

## HOMO SQUAD HIGH JINKS

It may not be nice to call them faggots, but hey, Beach cops will be Beach cops.

BY STEVEN ALMOND / Page 4

## A QUARTER FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

Life in the slow lanes at expressway tollbooths, where taking the toll can take its toll.

BY TODD PRUZAN / Page 10

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## WHERE WERE YOU IN '72?

Vietnam was burning. Washington was raging. And in Miami Beach, political idealism was dying.

BY STEVEN ALMOND / Page 20

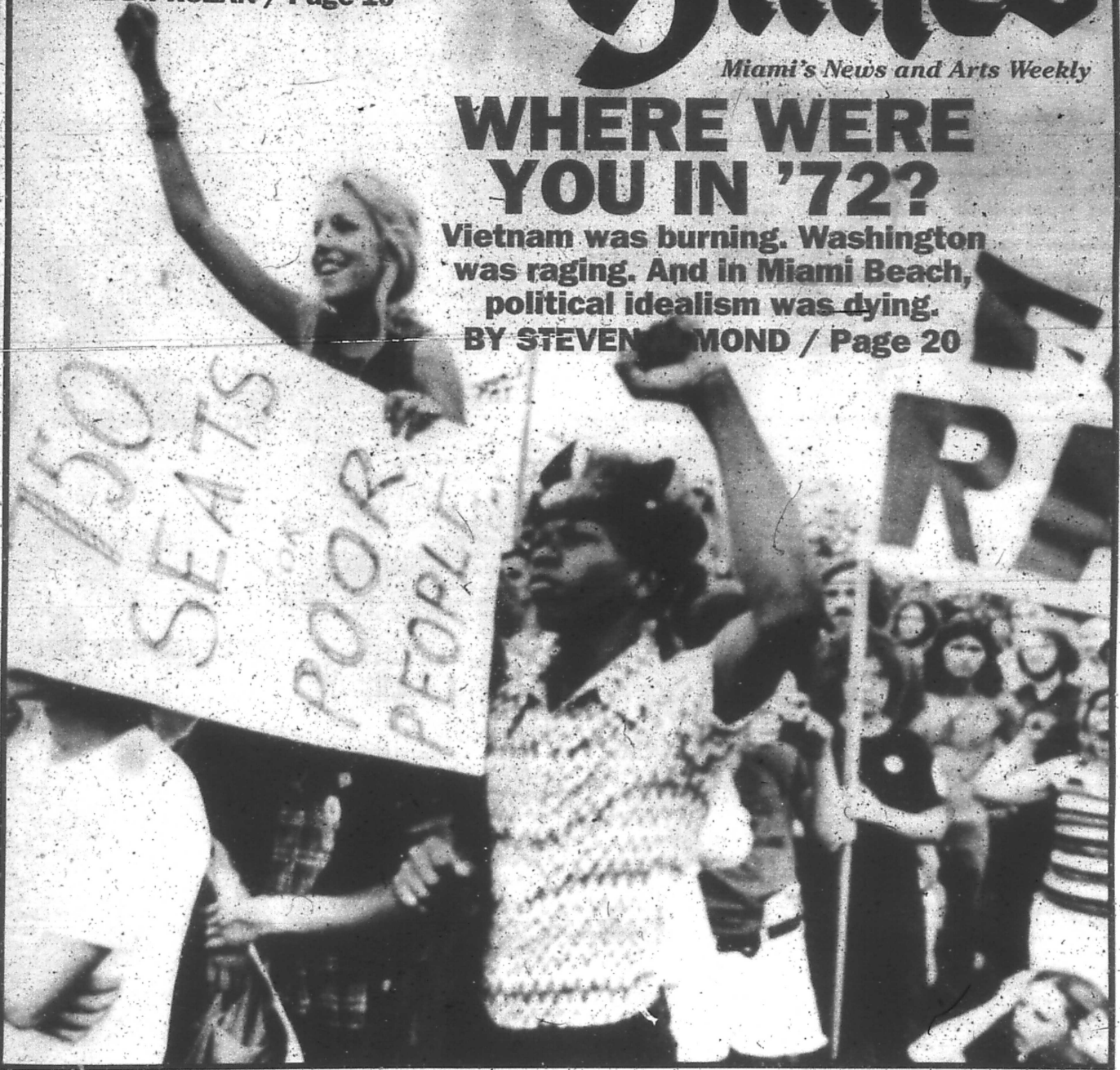


Photo courtesy: Historical Museum of South Florida

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# WHERE WERE YOU IN '72?

Twenty years ago both Republicans and Democrats held their national conventions in Miami Beach. American politics has never been the same. Too bad.

BY STEVEN ALMOND

This was the freaks' Last Supper, dumped like manna before the remains of America's protest movement. Course one consisted of selected nuts and fruits, primarily watermelon, sliced by and for the hippies who had pitched camp in Flamingo Park. Course two, a smorgasbord of homemade soups, was cooked up by local left-wing retirees who, no doubt stirred by visions of their own youthful radicalism, hand-delivered the stuff to the mangy insurgents in their backyard. The feast, fourscore and a thousand manifestos in the making, promised *revolution* as its final course. And if it came to that, the protestors blustered, they were ready to do it: burn the flag, snuff the pigs, fingerprint the prisoners.

Et-fuckin'-cetera. Among those huddled in the park awaiting the Democratic and Republican national conventions, such anarchic prospects crackled like angry static. This

would have been summer 1972, the last time delegates from both parties were herded into the same city to select a candidate. And the last time, frankly speaking, that the youth of this nation gave a damn. Or tried to. Those few, anyway, who were not on the payroll as undercover police.

Two continents away, U.S. pilots were torching the jungles and hamlets of Southeast Asia in a genocidal temper tantrum overseen by Nixon, and prompted by a paranoia only loosely organized into principles. The restless counterculture had converted the bombardments into a unifying cause.

An hour past midnight on July 13, inside the Miami Beach Convention Center at 1700 Washington Avenue, the Democrats reluctantly drafted as their presidential hope peacenik George McGovern, a dour South Dakotan whose underdog candidacy had torn the party asunder. Several blocks away the Flamingo Park coalition began

casting the Republican caucus as a last gasp for large-scale civil unrest. Borrowing from millennia of florid Arabic threats, they vowed to drive Tricky Dick into the sea.

The threat proved not so much idle as impotent. Six weeks later, on August 23, when Nixon was announced for a third time, protestors marched and bullhorned and generally tweaked the noses of the Establishment. Toward the end, they proved nettlesome enough to spawn a brief police attack. But nothing approaching a riot ever materialized. By closing night of the GOP cotillion — as Nixon's helicopter fled up and away from the island — the foul night stank of defeat.

Had he cared to glance down from his great, hovering whirlybird, the sitting president would have witnessed a tableau of comforting clarity in the tear-gas squalls below: the death, by choking, of that era cloyingly referred to as the Sixties.

Some insist it was Nixon's own downfall

in 1974 that put an end to the epoch. But from a distance of twenty years, the long, sweaty summer in Miami Beach stands out as the death knell, a Cinderella whirl on the glass pumps of American idealism. What began with all the utopian swagger of a newborn age fizzled in the manner of a grand but indisputably bad trip.

They all remembered 1968. That year the Democrats gathered in Chicago to nominate Hubert Humphrey. Outrage over Vietnam had driven incumbent Lyndon Johnson from the race, and Humphrey, his second-in-command, had backed the folly with all the foresight of a lemming. The old pol's Windy City reception was easily drowned out by the thudding of police billy clubs. Some 1400 people, mostly protestors, were injured during four days of anti-war insurrection, highlighted by the infamous skull-bashing on Michigan Avenue. Just four years later, Democratic planners



quaked at the thought of a repeat performance.

On the strength of geography, Miami Beach landed the July 10-13 convention a full six months before the event. What other city, boosters touted, could pull up its bridges and shut down its causeways, to be cut off from the rest of the world if things turned ugly? Besides, what young hippie worth his stash was going to launch Armageddon in a worn seaside resort? These very quirks had lured the GOP in 1968, and the Republicans had enjoyed a mercifully boring conclave.

For Nixon's troops Miami Beach in 1972 was an ingenious bailout. Originally planners set the convention for San Diego. But when that city was unable to fund an adequate site, planners looked to the Beach.

City fathers balked initially, fearful of unrest. Citizen mail ran four-to-one against. Miami Beach councilmen, after much tortured waffling, agreed to host the convention by a 4-3 vote, one that spared the Republicans immeasurable embarrassment. None of the nation's other cities, it seemed, wanted anything to do with the gathering. The switcheroo, announced just three months before the August 21-24 assembly, threw off thousands planning to converge on Southern California to raise Cain over Nixon's slaughter in Vietnam.

Journalists hastily set to framing both conventions as cataclysms-in-waiting. Panicky dispatches forecast tens of thousands of demonstrators, long-haired and short-tempered, tramping into town like the Woodstock Nation's evil twin.

With McGovern's nomination assured, worry over the Democratic convention soon dwindled. Protestor estimates gradually ratcheted down to 10,000, then half that. In all, just 2000 showed up, as compared to 7500 reporters and 6500 police. The demonstrators — or "nondelegates," as the euphemism went — were granted permission by the city council to set up camp in Flamingo Park, a few blocks south of the convention center on Meridian Avenue. "We will try to understand the counterculture," boomed Miami Beach Police Chief Rocky Pomerance, the man charged with coordinating convention security. His kinder, gentler approach included constant communication with protest leaders, and sensitivity training that featured classes on the history of dissent.

The counterculture did little to offend

the hospitality proffered during the Democrat's rally. Aside from a few turf squabbles and a lot of bad folk music, the assembled hippies, yuppies, and zippies all made nice. Members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War set up a military perimeter and guarded against the incursion of drugs deemed detrimental to the communal vibe. Assorted Jesus freaks clung to the fringes of the park, jabbering like lonely parrots. Screenings of the notorious Abraham Zapruder film, projected onto bed sheets hung from a tree, beamed the splattering of John Kennedy over and over.

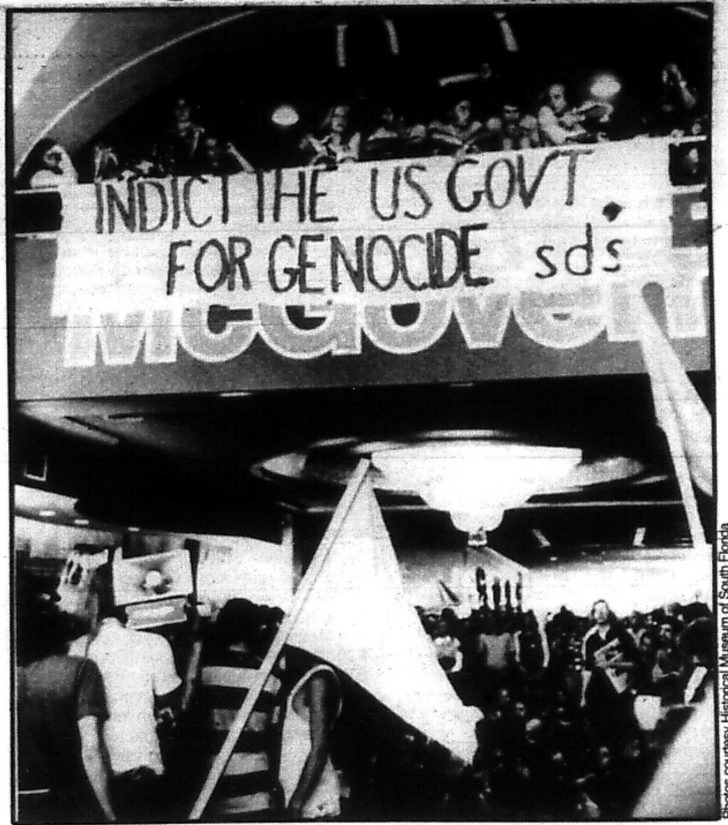
The herbal waft of cannabis twined languorously with patchouli. Gawkers stumbled from one scene to the next, along a meandering path dubbed the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Protest plans assumed the erratic air of a high school production, as nondelegate tribes debated the merits of staging skits during McGovern's shining hour. The bolder of the television reporters skulked the park as if in the

### The long summer in Miami Beach stands out as the death knell, a newborn age fizzled like a grand but indisputably bad trip.

presence of a volatile new species, compiling dizzily inane interviews. News of McGovern's nomination was met with no perceptible hurrah. Two days later the park was deserted. Knapsacks stuffed and rides hitched, the copacetic litterbugs left only a field of detritus to record their retreat.

Far from resenting the demonstrators, South Beach's retirees took an immediate shine to the rabble, a bemusing alliance that came to be known as the yuppie/yenta coalition. Police made only two convention-related arrests during the whole shebang, the second and most controversial against a gay activist who kissed a cop flush on the mouth. Skinny-dipping in the Flamingo Park pool and duping the odd senior into puffing on a joint was about as deviant as things got. Security reached such a height of overkill during the Democratic convention that at one point police officers were arresting other police officers.

The real strife went down *inside* the convention hall, where McGovern forces



Photos courtesy Historical Museum of South Florida

Vietnam was genocide, Nixon a war criminal — on that protestors at the Doral agreed

frantically fought off an eleventh-hour bid to prevent his nomination. Among those mounting the attack was Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, the man widely blamed for the drubbings at the 1968 convention. Four years later he lost control of the Illinois delegation to a young upstart named Jesse Jackson. The convention-floor skirmish was emblematic of a broader dynamic: how McGovern's motley anti-war coalition seized the party mantle from big labor and its minions. Unfortunately the old guard's unseating served less as an affirmation of the Democrat's adaptability than as entrée to ideological confusion. Which, critics argue, has haunted them ever since.

Nowhere was the chaos more evident than during the convention's waning hours. Late Wednesday, July 12, McGovern secured the nomination (no thanks to Florida's delegation, which cast 75 of 81 votes for George Wallace, Alabama's populist, not to mention racist, governor). On Thursday, closing night, the nominee put the final touches on his long-awaited acceptance speech. Senator Tom Eagleton already had received the vice-presidential nod. But giddy delegates placed some 70 other names into nomination. Among the more memorable: Archie Bunker, newscaster Roger Mudd, labor leader César Chavez, and Dr. Benjamin Spock. The diversion set back an already lagging schedule by precious hours. McGovern finally delivered his pitch at 2:48 a.m. Those still awake in the press gallery rated it vintage McGovern, a piece of oratory they agreed would have swung millions of votes his way had it been broadcast during that magical window of passive influence known as prime time.

The logistical snafu was only the beginning of McGovern's woes. Ten days after the convention, reports of

Eagleton's mental illness surfaced. McGovern initially stood by his man, then abruptly withdrew support and went begging for another running mate. His popularity plummeted. By mid-August the soft-spoken senator was 26 percentage points behind in the polls.

For political observers the focus now shifted back to Miami Beach and the Republican gathering. Again the press sent forth prophecies of doom. Again protest leaders promised to muster the troops for a last stab at derailing the Nixon juggernaut. Again, the results were a decided letdown.

It wasn't so much that demonstrators lacked the requisite enmity for Nixon, whose "secret plan" to end the war, invoked during the 1968 campaign, had been so secret as to approach nonexistence. The sense was more one of sluggish inevitability: McGovern simply stood no chance. Why bother? Even the rock and rollers knew it. Members of Jefferson Airplane, doubtful of McGovern's prospects, scrapped a concert slated for Miami during the GOP convention, a performance that would have drawn tens of thousands to the area.

The Republican affair, not surprisingly, distinguished itself as the antithesis of the Democrat's four-day circus. The tightly choreographed event marked the formal abandonment of the nominating convention as a forum for political debate. Instead it became a coronation, one not far removed from the pep rally/ad seminar that now serves as standard convention format. (For added insight, tune in to the Republican national convention — "Bush Bash II" — being staged this week in Houston.)

Nixon, a control freak of the highest

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Vietnam vets (opposite page) and students (above) composed the core of the protestors at the 1972 conventions in Miami Beach. Despite some unrest, police remained the silent majority

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order, was in top form. His cronies on the credentials committee managed to strip dark-horse candidate Paul McCloskey of his lone delegate, effectively denying the anti-war congressman a chance to speak before the convention. Other dissenters, such as Michigan Rep. Don Reigle, were carefully shunted off into preliminary platform subcommittees. Planners even stiff-armed a clutch of pacifist Quakers, none of whom, apparently, held any sway with their religious colleague, the president: Most venal of all, a federal grand jury indicted a half-dozen Vietnam veterans for conspiracy to cause riots during the GOP gathering. The bizarre and dubious charges — later disproved in court — conveniently left the protest leaders detained in Gainesville during the convention.

In fact, as press reports would later reveal, Nixon forces had been at work long before. In June 1972, five bungling Cuban-American burglars were caught attempting to wiretap the National Democratic Committee headquarters in Washington D.C.'s Watergate building. The break-in and ensuing cover-up — which would lead Nixon to resign in August 1974 — proved small potatoes compared to the cockamamie schemes dreamed up by psycho-patriot G. Gordon Liddy. His proposals for the Democratic convention, briefly considered by Attorney General John Mitchell, included kidnapping protest leaders, sabotaging the convention hall's air-conditioning units, and luring Democratic bigwigs into trysts with a pair of prostitutes. GOP officials eventually opted merely to set up a spy team in the Fontainebleau hotel and send daily reports to the White House.

Their own convention, an onslaught of predictable rhetoric, proved hardly worth spying on. Superhawk Ronald Reagan and Barry Goldwater bashed McGovern with the dependable ferocity of royal henchmen. "I am reminded, when I listen to the [Democrats'] constant complaints, of the coyotes who live in the desert of Arizona," mused Goldwater, trip-hammer jaw clenched. "These coyotes just sit and bay and moan and cry over everything that exists, but never suggest anything new. They just wait, like the coyote, until they can tear something down or destroy a part of America."

## LOOK BACK IN ANGUISH

Eight voices from the summer of '72: Seymour Gelber, Ellis Rubin, Mitchell Kaplan, John Rothchild, Ken Glassman, Barry Romo, Mike Thompson, and George McGovern

He had to be CIA. That or FBI, some kind of federal narc. Such was the consensus among the denizens of Flamingo Park. Who else, they wondered, would traverse the park daily in a gray suit and bowtie, surveying the scene like a kennel owner checking the runs?

In fact, Seymour Gelber was a measly assistant state attorney back in 1972. But his role in the Miami Beach conventions could not have been more pivotal. As legal advisor to Police Chief Rocky Pomerance, Gelber served as official troubleshooter, a conduit between the multifarious protest clans and the dozen law enforcement agencies assigned to corral them.

Twenty years later he is thicker about the middle and wrinkled by the stress of a newfound political career. The former

The only contention witnessed inside the hall came courtesy of boorish CBS reporter Mike Wallace, who cornered Maurice Stans, the new finance chairman of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, and forced him, at lenspoint, to lie dutifully about the slowly unraveling skein of Watergate.

Nixon's staged ceremonies took on so treading a flavor that even a few Nixon Youth broke ranks. "We're being herded around like cattle," moaned Butch Stein, a high-schooler from Elkins Park, Pennsylvania. "I just got fed up with it. I couldn't stand up every five minutes and

**Security reached such a height of overkill that at one point police officers were arresting other police officers.**

cheer, cheer, cheer." This epiphany, appropriately, came in the wake of a "spontaneous" rally starring Nixon and his heppiest of supporters, Sammy Davis, Jr.

What Nixon could not control — namely, the demonstrators — he ignored. Cocooned in his Key Biscayne compound, the president missed the kiss-in staged by a gay rights group, the sit-in organized by fierce-eyed Vietnam vets, even the sick-in undertaken by a group of feminists who vomited in front of the Fontainebleau to demonstrate their disgust with Nixon's misogynistic policies.

Though plainly bent on embarrassing Nixon, the protestors made his job easy. Factions fought among themselves, unable to formulate a collective ethos beyond contempt for the war and the status quo. Most of the groups obediently scheduled their protests with the full knowledge and often the aid of local police, who provided them space, transportation, bullhorns, and even guaranteed them media coverage — a level of co-optation that would have never flown in the Chicago of 1968.

Protest honcho Rennie Davis, who had promised to cap the convention with "the most massive sit-in in America's history," watched his proposed wall of resistance crumble on closing night, August 23. Stoic visions of civil disobedience fell before an onslaught of juvenile pranks. Delegates were egged. Tires slashed. Garbage cans overturned. Few of the militants aspired

to make any kind of political statement. They were more often venting errant libido and mugging for the cameras.

Finally goaded into a confrontation as the delegates began to arrive for the evening session, the legions of police chose not to pummel the protestors but rather to unleash a barrage of tear gas that stained the dusk a pale shade of blue. The kids dispersed like inconvenient bugs, many of those who had vowed to drive Nixon into the sea staggering toward the beach to soak their burning eyes in the Atlantic.

Not even the advice doled out by a battery of undercover agents could rouse the demonstrators. "The only thing I helped the [protestors] do," grumbled FBI operative Joseph Burton, "was incite them to turn over one of the buses and then told them that if they really wanted to blow the bus up, to stick a rag in the gas tank and light it. But they couldn't get the bus turned over."

As of mid-evening, more than 900 demonstrators had been arrested. Buzzed on the adrenaline of perceived combat, the suspects were hastily processed and loaded into makeshift paddy wagons, each invariably hoisting the power salute to comrades, like a cow's last, defiant moo. Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, arrested at least twice, titillated the TV cameras by declaring himself a "prisoner of Richard Nixon."

The president himself was by now on his way to the hall, ready to unveil for the delegates his new, mellower incarnation. The night before, Nixon had eked out the nomination by a judicious margin of 1347 delegates to 1. The Florida delegation, in a moment of mortifying hyperbole, had pledged all its votes for "the greatest president since Abraham Lincoln."

Nixon entered the hall to a drone of approbation. Gawky as a marionette, he crab-walked to the podium, once more confirming his rare, physical genius for transforming even the most elegantly tailored suit into an ill-fitting straitjacket. Mechanical bursts of applause and chants of "Four more years!" reduced to a distant prattle the shrieks of those VVAW renegades who had reached the convention floor. But for the stench of tear gas seeping through the hall's air-conditioning ducts, the moment allowed no hint of the strife beyond. Nixon began his address at 10:27 p.m., precisely as scheduled. "Let us build a peace," he intoned at his conclusion 30 minutes later,

"that our children and all the children of the world can enjoy for generations to come."

If you were a Nixon supporter, the overnight ratings were bliss. The protestors, on the other hand, barely made the evening news. The official numbers shaped up like so: CBS's convention coverage included thirteen minutes of street activity, NBC aired ten minutes, and ABC ran a whopping five. Virtually none of the footage was live from the fray. At one point late in the convention schedule, Walter Cronkite boldly informed viewers, "There have been reports that there's a riot outside." He added that CBS would go to a live shot shortly. The network never did.

Officials from all three media giants denied, quite disingenuously, that the embargo had anything to do with criticism leveled against the gritty coverage of the riots at the 1968 Democratic convention. "We got the film, but it hasn't fit into the format," wheedled one CBS official, referring to a clip of police and protestors squaring off on Collins Avenue. "It was an editorial decision."

The freaks who choked their way through that last vicious night — the one that at least fleetingly held out the

**Stoic visions of civil disobedience fell before an onslaught of juvenile pranks. Delegates were egged, tires slashed.**

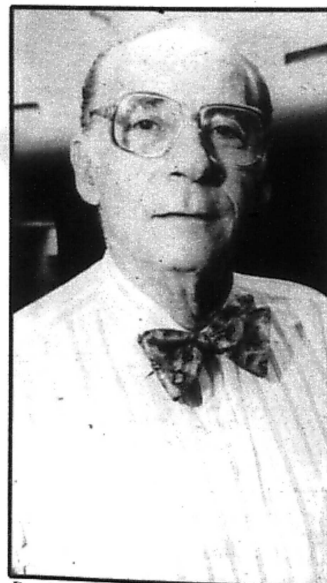
potential for some dramatic reversal — comforted themselves in the knowledge that, had the revolution come, it would not have been televised anyway.

The truth was, even in the midst of the irrelevant chaos, each participant housed in his soul the same dull realization Rocky Pomerance, the hulking figure at the center of the maw, articulated it as well as anyone. Fretting over what he took to be a mission of mere security, the chief unwittingly chiseled an epitaph onto that whole soggy summer: "We can't win," he sighed in the direction of anyone who would listen. "We can just lose as gracefully as possible." □

and the sheriff. And suddenly one of them starts shaking his head and says, 'Hey, we've got a lot of experience at this. We know how to deal with crowds. We came here to play golf.' They never even went on the tour. They didn't care what little Miami Beach was going to do. They were a big city. Of course, we all know what happened that year in Chicago.

"Our plan in '72 was to map out everything we could. Most of the protest situations were carefully orchestrated. We'd meet with the protest leaders every morning. We gave them space and made sure each group got media exposure. We even had to make sure to keep certain groups apart, because there were all kinds of rivalries. We had to work it all out — fight down to how the arrests were going to be made — or it would have been an absolute disaster, like Serbia and Croatia.

"Not all of the police were thrilled about the assignment. These guys couldn't fathom how a protestor could call them a name or spit on them and they wouldn't be allowed to retaliate. I remember at one of the police training sessions they had this protestor lecturing, with his ponytail



Beach Mayor Sy Gelber: Not with the FBI

Photo: Steve Hirsch

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bobbing up and down, and there were two or three police officers in back who turned their chairs around and wouldn't face the speaker. That was their civil disobedience, I guess.

"On that last night of the Republican convention, I recall standing with an on-duty policeman and watching a group of dissenters coming down Seventeenth Street, just running around making trouble. Because of our precautions, the guy couldn't do anything, but he was going crazy. He was so angry that he took his billy club and started beating a tree — just stood there taking it all out on this poor tree.

"The whole arrest process was very difficult. I was on the phone constantly with the prosecutor's office, releasing the leaders who I thought could come back and prevent a mob scene. I knew we were never going to prosecute these kids, but we wanted to take them out of action. It's how they describe the criminal justice system these days — a revolving door.

"I think the Miami Beach police performed exemplary during the conventions. When the convention ended, the City of Miami police attacked Flamingo Park. They were throwing fireworks in there and tear gas, and in the morning we had to give the young people living in the park safe escort out of the city. They needed protection, not against some invading marauders, but the City of Miami Police Department.

"But the massive protests just never happened. A lot of the fervor had died in the four years from 1968 to 1972. I remember I wrote my dissertation on student protest, and by the time I finished it, in 1971, no one cared any more. Had I finished it two years earlier it'd have been a national best seller. Still, those were pretty exciting years for those of us watching it happen.

"The 1972 conventions had to have an impact on anyone who was there, because America was erupting, and we haven't felt that since. Today a political convention is like any other convention in Miami Beach. They come in and you issue a proclamation. That was not an era for issuing proclamations. It was war. Kids these days are more accepting. *Too* accepting."

**E**llis Rubin wasn't kidding around: *Hippie chicks were swimming naked in the public pool at Flamingo Park. And he had the photos to prove it.*

Not only did he have the pictures, but he waved them before a bemused Miami Beach city council. The Peeping Tom proxy was one of several objections raised by Rubin, a self-appointed Mr. Tidy Bowl

determined to rescue his town from the toilet of moral iniquity. While others rolled out a red carpet for the drug-addled hordes of visiting dissenters, the young lawyer waged a campaign to stop protestors from camping in Flamingo Park. Code name: "Operation Backbone."

These days Rubin wears the deep tan of prosperity. A celebrated, if widely ridiculed, criminal defense attorney, he now speaks grandly of his ambition to argue more first-degree murder cases than any other lawyer in history. He also makes glowing allusions to his agent, the man allegedly brokering a deal that will soon result in a TV series based on Rubin's legal exploits. One can only hope his quixotic deeds of 1972 make the pilot.

"While the commission was arguing whether to allow the kids in the park, I debated that topic with Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman. Yeah, I took them on. The Unitarian Church sponsored the thing, and the place was packed for that debate because it was pretty well hyped.

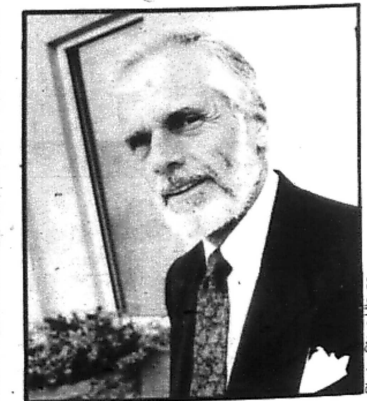
**"These hippies or zippies or whatever they called themselves were doing the same stuff they did at uh, uh... Woodstock."**

Jerry spoke first, and I remember he said that I was part of his family and he couldn't understand why his 'Uncle Ellis' was taking this stand. Then he started throwing around some obscenities. You know, 'Fuck this and fuck that.' And I had my little kids and my wife there, so I stood up and objected, 'Hey,' I said, 'Let's discuss this like gentlemen.'

"When it came my turn to respond, I remember stating that unfortunately Jerry Rubin was *not* a relative of mine, because he had no relatives because his mother and father never had any children. And that caused a big commotion. So he jumped up and started screaming obscenities, and I told the moderator, 'If he says one more word, I'm leaving.' And he did. And I marched my children and wife out. And everybody boomed and some people cheered, and the next day the underground paper in town carried a big article with the headline, 'Rubin splits at the sound of a fuck.' I thought that was great.

"I was very much opposed to the hippies and the Vietcong sympathizers coming down here and parading around carrying the Vietcong flag with the city's blessing. I remember Chuck Hall, the mayor of Miami Beach, joining the Vietcong sympathizers and marching with them, and I was appalled because I knew

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Ellis Rubin (then and now) implored officials to show some backbone with protestors







Photo: Steve Hlavac

It's been a long, strange trip: Bookstore owner Kaplan looks back in anguish

**'72**

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in the crease, his hair neatly clipped. Of that summer he speaks with a mellowed longing that recommends him as one of the few Sixties survivors who has made peace with the compromises of the era.

"On that last night of the Republican convention, my cousin Warren and I joined this march up Collins. The idea was to blockade Nixon's hotel, but somewhere around 20th or 30th Street the tear gas canisters started going off and people just flipped out. The police were actually charging and a lot of people ran into the ocean. Tear gas was actually being shot onto the beach. Warren and I, who both knew the area, ducked into a small hotel on Indian Creek.

"I'll never forget — we got in the elevator and ran straight into three Nixonettes, who were like Nixon

**"In the end, not much happened. But the period was one of compassion, where people were seeking some greater good."**

cheerleaders. These girls were really straight, like from the Midwest, and we looked like, you know, hippies, with hair halfway down our backs. But to this one woman's credit she took us into her room and we washed our eyes.

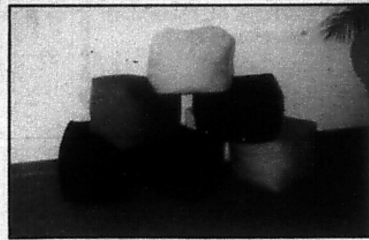
"What the police had done was cordon the protestors off, so we headed for the Indian Creek bridge. But there was a cop there who wanted to see our ID. I mean, remember, this is America, right? And he's asking us for ID, like he doesn't trust us. Eventually we gave that up and went back to Flamingo. There were helicopters overhead buzzing the park, which was kind of wild, so we walked to the convention center itself and there was heavy-duty gassing going on there, too. It was a drag because the older people living there were being affected by it. The tear gas was everywhere and my eyes were killing me again.

"I remember someone had chopped off a spigot and water was just gushing up, so I ran over to clean my eyes. The police were ten, maybe twenty feet away, and all of sudden something whizzed by my ear. One of the cops had shot a gas canister right past me and I got really pissed off and I think I picked up something and threw it. It was the only violent thing I did, and the guy came over and squirted Mace in my eyes. At that point I took off.

"The upshot is that we made it back to the Fontainebleau, where the protestors

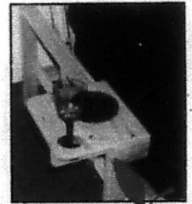
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# BACK TO SCHOOL



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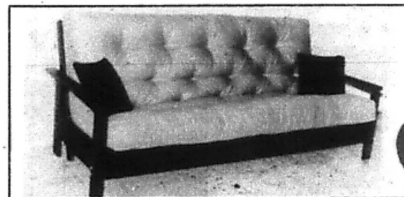


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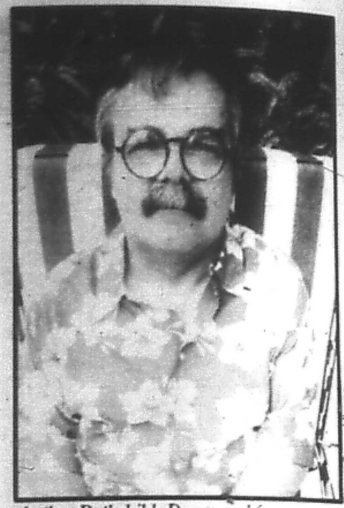


**72**

*continued from page 27*

were barricaded in and there was this orderly arrest thing going on. Now, you have to remember that the Republican convention was in late August and I was all set to go to college. In fact, I had a flight going out the next morning. I knew if they arrested me, they would let me out before long. But I remember saying to my friend that I couldn't get arrested because I had to go to college the next day.

"The most intriguing thing that happened during the Democratic convention was that I saw two cops dressed up as VVAW [Vietnam Veterans Against the War]. I had seen these cops testifying at another trial. I remember specifically going up to Abbie Hoffman after I first spotted them and telling him these two guys were undercover. He said, 'I don't wanna hear about it.' I guess after the [Chicago 7] conspiracy trial, he didn't want any hassles. So I was quiet about it for a while, but it kept gnawing at me. When I called up the VVAW and told them they said, 'But they're on our planning committee.' Finally I told a friend of mine about it and, to my utter surprise, he marched up to them and made a huge show of telling them to leave the park. Eventually the story got reported by the *New York Times* and, sure enough, when the VVAW went on trial for conspiracy [in Gainesville], these two cops were witnesses against them.



Author Rothchild: Drugs and fun won

"Most of the other groups had become much more like street theater. The counterculture was fragmented by then. The thing I see now that I'm older is that all these protest guys were really media stars. And a lot of the agitation was really about getting attention, acting on a grand stage. This was a time, after all, when Walter Cronkite could go on the news with a straight face and announce a delay in the U.S. Open golf championship because hippies had threatened to burn a peace symbol on the eighteenth green.

"So in the end, after all the planning, not much happened in '72. But I guess I make the argument that the period was one of compassion, where people were seeking some greater good. At least the rhetoric was good rhetoric."

**John Rothchild** landed in Miami Beach with every intention of writing an incisive analysis of the Republican national convention. But something in the sea air flushed that notion right out of his head. Instead the senior editor for the *Washington Monthly* wound up on a Bahamian beach, permanently estranged from the career fast track.

Such abandon, Rothchild posits, was the trademark of those 1972 conventions — at least as far as he could discern. Fortunately, Rothchild's hiatus from journalism eventually led to a higher calling: writing books. In *Up For Grabs* (1985), he captured the looniness of that summer in '72. His latest, *Going For Broke*, chronicles the collapse of business tycoon Robert Campeau's retail empire.

"A friend of mine told me I should stay at this mansion on North Bay Road. The place was like mission control for the left wing. It was going 24 hours a day. Plots and subplots were constantly being hatched. I was assigned to cover the convention, but I spent two of those days in Nassau, lying on the beach with a woman I'd met. The thing is, that was typical of what was happening. Most people came here because they were against the war. But at the drop of the hat they were willing to go off on a lark. I mean, the whole endeavor was half-serious and half-lark.

"There was this great pull between the

anti-war movement and the drugs. And the drugs won, there was no question. You could see it in the house where I stayed. People would say, 'Let's go down and have a demonstration,' or 'We'll make these signs,' or 'We'll figure out this way to get on the convention floor and have a protest.' But then someone would say, 'Ah, the hell with it, let's take some nitrous.' And that was that. It was the two great forces of America coming together:

**"Most people came here because they were against the war. But at the drop of the hat they were willing to go off on a lark."**

traditional politics that had been radicalized, and drugs.

"It's funny, because if you could isolate the most important thing to come out of that convention, you'd like to say it was a lot of people getting together to stop a terrible war — and that was part of it. But really the most important thing that emerged was the beginning of the drug trade on a massive scale. Until then drugs had been a small thing, a private, white pastime.

"The irony was that all these people were here to do something serious and Miami Beach inspired them to go off on a fool's errand. I mean, in a lot of ways it's the perfect Miami Beach contribution to politics. Even the hardened anti-war people said, 'Well, let's have some fun, this is the resort capital of the world.' This is the other irony, actually, because back then Miami Beach was really falling apart.

"I remember meeting Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin and those guys, and I got feeling that in some vague way they were serious about doing something. But basically they were like little kids who wanted to throw food in the dining room. I didn't have much respect for them. McGovern would have done poorly anyway. But being connected with those guys probably didn't do him much good.

"The thing that amazed me most was that right across the bay were the Watergate burglars. I mean, in its own way, Miami was the great undoing of Nixon. And there the whole story was, in a bunch of little houses in Little Havana, forgotten amid all the hoopla on this side of the bay."

*continued on page 30*



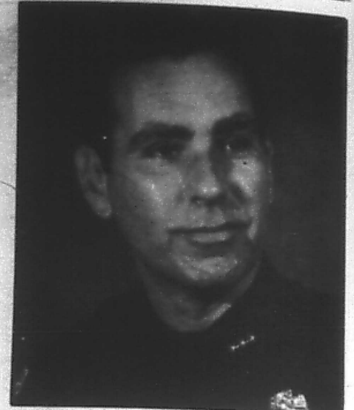


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Ex-Beach Police Chief Ken Glassman in full riot gear — and more recently, unmasked

**72**

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He never wanted to be a media star. When the youthful police officer took his place among the ranks outside the Miami Beach convention center, he expected riot gear would be enough to ensure anonymity. And it was. At least until the press corps cornered Chief Rocky Pomerance and demanded young cop flesh. The chief thumbed through his mental Rolodex and immediately sent for Ken Glassman. Square-jawed. Articulate. Safe. Sexiest of all: a Vietnam vet. Glassman quit counting after a half-dozen interviews.

He would enjoy his revenge, of sorts, by later ascending to Pomerance's job as Miami Beach chief of police, though his stormy tenure wound up dogged by nosy reporters. Since moving two years ago to a position as associate director of the School of Justice and Safety Administration at Miami Dade Community College, a sense of calm has pervaded Glassman's manner. But among the pictures scattered about his office is a reminder of that first high-profile gig: Glassman, in full riot gear, stands before the convention center marquee. Poised, no doubt, to answer another reporter's question.

"Our overriding concern, obviously, was that these conventions not be another Chicago. We had training sessions for months beforehand, not all of which the officers enjoyed. I remember at one particular session a number of officers threw doughnuts at the instructor.

"What surprised me the most when the convention season began was how many police officers were in Flamingo Park in an undercover capacity. I think every department in Dade County and probably every state and federal agency had people there, because no one really knew what to expect. I heard estimates that 10 to 25 percent of all the 'protestors' were affiliated with law enforcement.

"As it turned out, the Democratic convention was very civil. I remember during one protest a bunch of kids came up to the fence around the convention hall and this midget — an actual midget — jumped up on the gate, and to his shock and our amazement this gate swung right open. There were only three of us there and 75 of them, so had they wanted to come in I don't think we could have stopped them. But they had no more desire to come in than we had to join them. We wound up fixing the fence with plastic handcuffs.

"I remember in talking to the protestors I was struck by how young they were. So many of them were just high school kids. What they were doing had nothing to do with politics. This was just the place to be. To take on the police.

After the TV cameras left, the protestors disappeared. During the day we'd set up these awesome lines and at night we were down to like one officer every few hundred yards.

"The activity at the Republican convention was like a crescendo — every day the protestors got a little louder, a little nastier. On that last night, it was apparent we had several groups intent on interfering with the convention process. There were hundreds of people sitting down in front of the Seventeenth Street gate in death masks, the black and white make-up. They were preventing cars from moving. So the delegates would be dropped off on corner, and the demonstrators would spit all over them. When they started doing that, our sergeant told us to open the gate and move the protestors aside. And it got rough. They wouldn't move. They locked

**"We had one officer who was doing nothing but opening crates for gas grenades. He couldn't open them up fast enough."**

arms and then attempted to lie down. We had roving forces making arrests, but basically we were using tear gas to move people back. It never got violent, at least from my perspective, but we used a lot of gas. In our area, we had one officer who was doing nothing but opening crates for gas grenades. He couldn't open them up fast enough. We used so much gas that at one point somebody came out from the convention and told us the hall's air-conditioning was sucking in the gas.

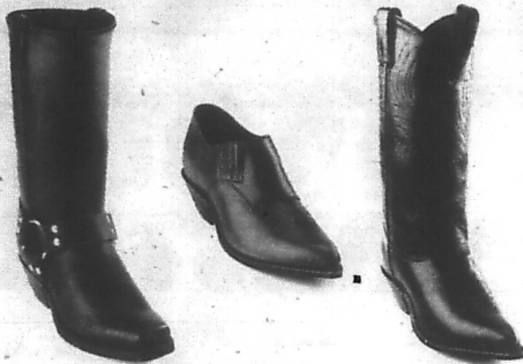
"Things got a little hairy the next morning. The story I have heard commonly is that the police officers leaving the city threw tear gas in the park, which was really kind of ironic since ten to twenty percent of people they were gassing were undercover police officers.

"Because I had served in Vietnam, a lot of the reporters asked me if I had any feelings of camaraderie toward the VVAW guys on the other side. The answer was no. Individually there were some bright guys, but for the most part they were a rather disheveled, nasty bunch of people.

Stone-silent, they marched up Collins Avenue, a battalion of war veterans in military fatigues. Even the wheelchair vets moved in precise formation, their gnarled limbs transformed into grim totems that shamed even the police sent to halt the advance. To those watching from the sidewalks, the

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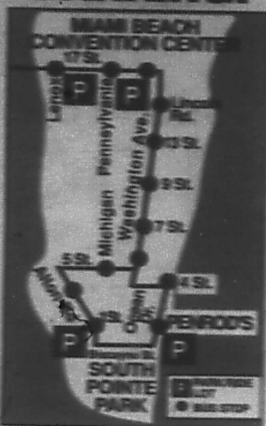
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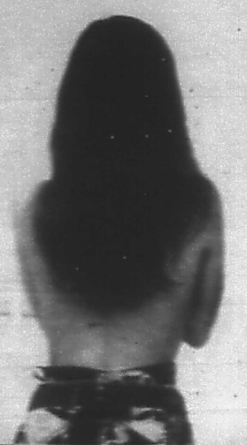
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FASHION VICTIMS



VVAW leader Barry Romo then and now: Still fighting for Vietnam vets' dignity

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spectacle bore little relation to the protest histrionics on display elsewhere at the 1972 conventions. Plainly, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War meant business.

Near the head of the procession was a young Californian named Barry Romo, a platoon leader who had fought in Vietnam four years before and returned from the war with his nephew's dead body. In 1971 he joined the VVAW, and a year later became the group's national coordinator. A postal worker in Chicago, Romo is still active in the VVAW.

"When we came down to Miami in May, to organize, we were pretty leery about the extreme right-wing elements in the Cuban community, and the racism we might face in a Southern city. But we were pleasantly surprised by the population. It was the local bureaucracy that hassled us. They threw up tons of legal obstacles, requiring all kinds of permits to demonstrate and camp. Our basic position was: 'How dare you think you're going to stop us from speaking for our brothers. You didn't care where we camped in Vietnam. We don't care where you say we can camp here.' We did our thing, regardless. You tend not to have the same kind of fears about carrying things out after you've been shot at for a year.

"Some of the other demonstrators were good and conscientious. But some were just crazy. We had a position against drugs, for instance. And here were these guys selling barbiturates and cocaine in Flamingo Park. The police wouldn't deal with it — apparently they preferred to have a bunch of people on drugs than protesting. But we caught the drug dealers and stuck them in the commodes head first. Basically we didn't want to be associated with that kind of crap, so we set up our own military-style camp. And we found ourselves actually having to clean up after the other protestors. They would storm down the street and we'd be in back of them, putting the benches and garbage cans back.

"Unlike the zippies and yippies, we weren't fighting for some abstract concept of life or democracy. We were fighting for our brothers who hadn't come home and the millions of innocent Vietnamese being killed. It was a question of stopping the bombs, not psychodrama. That's why we approached things so seriously. We orchestrated that march to the Fontainebleau without a peep. Even the guys in wheelchairs were in perfect synch. The cops they sent to break it up couldn't even look at us.

"One of the uglier scenes was when the Nazis took the stage in Flamingo Park. They kicked me and another vet off the stage. What they didn't realize was that we were getting ready for a rally with hundreds of vets who were arriving from all over the country. So their leader gets

up there and starts screaming, 'igger' this and 'ike' that, and all of sudden he looks out in the crowd and it's full of people who just finished fighting a war, not talking about one. We gave the Nazis 90 seconds to get out of the area, and ended up having to cordon off the stage. The crowd wanted to kill them, but we allowed the Nazis to get away — dragged half of them off and threw the rest out of park. Their leader was whiter than a sheet. We told him, 'You got 30 seconds to get out of the park or we'll kill you.' After that, local officials were real nice. They asked us if we needed any more stuff, bathrooms or electricity.

"We decided not to protest as a group on that last night of the Republican convention. It was obvious that the cops were out of control, that they were trying to prove their manhood by cracking skulls, and the idea of subjecting vets to that made no sense. We had felt an almost constant tension with the state and county police. I mean, these guys were a bunch of yahoos. They had all the professionalism of Barney Fife, only imagine Barney Fife as a sadist. We ended up sending patrols and medics out to retrieve demonstrators who had been beaten to a pulp. The police were also gassing people in the streets, and I remember little old Jewish men and ladies

**"Those delegates who spit on us were disgusting people. They spit on the sacrifices we had made."**

opening their doors to the protestors and telling the police, 'I saw what you are doing — in Germany. You leave these young people alone.' I was really inspired by those older folks.

"Another reason we laid low that night was that the Republicans had accused eight of our members of plotting to disrupt the convention. I mean, here the Ku Klux Klan was still killing people and all the government wanted to do was infiltrate groups of veterans who were fighting against war. Our interest wasn't in disruption, but in bearing testimony. We didn't care if Kissinger talked about the Geneva Accords. We were talking about our friends dying in the rice paddies of Vietnam. And we made a point that no one could obscure. I truly believe Kissinger's announcing in October that peace was at hand was the result of fear of our continued protests. Of course, Kissinger was lying.

"To me the greatest irony is that the only pictures of Vietnam vets getting spit on came not from anti-war fanatics, but from the Republican delegates at that 1972 convention. Those delegates who spit on us were hateful, disgusting people. They had no problems with us being sent off to lose our limbs. They spit on the sacrifices we had made."

# HOLD ON TO THE REELSTUFF

Each week in New Times Reel Section, Rafael Navarro ponders the latest on the big screen. Following the review are extensive capsule reviews of movies currently showing in the greater Miami area.

For more information about show times and theaters closest to you, use the directory at the end of the Movie Capsule section and hold on to the Reel Stuff.





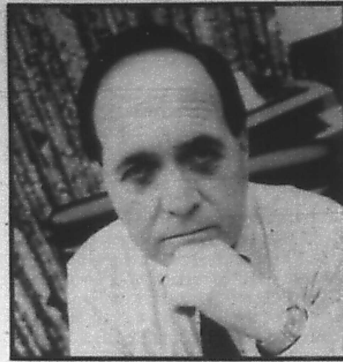
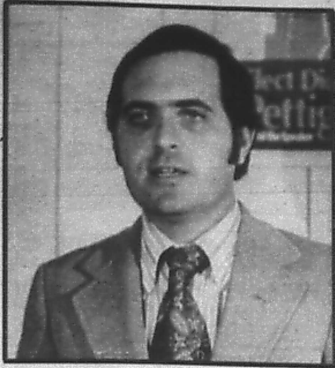


Photo: Steve Hirsch

Angry protestors covered Mike Thompson's car with spit, so he spit back — in court

Elephants dance outside Mike Thompson's home office. The animals hang from a flimsy mobile in the middle of what Thompson calls his "rogue's gallery," an alcove of autographed portraits featuring Richard Nixon, James Watt, Oliver North, Ronald Reagan, and selected other right-wing villains. The rest of the decor in his Coral Gables home reflects a life singularly devoted to the cause of conservatism: an autographed copy of Anita Bryant's autobiography, a Barry Goldwater doll, a letter signed by Dwight D. Eisenhower, and pachyderms of every conceivable form, from planters to macramé wall hangings.

A two-time loser as a congressional candidate in the 1960s, Thompson served as Richard Nixon's convention coordinator in 1968 and attended the 1972 convention as an alternate delegate to former astronaut and chief of Eastern Airlines Frank Borman. By that time, of course, Thompson had decided that Nixon was too liberal and backed Representative John Ashbrook for president.

"On the first day of the convention, late Sunday afternoon, I wanted to take five other delegates out to dinner in my new Lincoln. We decided to drive up Collins Avenue, but barely four blocks from our hotel we ran into a massive demonstration, right in front of the Fontainebleau, Nixon headquarters. We couldn't get by, so I turned around to head to the Julia Tuttle Causeway and suddenly my car was surrounded by demonstrators.

They could tell we were delegates because of our orange delegation jackets. They started jumping up on the hood and putting dents in it. They got on top of the car, on the trunk, and then started taking the stick end of their signs and trying to push through the windshield and windows. My car was actually swarmed over. Naturally we were going nuts in the car, not knowing what to do. We didn't want to kill anybody, although the demonstrators clearly weren't concerned about the prospect of killing us — which could have been done very easily with those sticks going right into the brain through the eye socket. So I said to everybody, 'I'm going to get us out of here. I'm just going to go slowly and pick up speed and hope to part these people out of the way.' That's exactly what I did. The demonstrators were eventually beating on the windows and spitting all over. My windshield was absolutely covered with spit, but we got clear of them.

"So now the mob was in pursuit of us and I pulled up to a few local motorcycle policemen on Collins and I said, 'Officers, can't you stop that mob? They're trying to kill us!' And one of the police said — 'I'll never forget this — 'We're under orders not to make any arrests.' So I tore off and went to police headquarters and reported this thing. Back at the hotel we were all in a state of shock, just emotional wrecks. I

don't even remember if we went anywhere for dinner that night. My car was a damn mess. It cost a helluva lot of money to repair. Every panel had to be worked. Every panel. I barely slept that night.

"By the next morning I had gathered my wits enough to call a lawyer friend of mine, Ed Corlett. I told him about the zoo over here. He said, 'Look, we need to get together and write up a writ of mandamus to force the governor of Florida and the local officials to start enforcing the law.' On that Monday we went into court shortly before noon. Everybody was there, of course, and after a hearing of less than an hour, the judge ordered that all laws be enforced on Miami Beach. Within about an hour there were hundreds of arrests made.

"All the media did a story. I remember being interviewed by Mike Wallace, because it was a big story that one of the delegates had decided to use the majesty of the law to do what the weasel-like

**"Those images had a profound effect because our citizens saw the effects of anarchy, and it scared the hell out of them."**

ected officials refused to do. If that hadn't happened, I think there's a very real possibility that delegates and bystanders would have been killed. I don't doubt that at all. What we saw in Miami Beach in 1972 was a snapshot of anarchy, and it was a very, very ugly animal.

"The convention, at least, was pretty orderly. There were no policy debates, no candidacy debates. The dominant conversation on the floor had nothing to do with politics. It was, 'Do you believe what is happening out there?' We were like a bunch of veterans exchanging war stories. Except the war wasn't over. And these attacks weren't random. There were systematic. The last night the police had to line a bunch of buses head-to-tail to block the protestors. It was like the Conestoga wagons all over again.

"Those images had a profound effect on American politics because our citizens saw firsthand the effects of anarchy, and it scared the hell out of them. In a sense it was responsible for the Reagan revolution. The Republicans were able to correctly exploit Americans' fear of anarchy. And I think it's finally had an effect on the Democrats. Just look at the civility in New York this year.

"You have to remember that there's always an element in any society that is willing and able to erupt for any cause. And unfortunately a lot of stupid analysts in the news media and the world of politics

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will go along with the plan and try to say that these people are venting their hatred or disappointment or disillusionment. When they're just looking for a free TV set or a chance to beat someone up."

The press nicknamed him "Mr. Magoo," and by the bitter end of his 1972 presidential drive, George Stanley McGovern seemed to have earned the moniker. With a tone as dull and flat as the plains of his home state, the avuncular South Dakotan led the Democrats to one of the worst losses in electoral history. He thus became the last true liberal to get his ass trounced in the general election, a man whose gravest error appeared to be the misapprehension that morality had anything to do with politics.

Since the days of his last public foray, as a token candidate in the 1984 presidential race, McGovern has worked at a number of Beltway think tanks and lectured extensively. His lone comment on the Clinton Gore ticket — that the duo represents a "Trojan horse" whose liberalism will emerge once elected —

**"The failure of my campaign took the bloom off the rose of idealism in American politics. It was the final straw."**

has, typically, been seized upon by GOP funders hoping to tar the Baby Boomers with the taint of liberalism.

McGovern is currently at work on a book outlining America's agenda for the rest of the century, and teaching a seminar at the Innsbruck International Summer School in Austria, from where he offered these observations.

"I don't know that any convention can match 1972 for intensity. The 1968 convention had great turbulence and conflict, but it didn't match '72. There were hundreds of people there attending the first convention of their lives. It was probably the most passionate gathering I've seen, and I've been in politics more than 35 years. I think even Bill Clinton, who was on hand as my Texas coordinator, would tell you that.

"One of the most vivid recollections for me was going down to the lobby of the Doral Hotel and taking on this radical group that was accusing me of selling out on Vietnam. It was a tense moment, but I felt as the standard bearer of the party



McGovern accepts the nomination

continued on next page



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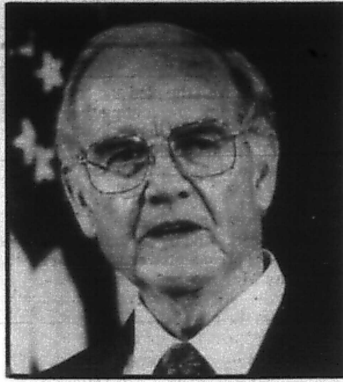
'72

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that I should confront these young people. And much to the consternation of the Secret Service, I did. If it hadn't been for later attacks during the campaign, I imagine that would have been cited as an example of my courage and imagination.

"We wanted to make the convention a truly open political forum. But we paid a bitter price for that, no doubt. I remember the speech I delivered at 3:00 a.m. Can't seem to forget that. There's no telling what would have happened if people had seen me at my best for an hour, setting out a new idea for the country. I think surely it would have helped me weather the Eagleton crisis. That very well was the finest speech of my career. The tragedy is that so few saw it. I was very truly envious watching Clinton give his acceptance speech in prime time.

"I wasn't too surprised by the dearth of



*McGovern today: '72 was a turning point*

demonstrators at our convention, because. I think our campaign was the relief valve for the nation's anti-war feeling. We had really taken the protest off the streets and

put it into the convention hall. There was no person out on that street who detested the war any more than I did, and I wanted to go to the White House. But the impression that my campaign was loaded with radicals was just goofy. That was a notion generated by the Nixon propaganda machine, at a cost of tens of millions of dollars. The core of my supporters were students and nurses and workers. I'd come from South Dakota, after all. It wasn't the Kremlin that kept sending me back to the senate.

"Some were disappointed that the protests at the Republican convention weren't more visible. But I was relieved. It may sound old-fashioned, but I just couldn't endorse people disrupting the political process. I do regret that the congressional committees investigating Watergate didn't get on the ball earlier. There were a bunch of senators in subcommittee, Gerry Ford and others, who just blocked the thing. They were downright gutless in not pursuing that investigation.

"But regardless of Watergate, I believe 1972 marked a watershed, in its own way. A turning point. Had we prevailed, our plan was to strengthen the idealism unleashed in the 1960s, to build upon the progress of the civil rights and anti-war movements and begin to pursue the environmental and women's causes, which were just starting up. The failure of my campaign took the bloom off the rose of idealism in American politics. It was the final straw. You had Kennedy killed in 1963. Then Johnson led us into the jungles. Then Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were slain. Then McGovern was defeated in 49 states. By then even those who cared deeply about the country were thinking, 'What the hell, why bother?'

"It remains in my mind an important convention and campaign. I run into people every day of my life who say that that was the last campaign that they really believed in.

"I am flattered, of course. But that is really quite sad." □

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