



by Wladyslaw Pleszczynski

Nice Going

IT GETS SO HOT AND DRY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA in August that even the morning fog hovers along the coast like ugly brownish smoke. On top of that, it gets sickly sticky, especially in the desert swamp known as San Diego. Republican convention crasher George Stephanopoulos called it the most beautiful city in the world, proving once again that beauty is in the eye of the beholder—assuming he could see through the glare that left me looking for another pair of sunglasses to put over the ones I was wearing. For all the humidity, this year the GOP might as well have met in Washington, where shady green predominates and afternoons are drenched by life-renewing storms. Besides, in Washington you wouldn't have run into so many Washington types congregating in the lobby of a single hotel.

MY FIRST THIRTY SECONDS INSIDE THE MARRIOTT convention central's ground floor I saw, in not so rough order, a frantic-looking David Gergen, and loud-talking Nina Totenberg, Gloria Borger, and Ken Bode, minor players all but very big in their own minds. The trauma was eased when I came across Bob Tyrrell and half the crew of the *Daily Standard*. Back in the lobby after lunch the first face I saw was David Gergen's, looking even more frantic than two hours before. A beaming Tony Blankley strolled out of a shoppe. I peeked into a spacious bar, which was eerily empty, which could only mean Christopher Hitchens hadn't yet arrived. I spotted a well-known journalist who used to make fun of colleagues engaged in cell-phone journalism talking on one himself. He left his number. This being Tuesday, the main complaint was that there was nothing to write about—other than the Marriott lobby.

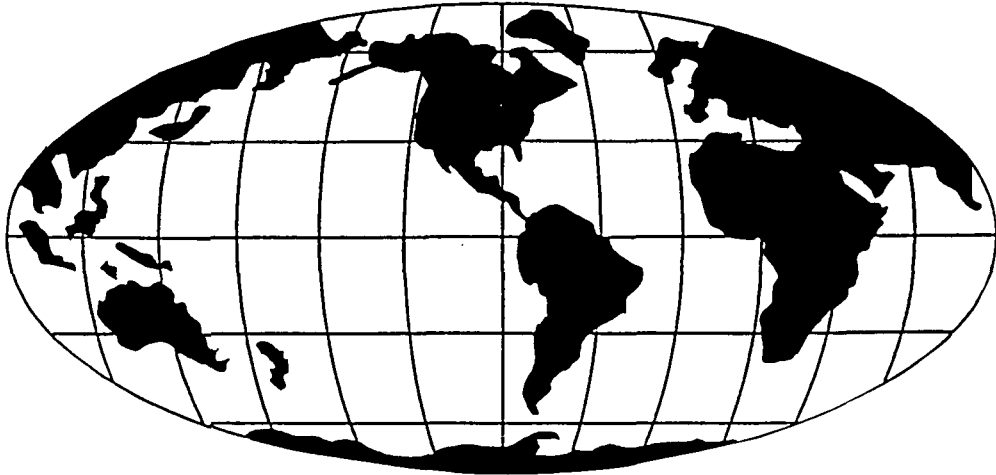
LUCKILY, THE CONVENTION FLOOR WASN'T IN the Marriott. Plenty of stories there: a few thousand delegates sitting quietly, politely, taking in the various early speeches, chatting in small groups, or milling about their favorite pols for photo, handshake, or small-talk ops. While reporters near the entrance flocked around Christian Coalition boychik Ralph Reed, a more endearing sight deeper in were the enthusiastic crowds surrounding the perfectly handsome George W. Bush, governor of Texas and a charmer who puts his father to shame, posing for photograph after photograph with young women bearing single yellow roses. (Brother Jeb, by contrast, stood practically ignored among the Florida delegates, a cruel reminder that winning is everything.) It would require a Ben Stein to describe how nice everyone was, including the put-upon Buchanan delegates. Even John McLaughlin turned

venerable, posing in the aisle with young and old alike. The only discord I came across was between two cameramen jockeying for a better shot of Jack Kemp. "Be nice," a delegate quietly told them. And naturally they obeyed.

YOU HAVE TO BE NICE TO ALLOW AN EVENT like this to come off. The press squawked about orchestration—but it was brilliantly organized, involving a huge cast of volunteers, ushers, pass inspectors, youth corps leaders, and other players freely committed and cooperating (and making their "Dole-Kemp" cheers sound like "Go Kemp"). I had joked that I was going to San Diego to listen to Susan Molinari, but she was a doll, inserting extra adjectives, prepositions, and interjections into her prepared text to reflect her natural warmth. (Now if only we could have been reminded that her famous baby is partly owned by its father—Rep. Bill Paxon, a major factor in whether the House will remain GOP or not. Fathers, needless to say, were everywhere, feeding babies and pushing strollers throughout the convention center.) At times the niceness went beyond the call of duty. Around seven the aisles near the podium were crowded with television heavies, about to go live. I came across Peter Jennings, dressed in a pricey dark suit. He just stood there, mike in hand, the bald spot on the back of his head covered, staring at his cameraman—and not a soul was heckling him. Aside from the instant response team at the Media Research Center, no one had heard him earlier that evening call Mrs. Paxon "a single, white professional woman" who is "going to look out of place in some respects at this convention."

THE CROWNING INSULT WAS THE MAJOR media's treatment of J.C. Watts's stunning prime-time performance—an unexpected and thus genuine moment that will become the stuff of legend, even if it has to be passed along by word of mouth. The Big Three didn't show it; the major papers didn't report it. (Only the Kemp-loving Al Hunt would later praise it.) The next day's *Los Angeles Times* did, however, feature an op-ed by a Donna Mungen lamenting that "far too many Republican ideas, appointees and aims threaten the basic survival instincts of African Americans." Would it have been genocidal to cite Watts's definition of character—"simply doing what's right when nobody is watching"? Of course, media character is a whole different matter. San Diego revealed it in kneejerk hostility to all things conservative and Republican. It's a problem we all can live with, so long as Main Street doesn't run through the Marriott lobby. Still, wouldn't it be grand to watch a Democratic convention covered by Republican journalists? ❀

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