

The real GOP goes MIA in NYC

By Bill Berkowitz

workingforchange.com | August 31, 2004

With thousands of New York's finest corralling free speech and hunting for terrorists, it isn't likely that the NYPD's Missing Persons Bureau will have time to unravel one of the more intriguing mysteries of the day. This whodunit has nothing to do with: missing weapons of mass destruction in Iraq; the non-existent link between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda; who was responsible for the miserable post-war occupation; how much U.S. taxpayer money has been wasted in Iraq; or who ordered the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison. The question that many will be asking by nightfall on Thursday is: Where in the name of Waldo are the Republican Party's fundamentalist evangelical Christian leaders?

Invoking the rarely used but always handy native-New-Yorker's point-of-origin-clause, I'm ordering the raising of the MPA (Missing Persons Alert) to Code Red. This morning I strapped on a wristband and wrapped a yellow ribbon around a Redwood tree in my backyard — and I won't remove either until I find out where Karl Rove stashed some of the GOP's most revered radical spokespersons. They appear to be ... Missing in Action!

With the return of (wink wink) "compassionate conservatism" seizing hold of the Bush re-election campaign (any moment President Bush and vice president Dick Cheney might break out with a "Gay is Good" chant) we can't help but wonder what happened to the radical Christian evangelical heavy hitters. After all, it's no secret that Bush's brainmeister, Karl Rove, (I know, he denies being any such thing) is pinning Team Bush's hopes on turning out the 6 million born-again Christian fundamentalists that stayed home in 2000.

Given that objective, one might expect to see the good old boys on the platform in prime time, and hear them addressing the convention and addressing America.

Has anyone here seen the Rev. Jerry Falwell, the Rev. Pat Robertson, Dr. James Dobson, the Rev. Donald Wildmon?

This year's convention, scripted as it will be from its dull beginning to its dull ending, bears

The real GOP goes MIA in NYC / 2

a strong resemblance to the dull Democratic affair in Boston. Don't expect mean-spirited "culture war" crusaders messing with the good vibes. Even though there's overwhelming support amongst the delegates for a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, there won't be any overt demonizing of gays and lesbians. There won't be any threats to dismantle the Department of Education and other government agencies, and there will be no Pat Buchanan-like speeches inveighing in support of more culture wars. (In fact, the only place you're likely to see Buchanan is in a pundit's chair on one of the cable news networks.)

Instead, what's planned is a squishy-feel-good-made-for-television-yet-nobody's-watching convention.

Has anyone seen Senator Rick Santorum, Rep. Tom DeLay, Alan Keyes, Phyllis Schlafly?

Team Bush understands that it needs to curb some of its mad dogs and ultra-conservative rhetoric or risk being hurt with whatever undecided independents, women, and so-called Reagan Democrats are still up for grabs.

But the details are in the party's platform. According to NBC's Meet the Press host, Tim Russert, the GOP Platform contains the following on abortion: "We support a human life amendment to the Constitution. ... We oppose using public revenues for abortion, will not fund organizations which advocate it. We support the appointment of judges who respect traditional family values and the sanctity of innocent human life."

Stem-cell research: "We support the President's policy that prevents taxpayer dollars from being used to encourage the future destruction of human embryos. We applaud the President's call for a comprehensive ban on the creation of human embryos solely on experimentation."

And on gays and lesbians, including the vice president's daughter, the platform advocates a constitutional amendment against same-sex marriage and opposes benefits for gay couples. Log Cabin Republicans, the oldest gay GOP organization, pointed out that "You can't craft a vicious, mean-spirited platform, then try to put lipstick on the pig by putting Rudy Giuliani and Arnold Schwarzenegger on in prime time."

Has anyone seen the Rev. Tim LaHaye, Beverly LaHaye, Rush Limbaugh or Dr. Laura Schlesinger?

Will the American public buy this fictitious story of a newly minted centrist Republican Party? According to the conservative Media Research Center, on his pre-convention NBC newscast on Sunday evening, Tom Brokaw concluded by saying:

"New York and the Republicans are like that old Jack Klugman-Tony Randall television

The real GOP goes MIA in NYC / 3

show, *The Odd Couple*. This city may elect Republicans as Mayors, but otherwise its cultural and political sensibilities are well to the left of the ideology defining the leading Republican power brokers. The President's team knows that it can't get back to the White House by taking only hard right turns, so it has, as three of its featured speakers, Republicans who have been successful by navigating the middle of the road as well the right hand side: Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, Rudy Giuliani and Senator John McCain who often calls himself John Kerry's best friend in the U.S. Senate. Streetwise New Yorkers may call that the political equivalent of a popular con game in this tough town, three-card monty. But then that's a game in which the dealer almost always wins."

During an appearance on HBO's *Real Time with Bill Maher*, Chris Matthews, the host of MSNBC's *Hardball*, was asked by Maher how Kerry could appeal to undecided voters. Matthews responded:

"What they have to do is remind people that it's not just an election about who do you want for class President and whose smile do you like who you'd like to have a beer with. As if they're ever going to have a beer with George Bush! I mean, it's absurd! When are they going to have this beer, this illusionary middle of the night drink with this guy? All they're going to have of this is their President. That's all they get out of these guys. And my answer is, you want to think about this election more seriously? Vote Bush, vote Kerry, but think about this: Do you really want the country to go in the direction they're taking you, or say they're going to take you, for the next ten or twenty years? Raise the stakes. That will make it easier for the undecided voter.

"If you can't decide based on what you've heard, think about this: Do you want to continue on the road of basically being go-it-alone in the world? I mean Tony Blair will be gone soon, Musharaff will be gone soon. Then we'll be completely alone in the world. Do you want to go to an economy that's basically geared towards tax cuts for people who have a lot of income and the working class and the middle class gradually disappear? Well, you know which party that is. If you want to go to a party that is a little more hesitant. This President, if we elect John Kerry President, he will be hesitant about going to war, he will be careful. In fact, he'll probably wait around to hear what the French think and if that bothers you, vote for Bush. It's easy. But these stakes are big. Do you want health research for the next twenty years or do you want the same diseases we have now in twenty years? I mean, think about it. I think there's an argument for the Republicans, but it's a long-term argument for both sides and people ought to make, how can you be undecided about Bush and Kerry? I don't get it. These guys offer radically different approaches."

Has anyone seen the Rev. Roy Moore, David Horowitz, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, William Bennett?

The real GOP goes MIA in NYC / 4

There will no doubt be a gaggle of conservative pundits veering off the reservation and carping about the teddy bear-like, wishy-washy, touchy-feely display their party put on. But their voice will be few and far between. Folks like the Rev. Falwell and the Rev. Robertson have already given their stamp of approval to the convention's story board.

When the dust clears late Thursday evening, despite the superbly-managed four-day infomercial, it will be clear to those who have read the party's platform (a very small minority) or to those that can deconstruct the spin that the "new" Republican Party, with or without the presence of its illustrious crew of moral-meisters, is the same old Republican Party with a well-engineered makeover.

Makeover notwithstanding, I'm keeping my wristband and my yellow ribbon firmly in place until the fundamentalist evangelical right wing Republican MIAs are finally found.