



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on March 27, 2011

Former Rep. Geraldine Ferraro Dies

When doomed Democrat presidential hopeful Walter Mondale picked Ferraro, whom no one had ever heard of, to run for the White House against Ronald Reagan and George Bush in 1984, many believed the decision was a masterpiece of political strategy that might turn the election in Mondale's favor.



The plan didn't work. [Reagan and Bush shellacked](#) the Democrat dynamic duo by winning all but 13 of 538 electoral votes. Only Washington, D.C., and Minnesota went for the Mondale ticket, and Mondale won his home state by a thin 3,761 votes. Reagan won more electoral votes than any President history, making the Mondale and Ferraro the two biggest losers the Democrats ever put forward as serious candidates.

But beside helping Mondale put together the most embarrassing loss ever for Democrats, the first woman to venture onto the national political stage in such dramatic fashion exited that platform on an equally unpleasant note. When Barack Obama was running against Ferraro's choice, Hillary Clinton, the failed [vice presidential candidate said](#) that Obama was chosen only because he is black.

The remarks were a major embarrassment for Clinton. That ended Ferraro's relationship with the campaign, for which she was raising money.

[Doctors diagnosed](#) Ferraro with multiple myeloma in 1998. She died surrounded by her husband and family.

Unknown From Queens

Born in 1935, the [pro-abortion feminist](#), who claimed she was a Catholic, landed in Congress in 1978, but her sudden appearance on the national stage occurred six years later as Mondale's right-hand woman.

[The New York Times recalls](#) that the radical Left propelled her elevation to platform boss for the Democrats in 1984, and Mondale's picked Ferraro as his running mate after the [National Organization for Women](#) threatened a convention floor fight if a woman wasn't chosen for the number-two spot on the Democrat ticket:

It was Ms. Ferraro's appointment as chairwoman of the 1984 Democratic Platform Committee that gave her the most prominence. In her book "Ferraro: My Story," written with Linda Bird Francke, she said that in becoming the first woman to hold that post she owed much to a group of Democratic women — Congressional staffers, abortion rights activists, labor leaders and others — who called themselves Team A and who lobbied for her appointment.

Even before then, however, Ms. Ferraro's name had been mentioned on lists of potential



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candidates for vice president, along with Representative Patricia Schroeder of Colorado, the former congresswoman Barbara Jordan and Dianne Feinstein, the mayor of San Francisco. By May 1984, Mr. O'Neill had endorsed her for the No. 2 spot on the ticket. It was "the Good Housekeeping seal of approval," as Ms. Ferraro later put it.

On July 1, the National Organization for Women threatened a convention floor fight if the Democrats did not choose a woman, and three days later a delegation of Democratic women went to Minnesota to urge Mr. Mondale to do so.

Mondale, of course, did what the delegation of ladies demanded, and thus became a part of history, albeit a very dubious part.

"If we can do this, we can do anything," [Ferraro declared](#) the night Democrats nominated her.

But they didn't do it, partly because of some shenanigans with her financial disclosures, a situation unaided by her husband, John Zaccaro. The news media revealed that he rented two floors of a building to pornographers.

[Reagan and Bush beat](#) the two like red-headed step-children, locking up 58.8 percent of the popular vote and, again, more electoral votes than any winner in history. With just 13 electoral votes, however, Mondale and Ferraro did have the least of any loser in history. Alf Landon's total of 8 in 1936 against Franklin Delano Roosevelt bested Mondale's embarrassing performance.

Slip of the Tongue

In 1985, Zaccaro [pleaded guilty](#) to misdemeanor fraud, and Ferraro, after losing the election in 1984, twice ran for the Senate, losing both times. After Sen. Charles Schumer [crushed her](#) in the Democrat primary, 51 percent to 26 percent in 1998, she ended her political career and drifted back into obscurity.

Ferraro briefly emerged from the dark three years ago during the Democrat presidential primaries. An honorary Clinton campaign official, she uttered impolitic remarks to the *Daily Breeze*, a newspaper in Los Angeles.

The paper [quoted her](#) thusly:

"If Obama was a white man, he would not be in this position," she continued. "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." Ferraro does not buy the notion of Obama as the great reconciler.

The remarks evoked the expected faux outrage from Obama, [via torpedo](#) David Axelrod and other campaign soldiers, but Ferraro, to her credit, [kept firing](#). She called the paper back to explain, adding even more racially incendiary remarks.

"Any time anybody does anything that in any way pulls this campaign down and says let's address reality and the problems we're facing in this world, you're accused of being racist, so you have to shut up," Ferraro said. "Racism works in two different directions. I really think they're attacking me because I'm white. How's that?..."

"In all honesty, do you think that if he were a white male, there would be a reason for the black community to get excited for a historic first?" Ferraro said. "Am I pointing out something that doesn't exist?"



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The Clinton campaign “distanced itself” from Ferraro, as [the Associated Press reported](#), and she stopped raising money for Hillary Clinton.

Oddly enough, Ferraro’s remarks about Obama applied to her own candidacy for Vice President. Her crowning achievement was a not a measure of her merit as a candidate.

[Said Ferraro](#), “I am the first to admit that were I not a woman, I would not have been the vice-presidential nominee.”

Photo of Geraldine Ferraro: AP Images



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