



## On the Bus With Bill and Hillary

by Terry Eastland

Having teamed up to cover the conventions, NBC and PBS finally had to part, and when they did so on the last night of the Republicans' gathering in Houston, Jim Lehrer of PBS praised his NBC colleagues—"you guys were pretty good"—and invited Tom Brokaw and company to leave their résumés. This was meant—and taken by Brokaw—in good humor. But, to ponder Lehrer's invitation seriously, the last thing PBS needs is more Brokaw and company, just as the last thing NBC needs is more Lehrer and company. What they need are new faces to provide some political balance.

Perhaps more than any other events, the quadrennial conventions, with their nonstop "analysis" and commentary, bring out the media's political leanings, especially television's. Studies of network coverage of the 1984 and 1988 conventions confirmed a pro-Democratic slant, and this year things were even worse.

Outfits like the Media Research Center (doing yeoman's work with its *ConventionWatch*, faxed daily during the conventions) and the Center for Media and Public Affairs have provided abundant and convincing evidence of the networks' bias and spin. Knee-jerk press defenders have attacked the latter's methodology, and dismissed the former for being unabashedly conservative (Brent Bozell III, president of the Media Research Center, worked in the Buchanan campaign). But there were other witnesses.

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Walter Goodman, television critic of the *New York Times*, described the networks' coverage as "a dissonant threnody." Whichever channel a viewer turned to on opening night (C-Span excepted), he learned of "dissension and dismay in Republican ranks." No anchor failed to note President Bush's low standing in the polls or the sluggish state of the economy or the divisions within the GOP. Abortion rights Republicans were showcased. (At the Democratic Convention, only NBC had taken note of pro-life dissent.) Viewers were repeatedly advised that the far—or, worse, religious—right had taken over the party. The "heavy drumbeat of disaster," wrote Goodman, "gave the coverage the aspect of an organized attack." This "edge that hinted at partisan pleasure in the Republicans' troubles" was too much for Goodman, who pointed out that "a little less animus with a little more analysis might enhance the credibility of network news as the political season heats up."

The print coverage was also infected with bias. Of course, the journalists—print or television—denied any such thing. "I think most bias exists in the eye of the beholder," said a defensive Brokaw. Actually, most bias exists in the labels and the questions. During the Democratic Convention, journalists tended to label Democrats as moderate or even conservative, and certainly no Democrat was ever referred to as "ultra-liberal." Many of the questions posed of Republicans during their convention could have been planted by the Clinton campaign. "How do you think Dan Quayle did?" asked CBS's Connie Chung of Pat Robertson after the Vice President's acceptance speech. "Was he

far right enough for you?" "How do you feel and how do many in your California delegation feel," asked CNN's Frank Sesno, "about some of the harsher criticisms that have been forthcoming from this convention this week? From Pat Buchanan, from Bill Bennett [so much for divisions within the GOP], from some of the very hard, far-right conservatives?"

There's no mistaking it: the press this year is positively agape over Bill and, yes, Hillary Clinton. This could affect the November outcome—although not necessarily as the press might hope.

Back in March, Hendrik Hertzberg, then of the *New Republic*, reported in a column that's become famous for its ingenuousness that he'd asked several dozen political journalists covering the New Hampshire primary how they'd vote if they were New Hampshire Democrats. "The answer was always the same; and the answer was always Clinton," he wrote, calling such unanimity among political journalists "unprecedented." (Don't think *all* reporters are for Clinton. Just before the Republican Convention, *Newsweek's* Evan Thomas told "Inside Washington" that the press is "at least 60-40 pro-Clinton" but not 80-20—I'd say it's about 79-21.) Hertzberg said that "The Press" (his phrase) likes Clinton because it thinks "he would make a very good, perhaps a great President."

Why? Hertzberg didn't explain, but I'd say part of the answer is that the press is suckered by Clinton's whiz-kid intellect. And, unlike the other Democrats running for President (and unlike Bush), Clinton is of the same generation as the reporters who now dominate political coverage. Boomers disagree on many

things—they are not a homogeneous cohort. Not so most boomer journalists, who *do* share a common set of values—which happen to be Clinton's.

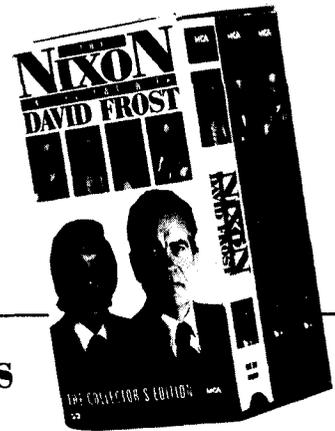
This is where Hillary Clinton comes in. She, too, is a boomer, and her values—for abortion rights, gay rights, children's rights, and an active government role in most spheres of life—tend to be those of most boomer journalists. These are also the values of most of the ever larger contingent of women covering presidential politics. Their interest in this election would be greater only if Hillary herself were at the top of the ticket.

Hillary brings out the pro-Clinton character of the press as no other subject can. In an interview during the Democratic Convention, Judy Woodruff of PBS failed to ask Mrs. Clinton any questions about the merits of her legal and political views; instead she merely wondered: "How important is it that [what she believes in] not enter in [to the campaign], and should it enter in?" The same week, Woodruff's husband, Al Hunt, who among other things is the *Wall Street Journal's* Washington bureau chief, jumped into print with an amazing (given his employment on the news side of the paper) op-ed defense of Mrs. Clinton, who he said was "no radical," has "a sensational mind," and is nothing less than a "compelling reason" to vote for her husband. Leaping to Mrs. Clinton's defense during the Houston Convention, if not quite announcing their votes, were ABC's Ted Koppel and Cokie Roberts, and CBS's Harry Smith. Incredible as it may seem, GOP strategists have got to like this turn of events.

Presidential contests are ordinarily battles between the two candidates. But as the summer wound down, the numbers were not there for Bush—and would not be unless something changed. Something did. Looking at public attitudes toward Hillary and Barbara, the Republicans in effect decided to run both Bushes against both Clintons. For this to happen, Hillary Clinton—especially the one described in the August *TAS* by Daniel Wattenberg—could not be allowed to vanish from public sight. Through its emphasis on "family values," which included the First Lady's full-court media press during the

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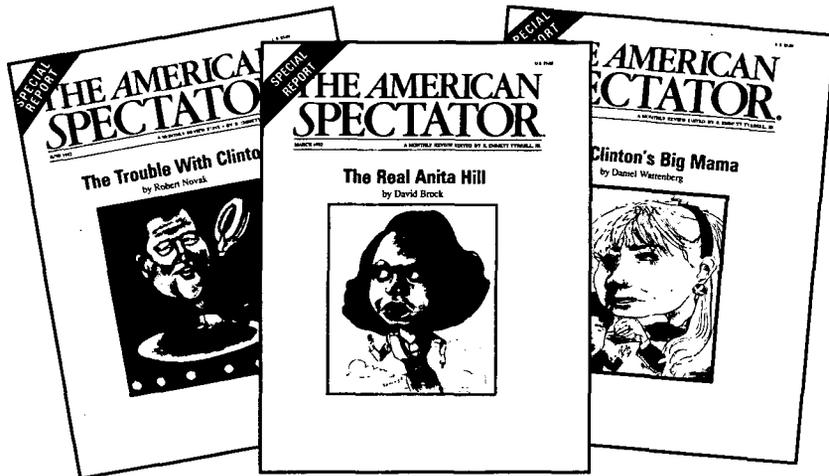
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convention, not to mention her unprecedented prime-time speech, the GOP hoped to make sure that Hillary stays visible, thus securing the party's conservative base. It was a Republican triumph that by late August she was often being referred to as Hillary, instead of Mrs. Clinton.

The GOP strategy just might work—thanks to the pro-Clinton press. For even if Hillary Clinton does not engage the attacks on her, the Hillary brigades, led by such as Woodruff and Hunt, can be counted on to do so. For example, the Monday following the convention, the *New York Times* devoted nearly fifty column inches to a one-sided defense of Hillary's legal writings. The page-one headline read: "Legal Scholars See Distortion in Attacks on Hillary Clinton." (Memo to Democrats: Remember Robert Bork?) Mark it down: Every media defense of Hillary Clinton in the battle over "family values"—initiated, by the way, by Dan Quayle back in May—will keep her tied to her husband's side in the GOP's preferred two-on-two race.

Lest we forget, there are serious issues raised by Hillary Clinton's legal writings, and John Leo give them a fair-minded reading in the September 7 *U.S. News & World Report*. To grasp the reality behind the political debate over family values, the pro-Clinton press would do well to read James Davison Hunter's excellent 1991 book, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*.

The campaign against Hillary is just part of a GOP strategy to counter the pro-Clinton press and take advantage of widespread contempt for the media, on a par with a derelict Congress when it comes to public esteem. The Republicans' attack against press bias is buttressed by the growing role of alternative media, especially talk radio. During the convention, Rush Limbaugh addressed his 12 million daily listeners from Houston, reinforcing public disdain for the mainstream press as he blasted its coverage of the event.

"I wear the badge of media scorn," Dan Quayle told the assembled delegates in Houston. You bet he does, proudly. We'll see whether this helps to produce victory in November—and, if so, whether the press merely scorns the GOP for a negative campaign, or decides to examine itself. □



# Up for Grabs

by Cathy Young

In July, food prices rose by an average of 8 percent. The Constitutional Court held hearings in the case of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Crowds of inebriated young toughs in two Siberian cities rioted against fruit and wine traders from the Caucasus, destroying their wares, ransacking their hotel rooms, and setting fire to their cars. A plane en route from Yerevan to Moscow saw its forty-minute stop in Sochi (Georgia) turn into a six-hour ordeal for 350 passengers left frying in the cabin while the 300,000 rubles the pilot had been given to pay for fuel—in three- and five-ruble notes—were being counted. And the Russian media were understandably shaken by the attempt of parliament—elected in 1990 and still thick with Communists and assorted authoritarians—to reclaim *Izvestia*, which had declared independence of the Congress of People's Deputies after the August '91 coup.

At the parliament session, Russian minister of the press and information Mikhail Poltoranin implored the festive MPs "not to disgrace themselves" by such a vote. Speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov, one of the men behind the motion, retorted: "It's up to the deputies to decide whether they want to disgrace themselves or not."

First impressions notwithstanding, this was not a simple black-and-white case of heroic journalists versus villainous apparatchiks. Though now formally owned by its staff, *Izvestia* continues to use government-owned premises and equipment and, like most other newspapers, to rely on government subsidies. In a guest column

*Cathy Young, our regular Russian Presswatch columnist, is the author of Growing Up in Moscow (Ticknor & Fields).*

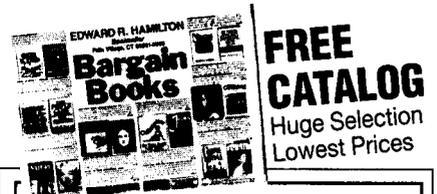
in *Moscow News* (July 26), *Kommersant's* new editor-in-chief, Ksenia Ponomareva, expressed dismay at the petty and tyrannical actions of the parliament—going after a newspaper that had criticized it—but also pointed out that the press itself gave ammunition to its persecutors by appealing for state funding. (*Kommersant* remains the only major Russian newspaper financially independent of the government.)

Ponomareva was favorably quoted in the *Literary Gazette* (July 22) by anti-Yeltsin MP Nikolai Pavlov, whose own politics are probably not of the free-market variety—though he does say the government shouldn't run newspapers. He concluded that subsidies will have to continue for the time being, but should be allocated on the basis of circulation. Meanwhile, sociologist Andrei Bystritsky pointed out on the same page that the bid to take over *Izvestia* is less an attack on free speech than an attempt to snatch a piece of the media and thereby of political power—"a desire not so much to limit the power of the press as to use it."

What is truly sad, Bystritsky noted, is that both the oafish deputies and the posturing journalists have utter disregard for the interests of the average news consumer. Readers at least have the choice of different newspapers, but all news broadcasting is government-owned: "No one is even thinking of switching to subscriber-based TV and radio, to give individuals the opportunity to choose what they like. Amazingly, the debate, once again, is over what is to be imposed on the audience: the politicians' buffoonery or the journalists' self-importance."

These debates are taking place amid mounting complaints that the Russian press, unable to wean itself from state subsidies, is becoming more docile and

less willing to give a forum to critics of the Yeltsin government. In the June 24 *Literary Gazette*, émigré journalist Vadim Belotserkovsky argued that "really hard-hitting articles have all but disappeared; moderately critical ones are 'balanced,' just like in the good old days, by positive responses or editors' notes. . . . The newspapers' deferential attitudes toward the government can also be seen in the treatment of my own articles which I tried to get published in Moscow." It should be noted that Belotserkovsky is a quasi-socialist who deplores the Russian intellectuals' inclination to "worship a new



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