



Media Reality Check

A Twice-Daily Analysis of Network Convention Coverage  Wed. Afternoon, August 16, 2000

Good Afternoon!

Welcome to the Media Research Center's continuing examination of Democratic convention coverage delivered by fax, e-mail and posted on our Web site. This edition concentrates on this morning's TV coverage.

Tomorrow morning, MRC will present a complete wrap-up of tonight's prime time coverage.

For the complete collection of these issues, including those published during the Republican convention, please go to <http://www.mrc.org> and click on "Campaign 2000." You'll be able to access issues as regular HTML files or view them as Adobe Acrobat PDF files.

Don't miss the video clips posted each day to illustrate the documented bias: Check the MRC home page and the "Campaign 2000" page for the latest.

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"Liberal Night" Issues Downplayed in Favor of Nostalgia

Kennedy Night Coverage, the Morning After

Rep. Harold Ford, Jr.'s post-prime time "keynote address" was ignored by the broadcast networks and MSNBC last night, a blackout that was continued by the networks this morning. Instead, they highlighted Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg's convention speech, an excuse to reprise the syrupy Kennedy hagiography of last summer.

"Here in Los Angeles, **Caroline Kennedy stirs the echoes and rekindles Camelot with memories of her father,**" ABC's Charles Gibson waxed at the start of *Good Morning America*, dropping her married name. "There were tears in the eyes of a lot of the delegates," his partner Diane Sawyer seconded.

"Last night's was a carefully-put-together program designed...to convince liberal Democrats that they have nothing to fear despite Al Gore's move to the center with his choice of Joe Lieberman," explained NBC's Claire Shipman on *Today*, "and who better to deliver that message than the Kennedys?"

Mrs. Schlossberg's speech last night included liberal calls for action on abortion, civil rights, the environment, and gun control, but this morning reporters acted as if it were nothing but a nonpartisan trip down Memory Lane. "It was Caroline Kennedy who provided the heart," asserted ABC's Linda Douglass. "She is the repository of the family legacy, the embodiment of her father's ideal that the government can solve problems."

Douglass was the most sugary of all. In a pre-taped interview with both Schlossberg and her uncle Ted Kennedy, she told the Senator he was "such a towering figure," and asked of Schlossberg, "Do you feel, ever, a sort of burden of having to carry on the mantle of the family legacy, the burden of being such a symbol of your family?"

And, as seems required of all interviews with the Kennedy cousins who have yet to thrust themselves on the public, Douglass asked, "Do you ever consider going into politics yourself?" Of course, endorsing Al Gore at a Democratic convention is a non-partisan act. □

Quote of the Morning

"I'm here as part of the media, believe it or not. So now I'm part of the problem."

— Bill Bennett explaining to NBC's Matt Lauer, his presence at the Democratic Convention, August 16 Today.

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Gibson Stops Short

GMA's Charles Gibson discussed presidential music with historian Michael Beschloss Wednesday morning. He explained that Bill Clinton used Fleetwood Mac instead of Elvis, since **"they found that every song they tried to use was about romances gone wrong. They thought that was a little bit off message."**

Gibson reported that Gore's campaign song is Bachman-Turner Overdrive's '70s hit "You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet," and read the first lines: "I met a devil woman/ She took my heart away/ She said, I had it comin' to me/ But I wanted it that way." Beschloss replied, "A little bit off message, too."

But Gibson didn't read the next two lines: **"I think that any love is good lovin'/ and so I took what I could get."** That sounds quite a bit like the Democratic platform.

Rocking Joe Lieberman

Joe Lieberman has officially been designated an interesting person. **"Last night, he got a rock star's reception when he made a surprise appearance at the convention,"** asserted CBS's Bryant Gumbel.

The Senator's walk onto the floor was **"one of the most exciting and electric moments so far of this convention,"** echoed ABC's George Stephanopoulos. Lieberman **"was mobbed like a rock star on the floor last night,"** declared NBC's Claire Shipman on *Today*. Watch for Spandex tights and hair extensions tonight. □

Dick Cheney Threw "Anti-Democratic...Red Meat"

Jackson's Rousing "Rhetorical Flourish"

ABC's Charles Gibson recalled today that two weeks ago Dick Cheney **"threw red meat to the delegates, and had a very anti-Democratic speech."** But Jesse Jackson's quadrennial Republican-bashing tirade was described by Gibson this morning as a plus: "Jesse Jackson, as always, **provided the rhetorical flourish."**

On *Today*, NBC's Matt Lauer claimed, "Jesse Jackson raised the roof on this convention hall with a podium-pounding speech that went right after George W. Bush." Jackson was shown: "Papa Bush gave us Clarence Thomas. Baby Bush gave us an end to affirmative action and women's right to self-determination in Florida. George W. won't stand against, or for hate-crimes legislation. I say, America, stay out the Bushes! Stay out the Bushes!" Lauer cooed: **"He does have a way with words."**

Jackson's claim that the words "Africa" and "AIDS" never came up at the GOP convention was rebutted by Republicans. Patricia Funderburk Ware, president of a nonprofit group that focuses on the African American family – devoted her entire speech to the AIDS epidemic. Governor Bush advisor Condoleezza Rice referred to Africa in a speech about foreign policy. But Jackson's speeches are never reviewed for accuracy or negativity. □

ABC's Stephanopoulos Reassures Democrats About Lieberman

Joe's "Been Down the Line With Liberals"

Senator Joe Lieberman, with a 95 percent liberal rating from Americans for Democratic Action and a zero from the American Conservative Union, is so far to the right he frightens the Democratic base, at least according to some network reporters.

Last night's "program [was] designed to reassure the party faithful, to convince liberal Democrats that they have nothing to fear despite Al Gore's move to the center with his choice of Joe Lieberman," NBC's Claire Shipman told *Today* viewers. "Earlier in the day, Lieberman met with the Congressional Black Caucus, to ease concerns about some of **his conservative positions.**" On MSNBC last evening, Andrea Mitchell similarly fretted to Bill Richardson, **"You worry that he might be too conservative?"**

But the notion that Lieberman is a conservative (let alone "too conservative") was debunked by none other than former Clinton aide and ABC Political Analyst George Stephanopoulos, who said this morning that **"liberals like him because he's got a liberal heart. He marched in the civil rights struggles in 1960. He's been down the line with liberals on a woman's right to choose, consumer issues, environmental issues."** Admitting that Lieberman "strayed from the liberal orthodoxy at times on issues like affirmative action, vouchers in public schools," Stephanopoulos nonetheless argued that Lieberman has "spent a lot of time at this convention, going to the Black Caucus yesterday, calling the heads of the teachers' union, reassuring them he's on Al Gore's team on those issues, and they've come away happy." □

Mrs. Cheney Pushed Politically, Mrs. Lieberman Emotionally
Republican Warriors, Democratic Victims

Tonight, Hadassah Lieberman will take her first steps on the national stage to introduce her husband, the vice presidential nominee. But ABC and CBS sympathetically introduced her this morning in a very different way than they introduced Lynne Cheney two weeks ago.

Two weeks ago, Jane Clayson was the only one of the morning anchors that stuck to personal questions instead of poking at Cheney as a "right-wing warrior." This morning, Bryant Gumbel presented Mrs. Lieberman as a victim.

■ **"Those Americans that have been victimized by discrimination. I count you among them, I count myself among them, know how intolerant some Americans can be.** How big a role do you think your husband's religion, his ethnicity will play with voters?" Boy, we should all get \$5 million a year. What victimization? Is he still mad NBC didn't let him interview O.J.?

■ Gumbel asked if she shared her husband's views "about the portrayal of sex and violence in TV and movies?" When she said yes, he followed up: **"I ask the question because this ticket has put a premium on what's called 'family values,' which for a long time as you know was a code word for intolerance. Need people be concerned about a hard turn to the social right in the Democratic Party?"**

On ABC, co-host Charles Gibson promised "a very emotional interview" with Mrs. Lieberman, a woman with "an extraordinary background." He introduced an interview with "one of the more intriguing new figures" at the convention, in which Jack Ford asked only one political question:

■ "Senator Lieberman has always been known for being independent, strong-minded, willing to say what he believes regardless of the circumstances. Those are not necessarily the characteristics that you see in a job description for the job of Vice President. Is that going to create some frustrations, do you think, for the Senator?"

Ford explained that Mrs. Lieberman's parents survived the Holocaust, and her mother recorded an interview with Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation, which preserves the testimony of survivors. Ford asked, "What do you think when you see your mother talking about the beating of her own sister?" Then, with the television set between them, he showed her mother saying through tears, "The blood was coming, you know, so much, I cannot explain, that was only the beginning." Then ABC showed Mrs. Lieberman's lips quivering with emotion, then cut to a more collected Mrs. Lieberman declaring she would work hard on "making sure it doesn't happen again."

Lynne Cheney received none of these "made-for-TV" convention favors. She was live, not taped and edited. ABC showed no pictures of her as a teenager, as they did Mrs. Lieberman; showed no pictures of her family, as they did of the Liebermans. (They showed only daughter Hana, not the other three children the Liebermans had in their first marriages.) Mrs. Cheney was not "intriguing."

Gibson peppered Cheney with questions about how "the platform is again very strongly pro-life and rejects abortion rights, and the platform specifically comes out against gay unions, and against legal protections based on sexual preferences. **So, is this really an open, compassionate, tolerant party?"** □

More Black-Jewish Tension

In the thick of questioning if America's ready for Joe Lieberman, the networks avoided the latest outbreak of anti-Semitism this morning. New York's *Daily News* reported the Anti-Defamation League lit into the local black *Amsterdam News* yesterday for an editorial that suggested Lieberman was chosen because "Jews from all over the world...will be sending bundles of money" to the Democrats, wrote Publisher Emeritus Wilbert Tatum. "If this scenario is the correct one - and we believe it is - America is being sold to the highest bidder." Where was Bryant?

Celebrating the Left

The Early Show focused on liberals this morning, not all of them Gore-friendly. Jane Clayson interviewed Ralph Nader and showed his entire 30-second "witty ad" touting that "getting the truth" [Nader] into the debates was "priceless." So was getting his ad aired free on CBS.

CBS's Lisa Birnbach profiled Rep. Lynn Rivers of Michigan: "In Washington 'frugal' is Rivers' middle name. She gave back her Congressional pay raise twice and refuses gifts from lobbyists." She didn't mention Rivers has an American Conservative Union rating of 11. Birnbach concluded that while the parties preach inclusion, "Lynn Rivers has spent her career making sure blue collar middle class Americans are not forgotten in the political process." □