

Obama Wins N. Carolina

Close call in Indiana; Oregon coming up next

(AP)—Barack Obama swept to victory in the North Carolina primary Tuesday night and declared he was closing in on the Democratic presidential nomination. Hillary Rodham Clinton led narrowly in Indiana, struggling to halt her rival's march into history.

"Tonight we stand less than 200 delegates away from winning the Democratic nomination for president of the United States," Obama told a raucous rally in Raleigh, N.C. — and left no doubt he intended to claim the prize.

He said it appeared Clinton had won Indiana's primary. Thousands of votes had yet to be counted, principally in Lake County, a heavily black area not far from Obama's home city of Chicago.

Returns from 62 percent of North Carolina precincts showed Obama was winning 56 percent of the vote to 42 percent for Clinton, a triumph that mirrored his earlier wins in Southern states with large black populations.

Obama won at least 40 delegates and Clinton at least 31 in the two states, with 116 still to be awarded.

That made Indiana a virtual must-win Midwestern state for the former

"This primary season may not be over, but when it is, we will have to remember who we are as Democrats ... because we all agree that at this defining moment in history — a moment when we're facing two wars, an economy in turmoil, a planet in peril — we can't afford to give John McCain the chance to serve out George Bush's third term."

Obama was gaining more than 90 percent of the black vote in Indiana, while Clinton was winning an estimated 61 percent of the white vote there.

In North Carolina, Clinton won 60 percent of the white vote, while Obama claimed support from roughly 90 percent of the blacks who cast ballots.



Democratic presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., greets supporters Tuesday in Raleigh, N.C.



Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., campaigns Tuesday at a fire station in New Albany, Ind.

Obama's delegate haul edged him closer to his prize — 1,785.5 to 1,639 for Clinton in The Associated Press count, out of 2,025 needed to win the nomination.

He has long led Clinton among delegates won in the primaries and caucuses, and has increasingly narrowed his deficit among superdelegates who will attend the convention by virtue of their status as party leaders. The AP tally showed Clinton with 269.5 superdelegates, and Obama with 255.

The impact of a long-running controversy over Obama's former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, was difficult to measure.

In North Carolina, six in 10 voters who said Wright's incendiary comments affected their votes sided with Clinton. A somewhat larger percentage of voters who said the pastor's remarks did not matter supported Obama.

The effect of Clinton's call for a summertime suspension of the federal gasoline tax — which dominated the final days of the two primaries — was impossible to judge.

The questionnaire used to learn about voter motivation did not include any questions about the gasoline tax.

In Indiana, about one in five voters said they were independents, an additional one in 10 said Republican.

Only Democrats and unaffiliated voters were permitted to vote in North Carolina.

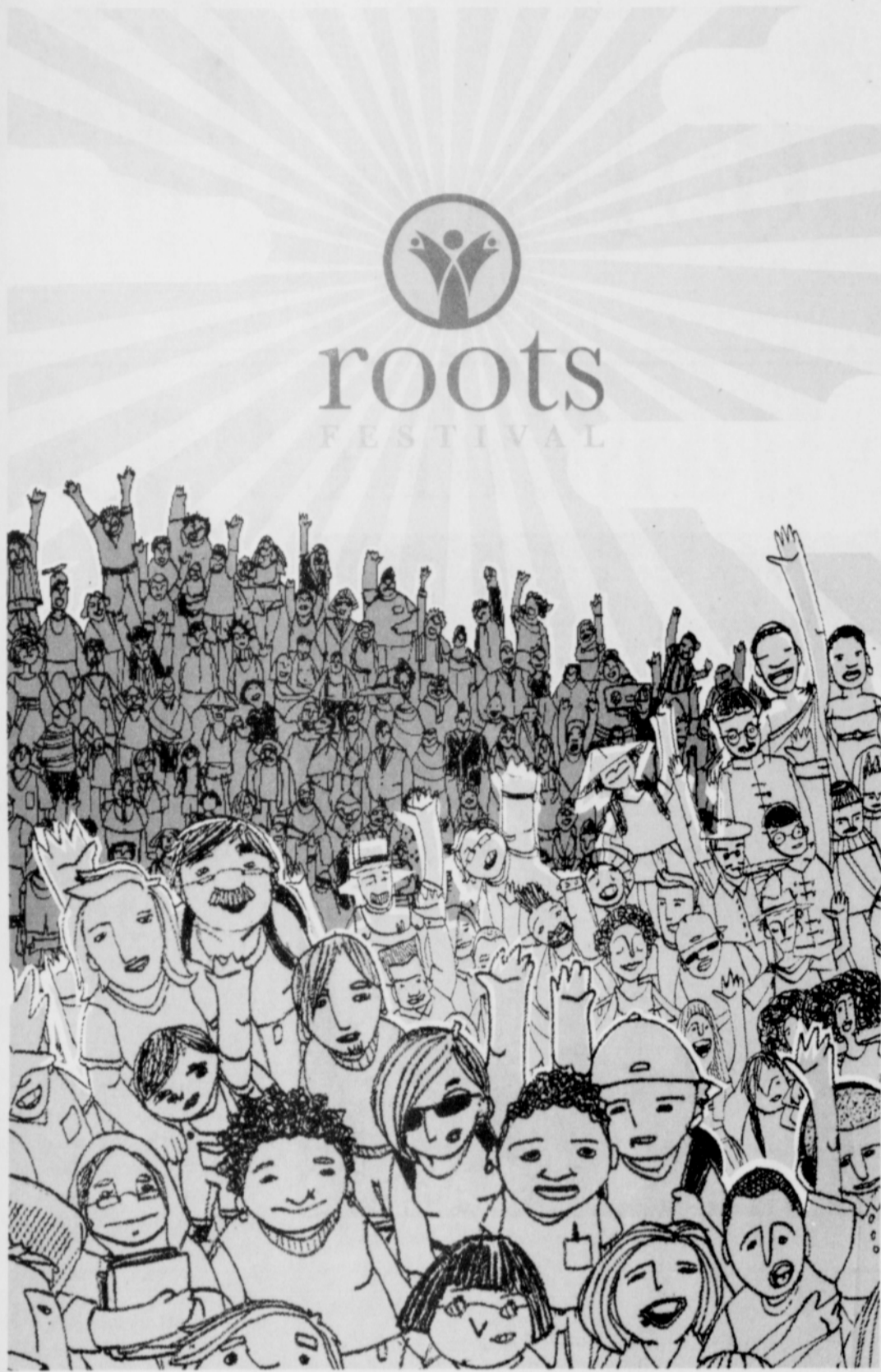
first lady, hoping to counter Obama's persistent delegate advantage with a strong run through the late primaries.

There, returns from 79 percent of the precincts showed Clinton with 52 percent of the vote to 48 percent for Obama.

Voters in both states fell along racial patterns long since established in a marathon race between the nation's strongest-ever black presidential candidate and its most formidable female challenger for the White House.

The economy was the top issue by far in both states, according to interviews with voters as they left their polling places.

Two weeks after a decisive defeat in Pennsylvania, Obama sounded increasingly like he was looking forward to the fall campaign.



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