

Strawberry Bullet



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Serving the 500,000 Veterans Living in Greater Los Angeles

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DNC Report from Philadelphia

The City of Brotherly Love played host to the 2016 Democratic National Convention (DNC) during July 25-28 this summer, bringing together an exuberant collection of Bernie Sanders supporters, a more sober establishment of delegates determined to nominate the first major-party woman presidential candidate, and the usual entourage of demonstrators and journalists.

Philadelphia, a city of over 1.5 million (5th largest in the U.S.), has a compact downtown, but the convention venue, Wells Fargo Center, where the NBA 76ers and NHL Flyers play, is over seven miles south of the Center City, so there was not the close mixture of convention delegates, protesters, journalists, and the general public that Cleveland enjoyed for the RNC.

On the convention's opening day, a large contingent of Sanders supporters staged a noontime march down the seven-plus miles of Broad Street from City Hall to Wells Fargo Center; they were joined by a miscellany of protesters advocating for or against a variety of causes, some related and some unrelated to the DNC meeting. This reporter saw them off at City Hall, then took the subway to greet them at the convention venue when they arrived later in the day.

Across from Wells Fargo Center is Philadelphia's extensive Franklin D. Roosevelt Park, where convention organizers and the Philadelphia police sought to concentrate protesters by setting up shade covers and tables with free bottled water (welcome oases in the hot and humid July weather) and phalanxes of temporary restrooms throughout the park. Many people pitched tents in the park, giving it the look and feel of an Occupy encampment from a couple of years ago. The "main stage" set up in the park was also reminiscent of Occupy, except that this stage came complete with a sound system.

When the Broad Street marchers arrived from City Hall that afternoon, many of them assembled en masse around the Wells Fargo Center/ FDR Park subway station. They reached such a mass that the police thought it necessary to mass in response, and between

SPECIAL BULLET ISSUE FOR 2016 ELECTIONS

Lauren Bon and the Metabolic Studio, who installed and maintained the *Strawberry Flag* art project at the West Los Angeles VA in 2009/2010 and more recently published the *Strawberry Bulletin* newspaper for military veterans and the arts community in 2011/2013, present this one-shot, one-sheet *Strawberry Bulletin* on the occasion of the national political conventions and presidential election of 2016.

Since the *Bulletin* ceased regular publication in 2013, the Studio has published occasional *Bulletins* from time to time, generally on the 1888 Deed Anniversary in March, Independence Day in July, and Veterans Day in November. In this extraordinary presidential election year, the Studio sent its veterans news correspondent to Cleveland and Philadelphia in July to cover events in those cities during the Republican and Democratic National Conventions.

Although he was not credentialed to cover events on the convention floors, our correspondent wandered the convention cities to report what was happening in the streets, on the buses, in the taverns and the parks. Herewith are as many of his thoughts and observations as we could squeeze onto this two-page one-sheet *Bullet*.

the two masses, they shut down the station.

Protests and speeches continued throughout the week, both inside and outside the convention hall. On Thursday, this reporter sought refuge in Old City, home to Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell, the military museum in New Hall (which it is not), and the like. A thunderstorm drove me indoors to City Tavern, where the Founding Fathers repaired after working long days at Independence Hall (and probably accomplished as much productive work). At the next table sat a 20-something Sanders supporter also seeking refuge from the rain. Reflecting on the events of the week and the whole campaign leading up to it, he said, "You know, I think I've had enough with all this protesting. I'm just going to run for office myself the next time around."

RNC Report from Cleveland

The 2016 Republican National Convention (RNC) completely occupied the city of Cleveland during July 18-21 this summer. This reporter remembers Cleveland as an industrial giant on the shores of Lake Erie, one of the ten largest U.S. cities in the 1950s and 1960s (it had been fifth in 1920). Today, Cleveland is the 48th largest city in the U.S.—second-largest city in Ohio (to Columbus), and second-largest metropolitan area in Ohio (to Cincinnati).

With less than 400,000 citizens, Cleveland hosted more than 50,000 visitors for the RNC—nearly 5,000 delegates and alternates, 15,000 credentialed journalists, over 11,000 "registered" demonstrators, and thousands more demonstrators not registered and journalists not credentialed.

But the city that had been in a decades-long decline has been on the comeback trail, and was clearly ready for the RNC, even the Donald Trump RNC. Civic engagement centered on Public Square, which had reopened from a thorough renovation within a couple of weeks before the convention. Within a comfortable walk was Quicken Loans Arena ("The Q"), home to the NBA-champion Cavaliers as well as the 2016 RNC, as well as major league baseball's Progressive Field and the NFL FirstEnergy Stadium. Then too, there was the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, a doable hike from Public Square.

The compactness of downtown Cleveland, including its public spaces, made it an exciting place for convention delegates, protesters of every stripe, an ocean of journalists (who outnumbered both delegates and protesters, perhaps combined), and the general public to rub shoulders. What appeared to be excellent event management made Cleveland a secure place as well. (See "Friendly Cops" story on back page.)

All manner of protesters descended upon Cleveland during the convention, from Trump detractors who played off his "Make America Great Again" slogan by chanting, "2-4-6-8, America was never great" to the Westboro Baptist Church people who show up to spread their fundamentalist Christian mes-

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The Irony of So Many Friendly Cops

Amid the dark days of police/community relations this summer, the experience in Cleveland at the Republican National Convention (RNC) was a relief and a joy to behold.

In the days and weeks leading up to the July 18-21 convention, the atmosphere of suspicion, distrust, and outright antagonism that had been building since the Ferguson (St. Louis) events of August 2014 had erupted in police shootings in Dallas and Baton Rouge—shootings *of* police, not shootings *by* police.

Cleveland expected 50,000 visitors for the

RNC Report

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sage wherever there are large crowds. There were even theatrical performers doing Protest Comedy in Public Square, a citizen clown act; perhaps it is an idea whose time has come: protest demonstrations as an entertainment event. Among their signs: “Morning People Are Beasts.”

Unlike the Republican convention four years ago in Tampa, where law enforcement officers from all over the country wore identical khaki uniforms with only their shoulder patches to identify their home agencies, the police on convention duty in Cleveland all wore their regular local uniforms. This native garb promoted conversation among the cops, protesters, and general public, and contributed to the air of good feeling that prevailed.

Overheard on a downtown trolley bus: An older couple, Trump people from Chicago, talking with a twenty-something Cleveland native. The couple told him how much they were liking Cleveland. The young man was clearly not a Trump fan, but was holding his tongue and being a proper host. The Chicago man decried the society of dependency that America has become, meaning welfare. The young man, who was raised in The Projects, generally agreed, but pointed out that anyone can fall on hard times and need some temporary help. He added that breaking “the cycle” of poverty/dependency required that Opportunity be provided to the less fortunate, and the Chicago man agreed, claiming that Trump was all about opportunity.

Who says civility is dead? This was one of the most civil conversations this reporter has heard. Very different people going out of their way to “accentuate the positive” and get along.

convention. And the Cleveland police department was under a federal consent decree to reduce the use of excessive force and to improve community relations. Many people were edgy.

There were 5,500 law enforcement officers assigned to convention duty, including federal officers, out-of-state police/troopers, and 500 Cleveland police, many on foot patrol, horseback, and bicycles. Downtown Cleveland was awash in cops.

Perhaps because of the recent events in Dallas and Baton Rouge, the public—including the protesters—welcomed the police warmly: expressions of appreciation, thumbs-up, even high-fives, and a myriad of thank yous and urgings to stay safe. These spontaneous overtures clearly heartened the officers. This reporter has never seen so many friendly cops.

An Indiana State Trooper complimented a sidewalk band on their sound, and then sat in with them at their invitation. A Cleveland motorcycle cop invited passersby to sit on his chopper and took their pictures with their cell phones (though he did examine this reporter’s lapel buttons to make sure he was not promoting subversive causes). Two pedestrians offered an “O-H” to a couple of Michigan State Police officers on a street corner; the officers responded the way any good Buckeye would, with an “I-O.”

It was certainly remarkable and a bit ironic that citizens and law enforcement officers seemed to genuinely appreciate the give and take that made Cleveland a safer place during an unprecedented week.



Seen in Cleveland: This protester on Euclid Avenue expressed a sentiment to which one observer responded, “Apparently not.”



As readers who follow this space know, we generally report on the progress and status of Building 209, promised for housing homeless vets. For this special 2016 election issue, we turn our attention instead to the impact of military veterans on this year’s election.

According to Bloomberg Politics, “Active duty personnel, veterans, and their families are the second-largest voting bloc after Hispanics, and the only group that consistently votes Republican.” And within the memory of most American voters, our presidents have generally been military vets – since Harry Truman, only Bill Clinton and Barack Obama did not serve at least in the reserves.

This election year, neither major-party candidate is a veteran, although both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump are courting the military/veteran vote. After both candidates brought their campaign messages to the American Legion the last week in August, the PBS NewsHour reported that “polls show Trump leading the veteran vote by double digits, but when veterans are asked who they feel would be most supportive of them, the candidates are even.”

Beyond generalized statements of support for military personnel and veterans, neither candidate has announced a particularly clear message on veterans issues. Rather, their campaigns have been marked by what they have said or done to offend veterans – Hillary by her role in the Benghazi affair, and by her remarks that media criticism of the VA is exaggerated; and Trump by his denigration of John McCain as a war hero only because he was captured, and by his attack on the Gold Star family of Army Captain Humayun Khan.

And so, when it comes to the outlook of military veterans on this year’s election, it seems to be much the same as it is with the population generally – America can do better, but didn’t.

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