

Big Media and Big Politics have Merged: I Won't be Politically High in the Mile End City

A News Dissector Decides Not To Dissect At the Dems' Meet-up in Denver

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New York: The first convention I remember was way back in 1952. I was at a summer colony, and I watched it on a black and white TV in the company of fellow day camper, Jeff Greenfield. It was the year of "I LIKE IKE," and I was not really clued in then about U.S. massacres in the war in Korea or the dangerous rise of Joe McCarthy.

I was mesmerized by that live event, in the same way that those watching their first Olympics are glued to the contests and hyped about the medal count. (If you had thought that NBC would report on the human rights situation or examine the commercial interests behind the games, you have to think again. NBC is one of those commercial interests.)

Back then, conventions were not just a show, and were shown gavel to gavel; there was a media commitment to let the people see a real, not staged, political process unfold.

That was back in the last century when TV was new and I was new to TV. Jeff was already offering living room commentaries on what he was watching. Who knew he would perfect that talent into a career with CBS and CNN? The two of us tuned in again in 1956 when the cast of characters was the same and Adlai Stevenson then, like Barack Obama today, was a Senator from Illinois and an electrifying speaker. Does this syntax and substance sound familiar?

"When the tumult and the shouting die, when the bands are gone and the lights are dimmed, there is the stark reality of responsibility in an hour of history haunted with those gaunt, grim specters of strife, dissension, and materialism at home, and ruthless, inscrutable, and hostile power abroad. ... Let's talk sense to the American people! Let's tell them the truth, that there are no gains without pains, that we are now on the eve of great decisions."

I was all the way with Adlai, backing an "egg head" with a hole in his shoe and eloquence in his language. I was actually thrilled to meet him when he was campaigning in the Bronx. I didn't wash my hand for a week; Alas, I did not put him over the top.

I then started a long march through the conventions ending up increasingly disillusioned by the way both parties came to clone each other's political issues. Soon these arena events ritualized into media extravaganzas, in which professional TV producers scripted every second of airtime and orchestrated waving flags and message points to sanitize all spontaneity. Even the floor demonstrations were timed and controlled as if Chinese Communist Party protocols were in effect.

Conventions become conventional as news of them became 'electotainment.' It wasn't always that way.

I watched JFK, the man without the 5 O'Clock shadow, win the debate in 1960 and then was in Atlantic City in '64 tearing as the brave Mississippi Freedom Party was rebuffed and the Dems fractured when the old refused to give way to the new. Abbie Hoffman invited me to Chicago in '68 for the BIG ONE but I was in London protesting the Soviet Union's invasion of Prague. Who knew Chicago would morph into Czechoslovakia?

A radio reporter, I was in Miami in '72 documenting the rise of the light of George McGovern and the evil glow from the darkness of Tricky Dick. Four years later, I was pushed out of Jann Wenner's Rolling Stone party in New York to make room for Walter Cronkite and Hunter S Thompson. In '80, I was back at the Garden with CNN to see Teddy the K dissed and Jimmy with lust in his heart win again, only to go down in flames.

Mondale turned me off in '84, and Mike D, who I reported on as a Governor in Massachusetts was the great white hope of '88. I liked Jesse more but despite his thrilling campaign, the Democrats of the right, left and center were stopped by the Reagan juggernaut. For us it was "mourning in America."

Then came Bill Clinton's magic in 92 and '96. We of Globalvision had our own "hospitality suite" next to a water fountain inside Madison Square Garden where all the alternative media gathered as the outsiders we had become in what was increasingly a corporate funded party put on for big donors. In '96, Jesse Jackson stopped his limo outside the Convention Hall to give me a ride and express his disgust at having had his speech scheduled against a baseball playoff.

In 2000, I took a rain check for Al and Tipper embracing on stage in a Broadway show-like moment with the anointing of the now dreaded Joe Lieberman, as a neo-con Veep poseur. I did go to Florida when it was over to discover how the Dems were deeply complicit in their own inexcusable loss. I documented that in a film, Counting on Democracy, just released as Recount Democracy. (Pathfinder Pictures)

In 2004, I trekked to Boston to see an old friend, John Kerry, posture to the right of Bush, and watch Boston cops literally push demonstrators into a pit of a disgusting and disgraceful "free speech" cage. The next month in Manhattan, our "liberal" Mayor, Mike Bloomberg, cheered on the convention as it turned into a Remember 911 Nuremburg Rally. He also unleashed his gendarmerie on the protesters. The city later paid millions in lawsuits charging unconstitutional arrests. (The City of Denver is reportedly readying its own "concentration camp" for protesters.)
<http://infowars.net:80/articles/august2008/150808Camps.htm>

Over all these years, our work was acknowledged by the Party and we were given media accreditation. This year, we were turned down. I take it as a blessing in disguise. We haven't changed but political races have.

So much of our politics has become event and personality-driven with little attention to substance or real solutions It's a big party, all right, but not in the political sense. It's about attending the right celebrity soirees. You end up running into people who come to conventions to run into people. The Pols are there to see each other and be seen. Decisions have already been made. They are looking for a "bounce."

The issues I care about, the war, the economic crisis, the millions facing foreclosure will be treated in a perfunctory way. I believe that if I believe anything. Happy Times are NOT here again despite the hoopla. I don't have to see it. I know it.

Barack Obama's mission is to avoid mistakes and make us feel good and I am sure he will do a good job at that. He knows that politics is about perception, not reality. It's about being on TV even as the networks cut back on convention coverage on cynical and self-serving grounds. I don't want to get my hopes up only to see them dashed down the line. (Hillary Clinton is there to assuage a wounded ego and may give the press the food fight they hope for.)

Independent journalists like us are frozen out of a mainstream process that is dominated by predictable partisan punditry. Critical voices will be smothered in a media overload. Ad Age reports: "...the outpouring is extraordinary. There will be five different morning dailies, not counting the host cities papers, and more dailies in the afternoon." Add in wall-to-wall TV, and other voices will be marginalized.

Yes, BIG media and BIG politics have merged. So, no, I won't be Dissecting in Denver. Been there, done that.. "Team Schechter" stays home.

I'll see you in the voting booth. I haven't totally given up on that yet. It's still a process I believe in.

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