

Ferraro's flub

by *The San Diego Union-Tribune*

"If Obama was a white man, he would not be in this position. And if he was a woman (of any color), he would not be in this position. He happens to be very lucky to be who he is. And the country is caught up in the concept."

- Geraldine Ferraro

Ferraro isn't just wrong about Barack Obama, whose personal appeal and rhetorical skills have drawn many a white voter to his side. She's also the last person in the country who should say that a personal distinction unusual in presidential politics got him where he is.

In 1984, facing incumbent Ronald Reagan, Democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale needed a campaign boost - say, a woman running mate, the first on a major-party ticket. With minimal vetting, he selected Ferraro, a New Yorker with all of three terms in the House.

Every sentient voter knew Ferraro was chosen because of her gender. She knows it, too. "In 1984 if my name was Gerald Ferraro instead of Geraldine Ferraro," she said Tuesday, "I would never have been chosen as a vice presidential candidate."

Assuming Obama's racial status has propelled his rapid rise toward the Democratic nomination, just as her gender status propelled her, was Ferraro's initial error. Interestingly, the same could be said, but wasn't, of Hillary Clinton. Ferraro then charged that the Obama campaign's response was just another of its racist attacks on white critics, and on her in particular because she was involved in Clinton's campaign. Finally, charging that the Obama campaign was using her to attack Clinton, she resigned from the Clinton campaign.

Fine. The reality is that many voters have moved beyond the "identity politics" that Ferraro's remarks perpetuate. And what moved them is not what race Obama is. It's who he is.

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