

# Burlington County Times

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Opinion

## Opinion: Clintons' sideshow fading, but not soon enough

By Carl Golden

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Like an aging vaudeville duo whose act has grown stale and whose once-adoring audiences have diminished to a nostalgia-driven handful, Bill and Hillary Clinton have taken to the lecture circuit in their obsessive quest for relevancy and, of course, money.

In their recent opening night in Toronto — the first stop on a 13-city, six-month tour — the Clintons played to a half-empty hall of true believers, who cheered their attacks on President Donald Trump, clucked sympathetically, and cursed the bad luck that had befallen Hillary in her loss to Trump.

The former first couple are singing to the choir. No one is apt to shell out anywhere from \$75 to more than \$700 a ticket in the hopes of learning something new. They filed into the Toronto venue because it was an opportunity to reinforce their fealty to the Clintons, swoon over their political heroes, and come away convinced that the country is on the road to ruin because, among other things, the American people failed to elect the nation's first female president.

Packed houses are unlikely for the remainder of the tour, but the Clintons won't be deterred or embarrassed. The money will continue to flow (once she left office, his \$250,000 speaking fees dried up) and the media will cover their appearances — the twin goals of the ex-president and ex-first lady, U.S. senator and secretary of state.

The distraction the two represent is the last thing the Democratic Party needs or wants as it struggles to accommodate the rising voices of a crop of new, young, ambitious and aggressive activists demanding an overthrow of the party establishment and a dramatic change in thinking.

The Clintons are quintessential establishment figures who stand for small, incremental steps toward change rather than the upheaval demanded by the restless newcomers.

Congresswoman-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, for instance, who has become the symbol of the new wave for change, was 3 years old when Bill Clinton won the presidency. Neither she nor her contemporaries have any emotional attachment to his administration, policies or style, nor any desire to follow the same path. The Clintons are throwbacks in her mind, appreciated for their service but to be obeyed or emulated no longer.

While the traveling Clintons berating Trump is consistent with party strategy, many worry that the tour is a precursor to muscling Hillary into the mix of potential presidential candidates in 2020, a prospect that produces agita among those who blame her for booting away a sure thing two years ago. She remains a polarizing, divisive figure.

Her recent interview comment, "Sure, I'd like to be president," sent shivers up the spines of party regulars, whose optimism about 2020 grows with each new Trump pronouncement and Twitter commentary, not to mention the potential for the investigation into allegations that the Trump campaign dealt with Russian operatives to influence his election spilling into the Oval Office.

Hillary Clinton, however, is not the object of their optimism. The blue tide that swept Democrats back into control of the House was an anti-Trump phenomenon, but one that someone other than Hillary is best equipped to take advantage of.

The Clintons, though, don't seem concerned with the party's future, only their own.

Her defeat at Trump's hands wasn't simply the loss of an election. Rather, it was a personal humiliation, a stinging rejection of her principles and values, a beatdown administered by an individual whom she disdained as inexperienced and unprepared, with a volatile and erratic temperament.

Hillary's tour with her husband is a stab at regaining relevancy, but a striving for redemption as well, dramatic proof that her loss was a colossal mistake committed by the American people.

The tour also fulfills a uniquely Clintonian need to occupy as much public space as possible, a relentless effort to remain the center of attention and the object of media and popular appeal.

Raking in considerable sums of money at the same time — another uniquely Clintonian trait — is an additional and welcome benefit.

Their decision to spend six months traveling the country is an unmistakable sign that, if the party wants them to retire gracefully, it will be forced to push them offstage. Self-absorption is in their DNA, and they're not about to leave voluntarily.

The Clintons may be a fading vaudeville act in peril of seeing their names in small typeface near the bottom of the theater lobby card, but the show must go on, and they are convinced they deserve starring roles.

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