

A Woman Runs For President

By DR. LENORA FULANI

Two weeks ago, Elizabeth Dole announced she was a candidate for the Republican nomination for President. The New York Times described her as America's "first serious female presidential candidate." And certainly, if seriousness is measured by having a viable shot at the White House, she may well be.

In 1988, I had the distinction of being the first woman in U.S. history to run for President and appear on the general election ballot in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. I was also the first African American to do so. Of course, it goes without saying that Elizabeth Dole is closer to winning the White House today - not yet on the ballot in a single state - than I was when I was on the ballot in all 50 states. I assure you that when I ran, there were no feature pieces on 60 Minutes about what a "feminized" White House would be like. Nor, for that matter, were there any articles about a potential "Africanization" of the White House. Everyone pretty much knew that I wasn't a "serious female presidential candidate" in the way Elizabeth Dole is. Eliza-

beth Dole is, after all, a Republican and will run for the White House - if she does - as a Republican with the full weight of the Republican Party behind her.

This means, of course, access to significant amounts of money, significant amounts of press coverage, automatic access to the presidential debates not to mention the imprimatur of legitimacy that comes with being a Republican or a Democrat in U.S. politics.

I, of course, was neither a Democrat or Republican. And though I did succeed in achieving access to the ballot in all 50 states and qualified for federal primary matching funds - becoming the second independent and first Black woman to do so - in fact, those achievements merely magnified the extent to which presidential politics and the political arena in general is a bipartisan and not a nonpartisan affair, no matter what barriers one breaks or "firsts" one achieves.

Indeed, this fact of political life in America, was the reason I ran for President. In other words, I was not a "serious" candidate for the presidency in the sense that I had any shot at the White

House. But I was a serious candidate for the presidency insofar as helping to expose and breaking open the barriers to a more inclusionary and up-from-the-bottom multi-party democracy is a serious concern. In my opinion, this concern is ultimately more serious than the question of who wins the White House in any given election cycle.

I polled nearly a quarter of a million votes in 1988, or about .25%, not exactly numbers that send the Republicans and Democrats running for cover. It would take a wealthy, white male independent and 20% of the vote to do that, an event of tremendous, and, in my opinion, deeply misunderstood political magnitude which occurred just four years later. In some respects, as I reflect back on my 1988 presidential run and all that has happened since, I see the years that followed it as a kind of simmering cauldron of political revolt that exploded in 1992 on several fronts - not the least of which was Ross Perot's independent campaign. I do not mean to suggest that my campaign was the cause of the revolt. Rather, it

was in anticipation of it.

If my 1988 presidential run detected a bare murmur of public discontent with politics-as-usual - it was, nonetheless, a clear statement about the myths of American democracy. My Democratic and Republican opponents had to gather about 40,000 signatures nationally on petitions to access the ballot. I had to gather 1.2 million signatures, the result of a patchwork of state laws all promulgated by bipartisan consent, to make access to the ballot virtually impossible for independents. The barriers weren't just structural, they were attitudinal. Virtually every time the press mentioned me, which wasn't often, my name was preceded by the words "fringe candidate." It was so frequent that I started to use it myself, sometimes to illustrate the gap between what I had achieved and how I was perceived. I would sometimes say, "Hi! I'm Lenora Fulani, the fringe candidate who qualified for two million dollars in matching funds from the United States Treasury." I even named my autobiographical account of my

second presidential run *The Making of a Fringe Candidate*.

But as traditional political alignments and alliances melt away, and new alliances start to form, the "fringe" starts to occupy a more influential political position. Millions of Americans - half the electorate, actually - are on the fringes of American politics. They don't vote and they view the political process as having little or nothing to do with them. They're right. And that's exactly what has to be changed. Reforming our political process to make it genuinely democratic, inclusionary and easy-to-use is the key. And those reforms could get us to the point where we not only could elect a woman or an African American to the White House, more importantly, we could elect an independent who brings a new way of doing politics, an up-from-the-bottom way of doing politics, to the highest office in the land.

Lenora B. Fulani twice ran for President of the U.S. as an independent, making history in 1988 when she became the first woman and African American to get on the ballot in all fifty states.

TOP 10 BOOKS THIS WEEK

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 All Too Human (Hard cover)
A Political Education
by George Stephanopoulos | 6 The Merck Manual Centennial Edition
by Robert Berkow (ed.),
Mark H. Beers (ed.) |
| 2 The Reader (Oprah Pick)
by Bernhard Schlink | 7 The Greatest Generation (Hardcover)
by Tom Brokaw |
| 3 Monica's Story
by Andrew Morton | 8 The Testament
by John Grisham |
| 4 Get Healthy Now! With Gary Null
by Gary Null | 9 What's Heaven?
by Maria Shriver, Sandra Speidel (illus.) |
| 5 The Courage to Be Rich
Creating a Life of Material and Spiritual Abundance
by Suze Orman | 10 Business @ the Speed of Thought
Using a Digital Nervous System
by Bill Gates |

KMHD - 89.1 FM

Every Sunday
6 p.m. to 10 p.m.

**New Vistas
In Music**

**New Age And
Light World Beat
Rhythms**

Mt. Hood Community College · Gresham