

## Stop Drinking The Kool-Aid, America: Political Fiction In An Age Of Televised Lies

By John WHITEHEAD (1)

“We’ve got to face it. Politics have entered a new stage, the television stage. Instead of long-winded public debates, the people want capsule slogans - ‘Time for a change’ - ‘The mess in Washington’ - ‘More bang for a buck’ - punch lines and glamour.” -- *A Face in the Crowd* (1957)

### Politics is entertainment.

It is a heavily scripted, tightly choreographed, star-studded, ratings-driven, mass-marketed, [costly](#) exercise in how to sell a product - in this case, a presidential candidate - to dazzled **consumers who will choose image over substance almost every time.**

This year’s presidential election, much like every other election in recent years, is what historian Daniel Boorstin referred to as a “[pseudo-event](#)”: manufactured, contrived, confected and devoid of any intrinsic value save the value of being advertised. **It is the end result of a culture that is moving away from substance toward sensationalism in an era of mass media.**

As author Noam Chomsky rightly [observed](#), “**It is important to bear in mind that political campaigns are designed by the same people who sell toothpaste and cars.**” In other words, we’re being sold a [carefully crafted product](#) by a monied elite who are masters in the art of making the public believe that they need exactly what is being sold to them, whether it’s the latest high-tech gadget, the hottest toy, or the most charismatic politician.

Tune into a political convention and you will find yourself being sucked into an alternate reality so glossy, star-studded, emotionally charged and entertaining as to make you forget that you live in a police state. The elaborate stage show, the costumes, the actors, the screenplay, the lighting, the music, the drama: all carefully calibrated to appeal to the public’s need for bread and circuses, diversion and entertainment, and pomp and circumstance.

**Politics is a reality show, America’s favorite form of entertainment, dominated by money and profit, imagery and spin, hype and personality and guaranteed to ensure that nothing in the way of real truth reaches the populace.**

After all, who cares about police shootings, drone killings, SWAT team raids, asset forfeiture schemes, private prisons, school-to-prison pipelines, overcriminalization, censorship or any of the other evils that plague our nation when you can [listen to the croonings of Paul Simon](#), laugh along with Sarah Silverman, and get misty-eyed over the First Lady’s vision of progress in America.

**But make no mistake: Americans only think they're choosing the next president.**

In truth, however, they're engaging in the illusion of participation culminating in the reassurance ritual of voting. It's just another [Blue Pill](#), a manufactured reality conjured up by the matrix in order to keep the populace compliant and convinced that their vote counts and that they still have some influence over the political process.

**Stop drinking the Kool-Aid, America.**

**The nation is drowning in debt, crippled by a slowing economy, overrun by militarized police, swarming with surveillance, besieged by endless wars and a military industrial complex intent on starting new ones, and riddled with corrupt politicians at every level of government. All the while, we're arguing over which corporate puppet will be given the honor of stealing our money, invading our privacy, abusing our trust, undermining our freedoms, and shackling us with debt and misery for years to come.**

Nothing taking place on Election Day will alleviate the suffering of the American people.

**The government as we have come to know it - corrupt, bloated and controlled by big-money corporations, lobbyists and special interest groups - will remain unchanged.** And "we the people" - overtaxed, overpoliced, overburdened by big government, underrepresented by those who should speak for us and blissfully ignorant of the prison walls closing in on us - will continue to trudge along a path of misery.

With roughly **22 lobbyists per Congressman**, corporate greed will continue to call the shots in the nation's capital, [while our elected representatives will grow richer](#) and the people poorer. And elections will continue to be driven by war chests and corporate benefactors rather than such values as honesty, integrity and public service. Just consider: it's estimated that [more than \\$5 billion will be spent on the elections this year](#), yet not a dime of that money will actually help the average American in their day-to-day struggles to just get by.

And the military industrial complex will continue to bleed us dry. Since 2001 Americans have spent [\\$10.5 million every hour](#) for numerous foreign military occupations, including in Iraq and Afghanistan. There's also the [\\$2.2 million spent every hour](#) on maintaining the United States' nuclear stockpile, and the [\\$35,000 spent every hour](#) to produce and maintain our collection of Tomahawk missiles. And then there's the money the government exports to other countries to support their arsenals, at the cost of [\\$1.61 million every hour for the American taxpayers](#).

Then again, when faced with the grim, seemingly hopeless reality of the American police state, it's understandable why Americans might opt for escapism. "Humankind cannot bear too much reality," T. S. Eliot once said. Perhaps that is one reason we are so drawn to the unreality of the American political experience: it is spectacle and fiction and farce all rolled up into one glossy dose of escapism.

**Frankly, escapism or not, Americans should be mad as hell.**

Many of our politicians live like kings. Chauffeured around in limousines, flying in

private jets and eating gourmet meals, all paid for by the American taxpayer, they are far removed from those they represent. Such a luxurious lifestyle makes it difficult to identify with the “little guy” - the roofers, plumbers and blue-collar workers who live from paycheck to paycheck and keep the country running with their hard-earned dollars and the sweat of their brows.

Conveniently, politicians only seem to remember their constituents in the months leading up to an election, and yet “we the people” continue to take the abuse, the neglect, the corruption and the lies. We make excuses for the shoddy treatment, we cover up for them when they cheat on us, and we keep hoping that if we just stick with them long enough, eventually they’ll treat us right.

### **People get the government they deserve.**

No matter who wins the presidential election come November, it’s a sure bet that the losers will be the American people.

As political science professor Gene Sharp notes in starker terms, “Dictators are not in the business of allowing elections that could remove them from their thrones.” As I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#), the Establishment—the shadow government and its corporate partners that really run the show, pull the strings and dictate the policies, no matter who occupies the Oval Office - are not going to allow anyone to take office who will unravel their power structures. Those who have attempted to do so in the past have been effectively put out of commission.

### **So what is the solution to this blatant display of imperial elitism disguising itself as a populist exercise in representative government?**

### **Stop playing the game. Stop supporting the system. Stop defending the insanity. Just stop.**

Washington thrives on money, so stop giving them your money. Stop throwing your hard-earned dollars away on politicians and Super PACs who view you as nothing more than a means to an end. There are countless worthy grassroots organizations and nonprofits working in your community to address real needs like injustice, poverty, homelessness, etc. Support them and you’ll see change you really can believe in in your own backyard.

### **Politicians depend on votes, so stop giving them your vote unless they have a proven track record of listening to their constituents, abiding by their wishes and working hard to earn and keep their trust.**

Stop buying into the lie that your vote matters. Your vote doesn’t elect a president. Despite the fact that there are [218 million eligible voters](#) in this country (only half of whom actually vote), it is the electoral college, made up of 538 individuals handpicked by the candidates’ respective parties, that actually selects the next president.

The only thing you’re accomplishing by taking part in the “reassurance ritual” of voting is sustaining the illusion that we have a democratic republic. What we have is a dictatorship, or as political scientists Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page more accurately term it, we are suffering from an [“economic elite domination.”](#)

A healthy, representative government is hard work. It takes a citizenry that is informed about the issues, educated about how the government operates, and willing to make the sacrifices necessary to stay involved, whether that means forgoing Monday night football in order to attend a city council meeting or risking arrest by picketing in front of a politician's office.

**It takes a citizenry willing to do more than grouse and complain. We must act - and act responsibly - keeping in mind that the duties of citizenship extend beyond the act of voting.**

Most of all, it takes a citizenry that cares enough to get mad and get active. As Howard Beale declares in the 1976 film Network:

“I want you to get up right now, sit up, go to your windows, open them and stick your head out and yell, ‘I’m as mad as hell and I’m not going to take this anymore.’ Things have got to change. But first, you’ve gotta get mad!...You’ve got to say, ‘I’m as mad as hell, and I’m not going to take this anymore!’ Then we’ll figure out what to do about the depression and the inflation and the oil crisis. But first get up out of your chairs, open the window, stick your head out, and yell, and say it.”

**Note**

(1) About The Rutherford Institute, see: <https://www.rutherford.org/about>