



Media Reality Check

A Twice-Daily Analysis of Network Convention Coverage  Thursday Morning, August 3, 2000

Good Morning!

Welcome to the Media Research Center's morning examination of Republican convention coverage delivered by fax, e-mail and posted on our Web site. This edition concentrates on coverage from Wednesday night.

This afternoon a second daily edition will look at today's morning shows.

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"I Thought This Was the Convention of Sweetness and Light"

Cheney's "Red Meat" Dissected

Even before Dick Cheney spoke Wednesday night, Tom Brokaw relayed the opposition's attack. On the NBC/MSNBC simulcast he announced: "Already the Gore campaign is out with a rebuttal to Dick Cheney's speech...They're saying, 'The mask is off the GOP masquerade ball. It's the most negative Republican convention speech since Pat Buchanan.'"

Afterward, Brokaw assessed: "Richard Cheney tonight, borrowing a phrase from Al Gore in 1992, 'It is time for them to go.' He proved himself an unflappable, if not a dynamic speaker tonight." Tim Russert chimed in: "You could feel this audience, they've been pent up for three days, with the politics of happiness, niceties. They wanted to let loose a little bit. And Dick Cheney gave them, if not red meat, a little steak tartar at least."

■ Just past 11pm on MSNBC, Jim Miklaszewski asked Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer "Was it too strongly negative?" And to Congressman Bob Livingston, he bemoaned: "But I thought this was the convention of sweetness and light. What happened to that?"

■ FNC's Paula Zahn complained: "There were some stinging rebukes in this speech. That one line in particular, 'Soon our men and women in uniform will once again have a Commander-in-Chief they can respect, one who understands their mission and restores their morale.' Ouch!"

■ ABC's George Stephanopoulos took up the liberal line: "I wonder whether it played as well at home. It was all about fixing the culture in Washington, not fixing the problems of the country. We'll see."

■ Dan Rather delivered the oddest comments: "Dick Cheney, in a metaphor that he as a former Secretary of Defense might use, delivered a...stealth bomber kind of attack in under the radar, quietly, but hitting hard at Clinton-Gore, as he so often referred to it. The themes were the themes of restoration. Restoration of what was, the son to lead the restoration of a father...If you want to read more about it you might consult Shakespeare, Henry the 4th, Prince Hal, the son who wanted to restore what was once his father's." □

Quote of the Night

"He's a hard-right conservative, as Cokie says...What George W. Bush seems to have done is solidify his party base; that is, he's pleasing conservatives...The question will be should Bush have selected someone to reach out, with that sex appeal?"

— ABC's Sam Donaldson on Cheney

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Rather on Bush's Face

"Look closely at the eyes... the triangle of the face," Dan Rather urged over a shot of George W. Bush at the top of CBS's 10pm ET hour of coverage Wednesday night. As viewers saw a split-screen of George W. Bush on the sofa in a hotel room and a shot of the cheering crowd on the floor celebrating Bush's nomination, Rather offered a peculiar observation.

Verging on incoherence, Rather intoned: "I suggest you look closely at the eyes, what some people call the triangle of the face, the eyes running down to the nose and mouth. Sometimes George W. Bush looks a little tense in there, now he's returning to that, but when he went over the top, and he's officially the party's nominee, well, it said it, along the lines of 'how good it is.'"

Well, maybe a bit beyond incoherence.

Rather on Cheney's Secret "Clinton Gore" Agenda

In the midst of Dick Cheney's speech, Dan Rather talked over the cheering crowd to make sure viewers realized Cheney's sleight of hand.

After Cheney said, "We're all a little weary of the Clinton-Gore routine...it is time for them to go," Rather helpfully explained: "You may want to note that Cheney is referring to Clinton-Gore, not Clinton and Gore, in effect making Clinton Al Gore's first name: Clinton Gore." □

"Is the Republican Party Held Hostage...By Its Views on Abortion?"

Party Not Tolerant Enough for NBC

Another night Wednesday of mostly questions from the left on MSNBC, with Tom Brokaw obsessed about the party's lack of tolerance, but a few questions from the right squeezed through.

■ David Bloom to J.C. Watts: "**Why should African-Americans...be heartened by his [Cheney] nomination** when he voted against the creation of the Department of Education, voted against higher funding for Head Start, voted against a ban on cop-killer bullets? **Doesn't that send the wrong message to the black community?**" (Bloom raised a conservative point with Dick Arme: "There's been a lot of talk about more conservative Republicans, the right wing of the party being excluded from this convention. What do you make of that?")

■ Tom Brokaw to Newt Gingrich: "But speaking of inclusiveness, **in the platform it tolerates no other point of view except anti-abortion.** There were people who tried to say that we welcome other points of view...."

■ Brokaw to Christine Todd Whitman: "**Is the Republican Party held hostage in your judgment, Christie Whitman, by its views on abortion?** So that people like you, who believe that there ought to be some choice can never be considered for Vice President?" Brokaw followed up to Pat Robertson about the platform committee: "**They wanted it only in the unreconstructed view: We are against abortion, period, no other point of view will be tolerated?**" □

Tom Brokaw Portrayed Concern As Contradicting "Inclusion"

"The Rock" from the Right & the Left

CNN and NBC picked up Wednesday night on conservative concern over the GOP's selection of wrestler "The Rock" to introduce Speaker Hastert. But CNN and NBC offered contrasting spins on the controversy:

■ At 7:20 pm CNN's Jeff Greenfield observed: "When you think about Newt Gingrich, when he was Speaker, attacking the Democrats for moral relativism, attacking the mostly liberal media for leading us into a swamp. Bill Bennett's crusade against the coarsening of American values. I wonder if the folks who planned this ever have seen *Smackdown* because despite the raunchiness of some stuff on WWF to be blunt about it, that's way beyond what you see on network television. There are women who lose parts of their costumes, there is, granted, play violence, but reenacted violence, men against women. There is language that is fairly coarse that would shock, I think, this convention."

■ Tom Brokaw opened MSNBC's coverage: "The Teachers and Parents Television Council are saying that he's an inappropriate figure to be appearing here before the Republican National Convention. And Brent Bozell, who is a keeper of the Republican culture, is criticizing him as well. So in this Republican convention, which is being billed as a gathering of inclusion, we've had the wrestlers now who are being told they're not welcome. Last night there were some delegates who said they would bow their heads and turn away when an openly gay member of Congress would talk. And in the platform here they're saying there is no discussion when it comes to abortion, they do not welcome other points of view." □

ABC Took on Bush on Health Insurance, Tax Cuts, Environment
“Compassion Clashes With His Record”

In what may be a preview of the media’s approach to the fall campaign, Wednesday’s *World News Tonight* dedicated an entire story to supposed proof of how George W. Bush’s “much talked about compassion clashes with his record.” The evidence listed by reporter Dean Reynolds defined compassion as supporting specific liberal policy prescriptions.

Reynolds began by noting how Bush’s photo-op with Hispanics “symbolizes his image as a different, more open kind of Republican.” Then Reynolds pounced: “In his home state he is undeniably more popular among minorities than any other Republican, **but there are times when it seems Bush’s much talked about compassion clashes with his record.** He is, after all, the same man who addressed the racially intolerant Bob Jones University six months ago and who refused to take a stand on the Confederate flag flying in South Carolina by repeatedly saying it was up to the people of that state to decide.”

Jumping to the convention, Reynolds assumed anyone opposed to certain specific legislation – of a liberal variety of course – is not compassionate: “He went along with having an openly gay Congressman address the convention last night, **yet Bush opposes hate crimes legislation, gay marriage and gay adoption.** He is the candidate who talks of making health insurance available to all who want it, **but has fought to limit federal insurance for children.** Bush is the candidate **who has proposed a huge tax cut** as a way to help the working class.” After a clip of Bush, Reynolds hit the idea from the liberal class warfare angle: “**But more than sixty percent of the relief would go to the richest ten percent of Americans.** And while he speaks of the need to protect the environment, Bush supports mostly voluntary efforts to do it.”

“On many of these issues, **the Governor offers a softer sounding position than many Republicans,**” Reynolds agreed before countering in conclusion: “**It is the reality behind the rhetoric that may prove troublesome for him in the fall.**” □

Monday Night More Tuned in to Brit Hume Than Tom Brokaw
Fox News Channel Beat Out MSNBC

Monday night a repeat of NBC’s *Third Watch* beat ABC’s convention coverage and CBS’s *48 Hours*, which showed Colin Powell’s speech, but in the cable world more tuned in to the Fox News Channel (FNC) than MSNBC. That’s quite a feat considering fewer homes have access to FNC, and MSNBC showcased its NBC News stars, led by Tom Brokaw and Tim Russert.

USA Today’s Peter Johnson on Wednesday provided the Nielsen numbers for Monday night. *Third Watch* attracted 10 million viewers while 6.4 million watched *48 Hours* and 5.9 million tuned in to ABC during the 10pm ET hour. The three cable news networks garnered a total of just 2.4 million viewers. CNN attracted 1.2 million, down 35 percent from the first night in 1996. FNC came in second with 676,000 viewers, ahead of MSNBC with 516,000.

Score one for FNC prime time anchors Brit Hume and Paula Zahn and FNC’s decision to actually show speakers on the podium. □

Rather’s Special Spin

Here’s how Dan Rather introduced a Wednesday *CBS Evening News* story on the nominee’s arrival in Philadelphia: “George W. Bush brought his happy face campaign road show to the feel-good gathering in Philadelphia today. One of his first orders of business, a photo-op with supporters of Hispanic heritage.”

NBC Resurrected the “Little Brown One”

In a profile on Wednesday’s *NBC Nightly News*, George P. Bush noted that with three Bushes sharing the George Bush name you need a “letter to distinguish between us.” Feeding off that line, reporter Kelly O’Donnell reminded viewers: “But his grandfather used something else to distinguish George P. as a child. Back in 1988, then Vice President Bush, pointing out his grandchildren to the Reagans.”

NBC played old video of George H.W. Bush pointing across an airport tarmac: “That’s Debbie’s kids from Florida, the little brown ones.”

O’Donnell then asked George P: “You were referred to as one of ‘the little brown ones,’ by your grandfather. That was controversial then, would it be even more so today?” George P. replied: “My grandfather is the sweetest, most loving man that I know. It was a term of endearment. And I would call my own grandkids that because there’s nothing as beautiful as brown skin.” □