

Six months after Clinton loss, public wants answers 'beyond Russia and Comey,' author says

Jesse Marx Palm Springs Desert Sun

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In the days and weeks after the 2016 presidential election, there was a resistance in local Democratic circles to talk about their own side. At one Desert Stonewall Democrats meeting, multiple people who questioned whether Hillary Clinton had been the best candidate were promptly booed and quieted.

That was six months ago. If the sales of Jonathan Allen's and Amie Parnes' book, "Shattered: Inside Hillary Clinton's Doomed Campaign," is any indication, there's now a hunger for political autopsy.

"I think people have a strong curiosity for why she lost, and they want answers beyond Russia and (FBI director James) Comey," Parnes told The Desert Sun on Thursday prior to a discussion at the Rancho Mirage Public Library.

After losing in 2008 to Barack Obama, Clinton had eight years to explain why she was running again for president, but her campaign struggled mightily to articulate a reason. Speeches were written by committee and even the people who put the words on the page thought they lacked focus.

"She had no message," said Parnes, senior White House correspondent for The Hill newspaper.

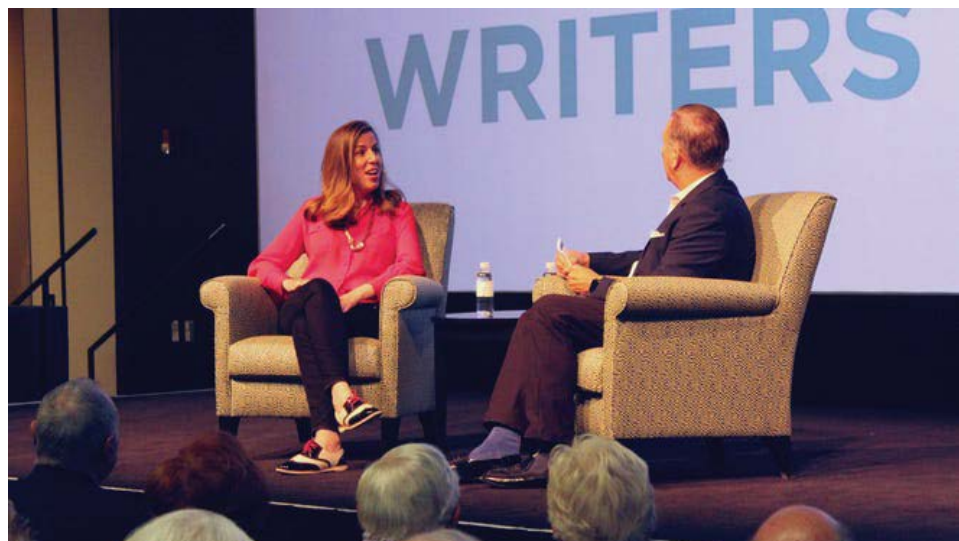
"Shattered" — which became a New York Times best seller this week and was optioned for a movie — is a portrait of a dysfunctional operation that favored loyalty above ability, turning a winnable election into a disaster. The people at the top, who were ostensibly in control, failed to listen to their swing state operatives and failed to give the white working-class a compelling reason to vote for a lifelong insider in an era of rage and resentment.

The book relies heavily on anonymous members of the Clinton circle who — without fear of reprisal — give brutally honest critiques of both the campaign and a Democratic Party establishment that has lost the ability to explain itself while continuing to act as a buffer against President Trump.

On the outside, "Clintonworld" was a well-oiled machine. In reality, grassroots organizers lacked basic resources, like lawn signs. The team that Clinton had assembled furiously fought with itself for the candidate's attention and favor.

After speaking with regular people on the campaign trail, Bill Clinton attempted to sound the alarm, but his advice was dismissed. While anger built on both the right and the left — fomented by both Donald Trump and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders — the Clinton campaign kept focus on computer data and simulations rather than outreach.

The sense of dread, flowing from one scandal after another, was summed up in a single phrase: "We're not allowed to have nice things."



Amie Parnes, one of the authors of "Shattered: Inside Hillary Clinton's Doomed Campaign," speaks May 4, 2017, at the Rancho Mirage Public Library with Writers Festival founder Jamie Kabler. *Jesse Marx/The Desert Sun*



David Bryant, director of the Rancho Mirage Public Library. *Jesse Marx/The Desert Sun*

In an interview Tuesday with CNN's Christiane Amanpour, Clinton said she took responsibility for her surprise loss, but gave no specifics. Instead, she deflected blame onto the media, misogyny, Wikileaks and Comey, who sent a letter to Congress on Oct. 28 saying he'd reopened an investigation into the former secretary of state's private email server.

"If the election had been on October 27, I would be your president," Clinton said.

Her gripe has some weight to it. Nate Silver, a statistician and writer, has argued that Comey's letter did irrevocable damage at the last minute, although data, presented by Politico, suggest otherwise.

In any case, as Allen and Parnes, and many others, have argued that the 2016 election was never supposed to be that close. Clinton racked up millions of extra votes in solidly blue states and lost the Electoral College where it really mattered — in a state like Wisconsin, where she never stepped foot.

Parnes said the reaction to the book from within "Clintonworld" has been positive. One reader wrote to her recently on Twitter: "I'm someone who didn't like HRC & did not vote for her. Even I felt quite a bit of sympathy 4 her in reading this book."

That's the reaction Parnes was hoping for. Behind the stories of turmoil and missed opportunities, the authors attempted to show a little of the candidate's humanity.

And if you can't see it, Parnes said, "You have to be a little heartless."