

ISSUE ASSESSMENT

THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

by

Janice Shaw Crouse, Ph.D.

Here are some specific points from an analysis of the speeches at the 2004 Democratic National Convention.

ISSUE #1 — FAITH

Summary: Kerry's remarks were designed to appeal to a big voting block of undecided American voters — evangelical Christians. He tried to convey the impression that the "religious right" that is predominantly Republican consists of extremists whereas Democrats, as he described them, are moderate and temperate, but are just as faithful. Kerry targeted his blatant appeals to faith to the undecided church-goers.

- Several speakers went out of their way to talk about faith and to declare that the Republicans do NOT have a corner on faith, but one of the biggest applause lines at the convention came when John Kerry declared that he didn't "wear his faith on his sleeve."
- The convention roared approval when candidate Kerry declared that, like Lincoln, he wasn't as worried about whether God was "on our side" as whether we are "on God's side."
- Kerry stressed that he would be a "uniter" not a "divider."
- One button on a delegate declared, "Freedom is the distance between church and state."
- His wife, Teresa, he said, has the "strongest moral compass" of anyone he knows.
- Kerry argued that, in regard to faith, "America is not us and them" — he, of course, was addressing the fact that the public is divided pretty much along the lines of church attendance. Those who attend church regularly are in the Red states and those who do not are in the Blue ones.

ISSUE #2 — ABORTION-ON-DEMAND

Summary: Speakers emphasized how much Democrats value children and value choice. Pro-abortion comments were cloaked in the soft language of choice, values, and how much Democrats work for children and value children.

- A comment heard repeatedly was that the Democrats would build, once again, a culture that values children — yet, even the children wore pro-choice buttons.
- Planned Parenthood's presence was pervasive in the form of buttons and placards.
- Much of the language about children was framed in "choice" being the key to avoiding poverty, preventing child abuse and providing opportunity.

ISSUE #3 — SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AND GAY AGENDA

Summary: While advancing the homosexual agenda of mainstreaming homosexuality and promoting same-sex marriage is a priority in the Democratic platform and a key position for the Democratic candidates, the convention downplayed this issue — apparently in an attempt to have the party appear unified and to avoid being “in-your-face” to the swing voters who are predominantly evangelical Christians.

- There were more homosexual delegates at this convention than at any previous convention, but the homosexual agenda was kept low-key and virtually out-of-sight.
- On the final convention day, Rep. Barney Frank (Massachusetts) spoke, deviating substantially from his prepared and vetted remarks to add extemporaneous pro-gay comments.
- Speakers who are known for their pro-gay advocacy were featured on the program, but they did not aggressively promote their agenda.

ISSUE #4 — FAMILY VALUES

Summary: A key issue at the convention turned out to be “family values” — generally considered a Republican theme. Kerry and other speakers sought to claim the territory for the Democrats by re-framing “family values” in terms of “choices” — a Democratic theme.

- Candidate Kerry framed the “family values” issue in terms of “choices.” Elections, he said, are about choices and “choices are about values.” Then he declared, “It’s time for those who talk about family values to start valuing families.”
- Al Sharpton, presidential candidate in the Democratic primaries, brought the house down with his remarks. The delegates especially liked his remark that family values weren’t “just for families with two-car garages and retirement plans.”
- “Family” was used in broad interpretations and was never used to refer exclusively to a married mother and father with their children and relatives. In fact, the various forms of “family” — single mothers, blended families, divorced parents, etc. — were mentioned explicitly, seemingly to point out that Democrats respect family regardless of how it is defined and however it is constituted.
- For Kerry, “narrow appeals” should never masquerade “as values.”

ISSUE #5 — EMBRYONIC STEM-CELL RESEARCH

Summary: Surprisingly, embryonic stem-cell research was a major issue during the Democratic National Convention and provided a strong demarcation between the two parties. Kerry stressed that ONLY the Democrats support embryonic stem-cell research.

- By asking Ron Reagan, son of the former Republican President, to speak on the subject of embryonic stem-cell research at their convention in a prime time, the Democrats guaranteed that the issue would be a major one in the election.
- The Democrats fail to distinguish between ADULT stem-cell research and EMBRYONIC stem-cell research.

- Currently, adult stem cells are successfully and effectively treating 45 different diseases, and some major, tremendously encouraging breakthroughs are happening.
- NO diseases are being treated with embryonic stem-cell research because at this point nothing is promising.
- Plus, major ethical and moral problems are associated with embryonic stem-cell research.

ISSUE #6 — FREEDOM AND THE WAR ON TERROR

Summary: Kerry presented himself as a war hero with tremendous potential as Commander in Chief. He stated that he would handle the war on terror differently and he would have handled Afghanistan and Iraq differently. He was highly critical of President Bush – while stating that the Democrats would raise the level of presidential campaigning above personal attacks and “low road” politics.

- Accusations that Bush “lied” echoed throughout the convention hall all week.
- Kerry began his remarks by baldly stating that he was “reporting for duty.”
- Kerry declared that as Commander in Chief, he would “never mislead the nation into war.” He went even further by saying, “America should never go to war because we want to; we only go to war because we have to.”
- Sen. Joseph Biden (Delaware) pitted freedom versus what he called “radical fundamentalism” (he seemingly included evangelicals in that category) and predicted that history would judge the Bush administration “harshly.”
- Candidate Kerry said, “The future doesn’t belong to fear, it belongs to freedom.”
- When he praised himself for “seeing complexities,” Kerry attacked Bush directly: “proclaiming mission accomplished certainly doesn’t make it so,” and by claiming that under his administration facts will never be “distorted by politics.”

ISSUE #7 — WOMEN

Summary: The Democratic convention featured an unprecedented number of women speakers. Clearly, the party is dedicated to equal representation and promoting women. According to data released by feminist groups, women make up 65 percent of undecided voters and 58 percent of swing voters, and these numbers hold true especially in the key battleground states like Pennsylvania and Florida.

- When Teresa Kerry spoke about women being valued as smart and well informed instead of being called “opinionated,” women delegates roared approval, many with tears streaming down their faces.
- Clearly, the issue of “choice” is catering to the Leftist women’s groups who are almost exclusively Democratic in their political leanings. The same holds true for the issue of federally funded child care.
- The Democrats clearly believe that their efforts for “women” will sway the undecided women voters and that their reaching out on faith issues will sway the evangelical women who constitute a large percentage of undecided women.

ISSUE #8 — TRUST AND CREDIBILITY

Summary: Ultimately, presidential elections turn on who the people trust — who they find most credible. Kerry asserted that he would “restore trust and credibility to the White House.”

- Kerry began by talking about changing the world and being true to American ideals. That begins, he said, by “telling the truth to the American people” — implying that George Bush doesn’t tell the truth.
- He talked about upholding the Constitution (implying that it is not now being upheld). Lest someone miss his point, he later said bluntly — in only slightly veiled criticism of the Bush administration — “let’s never misuse for political purposes the most precious document in American history, the Constitution of the United States.”
- He talked about this election being “the most important election of our lifetime.” (That was a recurring theme among the speakers.)

Janice Shaw Crouse covered the Democratic National Convention on behalf of the Concerned Women for America Legislative Action Committee.