

Elections USA: The 2012 Politics of Fantasy

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Those who succeed in politics, as in most of the culture, are those who create the most convincing fantasies.- Chris Hedges, Empire of Illusion

With both tickets now set, the democratic farce that is the U.S. presidential election lumbers into its final act. And for a campaign already rife with all the petty trivialities and celebrity intrigues more suiting of a reality TV show, it is no surprise that both political parties intend on using their upcoming political conventions to furnish choreographed spectacles designed for little more than prime time viewing.

According to the [New York Times](#), a “\$2.5 million Frank Lloyd Wright inspired theatrical stage,” complete with 13 different video screens, will welcome the television viewer of the Republican national convention in Tampa. All part of an effort, the *Times* notes, to cloak that cold, vulture capitalist Romney in a veil of “warmth, approachability and openness.” As a senior Romney advisor boasted to the paper, “Even the [wooden video screen] frames are designed to give it a sense that you’re not looking at a stage, you’re looking into someone’s living room.” (Presumably a direct mock-up of one Romney’s living rooms.)

Protecting Mitt’s newly crafted aura of “approachability and openness” from the potential wayward vagabond, the city of Tampa will spend \$24.85 million alone on law enforcement personnel during the four day convention. This will include a massive deployment of 3,500-4,000 “contingency officers” from up to 63 outside police departments. Hospitality clearly has its limits.

It is all much the same for the Democratic convention set for early September in Charlotte. The award-winning Brand Obama is also much too valuable to be tarnished by the taint of social unrest.

The looming crackdown on dissent Charlotte-style, though, will be eased by nothing short of an Orwellian city law allowing any large public gathering to be declared “an extraordinary event.” Arbitrary search and arrest of any individual the police fancy will then be ipso facto legal. (Like such police practices are in any way “extraordinary.”)

Of course, all those hapless souls set to be greeted with the swing of the police truncheon in the streets of Tampa and Charlotte will garner nary a mention from the herd of corporate media planning to embed safely within the bunkered convention halls. Instead, the legions of dimwitted media pundits and talking heads will busy themselves filling airtime as they wax-poetic on the true splendor of American democracy manifested in the sheets of convention confetti raining from the rafters.

The media's neat packaging of the entire spectacle as all part of the must-see docudrama titled "Decision 2012" will undoubtedly do little to hide the true nature of the charade from the perceptive observer. Nonetheless, the politics as entertainment orgy will precede forth, with the media present to celebrate and partake in it all. Which can only give added credence to the Neil Postman quip that, "In America, the least amusing people are its professional entertainers."

The fundamental matter of whether there is truly a decision at all to be made in 2012, needless to say, is rather dubious.

As the [New York Times](#) writes of the international outlooks of Obama and Romney: "The actual foreign policy differences between the two seem more a matter of degree and tone than the articulation of a profound debate about the course of America in the world." Put differently, threats to bomb Iran, "contain" China, and bow to Israel are simply beyond debate.

Indeed, even leftist supporters of Obama admit there is no discernible difference between the two candidates. As Obama backers Bill Fletcher and Carl Davidson instead [argue](#), "November 2012 becomes not a statement about the Obama presidency, but a defensive move by progressive forces to hold back the 'Caligulas' on the political right." Such bankrupt arguments inevitably rear their ugly head every four years in the now tired attempt to send the fractured American Left scurrying straight into death vise of the "Party of the people."

Given this altogether pitiful state of affairs, the presidential campaign necessarily must devolve into little more than a national marketing campaign—replete with the assorted gimmicks, tricks, and deceptions inherent to that vile craft deemed "public relations." Thus, the "decision" to be made in 2012 is limited to that between Brand Obama and Brand Romney. No different in approach, really, than choosing between Pepsi and Coke—Nike and Adidas. For just as with all branding, the 2012 decision is not about deciphering between two differing products or candidates—as the both promise to deliver the same agenda of neoliberalism at home, imperialism abroad—but rather choosing between two sets of experiential promises (fictitious as they are). In terms of 2012, it's the dim hope and vague slogan of "Forward" proffered from camp Obama, versus team Romney's promise of comfort to be found in a restoration of America power.

In other words then, the man best able to peddle the most convincing fantasy to the American consumer this fall shall be the one to ultimately prevail in November.

All befitting of an empire of illusion.

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