

[Garden Party]

Conventional Wisdom

Without the peaceful street protests, the Republican Convention would have been less democratic.

By **Scott McConnell**

BY THE REPUBLICAN convention's first night, after McCain and Giuliani had spoken, it was easy to sense that the race had turned a major corner. It was no longer a toss-up or a slight Kerry lead. There had been a shift in the polls that seemed to ratify something the political pundits had all sensed: Kerry was poor candidate. (Chris Matthews kept hearing of GOP operatives wondering who is in charge of the campaign, as if there were suddenly no there there when Kerry was windsurfing on Nantucket.) The months of a "virtual tie" were over. It had settled into a contest between an incumbent president who is a good campaigner and a challenger who is not. Advantage Bush.

There had been glimmers earlier. At a MoveOn.org event a week before the convention opened, a star-studded affair in an old Manhattan theater, Natalie Merchant had prefaced a song by noting that her antiwar and progressive views were not popular out there in America, sounding almost as if she were Pete Seeger in 1953. A week earlier, Michelle Shocked (an altogether edgier number than Ms. Merchant) said roughly the same thing during a coffeehouse performance on the East End of Long Island: she often "got into trouble" when she reminded her audience that we were "about to pound the s**t out of a town in

Iraq." (This was when the Marines were in Najaf.) Not a poll, to be sure, but perhaps more valuable, this was testimony by well-traveled performers who are highly sensitive to their audiences. When some "take-the-war-to-the-terrorists" guy felt like shouting for Michelle or Natalie to take her politics and shove it, he felt no peer pressure constraining him from doing so. It wasn't the 1960s.

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The Sunday before the convention, New York saw a very large march, as big as anything since the anti-nuke protests of the early 1980s. This wasn't a reprise of the '60s Left (as the Nuclear Freeze movement seemed to be), and it may be too early to discern its tendencies. There is no recognized core of intellectual leaders—no Tom Haydens, Jerry Rubins, David Dellingers, or David Horowitzes to give one a sense from reading. Of course there are groups of veteran leftists who negotiate the permits for the marches and provide infrastructure, but no one really cares what they think.

My day began with Billionaires for Bush, a group of about 200 who dress in tuxedos, Junior League dresses, pearls, and yachting caps to make their class-warfare point through irony. They started with a croquet match and a call for privatization of Central Park, then moved

down Fifth Avenue, carrying placards like "Cheney is Innocent" and "We Paid for Eight Years." They were a big hit with New York tourists, who invariably smiled and took pictures. Immigrant shopkeepers were treated to a "thank you for paying my taxes." With my press credentials flapping around my neck, I heard "Oh look, our media ... thank you for doing such a good job" from a preppy girl in a white summer dress and pearls.

Part of the joke is the play on the Eastern seaboard WASP stereotype, which may be the only totally safe ethnic cliché remaining in America. I heard two women with pronounced Long Island accents (as in "The Nanny") observing, "They even look like billionaires, all WASP-y." In fact, old WASP money is about as influential in today's political process as wooden racquets are useful for winning the U.S. Open.

Things were less gay by the time we had linked up with the main march, a three-mile-long mass of the sweltering. On a very humid day in the mid-90s, it was a sauna in the canyons between the Seventh Avenue skyscrapers. But with drums and flags on coffins and relatively few Marxist slogans (but far too many vulgar puns on Bush's name), the sweating procession made its way past the convention site. The cops—good-natured and in complete control—had little to do.

There was tension with some counter-demonstrators. A group of 50 "Protest Warriors" had staked out space for themselves along Herald Square, looking to provoke a reaction—and succeeding. They carried signs to mock the purported pacifism and leftism of the demonstrators: "Criminals for Gun Control," "Leftist for Free Speech/Shut up Fascist Conservatives," "My son was a suicide bomber and all I got was this lousy T shirt (and \$20,000 from Saddam Hussein)." Some waved Israeli flags along with American ones, one a sign reading "Pray President Bush Keeps God's Covenant with Israel." They had a knack for getting the marchers angry—calling the American flag draped coffins "a desecration." But their cruelest, most withering taunt was the chanting, in singsong voice, "Kerry supports the war."

They were a relaxed and self-confident bunch. When one marcher stopped for an almost fisticuffs face-off with Protest Warrior chapter head Tom Paladino, the latter said, "I don't know what you're talking about. Unemployment? I hold two executive positions." Protest Warrior was formed on the West Coast by Alan Davidson and Kfir Alfia to protest the protests and in the process expose the alleged left-wing agenda of those organizing peace marches. They are clearly operating at a level different from the counter-demonstrators of the 1960s, whose polemical imagination seldom rose beyond "Take a Bath" and "God Bless America."

* * *

Monday evening: Grover Norquist's Americans for Tax Reform reception at the New York Yacht club. Grover is the Right's happy warrior, a man of good humor and unwavering principle and, in his persistent readiness to include Muslim immigrants in his low-tax "leave us alone" big tent, a Beltway figure of

unusual courage. I spoke to Phyllis Schlafly, author of the Goldwater campaign bestseller *A Choice Not an Echo* and some 19 other books, the gold standard for American social conservatives. Phyllis had spent a good part of her weekend battling the Bushies on the platform, specifically the White House's immigration plank. Bush essentially supports an amnesty for illegal aliens, though he doesn't dare call it that, and he did get through a guest-worker program that would allow illegal aliens "to come out of the shadows." In the platform negotiations, the White House pushed for full support of the president's January proposal, which included the provision that anyone, anywhere in the world with a job offer from an American employer could get a visa and be hired—provided an American couldn't be found at the posted wage. In other words, let's see if poor Mexican workers can be underbid for labor by even poorer Bangladeshis. Phyllis said to me, "Can you imagine how that must feel to an American who has just lost his job?" In the end, the global job fair didn't make it into the platform—but not for lack of White House effort.

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The rhetorical goal of the opening night speakers was to blur the distinction between the war against those who perpetrated 9/11 (unavoidable, or at any rate a war forced upon America) and the war on Iraq—a war of choice and now an increasingly unpopular quagmire. The speakers—Giuliani, McCain, Hollywood's Ron Silver—were touted as moderates with broad appeal to the center: swing voters, soccer moms, those uncomfortable with the culture war. Reduced to its essentials, this means that they are fine with abortion, tolerant of gay marriage, and not especially distinguishable from the Democrats on any social issues.

Giuliani was an outstanding law-and-order mayor, something no New Yorker will forget, but what draws the GOP to put moderates front and center is their readiness to give full-throated support to the Bush foreign policy and its elective war against Iraq. Weaving the two strands together, an unabashed right-to-lifer might, with some justice in the charge, call them "pro-death Republicans."

And so McCain's speech traveled from the awful events of Sept. 11 to the war "we must fight," and Giuliani related how, three days after 9/11, he found himself saying, "Thank God Bush is our President." Neither explained (because no attractive explanation was plausible) why the Pentagon broke off the attack on Osama bin Laden late in 2001, allowing him to escape, and why the president then shifted focus to Iraq, a nation that had no connection to 9/11. But the rhetoric was upbeat, forceful, and above all simple—in contrast to the Democrats with their talk of (unlikely) international coalitions to help shoulder the burden in Baghdad. George W. Bush is "taking the war to the terrorists"—one might have heard the phrase a hundred times on the floor or in the press section's Radio Row above the Garden, where an array of GOP-friendly talk-show hosts had their booths primed to pump the message to the heartland. Unfortunately, between the robustness of the message and the actual news from abroad, the disconnect was gaping.

The words streaming out of Madison Square Garden made sense only if one ignored actual reports of where American armed forces are engaged. On the eve of the convention, the *New York Times* published a story on the state of democracy building in the Sunni triangle, just after American troops had loosened their cordon round the Shi'ite holy city of Najaf. The Sunni cities of Fallujah and Ramadi have now, according to the

Times, fallen under the control of fundamentalist militias; the Iraqis whom the United States had enlisted to run these cities have been effectively neutralized. In some gruesome instances, more than neutralized: America's allies have been literally decapitated by Islamic enforcers, and videotapes of the beheadings are readily available in the Fallujah marketplace.

What this means is that Iraq now really is falling under the control of forces linked to those who struck on 9/11, where previously it had not been. Bush policies have turned a country that was not a terrorist threat into one. But if any Republicans read the newspapers (and some surely did) and doubted the wisdom of the Iraq invasion, they would not speak in public about it. Instead, the mantra—"Bush has taken the war to the terrorists!" And the fallback—as the head of the Protest Warriors told me—there was a "lot of good news in Iraq that wasn't being reported."

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Tuesday morning, I tried to catch up with Nebraska Sen. Chuck Hagel, who the previous day had been wooing the Iowa and New Hampshire delegations, and today was introducing Nebraska's current Gov. Mike Johanns (a possible future Senate candidate) to his own circle of New York fundraisers and supporters.

Hagel makes the short list of possible 2008 GOP presidential contenders. He was a decorated Marine in Vietnam, is good-looking, and has presidential bearing. He also has a reputation, relatively rare among the GOP in Congress, as a man who cares about foreign affairs and doesn't rely heavily on the work of staffers. He is not actually a dissenter—like John Kerry, he voted to grant Bush war powers to attack Iraq. But he was critical of the administration's rhetoric going into the war, singling out the David Frum phrase

"axis of evil" as simplistic, and his comments are laced with references to the limitations of military power. This attitude earned him an attack from *National Review* and an identification as "R, France." It also makes him interesting to those who think Bush has gone too far in isolating the United States from its traditional allies.

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This morning, Hagel was at the lovely Park Avenue apartment of an investment banker, amidst limited-edition Matisse prints and a table groaning under platters of fresh fruit, smoked salmon, and brioches. But it's not easy. When we see politicians on television, they are usually doing something that most of us could do comfortably—reading a speech, shaking hands, signing a bill, moving purposefully from car to event. The fleeting images never convey the stamina required. Watching Hagel for an hour or so that morning gave a clue. The apartment was air-conditioned, of course, but with 80 people circulating through it hardly mattered. Hagel's suit was crisp, he had kind words and a smile for everyone, a memory for relevant small talk: "Has your son finished law school yet?" A Washington lobbyist told me that the scuttlebutt is that Cheney will resign in mid-term, so Bush will be able to appoint someone to give him or her a leg up on the next nomination. Interesting. After an hour, most in the apartment were visibly warm, but Hagel remained well pressed, still meeting and greeting. I heard from an Omaha reporter that he was up the previous day at 5:30 a.m. and

kept going like this till dinner at 10. There were large pouches under his eyes, but after 90 minutes he remained the coolest and most animated person in the room.

His press secretary told me I could interview the senator in the lobby after the event, and I came up with three questions: Knowing what we know now,

would you still give Bush *carte blanche* to go to war? What's your view on the rise of anti-Americanism around the world, as evidenced by the polls, and do you think it has important strategic consequences? And do you agree with President Bush's endorsement of Ariel Sharon's plan to build a fence cutting through, rather than adjacent to, the West Bank? Norman Mailer once wrote that it is no easier to surprise a skilled politician with a question than it is to hit a professional boxer with a barroom hook, and I had no illusion that these queries would send Hagel into uncharted territory. But there were some low obstacles to clear in them, and the sad fact is that no one whom the GOP selected to represent the party at the podium could give answers that would diverge from Bill Kristol's talking points. In the end it didn't matter. Hagel's event ran over, he had to leave quickly, and his staffer found a time for me to talk to him on the convention floor Wednesday night—too late for my deadline.

* * *

The Sunday march of perhaps 400,000 went off virtually without incident. But of that group there were a fair number—

10,000? 20,000?—who were far from done, who had come to demonstrate all week and, dammit, disrupt if possible. Tuesday afternoon, I went to Sotheby's, the auction house nestled next to the New York Presbyterian Hospital near the East River, where hundreds of delegates were scheduled to visit an exhibit

Amidst guitars and Johnny Cash lyric sheets and everyone dressed in black, first dozens gathered, then hundreds. "You can have your Brooks and Dunn, but Johnny Cash belongs to everyone," read one placard—a proposition my colleague Pat Buchanan would surely second.

Latina I guessed, a single nose ring. You could stand her next to J-Lo and Britney and she would draw the stares. She was chatting languidly with friends when a couple approached, white guy in a suit and prim Asian woman in business garb. The Latina's face suddenly lit up as she leapt to the barricades. "Look, it's another rich white woman," she taunted with glee. For some unfathomable reason it struck me as very funny.

* * *

There were 900 arrests on Tuesday. More confrontations are expected Wednesday and Thursday. The New York cops, who have been superb throughout, will inevitably make some mistakes, and it stands to reason that out of 300,000 demonstrators, 30 or 300 will be real criminals, so there will be every chance for ugliness or tragedy. It shouldn't obscure the fact of how necessary these demonstrations are, how vital it is that they grow. As the convention illustrated beyond a doubt, one of America's great political parties has wholeheartedly embraced policies that put the country on a collision course with much of the world, in the process transforming a marginal fundamentalist Muslim thug into a hero for billions. The demos were part of a voice saying "no" to those policies—a brake, a spur.

And there was such a glory in it. I believe there should be fewer new immigrants to the United States—many fewer. But occasionally this past week, one could look at one of them and see the wonder in his eyes, surprise at the very possibility of this great unruly mass saying a rude "no" to their leaders. It is something that happens, without violence, only in the West. Without them on the streets of New York, the Republican celebration of George W. Bush and his war policies would have been a far uglier thing. ■

REASON FOR THE PROTEST: FOR PROTEST'S SAKE, OF COURSE.

from the estate of the late Johnny Cash. Reason for the protest: for protest's sake, of course, and the pleasure of making GOP delegates uncomfortable. But also out of respect for the memory of the great Cash—who was nothing if not consistent in his support for the poor and downtrodden, a philosophy that, in the demonstrators' view, GOP delegates did not necessarily share.

The cops were there with their mobile metal fences—adding more fence, then allowing movement, rearranging the fences, always in comfortable control of the choreography. By the time the delegates began to arrive, there were 300 protesters, 50 journalists, two dozen observers from the New York Civil Liberties Union and the National Lawyers Guild with their minicams, and perhaps 100 cops, some with riot gear. Similar face-offs might have been occurring in half a dozen spots across Manhattan. The protesters were young—one would guess they had been sleeping in places where shower space was at a premium. Piercings were common. Among the women, there was perhaps a higher than normal distribution of the quite plain but also a high proportion of real beauties—and the New York sidewalk that afternoon was a great stage.

When the delegates arrived, they had to run a gauntlet—they could hear "RNC Go Home" or "No Cash for the Rich" or the occasional idiotic shout of "Baby-killer." I felt a bit sorry for the delegates, filing off a bus, for here were scenes so visually evocative of the 1960s—comfortable middle-aged men and women in blazers and matronly suits looking puzzled and a bit frightened by this vocal assault from the bizarrely dressed and unwashed. Those who came by limo or cab had a longer gauntlet march.

I found myself watching a dark haired, dark-eyed beauty, 20 perhaps,

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Tracking the Field

An un-PC scorecard of the Athens Olympic Games

By Steve Sailer

THAT THE FIRST modern Olympics were held in Athens in 1896 turned out to be an inspired choice. Not only did ancient Greece invent the games in 776 BC, but modern Greece's struggle for freedom from the Turks in the 1820s—the rebellion in which Lord Byron gave his life—fired the 19th-century romantic nationalist imagination, of which the Olympic revival was a felicitous outgrowth.

A particularly creative tribute to patriotism was the organizers' invention of a footrace over the 26 miles that Pheidippides is said to have run from Marathon to Athens with the joyous news of the defeat of the Persian invaders in 490 BC. The inspiring victory of a Greek shepherd named Spiridon Louis in the inaugural marathon did more than anything else to help the Olympic spirit survive the organizational ineptitude of the next two Olympics.

In that distant era, national pride drove European artists to create masterpieces redounding to the glory of their homelands. Such atavistic attitudes are as rare in the cultural realm today as the artistic greatness they spawned.

In the globalists' fantasy of post-nationalist sports, the Olympics likewise wouldn't be organized around anything so passé as patriotism. Instead, athletes sponsored by Coke could battle Nike's hired guns for world marketing supremacy. The only problem with this vision is that nobody would watch. In these hypothetical Globalist Games, how would you know for whom to root? Watching eight strangers splash around

face down in a swimming pool is dull unless you can use nationality to choose a favorite. In reality, the only sport where fan loyalties are more corporate than regional is NASCAR, and that's because stockcar racing is already a festival of ethnic pride for white Protestants from red states.

At the Athens Games, the stratagems of the sponsors receded to the level of inevitable background noise while overt patriotic gestures took center stage. Back in 1984, it was an unusual and controversial gesture when Carl Lewis waved a large American flag while jogging his victory lap after winning the 100-meter dash. By 2004, however, almost every medalist draped his national banner across his shoulders while celebrating for the television cameras.

Rivalries among nations stoke competitive excellence, both on and off the field. Killjoy economists warn that Greece's vast investment in staging the 2004 Olympics may never pay off, but the Greeks will remember that, in the face of universal skepticism about their ability to pull it off, they threw the world one helluva party.

Track and field, the Olympics' signature sport, has its troubles, both well-publicized (doping) and subtle but systemic. Running's biggest problem as a spectator sport is that its best fans—data-loving European and East Asian nerds—don't overlap much with its biggest stars: brawny sprinters of the West African diaspora and lean and hungry distance runners from East Africa and the Maghreb.

Yet running has one great strength: it is the most universal, even natural, of sports. It's the only major game where humanity's fascinating multiplicity competes on a relatively level playing field little tilted by the vast disparities in GNP that predetermine which countries are likely to win and lose in other sports, even soccer.

In Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop*, the press baron Lord Copper memorably defined his newspaper's policy as, "The *Beast* stands for strong mutually antagonistic governments everywhere... Self-sufficiency at home, self-assertion abroad." This admirable philosophy comes closest to realization in the main Olympic stadium, where this year 40 different countries, including several of the world's poorest, battled their way to track and field medals. Black Africa has had little to cheer about in recent decades, but the smooth-striding, narrow-hipped highlanders of Kenya and Ethiopia tied for third in track and field medals with seven each, trailing only America (25) and Russia (20).

The Anglophone West Indies are healthier and happier places than West Africa, and its stylish representatives were omnipresent in the sprint finals. For the second Olympics in a row, the tiny Bahamas (population 300,000) beat the world in a globally televised women's race.

The Arab world hasn't had many accomplishments to celebrate lately, but the famed miler Hicham El Guerrouj who, with his emaciated build and dark circles under his eyes, looks more like an El