

One Big Happy Family

ATLANTA—Aware, though unwilling to admit, that Democratic policies over the past 50 years have had a disastrous impact upon the American family, and seeing the need to placate family-oriented voters at least until they can finish destroying the institution, the Democrats have made an impressively unified effort to recast themselves as friends of the family in 1988. Repackaging abortion, welfare, homosexuality, disarmament, and tax hikes as family commodities, however, is no mean trick. But the Democrats are nothing if not audacious, and they have made a valiant effort. Moreover, they have exploited for all its worth the one association between Democrats and families that cannot be contested: They all have them! Barring spontaneous generation, all party members can be shown to have sprung from the union of two parents (of opposite sexes yet!). Some have brothers and sisters and cousins. Others have even produced offspring of their own.

Family Ties

Lo and behold, convention keynote speaker Ann Richards, the ambitious state treasurer of Texas, has a granddaughter named Lily. Now maybe Ms. Richards is divorced, but heck, if she's got a granddaughter, that means she herself must have had a child, and that child in turn another child. Shucks, if that's not a family, what is it? Why not work a cute little anecdote about Lily into the keynote speech? Something like this:

I'm a grandmother now. And I have one nearly perfect granddaughter named Lily. And when I hold that grandbaby, I feel the continuity of life that unites us. . . .

And sometimes I spread that Baptist pallet out on the floor and Lily and I roll a ball back and forth.

Say, maybe we could even lower the podium and have Ann and Lily roll the ball back and forth right there on the convention stage! No, better not: The baby might cry and ruin the effect.

And Jimmy Carter, he's got that

brother Billy and that daughter Amy. Maybe one of them could introduce Jimmy. No, scrap that idea. How about Ted Kennedy, though? He's the uncle of John Kennedy Jr., the son of Democratic martyr John F. Kennedy, he of the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis and other great Democratic triumphs. Why not have John Jr. introduce Uncle Ted?

Jesse Jackson could be introduced by his passel of kids, and Lloyd Bentsen could tell that story about his 94-year-old father's pioneer days:

Talk about risk-takers. His family came to this country across the ocean, across the prairie, to homestead in South Dakota. . . .



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They built a sod hut, and when the first blizzard struck, they took turns staying awake for 36 hours, burning bundles of straw so they wouldn't freeze to death.

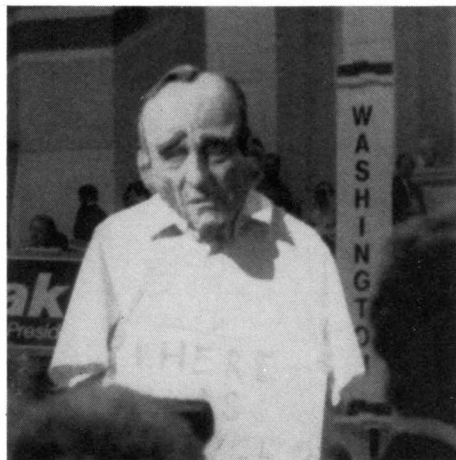
And Michael Dukakis, we've got to have strong family associations for Michael Dukakis. Why not have his father-in-law, Harry Ellis Dickson, conduct a musical tribute to the Duke? And his suddenly famous cousin Olympia could introduce Mike with a cute little video that would dispel those persistent concerns about the Duke's reputation for being soft on criminals and hard on taxpayers. Meanwhile Mike could be watching the program from his hotel suite with his arm draped around his mother Euterpe's shoulders. Then, during his acceptance speech, Mike could refer to his deceased father and pretend to adlib something sentimental like how he wished he were here: "He'd be very proud of his son. And he'd be very proud of his adopted country, I can assure you." Then he could pause, like he was all choked up with emotion, but not so choked up that you wouldn't want him to be president in a crisis — you know, all choked up, but fully in control, all choked up in a hard-nosed-administrator kind of way.

Then Mike could mention how moved he was by Ann Richards' story about her granddaughter Lily and how impressed he was by the way the Jackson kids introduced their Dad, just in case anyone had missed their subtle references to their close family ties. Finally, when everyone's gotten the message that Democrats are big family people, then Mike could let them in on the big secret: the fact that all the white people in the Democratic Party are actually related to John Kennedy, and that all the black people in the Party are blood relatives of Martin Luther King Jr. Distant relations, maybe, but still heirs to "the dream."

Surely no one could fall for a scenario as schmaltzy and contrived as the one related above, or could they?

Family Entertainment

"Duke! Duke! Duke!" The chant was eerily reminiscent of the "*Duce! Duce! Duce!*" that once punctuated the fiery oratory of the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. Italian — as Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton noted in his speech nominating Dukakis — may be one of the five



The conventionally unconventional Democrats

languages spoken by the Democratic standardbearer, but his English is passionless, and thus unlikely to draw attention to disconcerting similarities between the socialist tendencies of the Duke and those of *il Duce*.

Michael Stanley Dukakis is the Ed Sullivan of the Democratic Party — shrewd, opportunistic, dull as sawdust. He may not have been present in person

to introduce each of his guests during the four-day variety show broadcast live from the Omni Coliseum in Atlanta, but his iron-fisted control of the proceedings was evident throughout. The Democratic National Convention is invariably "a really big shew," but this time it came off without a hitch, for the guests had clearly been admonished that this was to be a "family" program.

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Media overkill: 13,500 media personnel representing over 2,000 news organizations



Sprouting like mushrooms after the rain, about 60 satellite dishes broadcast to smallest audiences ever

Everyone from Lou Grant (Ed Asner) to Wonder Woman (Lynda Carter) was on hand to dazzle the delegates. Ted Koppel, Peter Jennings, and Dan Rather were stalked by autograph hounds. Even lobby-loitering also-rans like Senators Paul Simon and Al Gore made credible efforts to impersonate celebrities.

Cramped conditions at the Omni impeded movement on the convention

floor, thereby discouraging impromptu politicking on the part of free-thinking delegates. Floor passes issued to the press often came with 20-minute deadlines for their return — 20 minutes, oddly enough, being just about the time it would take an anorexic journalist to worm his way through the thick of delegates, security guards, and other pressmen down to the floor and back again

without stopping to speak to anyone. Delegates sensible enough to forego the early hours of each night's program, given over to moments of glory for lesser lights of the Democratic Party, found themselves locked out by the fire marshall when big draws like Jackson and Dukakis swelled the ranks of late-night attendees beyond the facility's capacity. They were obliged to watch the proceedings on television screens set up in lounges and hospitality suites in the adjacent Georgia World Congress Center, or to give up on the whole affair and hit the streets of Atlanta, spending money like good tourists.

Family Schedule

The convention chairman, House Speaker Jim Wright, maintained a discreetly low profile as he and his co-chairmen enforced a strict timetable by deleting or rescheduling various "acts" to compensate for the occasional windbag. A four-day schedule made available to the press on Monday morning removed all hope of dramatic surprises: The entry for 9:03 p.m. Wednesday, "Nomination of Michael Dukakis . . . and Nomination of Jesse Jackson," was followed, without regard to chance or common courtesy, by this entry for 10:02 p.m. Thursday: "Acceptance Speech by Michael Dukakis." The program for Thursday evening also included this self-assured pairing of entries: "7:56 p.m. — Nomination of Vice Presidential Candidates" and "9:17 p.m. — Acceptance Speech by Senator Lloyd Bentsen." (A schedule of extracurricular activities distributed to Massachusetts delegates by that state's Democratic State Committee several days before the Duke's "surprise" announcement of Lloyd Bentsen as his chosen running mate gave notice of an "Austin to Boston Party" to take place on the last night of the convention. Coincidence? Not likely.) Unlike the irrepressible members of the media, the convention planners obviously gave no thought to the possibility of a Jackson fight for the number two spot on the ticket. Savvy opportunist that he is, Jackson played his cards right, cut a deal, and is now looking forward to a payoff from President Dukakis.

The meticulous organization that made the convention such a dull show also reduced the publicity hounds and professional protestors that have plagued previous Democratic conven-



Fringe elements confined to designated protest area

tions to the level of pathetic curiosities. Confined to a designated protest area — a shadeless parking lot across the street from the Omni, shielded from onlookers by caravans of chartered buses, surrounded by riot police, and battered by a scorching sun — the malcontents were hustled on and off a barren platform like so many decrepit blind guitarists at a folk music festival.

Meticulous organization also ensured that the party platform and all of the speeches delivered at the convention would be monotonously similar — all stressing concern for the family, party unity, the disavowal of ideology, the need for change. The same stale rhetorical devices cropped up in speech after speech,



Behind the foliage, Ed Asner represents the Hollywood Left

the repetition of the same dull phrase ad nauseam proving to be the favorite.

Twenty-seven paragraphs of the party platform began with the words "We believe that. . . ." If it was good enough for the platform, it was good enough for Ann Richards, whose keynote address repeated the phrase nine times. But Ms. Richards also wanted to criticize the beliefs of the Republicans; so she put on her thinking cap and came up with the inspired formulation of "That is wrong," five times repeated.

Jimmy Carter used the old standby, "It's time to," seven times. Then he invoked the Muse and scaled Olympus with five repetitions of "America is strong when. . . ."

"America needs" thrice sufficed for Ted Kennedy. The fifth repetition of his sally, "Where was George?" touched off a spirited round of chanting inside the arena and provoked a flurry of malicious Republican rejoinders outside (to wit, "Where was Ted?" when a certain Massachusetts woman drowned in the backseat of his car, and "Where was Mike?" during the 25 years that the wife to whom he is so publicly devoted was popping pills).

Jesse Jackson set the pace with five repetitions of "They work every day," nine repetitions of "I understand," and a truly awesome 19 repetitions of his metaphor for party unity, "common ground."

"I want Michael Dukakis to be president because" provided Bill Clinton with a lead-in to six of the reasons he had mustered for his nomination of the Duke. Vice presidential candidate Lloyd Bent-

sen's paraphrase of the party platform mantra, "Democrats agree that," was retired after five repetitions.

Michael Dukakis gave Jackson a run for the money with five repetitions of "We are all enriched and ennobled," eight repetitions of Jimmy Carter's "It's time to," and a whopping 14 iterations of "We're going to. . . ."

Family Fate

The reputation for frugality that Michael Dukakis has assiduously cultivated clearly does not extend to the conservation of clichés, which he employs with reckless abandon. To expect truly innovative, fiscally responsible policy initiatives from a man whose speech is overgrown with hackneyed phrases is to expect something that it is not in his power to offer. All that Michael Dukakis can offer us is a stale, second-hand dream; the same dream that Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Jimmy Carter offered us — the dream that destroyed the mighty nations of Europe; the dishonest, unworkable dream of socialism.

Michael Dukakis is the dream candidate of the Democratic Party. With his cool exterior, his passionless demeanor, he can apply a veneer of sanity to the lunatic fantasies of his party. He can popularize the Party's pleasant euphemisms for depravity and destruction. In an age when xenophilia has supplanted xenophobia, nativism has given way to alienism, and the immigrant ship and the slave ship have replaced the log cabin as the status symbol of the demagogue, first-generation American Michael Dukakis has the perfect pedigree for a party desperate to position itself as the one "that believes in the American dream." As the son of a Greek immigrant who arrived in America with no money in his pockets (without pockets even!), the Duke can and will identify himself as "a product of that dream."

But the Democratic dream of coercion and entitlement is squarely at odds with the American dream of freedom and opportunity. The Democratic dream of Michael Dukakis promises to be a nightmare for America. The Duke may sleep peacefully in the Oval Office, but the victims of his dream will one day wake up screaming. ■

— F. R. DUPLANTIER