

Harmonious convention 'nuthin' to sneeze at'

The Democrats' convention was the sort of event that Jim told Huck Finn "you wouldn't want to miss for three dollars." Four maybe, but not three.

It might have been a \$7.50 convention, a humdinger, had Gary Hart pounced after Geraldine Ferraro's first interview with Walter Mondale, whose staff reported that she had done poorly. Had Hart got her to join a Gary-and-Gerry ticket, he might have knocked enough delegates off Mondale's pile to pull Mondale below the winning total. Hart then would, I believe, have been nominated in a rush.

Democrats certainly do have a powerful liking for

being stampeded. The premier stampeder, Jesse Jackson, probably helped his party, and Ronald Reagan's.

Jackson gave Democrats in the hall, and some traditional Democratic constituencies, a chance to do what self interest and liberal doctrine make them want to do: feel warmly about him. So the unprecedented — turning over a night of the convention to someone who finished a distant third in the nomination contest — was practical politics, as well as emotional therapy for the man who has been seeking respect while others were seeking the presidency.

nated from this year's campaign. Lance left Washington under a cloud of charges that were as insubstantial as, well, a cloud — or as the charges against Ed Meese. Perhaps the parties can negotiate a mutual and verifiable freeze on sanctimony: "We won't talk about Lance's checkbook if you won't talk about Meese's cuff links."

The convention made the campaign themes as clear as consomme: Reagan is unfair at home and unsafe abroad.

When Jim asked Tom Sawyer what a Moslem is Tom said a Moslem is someone who is not a Presbyterian. With similar precision Democrats say that "fairness" is not what Reagan delivers. Among the many things we will learn in the next 100 days is whether the "fairness" of the federal social agenda is a salient issue during an economic boom.

The country is more conservative than it was four elections ago, and the Mondale-Ferraro ticket is even more ideologically uniform and pronouncedly liberal than the second-most-liberal ticket of the postwar era, Humphrey-Muskie in 1968. Today only one-third of all Democrats describe themselves as liberals.

The current House of Representatives is the first in which a majority of seats are not from the states that won the Civil War. Republican successes in the rising regions — the South and West — have tempted, or forced, Democrats to concentrate on the Northeast and industrial Midwest. This regionalism partially explains today's unusually divergent views of the two parties concerning the country's condition and the government's agenda.

Only 10 elections since 1789 have been close, meaning won by a margin of approximately 3 percent or less. But close elections seem to come in clusters. Five were consecutive (1876-1892) and three were recent (1960, 1968, 1976). More than one-fourth of those who voted for Carter in 1976 did not in 1980.

Democrats can reasonably hope that their reasonably harmonious convention (only the second such since 1964) will revise the allegiance of those Democrats who were dispirited four years ago. So this was indeed a \$3 convention, and in Huck's day three dollars wasn't, as he said, nuthin' to sneeze at.

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Myth . . .

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As for conservative

Southern women, Richards wryly asks about the origins of the leading anti-feminist from Illinois: "Hey, tell me, where does Phyllis Schlafly come from?"

In the next days, a lot of the rhetoric about Gerry Ferraro will be about doors opening, about old ideas and old stereotypes breaking down. It would be intriguing and quite delicious if this lady and this campaign crumbled another myth, one with a distinctly Southern accent.

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George Will

On the other hand, the congregation in the convention hall, experiencing a political Pentecost, was not, to put it mildly, a representative slice of that which matters: the electorate. Many people at home watching Jackson's hot performance on the cool medium must have thought, "Surely I am not part of the huddled masses summoned to come unto him. That party makes me uncomfortable."

Now as Walter Mondale charges forth, his lance at the level, to slay the dragon of Reaganism, the question is, "Where is the best of him?" He left here under the shadow of a doubt that hovered over him in January. The doubt is whether he has, as his opponent so conspicuously does, a talent for embodying a cause.

One discouraged Democrat says Mondale's strategy has become his message. Another says Mondale's method mirrors his mind, in this sense: Mondale does not think in terms of individuals. Rather, he thinks that everyone is a member of a group, and every group has their organization, and every organization has a leader with whom you make arrangements. For example, a person from the South is a member of "The South," which has a regional political organization, at the head of which is . . . Bert Lance.

One splendid if unintended result of this convention is that a dreary subject may have been elimi-



Black journalists . . .

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To find the solution, people can look at the way the news is gathered and presented in America.

For example, many anchormen editorialize for an entire hour in the name of news. Anchormen are not the only editorializing culprits; they also invite other political commentators/analysts and reporters on their shows to do the same. Reporters put editorial comments and speculation in their stories, passing these comments off as fact. Examples of this abound in an election year when winners are declared before the vote is taken. More subtle instances include the choice of descriptive words used in any report.

How can the news be objective when what journalists choose to report — or even highlight for that matter — is based on subjective criteria? How can the result be objective when the process is highly subjective?

It's a process that begins with people determining, according to their own criteria, what is newsworthy, what is worth covering. The next step is reporters deciding what questions to ask — the focus and direction of their interviews. Then the reporters decide what to leave out of the story, paring down the already selective material that has been gathered. Someone else may edit the story further, then

decides, again using personal criteria, where to place the story, either what page in the newspaper or magazine, or when during the newscast. Every step requires the judgment (a synonym for opinion) and is at the discretion of some person who has distinct perceptions, principles, and opinions. It is an evaluative process, which by its very nature is value-laden. This is the standard.

So the question that follows is: Should black journalists be expected to deviate from the standard, and perform at a higher level than that of their non-black colleagues? Should blacks be objective about Jesse Jackson, about racism, about issues important to them when white journalists are not doing so?

It's not a matter of being "objective" across the board; it's a matter of where your perspective is on the board. We need to get away from the belief that if you have a mainstream perspective you can be objective, but no one else can. Perhaps, in striving for the unattainable ideal of objectivity, the mainstream perspective is less objective than others. Those outside the mainstream are forced to deal with those perceptions because they're encountered and must be taken into account in all aspects of life. Mainstreamers rarely know what other perspectives are, if they even acknowledge that they exist.