were promptly detained by Border Patrol agents, she says, adding that agents often park their SUVs at the edge of the golf course.

River Bend Resort is owned by John Allburg, who incorporated the business in 1983 as River Bend Resort, Inc. Allburg

refused to comment for this article. A scan of the Federal Election Commission and Texas Ethics Commission databases did not find any political contributions linked to Allburg.

Just 69 miles north, Daniel Garza, 76, faces a similar situation with a neighbor who has political connections that reach the White House. In the small town of Granjeno, population 313, Garza points to a field across the street where a segment of the proposed 18-foot high border wall would abruptly end after passing through his brick home and a small, yellow house he gave his son. "All that land over there is owned by the Hunts," he says, waving a hand toward the horizon. "The wall doesn't go there."

In this area everyone knows the Hunts. Dallas billionaire Ray L. Hunt and his relatives are one of the wealthiest oil and gas dynasties in the world. Hunt, a close friend of President George W. Bush, recently donated $35 million to Southern Methodist University to help build Bush's presidential library. In 2001, Bush made him a member of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, where Hunt received a security clearance and access to classified intelligence.

Over the years, Hunt has transformed his 6,000-acre property, called the Sharyland Plantation, from acres of onions and vegetables into swathes of exclusive, gated communities where houses sell from $650,000 to $1 million and residents enjoy golf courses, elementary schools, and a sports park. The plantation contains an 1,800-acre business park and Sharyland Utilities, run by Hunt's son Hunter, which delivers electricity to plantation residents and Mexican factories.

The development's Web site touts its proximity to the international border and the new Anzalduas International Bridge now under construction, built on land Hunt donated. Hunt has also formed Hunt Mexico with a wealthy Mexican business partner to develop both sides of the border into a lucrative trade corridor the size of Manhattan.

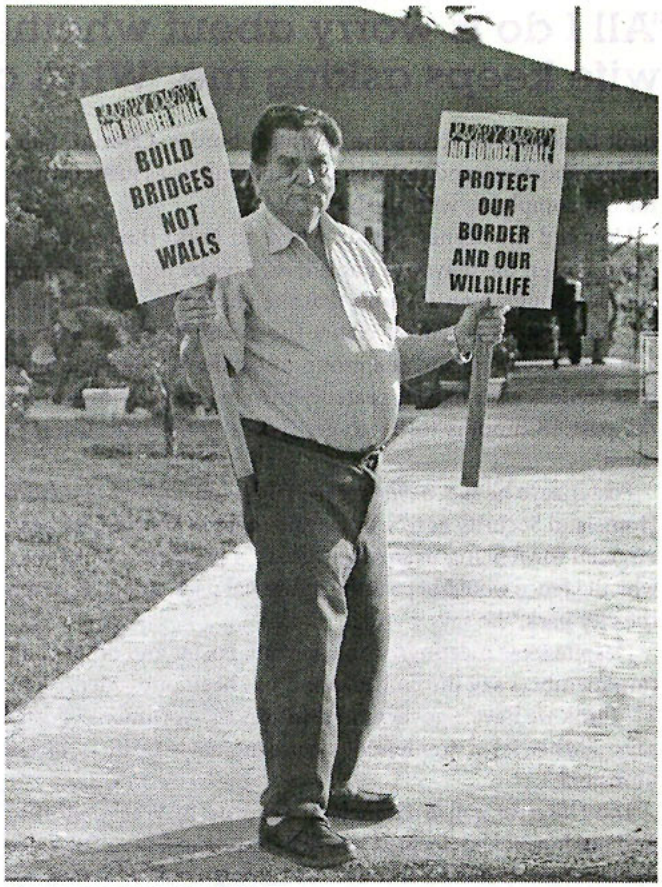
Jeanne Phillips, a spokesperson for Hunt Consolidated Inc., says that since the company is private, it doesn't have to identify the Mexican partner. Phillips says, however, that no one from the company has been directly involved in siting the fence. "We, like other citizens in the Valley, have waited for the federal government to designate the location of the wall," she says.

Garza stands in front of his modest brick home, which he built for his retirement after 50 years as a migrant farmworker. For the past five months, he has stayed awake nights trying to find a way to stop the gears of bureaucracy from grinding over his home.

A February 8 announcement by Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said the agency would settle for building the fence atop the levee behind Garza's house instead of through it, which has given Garza some hope. Like Tamez, he wonders why his home and small town were targeted by Homeland Security in the first place.

"I don't see why they have to destroy my home, my land, and let the wall end there." He points across the street to Hunt's land. "How will that stop illegal immigration?"

Most border residents couldn't believe the fence would ever



*Granjeno landowner Daniel Garza*

be built through their homes and communities. They expected it to run along the banks of the Rio Grande, not north of the flood levees—in some cases like Tamez's, as far as a mile north of the river. So it came as a shock last summer when residents were approached by uniformed Border Patrol agents. They asked people to sign waivers allowing Homeland Security to survey their properties for construction of the wall. When they declined, Homeland Security filed condemnation suits.

In time, local landowners realized that the fence's location had everything to do with politics and private profit, and nothing to do with stopping illegal immigration.

In 2006, Congress passed the Secure Fence Act, authored by Republican Congressman Peter King from New York. The legislation mandated that 700 miles of double-fencing be built along the southern border from California to Texas. The bill detailed where the fencing, or, as many people along the border call it, "the wall," would be built. After a year of inflamed rhetoric about the plague of illegal immigration and Congress's failure to pass comprehensive immigration reform, the bill passed with overwhelming support from Republicans and a few Democrats. All the Texas border members of the U.S. House of Representatives, except San Antonio Republican Henry Bonilla, voted against it. Texas Sens. Kay Bailey Hutchison and John Cornyn voted for the bill.

On August 10, 2007, Chertoff announced his agency would scale back the initial 700 miles of fencing to 370 miles, to be

## "All I do is worry about whether they will take my home. My wife keeps asking me, 'What are we going to do?'"

built in segments across the southern border. Chertoff cited budget shortages and technological difficulties as justifications for not complying with the bill.

How did his agency decide where to build the segments? Chad Foster, the mayor of Eagle Pass, says he thought it was a simple enough question and that the answer would be based on data and facts. Foster chairs the Texas Border Coalition. TBC, as Foster calls it, is a group of border mayors and business leaders who have repeatedly traveled to Washington for the past 18 months to try to get federal officials to listen to them.

Foster says he has never received any logical answers from Homeland Security as to why certain areas in his city had been targeted for fencing over other areas. "I puzzled a while over why the fence would bypass the industrial park and go through the city park," he says.

Despite terse meetings with Chertoff, Foster and other coalition members say the conversation has been one-sided.

"I think we have a government within a government," Foster says. "[This is] a tremendous bureaucracy—DHS is just a monster."

The *Observer* called Homeland Security in Washington to find out how it had decided where to build the fence. The voice mail system sputtered through a dizzying array of acronyms: DOJ, USACE, CBP, and USCIS. On the second call a media spokesperson with a weary voice directed queries to Michael Friel, the fence spokesman for Customs and Border Protection. Six calls and two e-mails later, Friel responded with a curt e-mail: "Got your message. Working on answers..." it said. Days passed, and Friel's answers never came.

Since Homeland Security wasn't providing answers, perhaps Congress would. Phone conversations with congressional offices ranged from "but they aren't even building a wall" to "I don't know. That's a good question." At the sixth congressional office contacted, a GOP staffer who asked not to be identified, but who is familiar with the fence, says the fencing locations stemmed from statistics showing high apprehension and narcotic seizure rates. This seems questionable, since maps released by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers showed the wall going through such properties as the University of Texas Brownsville—hardly a hotbed for drug smugglers and immigrant trafficking.

Questioned more about where the data came from, the staffer said she would enquire further. The next day she called back. "The border fence is being handled by Greg Giddens at the Secure Border Initiative Office within the U.S. Customs and Border Protection office," she said.

Giddens is executive director of the SBI, as it is called, which is in charge of SBInet, a consortium of private contractors led by Boeing Co. The group received a multibillion dollar contract in 2006 to secure the northern and southern borders with a network of vehicle barriers, fencing, and surveillance systems. Companies Boeing chose to secure the southern border from terrorists include DRS Technologies Inc., Kollsman Inc., L-3 Communications Inc., Perot Systems Corp., and a unit of Unisys Corp.

A February 2007 audit by the U.S. Government Accountability Office cited Homeland Security and the SBInet project for poor fiscal oversight and a lack of demonstrable objectives. The GAO audit team recommended that Homeland Security place a spending limit on the Boeing contract for SBInet since the company had been awarded an "indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity contract for 3 years with three 1-year options."

The agency rejected the auditors' recommendation, saying 6,000 miles of border is limitation enough.

In a February 2007 hearing, Congressman Henry Waxman, a California Democrat and the chairman of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, had more scathing remarks for Giddens and the SBInet project. "As of December, the Department of Homeland Security had hired a staff of 98 to oversee the new SBInet contract. This may seem like progress until you ask who these overseers are. More than half are private contractors. Some of these private contractors even work for companies that are business partners of Boeing, the company they are supposed to be overseeing. And from what we are now learning from the department, this may be just the tip of the iceberg."

Waxman said of SBInet that "virtually every detail is being outsourced from the government to private contractors. The government is relying on private contractors to design the programs, build them, and even conduct oversight over them."

A phone call to Giddens at SBI is referred to Loren Flossman, who's in charge of tactical infrastructure for the office. Flossman says all data regarding the placement of the fence is classified because "you don't want to tell the very people you're trying to keep from coming across the methodology used to deter them."

Flossman also calls the University of Texas at Brownsville campus a problem area for illegal immigration. "I wouldn't assume that these are folks that aren't intelligent enough that if they dress a certain way, they're gonna fit in," he says.

Chief John Cardoza, head of the UT Brownsville police, says the Border Patrol would have to advise his police force of any immigrant smuggling or narcotic seizures that happen on campus. "If it's happening on my campus, I'm not being told about it," he says. Cardoza says he has never come across illegal immigrants dressed as students.

Flossman goes on to say that Boeing isn't building the fence, but is providing steel for it. Eric Mazzacone, a spokesman for Boeing, refers the *Observer* to Michael Friel at Customs and Border Protection, and intercedes to get him on the phone. Friel confirms that Boeing has just finished building a 30-mile stretch of fence in Arizona, but insists other questions be submitted in writing.

Boeing, a multibillion dollar aero-defense company, is the second-largest defense contractor in the nation. The company has powerful board members, such as William M. Daley, former U.S. secretary of commerce; retired Gen. James L. Jones, former supreme allied commander in Europe; and Kenneth M. Duberstein, a former White House chief of staff. The corporation is also one of the biggest political contributors in Washington, giving more than $9 million to Democratic and Republican members of Congress in the last decade. In 2006, the year the Secure Fence Act was passed, Boeing gave more than $1.4 million to Democrats and Republicans, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

A majority of this money has gone to legislators such as Congressman Duncan Hunter, the California Republican who championed the Secure Fence Act. In 2006, Hunter received at least $10,000 from Boeing and more than $93,000 from defense companies bidding for the SBInet contract, according to the center. During his failed bid this year for the White House, Hunter made illegal immigration and building a border fence the major themes of his campaign.

In early February 2008, Chertoff asked Congress for $12 billion for border security. He included $775 million for the SBInet program, despite the fact that congressional leaders still can't get straight answers from Homeland Security about the program. As recently as January 31, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee members sent a letter to Chertoff asking for "greater clarity on [the Customs and Border Protection office's] operational objectives for SBInet and the projected milestones and anticipated costs for the project." They have yet to receive a response.

Boeing continues to hire companies for the SBInet project. And the congressional districts of backers of the border fence continue to benefit. A recent *Long Island Business News* article trumpeted the success of Telephonics Corp., a local business, in Congressman King's congressional district that won a $14.5 million bid to provide a mobile surveillance system under SBInet to protect the southern border.

While Garza and Tamez wait for answers, they say they are being asked to sacrifice something that can't be replaced by money. They are giving up their land, their homes, their heritage, and the few remaining acres left to them that they hoped to pass on to their children and grandchildren.

"I am an old man. I have colon cancer, and I am 76 years old," Garza says, resting against a tree in front of his home. "All I do is worry about whether they will take my home. My wife keeps asking me, 'What are we going to do?'"

Besides these personal tragedies, Eagle Pass Mayor Foster says there is another tragedy in store for the American taxpayer. A 2007 congressional report estimates the cost of maintaining and building the fence could be as much as $49 billion over its expected 25-year life span.

"They are just going to push this problem on the next administration, and nobody is going to talk about immigration reform, and that's the illness," Foster says. "The wall is a Band-Aid on the problem. And to blow $49 billion and not walk away with a secure border—that's a travesty." ■

# Failing Upwards

**WHEN HEROES ARE HUCKSTERS** Oh, Angelo, what a hero you are. Yessiree, a real corporate hero.

Angelo Mozilo is CEO of Countrywide Financial Corp., which was America's largest huckster of subprime mortgages before that whole house of cards came tumbling down. Thousands of Countrywide's customers have lost their homes, thousands of its employees have lost their jobs, and Countrywide itself was on the brink of bankruptcy until it arranged a bailout merger with Bank of America.

Angelo didn't suffer a bit, though. He had set himself up with a nice little severance package of $36 million, plus $400,000 a year in consulting fees from the new owners and the use of the corporate jet. However, after an explosion of public outrage over this sweetheart setup, Angelo has stepped up to say he will voluntarily forego his golden parachute. What a guy, huh?

But wait—before you burst into tears of gratitude, let's note that Saint Angelo had taken even earlier steps to provide a financial cushion for himself. At the dawn of 2007—a year that would be catastrophic for Countrywide—Mozilo quietly adjusted an executive stock-selling plan so he could unload his millions of shares of company stock.

When he first "adjusted" the plan, Countrywide's stock price was about $40 a share. Today, it's $6. In between, his sales netted him a cool $132 million. That does not count more than $300 million in stock he'd previously sold. So when Angelo made the grand gesture of giving up a severance package he didn't deserve in the first place, he was already sitting in the lap of luxury—unlike the shareholders, customers, and employees who didn't have advance knowledge of Countrywide's collapse.

Some hero.

**THE WOLF SURVIVES** On a wintry night, in the pale light of the moon, the wolf emerges to howl again.

Yes, "Howling Paul" Wolfowitz is back in government! The neocon hack who was a top architect of George W's Iraq debacle is being brought out of the shadows to chair a prestigious State Department committee that advises the secretary on such matters as weapons of mass destruction.

You might recall that when Howling Paul was Bush's undersecretary of defense, he insisted that big bad Saddam Hussein had WMDs and had to be taken out before he dropped one right here in America. "Disarming Iraq," Wolfowitz solemnly declared just before Bush's invasion, "is a crucial part of winning the war on terror."

As Americans have learned the hard way, Paul, George, Dick, Rummy, Condi, and others were duping us. Saddam had neither WMDs nor any connection to the al-Qaida terrorists we should have been fighting. Incompetent ideologues like Wolfowitz led our country into a disastrous war that has strengthened the enemy and weakened the U.S. As one leading nuclear policy expert says, "The advice given by Paul Wolfowitz over the past six years ranks among the worst provided by any defense official in history. I have no idea why anyone would want more."

Yet here he comes, newly appointed to head the 18-member International Security Advisory Board. There, he'll have access to highly classified material and leeway to affect our national policy on such explosive matters as Iran and Pakistan. A State Department official says, simply, "We think he is well-suited."

Well-suited to do what—lie? A new report documents 935 false statements that Bush & Co. made to justify their invasion of Iraq. Eighty-five of those were by Wolfowitz.

**LESS NEWS IS BAD NEWS** Be careful, it's a jungle out there—especially if you're the editor of the *Los Angeles Times*. If you don't eat your own editorial staff, that newspaper's corporate brass will eat you.

In 2000, the *Times* was bought by the Tribune Co., a media conglomerate based in Chicago that owns the *Chicago Tribune*, as well as two dozen television stations. The conglomerate brought in a well-regarded editor, John Carroll, to run the L.A. paper, and he and his staff produced 13 Pulitzer Prizes in five years. But headquarters kept forcing newsroom cuts on Carroll until he got fed up in 2005 and quit.

Next came Dean Baquet, another stalwart journalist. Again, chieftains in Chicago kept ordering him to devour reporters until he couldn't take it anymore and, in 2006, said "no." He was sacked. That put James O'Shea in the editor's chair, but now comes word that the job has swallowed him, too. He's just been fired for refusing to cut $4 million from the newsroom budget.

That's three editors chewed up and spit out in just over three years. They were fired not for any journalistic shortcoming, but because they wouldn't fire the people who do the journalism.

Was the paper unprofitable? No. The nastiest part of America's increasingly conglomerated media is that the owners don't just want to make a profit, they want to make a killing. In 2006, for example, the *Los Angeles Times* hauled in nearly $600 million in profit—a 10 percent return on sales.

Many independent papers would be happy with that financial result, but conglomerate investors howl for returns of 30 percent or more. So they try to bleed newsrooms to death to extract more dimes for their own pockets. ■

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*For more information on Jim Hightower's work—and to subscribe to his award-winning monthly newsletter,* The Hightower Lowdown—*visit www.jimhightower.com.*

## FISH TALE

*for Barbara and John Filippidis*

If, as you walk the beach west of the seawall,
through the archipelago of shattered warehouses,
the scuttled fleet of dreamboat Fords and Chevies
shoring up this neglected end of the island,
and into whiffs of unseen honeysuckle
abrupt as gulls' high laughter at the wind
that grudges them small headway —
if you find there a pink jelly sandal
netted in scab-red seaweed, gaudy
among conch shards, beer bottle caps,
and gobbets of tar; if there you see
our little girl's sandal in the untold haul
of sand dollars quartered like doubloons
and rough-cheeked oysters forever done
with mothering their long gone pearls,
pass by for other booty, leave it
an unmatched treasure, her first lost
possession. Leave it, for she did not cry
when the sand tugged it off her foot,
and it was handed from wave to wave,
considered as the world considers us
and ours, towed under and tucked away.
And leave to fairy tales the faith
that what we've lost always returns
in the hands of a prince who's combed
his sea-wracked kingdom just for us.
Leave it, for when we told our girl
a fish might fit her sandal on his tail
and strut away on his own vacation,
her sweet laugh flew off in the beaks
of the gritty wind.

## HOMETOWN SKYLINE

They agree the latest monstrosity
would make an excellent
hard target, if this were a place
where important things happen.
She says it looks like a great
horned owl with its spires
and faux-clockface eyes.
A cuttlefish, he says,
that's just sucked the meat
from the moon and let it sink back
into the deep trench of night,
or a *moa* with a Mohawk,
radiating the hopeless squares
hunched at its feet with *cool.*
Don't be so pretentious,
she says, it's obviously an owl.
No, you're wrong, he says,
and it's ugly — live with it.
I do, she says.

ALAN ALTIMONT lives in Austin with his wife Dee and daughter Clementina. He is on the English faculty at St. Edward's University. *–Naomi Shihab Nye*

*TOP* ***No Country for Old Men***
*BOTTOM* ***There Will Be Blood***

***Photos courtesy of the Texas Film Commission***

# The Devil's Domicile

## What West Texas has to Show the World

By DAVID THEIS

There was much talk last fall about the box office failure of a handful of films that dealt directly with the Iraq War. *In the Valley of Elah, Grace is Gone, Redacted,* and *Lions for Lambs* combined didn't gross enough to pay for *Spider-Man 3*'s catering. Brian de Palma's *Redacted* grossed less than $300,000 worldwide, a total the director probably topped back when he was working in 16 mm.

For the most part, critics said the films flopped because they weren't particularly good (though *In The Valley of Elah* certainly was). More plausibly, the ticket-buying public wasn't interested in paying scarce, pre-recession dollars for the privilege of confronting grim reality, regardless of quality.

So what's a serious filmmaker to do? You want to do work that catches the temper of the times, repellent though they may be, but you've also got to sell some tickets.

The answer, if you're Joel and Ethan Coen, is to point your camera in the other direction, away from Iraq and toward Texas. If you want to show amoral, cold-blooded killing (complete with a car bombing), and if you want to depict the murderous impulse against a desert backdrop, you shoot *No Country for Old Men* in "Bush country," as more than one critic has labeled the badlands of Big Bend and the Texas-Mexico border.

The same trick works for Paul Thomas Anderson. If you want to portray the spiritual and physical ravages of pitiless capitalism, and if you intend to argue that the oil business is a depraved way to make a fortune, you can do that in "Bush country," too, in the slightly higher desert near Marfa, where Anderson shot *There Will Be Blood.* (*Blood* is ostensibly set in California, but the phrase "California oilman" doesn't conjure the same dark thoughts.)

Both films have received extravagant critical praise, and each has been nominated for eight Oscars, including best picture.

In short, if you want to make a serious-as-life-and-death film about the choices America has made (and avoid collateral charges of being anti-American), you've got to come to Texas. This is how Hollywood takes its revenge on Texans. They make our state a stand-in for hell.

For now, at least, the charge largely sticks. After all, George W. Bush grew up not too terribly far from where these films were made, at least as distances are reckoned in West Texas. He's said that his values, such as they are, were forged there.

That may be, but this landscape, and these times, have pushed these filmmakers toward something closer to greatness. *No Country for Old Men* and *There Will Be Blood* aren't perfect films (*No Country* comes closer, if you're keeping score), but they hew more tightly to painful reality, and do so more artfully and ambitiously, than any American film in a long time.

Not that the respective filmmakers have taken similar approaches. Aesthetically, they've gone in almost opposite directions, only to wind up close to the same place. Anderson is wilder and weirder than ever here. The Coens seem greatly sobered by the elemental hardness of the landscape and the border life that's lived there, as well as by Cormac McCarthy's story of a fatal cat-and-mouse chase between an otherwordly assassin (Javier Bardem's improbably named Anton Chigurh) and his Texas-tough prey (Josh Brolin's perfectly realized Llewelyn Moss), an otherwise aimless Vietnam vet who makes off with $2 million of somebody else's drug money.

Rather than mocking the rubes, as they did in *Fargo*, or calling attention to their camera placements, as in *Raising Arizona*, the Coens here finally acknowledge the gnawing sense of emptiness and futility that has shadowed some of their most memorable characters. There are actually several similarities of plot and character between *No Country* and the Coens' other desert hit, *Raising Arizona*. Both films feature assassins who seem to have dropped in from Planet Death. Both deal with the struggle to live decent, "normal" lives. In *Raising Arizona*, Nicholas Cage's H.I. and Holly Hunter's Edwina McDunnough go to touching extremes to acquire a little family of their own, and the story ends on an optimistic note: In H.I.'s dreams, at least, he lives in Norman Rockwell-land.

The Coens have conceded defeat in *No Country*. Tommy Lee Jones' Sheriff Ed Tom Bell spends much of the film wondering just when, exactly, everything went to hell. The film is set in 1980, when the "War on Drugs" became more like a real war, complete with border skirmishes. When, according to the Coens and Cormac McCarthy, we as a civilization said to hell with it and let the beast out. Bell yearns for a golden age when some Texas sheriffs "didn't even carry a gun." But unlike H.I.'s, Bell's dreams (which he recounts in the closing scene) lead into a bleak future—death itself. Or rather, nothingness.

The Coens, channeling McCarthy, seem to be asking the same question as Bell: *Who are we now, and how did we get to be this way?* And something—their accumulated years, the times we live in, the clarity of vision that West Texas affords—has pushed them into hushed classicism. There's virtually no music or soundtrack, so every noise—the jangling of keys, the ping of a stray bullet—carries weight. And though *No Country* is a beautifully filmed movie, few shots call attention to themselves.

It's as if the brothers Coen, faced with McCarthy's vision and the stark landscape it illuminates, have reinvented themselves.

Likewise, *There Will Be Blood* is a far cry from Paul Thomas Anderson's previous work, especially *Magnolia* and *Boogie Nights,* which featured L.A. settings, ensemble casts, and interwoven story lines. With *Blood*, Anderson seems to have gone into the desert and returned a raving prophet (a tendency he exhibited in *Magnolia*, with its climactic rainstorm of frogs). He has created a work that's extremely powerful, extremely weird, and epic, almost eternal.

His early 20th-century oil mines (at first the characters go after the "black gold" underground, with hammer and pick) seem like the gates to hell. Jonny Greenwood's soundtrack is self-consciously jarring (one critic compared the music to "hell's orchestra warming up") and even demented, as if only such jag-

ged, flinch-inducing sounds could convey the inner life of the film's protagonist, Daniel Plainview, played with a mostly tamped-down intensity and gleaming intelligence by Daniel Day-Lewis.

Unlike the Coens of *No Country,* Anderson eagerly refers to other movies—to the whole history of movies, perhaps—to create the eternal feel that suffuses his film. *Blood*'s wordless opening, with its brooding hills and piercing score, evokes the equally wordless introduction to *2001: A Space Odyssey.* When Plainview climbs out of an oil shaft, bathed in black, he seems to be emerging from an early stage of human development.

Through the course of the film, Plainview evolves; his oil riches, guilty conscience and hatred of humanity open the door to murder and madness. That's not how he begins. When a man in his crew dies in a work accident, Plainview adopts the man's son (provocatively named H.W., as in Bush 41) and presents him as his own. In what may be the film's only truly tender moment, we see Plainview riding in a train, holding the sleeping toddler to his chest in an almost primal gesture of parental love.

But Anderson casts a baleful eye on the effects of greed and unchecked capitalism, and we watch in fascinated horror as Plainview descends from recognizably human hard-dealer to monster who turns finally and brutally against his "son." Here again, Anderson uses film history to make his points. You're reminded of *Citizen Kane,* of *Greed* (for all its noise, *There Will Be Blood* has a larger-than-life, silent-film feel), and of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre.*

You might think Anderson is critiquing Bush directly when you see that the oil business and evangelical religion cross paths here. Early in the film, Plainview works with a local boy preacher (Paul Dano) to get the kid's congregation on his side, even as he buys up their land for a pittance. Such cynical use of religion certainly evokes Bush and his handlers. Then, in one of the film's most powerful scenes, Plainview agrees to confess his sins and be baptized in the primitive church, though the hard-bitten materialist sneers at the little preacher to his face.

As Plainview submits to the ritual, you can't help but imagine Anderson's angle: thoroughly materialistic right-wing politicos bathing themselves in the baptismal waters of simple folk—the better to pick their pockets.

West Texas will outlive its temporary cinematic association with the American dark side. It's a landscape that doesn't depend on humanity to give it meaning, a landscape in fact that reduces humans to bite-sized specimens, then consumes them. For that reason, a certain sort of storyteller will keep coming back to Texas' border country, to see what lessons that dry land is teaching today.

Or rather, to see which variations on the very oldest lessons are being taught today. Near the end of *No Country for Old Men,* Sheriff Bell visits a crippled, old lawman living in shabby dignity. When Bell tries to explain why he's retiring and giving up the fight against a seemingly overwhelming dark side, an evil so much more barbaric and pitiless than in days gone by, the old-timer rebukes him.

"What you got ain't nothing new," he says from his wheelchair. "It's a vanity to think so."

Perhaps those words are aimed at viewers as well. Thanks to human weakness, the end is always near. Or at least that's the way it looks from the badlands of Big Bend. ■

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*David Theis lives in Houston. He is the author of the novel* Rio Ganges.

# The Big Empty


*Won't go back to Clarksville: An early Wal-Mart in better days, LEFT, and post-pullout.* *Photos courtesy of C.B. Evans*

For many residents of Clarksville, the seat of east Texas' Red River County, 2008 arrived trailing a sense of doom. On December 31, 2007, after some 30 years of business, the local Wal-Mart had closed its doors. Clarksville isn't the first Texas town to experience the shock and subsequent shudder of the giant retailer's departure; Hearne lost its Wal-Mart way back in 1990. But I'm a Clarksville legacy, so to speak, so this particular closing was big news for me.

My mom and aunt grew up in Clarksville, my cousin has made it his home, and my grandparents lived there most of their adult lives. As a kid, I visited them at least every other month, and I have many quaint memories of walking around the town square, shopping at Piggly Wiggly and eating red hot tamales (a delicacy rarely seen west of Interstate 45).

Then there was Wal-Mart. It was located at the edge of town, on Highway 82, and we'd occasionally go there for some household good or another. At the time, I thought it was unique to Clarksville, and as it turns out, it was one of the first Wal-Mart stores in Texas. They didn't yet exist where I lived, in suburban Dallas, which is now one of the most Wal-Mart-saturated areas in the state.

I'd go straight to the toy aisle, which offered only slightly more variety than the dime store's. It seemed kind of goofy and pathetic in comparison with the Circus World at my local mall, but that's what I liked about it. There was something delightfully quirky about its strange assortment of off-brand dolls and games no one had heard of. Later, as a young teenager, I got tentative driving lessons from my uncle in the parking lot. It was closed on Sundays, after all.

Before I graduated from high school, a Wal-Mart appeared within a mile of my Garland home. My mom was thrilled, but I quickly discerned that the only thing this store had in common with the familiar one in Clarksville was the sign. The parking lot never ceased to be packed, and inside was chaos, though it must have been twice the size of the Clarksville store. It felt intentionally different to me, rolled out according to research on suburbanites and what makes them tick. Or maybe it was just the swarms of suburbanites that fostered that impression. Unless I was a captive on my mother's errand route, I avoided it.

That was nearly 20 years ago, and since then Wal-Mart Stores Inc. has infiltrated just about every urban and suburban area of the country, all the while maintaining its grip on small towns, not to mention its impact on other nations. In that time, anti-Wal-Mart activists have amassed documentation of the company's deplorable treatment of workers (especially women and undocumented immigrants) and its deleterious effects on retail wages, manufacturing jobs, communities, small businesses, and the environment. Despite recent moves by the company to ameliorate its reputation, Wal-Mart remains firmly planted in the progressive imagination as an encroaching global evil.

Clarksville, I imagine, was a poster town for the kind of place Sam Walton was looking to expand. It's only 65 miles from the Arkansas border, for one. It also happened to fit certain of Walton's criteria. Its population, for instance, has hovered near 4,000 for decades, which was in keeping with his early strategy of locating stores in towns with fewer than 5,000 people. And perhaps most important, there was nothing of Wal-Mart's stature to be found anywhere in it. In other words, what competition did exist was merely "competition." It existed in theory but posed no real threat.

Before Wal-Mart's arrival, Clarksville was holding its own. While it had never been a tourist town, miles from the interstate as it is, it had managed to retain just enough natives to sustain it. The town square, as I remember it, was full and diverse. There were clothing stores, drugstores, a hardware store, and a dime store. It's a cliché by now, of course, but things began to visibly change within about five years of you-know-who's opening, and the square has struggled for viability ever since. Today it's a strange mishmash: an antique store or two, an Italian restaurant, a movie-rental shop, and a title company. Amazingly enough, a drugstore dating back to the 1930s is still there (missing its soda fountain, but impressive nonetheless).

But the first thing you notice about the square now is its sense of general scarcity. It was revitalized in 2003 under the Texas Historical Commission's Main Street Program, and while the aesthetic effect is nice, it's hard to mask an absence of business with a fresh coat of paint and some new grass.

John Nichols owned a ladies' boutique on the square at the time of Wal-Mart's opening. He closed the store in 1990, when it was no longer feasible to operate because most of his customer base—other local business owners whose own stores had taken a hit—could no longer afford to shop there. He considers Wal-Mart only the most obvious cause of the square's demise, though, citing the lure of big-city shopping, increasing mobility, and changing business concepts as other contributing factors.

Sometime in the early 1990s, Clarksville was deemed worthy of an upgrade, and Wal-Mart abandoned its original store for a bigger one, though not a Supercenter, on a neighboring lot. The old shell and accompanying parking lot still stand—too small for Wal-Mart, but too cavernous for any homegrown business; it serves as a monthly distribution center for the local food bank.

The new store wasn't given much of a chance when Supercenters began appearing menacingly close by. There are five Supers within 45 miles of Clarksville, in New Boston, Mount Pleasant, and Paris, Texas, and Idabel and Broken Bow, Oklahoma. Clarksville's store was literally surrounded, and the gradual result was an inferiority complex. To local shoppers, their hometown Wal-Mart came to seem inadequate and outdated compared with the robust Supers. Sure, it would do in a pinch, but more and more, residents passed it by in favor of one-stop shopping down the road. For that reason, I think many residents feel some respon-

sibility for the closing.

I've read that the threat of closure had faced the Clarksville Wal-Mart for some time, and who really knows why or how it was spared until 2007? The official reason for the shuttering was "sagging sales," but sagging compared with what? Compared with any of the nearby Supers, sure. Compared with its heyday in the early 1980s, when there were still relatively few around? Wal-Mart's business model has changed, and towns with fewer than 5,000 people, the ones that nurtured the store like one of their own, are no longer part of the formula. Wal-Mart now does business in some of the world's most ostentatious cities (Beijing, São Paulo). Clarksville is like an old buddy from Wal-Mart's pre-adolescent days with whom it wouldn't be caught dead at a party.

Some 68 people worked at the Clarksville Wal-Mart, and the initial outcry over the closing—as expressed in several widely circulated e-mails—focused on the loss of jobs. I recently read that most of those laid off got offers to transfer to Supers, or were given severance packages. Regardless, their lives are doubtless more precarious now, even given that most of them worked part-time and didn't really make much of a living anyway. The other issue preoccupying townspeople was their loss of access to consumer goods. As one woman pointed out, there is now nowhere local to buy such mundane staples as underwear and socks.

Immediately following Wal-Mart's closing announcement, locals launched a movement to convince it to stay. I received an impassioned e-mail, forwarded by my aunt, urging folks to call a toll-free number, enter an extension, and then testify (to a voice mailbox or a person, it wasn't clear) about the importance of Wal-Mart to Clarksville and Red River County. The idea was that if everyone pulled together, then maybe the suits at Wal-Mart would reverse course. They would realize they had been rash and careless, and they would give Clarksville another chance.

For a split second I considered picking up the phone. I felt personally spurned, and I wanted to take action. But the idea was preposterous. Clarksville was no match for Wal-Mart. I mean, didn't these people know who they were dealing with? This is the company that eliminated meatcutting jobs companywide as soon as meatcutters in Jacksonville voted for union representation. But the Clarksville Wal-Mart belonged to a different time and a different mythology, one in which Sam Walton personally looked after each of his stores and treated employees like family. I was moved by the earnestness of the e-mail message and saddened by its desperation. It was stunning to realize that people would beg for Wal-Mart's attentions even as they acknowledged its role in their town's stagnation. It was especially hard to conceive of as a resident of Austin, where I'd since moved, and where local businesses abound and a good portion of the city bemoans—if not outright protests—Wal-Mart's every incursion.

But I can't blame the good people of Clarksville for their response. It speaks to the society in which we all now live: Anytown, U.S.A. When even the dubious "right" to be an Anytown is taken away, people are left utterly bewildered. I'm tempted to believe Clarksville Mayor Ann Rushing, who told the *Paris News* she thinks some mom-and-pop business will return, but I wonder if survival post-Wal-Mart will be any easier for local business owners than eking out a living in its shadow was? I'm afraid the legacy of Wal-Mart and its ilk has left us with an irrational attraction to all things gigantic and box-shaped. Add to that the powerful promise of savings, and we're at their mercy. I'm not sure the people of Anytown, or Clarksville, can be convinced otherwise.

I like to fantasize about living someday in a town not too dissimilar from the Clarksville of my childhood. I would live within walking distance of the town square like my grandparents did and, like my grandfather, I would walk to my favorite of four (!) drugstores every morning for coffee. What could I possibly need on a regular basis that my town's economy couldn't supply?

Alas, I was born too late to play that out. At least I have some sense of it. I'm imprinted with the memories of my mom and aunt and grandparents, who experienced the vivacity (among other things) of small-town life. I worry that subsequent generations won't get even secondhand impressions of that kind of life. If they can't at least imagine such places, how will they know alternatives to Wal-Mart exist? ■

*C.B. Evans is a writer living in Austin.*

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