

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Mailer Dominance



San Diego
The Republicans chose a geographical jewel for the site of their convention. San Diego claims to have more sun than any other city in the Republic. It ought

also to boast of its fine sea breezes and its cleanliness. The only endangered species here is the litterbug. Naturally, joggers, bikers, and energetic lady walkers abound—the latter pumping their little fists back and forth, some carrying light dumbbells. By and large this is a city of health enthusiasts, with many of its older citizens wearing peculiar straps on their knees and forearms—the consequence of one jog too many or a tennis swing that went haywire.

Over at the Marriott by the marina the political journalists have congregated. This was supposed to be a national Republican convention with people coming from all parts. Yet at the Marriott the same old Washington-New York personages hog the show. What characterizes them? Joyous Republicans are everywhere, and when Jack Kemp's vice presidential nomination is announced the joyous Republicans become almost delirious. The Washington-New York press giants are not joyous. Their salient characteristic is a huge and unhappy self-importance. They rarely smile, and when they laugh it is a bitter laugh.

One of the talking heads of the evening news comes through the lobby. A couple of aides clear the way. His voice is as deep as his tan. His suit is flawlessly tailored over a curiously desiccated frame. Two young female pressies rush to him with their disposable camera. They want his picture.

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He is amenable, even agreeable. The television news personalities are America's Ceremonial Figures, our Royal Family—no brighter or more accomplished. Anyway, this Ceremonial Figure is particularly preposterous. As his aide snaps the pictures, a passer-by intrudes. Our Ceremonial Figure waves his arms toward the passer-by. "Step aside, there," he commands. The term sounds stilted. What will he intone next—"Avast!" or "Forsooth!"?

Yet he is not the only ridiculous figure from the press. Into the milling crowd of pressies comes Sidney Blumenthal, the left-wing writer for the *New Yorker*. He is smoking a gigantic cigar in a hall that the reformers of his ilk have tyrannically made non-smoking. No one else has dared light up. After imparting his words of wisdom—briefly—he proceeds magisterially through the lobby out into a wide hallway beneath clouds of cigar smoke. The hallway is clearly marked by no smoking signs. I like to think that at some point he was accosted by a squad of health-nut nazis and beaten horribly about the head and shoulders.

Back in the lobby the giants of the press corps dominate. They all talk to each other grimly. Al Hunt looks particularly miserable. Is he having trouble digesting his breakfast, or is it the grim specter of this radical Dole taking over the White House? I make a horrible blunder. The kind of social *faux pas* from which one never recovers among the Washington-New York press corps. I tell one of the giants that I am off to lunch with Norman Mailer. "He knows nothing about politics," the giant informs me. My transgression could have been more embarrassing. I could have been off to lunch with Mozart or Aristotle.

Anyway, Norman is in excellent form. He is fascinated by the convention. My guests and I fill him in on our observations. We talk as reporters. He talks as a novelist. He operates from instinct. He sees drama and theme where the idiots

back at the hotel lobby see only statistics and an opportunity to pontificate. Mailer is particularly happy when the conversation turns to bullfighting and to boxing. He talks of a young bullfighter he knew with a case of the nerves. He talks of Muhammad Ali being afraid of Sonny Liston until, in their first round, Ali suddenly saw an opening, and—whammo—no more fear.

Mailer is no spring chicken, yet he laughs readily, moves quickly across a wide range of topics, and is vastly interesting. His political party, the Democratic, is in ruins. Nonetheless, he is a much happier fellow than the grim giants back at the Marriott—the giants who claim to have no political affiliation. It is their burden to serve as the conscience of the Republic, or at least pretend. Ironically many of Mailer's lusty interests are now ruled politically incorrect because of these idiots. Prize-fighting? Bullfighting? A cigar after lunch? I hope Mailer recognizes that only Dole-Kemp can liberate us from the storm troopers of political correctness. ❧

25 YEARS AGO IN The American Spectator

What we do need, I think, is to develop a body of literature of high quality by people of conservative instincts—what, for example, T.S. Eliot undertook to do in his own writing and in his encouragement of others. For this, we need to encourage new talent, and one means, almost the only means, in fact, of doing this, is good periodicals.... I don't mean a conservative magazine; it should be edited by a man of conservative instincts—a man, that is, who takes a positive attitude toward the traditions of Western civilization—but the first consideration should not be Conservatism, but quality.

—Henry Regnery,
"A Conservative Publisher
in a Liberal World"
OCTOBER 1971

Pervasive Politics

Chicago Brawny Chicago, with thousands of Democrats *en masse!* San Diego sparkled in the sun, but it is historyless! Chicago is New York City by the prairie, and it is not historyless. This is particularly true for me. Chicago has been a staging ground for generations of Tyrrells. In 1876 great grandfather Tyrrell cracked the plot to steal Lincoln's body from its crypt down in Springfield. He was with the Secret Service here surveilling counterfeiters. Great grandfather Tyrrell fought in the Haymarket labor riot. You can guess with whom he served. As a boy in short pants I was called upon by the Chicago Police Department to lay wreaths at the Haymarket Memorial to the fallen Chicago police; great grandfather had lived to be the sole survivor. Wounds from the melee caused him to limp, and in his great old age he took to a wheelchair. When, in 1970, the left-wing Students for a Democratic Society bombed the statue, I took their impudence personally.

Possibly some of the SDSers are here in convention, assembled. There is a boast among the Democrats and their sympathizers in the media that the radicals of the 1968 riots have mellowed and joined the Democratic fold. If the protesters of yore are here, I can tell you that they are no longer in fighting—or should I say bombing?—trim. These are the New Age Democrats. I have no doubt that many prefer Socialism to Capitalism, but nowadays they settle for softer reforms. They are ardent to reform Americans' diets, mating habits, recreational pursuits—and the American "love affair with the automobile." One of their many false pieties is a reverence for "mass transportation."

Yes, the Chicago Democrats brag about bringing the spirit of 1960's reform into their convention. Possibly they have made good on their boasts, but rarely have I seen so many fat people, anxious people, and disgustingly skinny ones. Those must be the nutrition fanatics. It is said that security is tight here, but I actu-

ally smuggled a chubby black cigar into the United Convention Center past the cops, past the fruit juice fanatics and the tobacco patrols, and into the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's skybox, which doubled as CBS's skybox. I even waved it on screen, right in the face of my left-wing antagonist, Molly Ivins, and lived to tell about it. Live dangerously, I say. Down below on the convention floor sameness was purring under the banner of diversity. There were indeed more blacks here than in San Diego, but they were all the same, government employees or school teachers. There were women, but again, from the same bureaucratic class. The men were pretty much out of the same mold, too, and whether they were small businessmen or big businessmen theirs were either businesses that service government or were part of the entertainment industry. What I have noticed about these Democrats is that they see almost every aspect of normal life in political terms. They turn to government as the first instrument for solving almost any problem. For them, government is a sure cure.

These Democrats differ significantly from Republicans and Independents and Americans of the non-political type. They differ in terms of culture. Their ideas and ideals are all informed by a political point of view. The political point of view is intense and far-ranging. It reaches back decades to the glories of the New Deal, but over the decades it has acquired so many left-wing refinements that it is nothing like the New Deal.

Though they might deny it, the Democrats here assembled are very ideological. They think nothing of talking about the Republican opposition in shockingly derisive and inaccurate terms. In Jesse Jackson's speech, the Republicans were Nazis. In Mario Cuomo's, they were exploiters of humanity. By my calculations they were breakers of at least five of the ten commandments, and Mario meant regular, devoted breakers of those commandments.

Neither of these frauds was kidding. Jackson's allegations of Nazism and Fascism against Republicans have been repeated in Democratic convention after Democratic convention since 1948. Can you

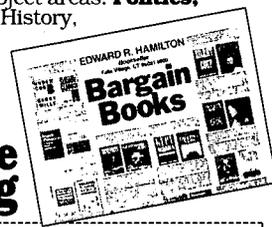


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imagine Republicans today calling their Democratic counterparts Communists? The political culture of the country would erupt in colossal indignation—in part because Democrats control the political culture, in part because America has become accustomed to these kinds of charges from Democrats. The Republicans are not even allowed to file caveats about Hillary's veracity, though documents—some written by Hillary's own colleagues—keep coming out and proving that she has lied repeatedly about Travelgate and the cover-up she orchestrated at the late Vince Foster's office. In the culture of the Democrats, the Democrats are what they say they are, and so are the Republicans. For that matter, so is every aspect of the outside world. The culture of the Democrats is an illusion, but it is a pervasive illusion. ❁

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Kultursmog Alert

The policy-making elite wants to drive you off the road.

Mr. R. Emmett Tyrrell's allusions to *Kultursmog* are quite appropriate to this story, which is about smog, the media, and the cultural war. Amendments to the Clean Air Act, signed into law by George Bush in 1990, oblige the states to remove still more particles from the air. California (among other states) has therefore tightened its automobile emission standards. Cars in the state have to pass a "smog-check" every two years, and the new standards are stringent enough to ensure that many old cars will fail. The cost of repairs will be too high to keep many cars legally on the road. The air is already much cleaner than it has been in decades. But the concept of an "invisible threat" has worked wonders for regulators over the years, and they won't abandon it lightly.

The California Department of Consumer Affairs issued a statement claiming that "no more than about 30 percent [of cars in the state] are expected to fail the new test." *No more than!* Thirty percent of 24 million is 7.2 million cars failing every two years. I called Martin Keller, a Log Cabin Republican who went to Sacramento with Governor Wilson and landed a job in what he surely expected would be a quiet bureaucratic backwater: chief of the Bureau of Automotive Repair. Now his phone was ringing off the hook. "No one ever said that public service would be pretty," he said, when I mentioned his sudden notoriety. I asked him what percentage of cars had failed the test under the old standards. "The

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number I have seen is 15 percent," he said.

Clearly, if the failure rate doubles, the auto-repair business is going to flourish. Cars are going to become even more expensive than they already are.

All this will "hit the poor hardest," as the press likes to say in other contexts (cuts in government spending). New cars easily meet the standards, and the wealthy will have little trouble correcting any tune-up problems they may have. So what we have here is one more instance in which the burden of regulation will be overwhelmingly borne by the poor. But environmentalism trumps egalitarianism, and the press that so ostentatiously affects a concern for equality preserved a discreet silence about this new law. Until talk radio got into the act, that is.

There was very little press coverage of Smog Check II until Disney-owned KSFO and KGO in San Francisco began to hammer away on the subject, week after week. In August, KSFO organized a protest outside the state capitol in Sacramento. I drove there with friends who happen to own a couple of older cars. Three to five thousand people had gathered by mid-morning, and the level of anger directed at the lawmakers was intense. A couple of reporters told me that it was the largest rally they had seen in Sacramento in years. The following placards convey the flavor: "Poor People Need to Drive, Too." "First They Came for Our Guns, Now They Come for Our Cars." "A California Tea Party Is Being Born." "Stop the Tyranny of Unelected Planners."

Among those who spoke was Dr. Bill Wattenburg, a scientist formerly with Lawrence Livermore labs who now hosts

a science talk show on KGO. With one of the largest audiences on the West Coast, he has been a prime mover behind opposition to Smog Check II. "We already eliminated 95 percent of the pollution coming from cars," he told me. "Most of the remaining pollution comes from stationary sources and from nature. We're beating the remaining five percent to death with billions that could be better spent elsewhere." He estimates the new program will cost California consumers \$2 billion.

San Francisco, with "no Republicans," as Mayor Willie Brown told Bill Clinton earlier this year, is the last place one would expect something like this to begin. The new smog standards are set at different levels in different parts of the state, and the air quality in the Bay Area is considered to be okay, even by the smog police. It is in Los Angeles and Orange Counties that most of the cars are going to fail the test and fall into the bureaucratic bog reserved for "gross polluters." But talk radio in L.A. still hasn't picked up the story, and the *Los Angeles Times* has scarcely mentioned it.

After the KSFO demonstration, supporters of the new law held a press conference in the state capitol. A dozen or so demonstrators wearing sun hats and recreational clothes sat in the back of the room but were soon shooed out by media types in regulation attire. "You're not supposed to be in here," one journalist told them. With the exception of a reporter from KQED, the journalists openly sided with the regulators. As the despised populace was officiously turfed out, the sense of class war was strong. We need to be reminded on such occasions that the First Amendment applies to all and that the media enjoy no special privilege.

The speakers were introduced by a lob-