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Style

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CAMPAIGN 2008

Democrats' Convention Pool: Is It All Wet?

Bloggers Say DNC List Lacks Racial Diversity

By JOSE ANTONIO VARGAS
Washington Post Staff Writer

Forget the row over RFK, the latest superdelegate tally or Saturday's sure-to-be contentious meeting of the Rules and Bylaws Committee.

With the Democratic National Convention less than three months away, and with Web pundits playing an even bigger role during the four-day event, a whole other drama is chewing up the blogosphere — and the often unmentioned Afrosphere.

A small taste of the commentary:

"OK, folks, black bloggers to the back of the bus," read one post on the African American Political Pundit, one of the more prominent national black blogs. A posting on Georgia Politics Unfiltered, a state blog, read: "Jim Crow raises his ugly head... at the Democratic Convention."

The protracted primary has been like a bottomless glass to thirsty national and local bloggers — so much to blog about! — and about 400 of them have applied to attend the convention. Although four years ago the credentialing of 30 bloggers in a single pool was a historic event, this August there are two blogger pools: a State Blogger Corps and a General Blogger Pool.

The State Corps is considered the more elite; its 55 bloggers will have floor access all four days, sit next to their state delegations and be hooked up to the Internet. Those not chosen for the State Corps are competing for spots in the General Pool, which will

See BLOGGERS, C2, Col. 1

The Magazine Reader

Looking at 12 Years Between the Covers

By PETER CARLSON
Washington Post Staff Writer

Last week, the cover of Us Weekly screamed in big yellow type "The Plot to Destroy Lauren," and my first reaction was, "Oh, no, they can't destroy Lauren."

My second reaction was, "Who the hell is Lauren?"

It wasn't the first time I was utterly baffled by a magazine cover since I started writing this column,

but it turned out to be the last. That's because this is my final Magazine Reader column. I'm taking The Post's early retirement buyout and heading off to pursue other interests, such as sloth and gin.

For nearly 12 years, I've been paid real American money to read magazines and write about them. During those years I've pondered the glories of magazines ranging from Life to Sounds of Death, from

Reason to Paranoia, from George to Jane, from Spy to Sly, from Good Dog! to Murder Dog, from New Beauty to New Witch, from Modern Maturity to Modern Ferret to Modern Drunkard.

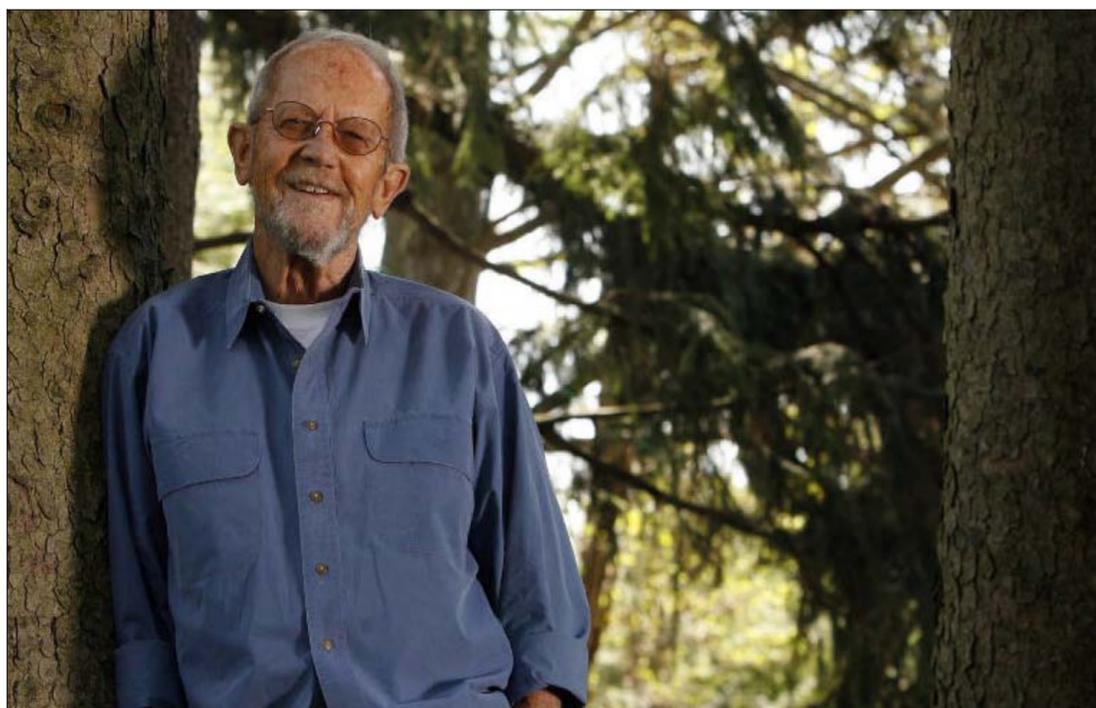
And let's not forget Wrapped in

See MAGAZINE, C8, Col. 4

After more than a decade reporting on magazines, some things never change. Baffling covers, for one.



Beneath Elmore Leonard's Cool Exterior Lurks a Crime-Novel Mastermind



BY JEFFREY SAUGER FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The author of "Get Shorty," "3:10 to Yuma" and many other novels will receive this year's F. Scott Fitzgerald Award for Achievement in American Literature.

A Blast of Bullets

By NEELY TUCKER
Washington Post Staff Writer

BLOOMFIELD VILLAGE, Mich. Dutch Leonard, standing over by the typewriter. He's saying to Christine in this loud voice, "Christine!" Calling up the stairs. They're going to be late for dinner.

Christine used to be the gardener. Now she's the missus.

Dutch and Christine Lelich know a lot about life, which is one reason it's good. Even when bad things happen they understand that it's just the way it is sometimes; they're at that stage.

Like, they got cleaned out the other day, while

they were down at the other house in Palm Beach, Fla. About \$15,000 worth of stuff.

It was no big mystery. The thieves used a key. Took jewelry, clothes, Christine's unmentionables. Left the electronics. Who are the cops going to think did it, two guys with a U-Haul and a party fetish? It was the maids. They fired the maids.

You'd expect a little more creativity from the criminal class, particularly when they break into a crime novelist's house.

But it's the kind of idea Dutch could use, people that stupid.

"I never had a really brilliant idea," he is saying, coming back into the room. His name is Elmore, but people call him by his high school

nickname. "A really great story idea that keeps readers turning the pages. And I just never had one. I always came up with stuff that I'd say, 'Oh, I guess I could make a book about that.'"

Dutch sits down to wait for Christine. He's watching the Tigers on the TV. They're down by two in the first. Dutch has been writing the great quirky endlessly entertaining endlessly violent American novel for half a century, mostly right here in this room, over there at the desk with an unlined yellow legal pad and a typewriter. Some 43 novels, who knows how many short stories and screenplays. He's been hailed as the "greatest living crime novelist," "the king of crime,"

See LEONARD, C2, Col. 1



BY LEAH L. JONES

Dolora Zajick in a riveting performance as Santuzza in Washington National Opera's "Cavalleria Rusticana."

Opera

Mezzo-Soprano's Glorious Debut Lifts 'Cavalleria'

By ANNE MIDGETTE
Washington Post Staff Writer

Dolora Zajick, 56, has long been the reigning American mezzo-soprano. She is a fixture at the Metropolitan Opera, where she is unequaled in the major Verdi roles (Amneris, Azucena, even Eboli).

We must pause here as fans of Olga Borodina rise up in protest. Calm down, people. Borodina is fine in these roles, but for my money, Saint-Saens's Delilah is a better fit for her. But, counter my conveniently fictional Borodina fans, Zajick just pumps out sound without much dramatic inflection.

This has been one segment of the conventional wisdom about Zajick for far too long. And Sunday afternoon's concert performance of "Cavalleria Rusticana," in which Zajick made her astonishingly late debut at the Washington National Opera, showed that it is just plain wrong. Anyone who has hitherto failed to "get" Zajick should be invited — no, forced! — to hear this "Cavalleria," which repeats once

See OPERA, C8, Col. 1

Recordings

Usher's Sensuous Storytelling Matures in 'Stand'



By SERENA KIM
Special to The Washington Post

In the crowded field of abdomen-undulating R&B boychiks, Usher has long been king, thanks to his tender and nimble vocals. But since his Grammy-winning 2004 album, "Confessions," with its plotlines worthy of a telenovela, he's weathered even more major personal changes: breakups, makeups, one wedding and the birth

of his first child.

Catapulted firmly into manhood, Usher now revisits the booty-shaking, babymaking content of his material with a more confident and relaxed cool that smacks of — could it be? — maturity.

Bookended by a heartfelt prelude that sounds like a love letter to his wife and a socially conscious hidden end track that ex-

See RECORDINGS, C5, Col. 2

■ ALSO REVIEWED: New releases from Wale, Al Green and Spiritualized, plus Singles File. | C5

BY GUS RUELAS — ASSOCIATED PRESS



TOP 10 FILMS
'Indiana Jones' Climbs Atop the Box Office Hill | C7

THE RELIABLE SOURCE Grilling puts some sizzle in McCain's weekend | C3 »

BOOK WORLD Finding one's way in the work world | C8

KIDSPOST Veterinarian's life has warm and furry moments | C12



ARTS, C5 • ASK AMY, C7 • BRIDGE, C10 • CAROLYN HAX, C8 • COMICS, C9-11 • CROSSWORD, C9-10 • KIDSPOST, C12 • SU/DO/KU, C11 • TELEVISION, C6

Online Today » Media Backtalk with Howard Kurtz | Noon » Station Break with Paul Farhi on pop culture | 1 p.m. » Freedom Rock with pop music critic J. Freedom du Lac | 2 p.m. »

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At 82, Crime Master Still Makes Killer Lines Look Easy

LEONARD, From C1

"the Dickens of Detroit."

He has helped shape an entire body of literature and cinema. He has become, in these later years, an iconic cultural reference point: Any quirky violent crime story with punchy dialogue is Dutchesque. When the new version of the video game Grand Theft Auto came out recently, the New York Times said its street patois could "rival Elmore Leonard's." "Pulp Fiction" is the best Elmore Leonard film not written by Elmore Leonard; director Quentin Tarantino acknowledged a "big debt" to him when the film came out. The New Yorker reviewed the Oscar-winning "No Country for Old Men," and said, "If I want wry lawmen and smart, calculating fugitives, I'll get them from Elmore Leonard." (His own books have been turned into films since God was a baby: "Get Shorty," "Jackie Brown," "Out of Sight," "3:10 to Yuma," "Hombre," "Mr. Majestik.")

You sit down and wait on Christine, too. You expect a guy with this kind of career to come across as the love child of Joe Eszterhas and Mickey Spillane, spewing ego all over your shirt. Instead you get this skinny guy, little chicken legs, not tall, soft-spoken but funny. He's wearing shorts, for God's sake. T-shirt. Light beard. Says he's 82, but moves around like he's 20 years short of it.

"The second-worst movie ever made," he's saying, "is the first version of 'The Big Bounce.' God, it was awful." This was a book he wrote back in the 1960s that was indeed made into a terrible movie. He pauses to inhale from a Virginia Slim. "The worst movie ever made was the second version of 'The Big Bounce.' I met Morgan Freeman on the set; he's a good actor, I like him, I asked him what he was doing there. He said, 'Well, I'm the law guy.' And I said 'No, not your role. I mean, what are you doing in this thing?'"

Dutch lives in suburban Detroit, but his world is off-kilter America, primarily a vision of the lower end of the post-Vietnam era, when the margins got thin, the morals of the nation got cloudy, and irony became a survival mechanism. It's populated by cops who aren't exactly good, crooks who aren't exactly bad, and women who have an eye for the in-between. There is no judgment. Bad guys don't know they're bad. They brush their teeth and call their moms and then go rob a bank. Cynicism is on view, as is a vast detailing of bars, alcohol, prison cells, loan-sharking operations and gun runners. There is usually a lot of cash in a small container. People get shot. Self-confidence is a requirement. It's a place where getting dead isn't funny, but if this lounge singer shoots a would-be rapist and the bullet goes through him and hits her detective boyfriend right in the butt, well, you have to see the humor in the situation.

"This one time, he ran into a bull semen salesman at an opera," says Greg Sutter, his researcher of 25 years. "A bull semen salesman! At an opera! You think Dutch Leonard is going to let that go by?" (No. See "Mr. Paradise.")

In October, Leonard will receive the 2008 F. Scott Fitzgerald Award for Achievement in American Literature, from the Fitzgerald Literary Conference in Rockville. Some previous winners: Norman Mailer, E.L. Doctorow, Joyce Carol Oates, John Updike, Jane Smiley and William Kennedy. Books by some of those: "The Naked and the Dead," "Ragtime," "Rabbit Is Rich," "A Thousand Acres," "Ironweed."

Hey. Wait a minute. This is good fun, Grand Theft Auto and all, but when did bull semen salesman get to be art?

Leonard isn't Raymond Chandler, the designated crime writer allowed to perch upon Mount Literature. He was a copy writer for an ad agency who started writing for pulp western magazines in the 1950s, getting up at 5 a.m. to crank out a couple of pages before work. He didn't have a best-seller for 30 years.

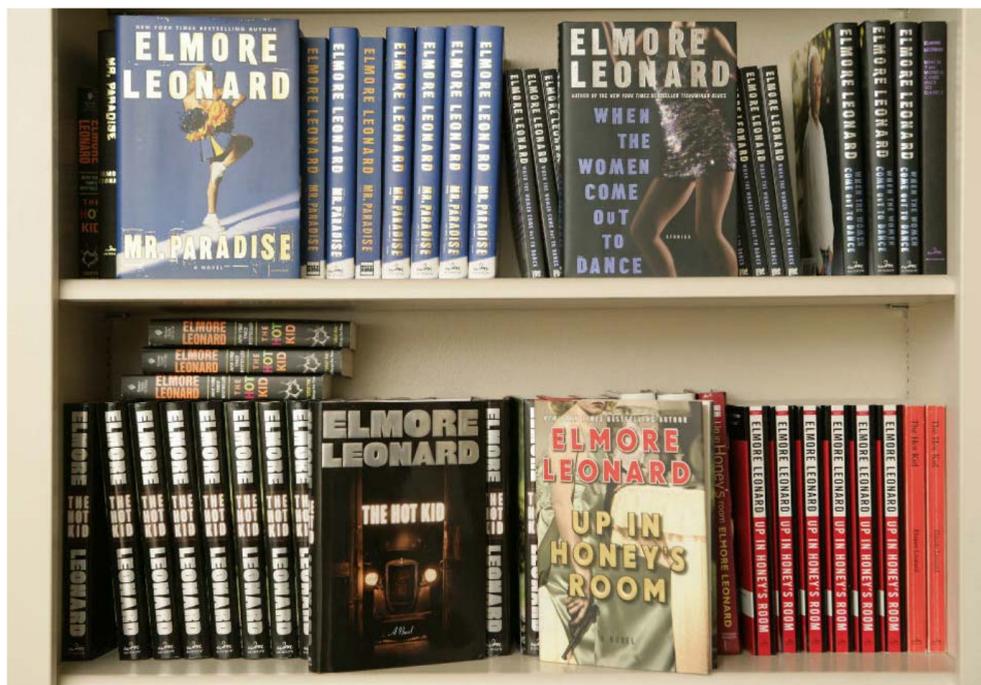
"It came down, on the final ballot, to Elmore and John Irving," says John Moser, the conference president. "Elmore won."

Dutch himself is elated to get the award but pretty unimpressed by it all.

"Lately I've been getting more acknowledgment that I'm a literary writer, not a pulp writer," he says. He stands up. Christine has come down for dinner. He has that sneaky grin. "But I don't know how many people really believe that."

Few Clues of Celebrity

Walk through his house, a two-story thing on a nice-but-not-ostentatious street in this leafy 'burbs, and you'll be hard-pressed to know you are in the house of a writer, much less a famous one. He works at a regular desk with an IBM Wheelwriter 1000 typewriter at the side. It's in a nice room with some wooden bookcases and a television at one end. He doesn't own a computer. Then there's a family room with pictures of his five kids and 13 grandkids



PHOTOS BY JEFFREY SAUGER FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Elmore "Dutch" Leonard's office is scaled down: Bookcases that hold his novels, along with a desk, a TV, a typewriter — but no computer.

and three great-grandchildren and a lovely oil portrait of Christine. The kitchen opens onto a sunroom, and there's the back yard with 40-foot fir trees and a small swimming pool and a tennis court with a sagging net.

He drives a VW Jetta. There is no glory wall, no photographs of him with stars in his movies: Cheadle, Clooney, De Niro, Eastwood, J-Lo, Newman, Travolta. He doesn't go to the Oscars. Until you get to the "business room," a tiny thing off a hallway with the garage with a couple of bookcases lined with copies of his books, the only sign he's in the business is in a wet bar off the kitchen: the iconic Annie Leibovitz photograph of him on a hard-backed chair on Miami Beach, all in black, wearing a beret and typing away.

He looks cooler than you could ever hope to be.

"One time when I was a kid, I picked up the phone. This lady said, 'I have Clint Eastwood calling for Mr. Leonard,'" says his son Bill, an ad agency executive who now lives just a few blocks over. "I said, very calmly, 'Dad, Clint Eastwood is calling from California.' Everybody screamed. We kids ran to the other room and unscrewed the mouthpiece so we could listen in. . . . He was completely unassuming about Hollywood. He'd say, 'They're just people.' Aerosmith — the whole band — came over to his house a few years ago. They all went swimming."

This evening, he and Christine go to dinner a mile or so from his house. He gives the maitre d' his name for the reservation. Goes right over the guy's head. He tells Dutch he's late and he's missed his spot and he'll just have to wait some more. Dutch, who could buy the restaurant, doesn't say anything. He and Christine just stand there, looking like a couple of nice retirees, and then Christine flags a waitress she knows, and this lady gets them a booth.

It's like going out with the egoless Zen master.

He was born in New Orleans in 1925, the son of a General Motors executive. They moved around — Memphis, Dallas, Oklahoma City — before settling in Detroit. He liked westerns and Bonnie-and-Clyde kind of stories. He worshiped Hemingway, liked that spare copy and all the white space on the page.

He did his time in the Navy and married his college sweetheart, Beverly Cline.

He put in his years of writing at 5 a.m. He sold "3:10 to Yuma." Sold "Hombre." There were five kids and long family vacations down to Pompano Beach, Fla., where the kids would play in the water and the parents would drink bloody marys.

"Every Sunday we'd come home from church, all in the sta-

tion wagon, and we'd go by this trailer park," remembers Chris Leonard, born the year his dad published his first book, "The Bounty Hunters," in 1954. "And every Sunday, without fail, he'd say, 'There's our future home if Dad doesn't sell a book.'"

Dad also became extremely fond of Early Times bourbon over shaved ice.

One day in the early 1970s, Dutch came back from one trip to Los Angeles — where he might go through 20 drinks in a day — and started throwing up blood. It was acute gastritis. His doctor told him this was usually seen in "skid row bums." He found himself arguing with his wife "every single night," with him saying "vicious things, which I couldn't believe the next day. I'd be filled with remorse."

He moved alone into the Merrillwood Apartments, where he lived and wrote and went to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and tried to stop drinking for another three years. "I was flat broke." The book he was working on, "Unknown Man #89," was rejected by 105 publishers before finding a home.

"It was a very difficult time," remembers Bill Leonard.

The couple divorced in 1977, the year he had his last drink — Scotch and Vernors ginger ale one morning while shaving.

There is a way that recovered alcoholics have of looking at the world — beginning, say, about an hour and half after the last drink — that is a straight ahead take on life. The absolute beat-down of denial. The reservoir of belief in a higher power.

This is what Elmore Leonard found. His characters took on some of that same self-confidence.

He met his second wife, Joan Lancaster, at a country club. He got rich and famous, and she came up with the title for "Get Shorty," and they were happy, and because life can be cruel, she died of cancer in 1993. Alone in the house, he hired a gardening service to take care of the shrubs and such. They sent Christine, a master gardener. They married a few months later. She's 23

years younger. Then Christine's daughter was killed by a drunk driver. Her name was Geraldine. The guy went to jail, but it didn't matter much. It was devastating.

"It's still just unbelievable," Christine is saying. "It's like being handicapped."

Leonard deals with all this so far out of the public eye that nobody knows. He's been pushing out one well-reviewed book every year for so many years that it seems effortless.

"I'm doing exactly what I want to do. There is no better situation. I sit and look out the window when I'm writing away; I look out, and I don't believe it. I'm sitting here all by myself, doing this story, getting all excited about it and getting paid for it — a lot of money. I'm not bending to a certain commercial way to fit a commercial need. I can't do that. I have to do it my way, and thank God, it's salable."

You want to know something about Elmore Leonard, what it would be like to be stuck with him on an elevator for a couple of hours, here it is: Leonard wrote the preceding paragraph in the early 1980s as a contribution to "The Courage to Change," a book by and for recovering alcoholics.

It was before he hit the bestseller list and became a household name.

Everything else has been gravy. He loves his kids and they love him. He gets paid millions of dollars. He just finished his latest book, "Road Dogs." Now he's hanging around the house, revising the book.

"I just don't know many writers who are as loose, as mellow, as Dutch," Sutter says. "It's not like he's one of these literary guys sitting there with the weight of the world on their shoulders, going 'God, I've got to be profound!' Or one of those tragic noir types. He has an Ozzie Nelson-like calm about him."

'Two Guys in a Room'

He still writes as he always has, from 9 to 6, on an unlined yellow pad, then typing up a scene when he likes it. He never has an outline. He thinks of, say, "two guys in a room, talking," usually about some criminal endeavor, and lets them "audition" for leading roles. He shapes them by intense research — in 1978, he hung out with the Detroit police's homicide squad, an experience that shaped the rest of his writing — and then lets them wander deeper into trouble.

Any passage sounds like "writing," he rewrites it. This nets two to four pages a day. The next morning, he'll read over those pages and "add cigarettes and drinks and things like that" and press forward.

He is not obsessed by crime, says an opinion-

ionist about crime in America. Maid theft notwithstanding, he has almost no life experience with it.

Sutter's research fills a box for each book. What cops do each day, books on prison culture and slang. The boxes are kept in the basement. Inside, there's a regular schoolboy's notebook, 80 pages. It's the "skinny" for each book, or his essential notes. These are filled with possible character names, addresses of banks that get robbed, snippets of dialogue, and facts like the population of Miami and the number of autopsies performed each year in Detroit.

For "Up in Honey's Room," one of his most recent books, there are Hitler jokes. Hitler asks a fortuneteller when he'll die. "On a Jewish holiday." Which one, asks Hitler. "Any day you die is a Jewish holiday."

He always has an ear for speech patterns, phrases. Like how a call comes in for a detective in Detroit homicide, and they'll say, "He's on the street." A guy so dumb that if he was any dumber, "they'd have to water him twice a week."

Walker Percy, writing in the New York Times more than 20 years ago, noted that in Leonard's books, violence was so off-hand that "people get shot in dependent clauses." And that he drops the word "if" at the beginning of sentences and uses hardly any conjunctions: "I had a tire iron we could find out in ten minutes." Note the missing "if" and comma. Percy said it was worthy of a graduate thesis.

Barry Sonnenfeld, the first director to figure out Leonard's dark humor ("Get Shorty"), says his books are "medium camera-shot" stuff with no close-ups for punch lines, no cues to the audience something funny just happened.

"There was a scene in a book of his ('Bandits') where this guy tells a bartender something like, 'You know, every year 100,000 women get battered by their husbands.' Bartender says, 'You wouldn't think that many women get out of line.' In the script, it called for the bartender to say that with a wink. Elmore said, 'No! The bartender would know that he's making a joke.'"

The joke, see, is that the bartender is the stupid one.

"His writing seems effortless, and sometimes people think that it is," says George Pelecanos, the D.C.-based crime novelist often mentioned as Leonard's heir apparent. "Sometimes you'll hear people say, 'I read an Elmore Leonard book, and I just don't get what the fuss is about.' You just try it sometime. Try it, buddy. Nobody's been able to duplicate it."

Right on Target

Here's what Dutch doesn't do: go cosmic, not even at the end. He keeps it spare. He'll let you figure out what happens next, because that's what life is like.

Let's look at two endings here. First, here's the deity himself, Ray Chandler, at the end of "The Big Sleep," one of his signature works.

Private eye Philip Marlowe, musing about homicide:

"What did it matter where you lay once you were dead? In a dirty sump or in a marble tower on top of a high hill? You were dead, you were sleeping the big sleep . . . you just slept the big sleep, not caring about the nastiness of how you died or where you fell . . ."

Life. Death. Deep think. Now here's the end of "Glitz," a terrific Leonard book from 1985.

Vincent Mora, a weathered Miami police detective, is hospitalized with a gunshot wound. It was incurred when he and his girlfriend, a lounge singer named Linda, were confronted by a very bad man named Teddy. All of them were armed, with Linda holding one of Mora's guns. Lots of gunfire. The bad guy died. Mora nearly did, and has just come out of surgery:

"Vincent, there's something I have to tell you." He waited and she said, "You know the bullet they took out of your butt?"

He said, "Oh, no, you better not tell me." "I have to," Linda said. "It was from your gun, not Teddy's. I guess it went right through him."

He took a moment, breathed in and out, settled. "It will do that."

"I shot you, Vincent."

"You didn't mean to."

"No, but I shot you. I want you to understand, it wasn't to get you to stay."

Vincent said, "Oh." He said, "Are you sure?"

That's it. That's the end. Gunshots, dead men, bloody wounds, dames with nice legs but lousy aim, irony and affection. Dutch Leonard's America.

Neely Tucker was the basis and namesake for the "Neely Tucker" character in "Cuba Libre."

A Question of Blogger Diversity at the Approaching Democratic Convention

BLOGGERS, From C1

week.

Natalie Wyeth, spokeswoman for the convention committee, says criteria for selecting State Corps bloggers were readership, online ratings and focus on local and state politics. The General Pool will also be selected on the basis of readership and online ratings, she adds, with an emphasis on bloggers covering "national politics to niche issues of interest to specific communities."

Race was not a factor in the selection of the State Corps, Wyeth repeatedly says.

But, to the frustration of black bloggers, the list appears to be mostly white — dur-

ing a primary race in which black voters turned out in droves in Georgia, South Carolina and Mississippi. And, they add, this pool is for coverage of a convention that might very well see the first African American presidential nominee.

In other words, this constitutes convention drama and, rightly or wrongly, people are getting called out, e-mails are being exchanged, accountability is being demanded. Francis L. Holland, one of the vocal black bloggers, sent e-mails to DNC officials asking that 15 black-operated blogs be added to the State Corps. "There is nothing 'Democratic' about an all-white Democratic National Convention floor blogging corps," he wrote in an e-mail.

L.N. Rock, a Silver Spring-based information technology professional and founder of the African American Political Pundit blog, likens this "black shut-out" in the State Corps to an "I'm sick-and-tired-of-being-sick-and-tired" Fannie Lou Hamer moment. The civil rights activist and Mississippian challenged her state's all-white delegation at the 1964 Democratic convention.

"This is all very puzzling to me — and to a lot of black bloggers," says Rock, who didn't apply for the State Corps because he blogs about national issues. "The Democratic National Committee says it wants to be inclusive. It wants to have a big tent. And then *this*? What were they thinking?"

It's a complicated — and sensitive — issue. For all its openness and accessibility, the Web can be a segregated, isolated place. You read what you want to read, you link on what you want to link on, Take Hollywood gossip. There's PerezHilton.com, the reigning king of celeb dish, but there's also TheYBF.com, short for Young, Black & Fabulous, one of the must-click-on black celeb sites.

In the growing political Web, many of the most popular liberal blogs — save for DailyKos, created by Markos "Kos" Moulitsas Zúniga, whose heritage is in part Latino — are run by white men, as was evident at last year's YearlyKos blogapalooza, the gathering of the who's who of the netroots

crowd. It's not because the blogosphere is racist, bloggers say, but because, at about five years old, it is still evolving.

D. Yobachi Boswell, a black blogger in Nashville, applied for the State Corps pool but didn't make it. He says he doesn't have a problem with the Tennessee blogger that was chosen, KnoxViews.com. He hadn't heard of it before — "Our spheres of blogging don't collide," he says — and he can't name another black-operated blog in his state besides his own, BlackPerspective.net.

"This is a historic moment," Boswell says. "Everyone wants a part of it."

He's waiting to see if he gets into the General Pool.