

US Elections: Just Like the Movies.

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The United States political process bears an uncanny resemblance to mainstream filmmaking. Elections and speeches are scripted to the letter, politicians put on a tirelessly rehearsed act, catering endlessly to the whims of the target audience. A successful Hollywood filmmaker can't afford to risk raising issues in a way that don't immediately reflect audience sympathies. Good politicians vying for votes are similar in that they speak according to the already existing expectations — and prejudices — of the voting public.

Rarely do candidates stand behind a podium without amending or overriding their personal beliefs in return for generating applause. You would hardly hear, for example, of a US presidential candidate getting booed by an audience.

Candidates do not bring fresh principals to the table, but instead shape their views based on what national and local polls tell them matters to the voting public. And what matters is largely manipulated by the media and the state. Their combined scare tactics convinced most Americans of outright falsehoods, such as Saddam's ties to 9/11, his stockpiles of WMDs, the "liberation" of women in Afghanistan, and so forth.

In a healthy democracy, the media is expected to represent the interests of the people — all the people, while the government serves as a conduit to carry and defend these interests without violating the constitution. But in the age of evangelical fanatics, lobby groups, international corporations and lucrative Iraq contracts, democracy itself can be placed on hold.

Indeed, maintaining the image of a democracy while violating its genuine principles has consumed the efforts of successive US administrations. No other administration, however, has compromised the interest of the American people and flouted the constitution as much as the brazen Bush administration. No wonder Republicans were squarely defeated in the Congressional elections of 2006. Americans clearly voted for change, but change in a system so skilfully corrupt doesn't come easy. The way in which Democrats supported the recent spending bill for 2008, their vacillating stance on Iraq, and their downright hawkish stance on Iran say volumes about their contribution to maintaining the status quo.

Democrats are also bound by the rules of the game. They need the money, media coverage and lobbyists. Currently there are 35,000 registered federal lobbyists representing all sorts of special interests, including foreign powers such as Israel, whose collaborative role in the Iraq fiasco is too blatant to overlook.

Barack Obama, who does indeed have little experience of understanding how the system works still possesses a talent for pleasing the crowd. Thus his initial assertion that lobbyists "won't work in my White House". Then, possibly after being told by his campaign managers

that special interests are more influential than the rest of the country, he tweaked his vow slightly whereby lobbyists “are not going to dominate my White House.” Although his pledge changed its substance almost entirely, he was able to receive victory in Iowa.

For now, analysts can extract temporary comfort from the prevailing interpretation of the Iowa caucuses’ results. Obama was elected by the Democratic caucuses with 37 per cent because he was the only nominee that managed to present a truly new message — that he and only he can advocate real “change”. As for former Arkansas governor, Republican Mike Huckabee, he was the best possible candidate to represent the Republican voters’ conservative concerns. The former Baptist pastor is the rising star of the Christian evangelicals who boast 40 million followers, all tied by an outrageous message of doomsday.

Rev Stan Moody of the Christian Policy Institute, writes, “Huckabee is a Rapturist” in reference to the mid-19th Century interpretation of biblical text which culminated in 1909 as the Scofield Desk Reference Bible. This envisions — and not metaphorically — a Greater Israel as a precondition to the return of Christ, who, with the true Christians, will defeat Satanic forces, convert 144,000 Jews and exterminate the rest. It has no Harry Potter twists, but it puts Hollywood horror movies to shame. The actual concern is that this group has cultivated an alliance with the Israeli government since the late 1970s and is a major powerbroker in US foreign policy in the Middle East.

In her article, which appeared in The Jerusalem Post on 3 January, Hilary Leila Krieger reported from Iowa that Huckabee “has also been staunchly supportive of Israel, writing in Foreign Affairs that, ‘I will not waver in standing by our ally Israel.’ It is a country he has visited several times, leading groups there as well as taking his family.”

According to the same article, “Huckabee has drawn on his experience in the Holy Land in making his pitch to voters, which has especially resonated with evangelicals.”

With the notable exceptions of Republican Ron Paul and Democrat Dennis Kucinich, most visible presidential candidates were eager to compromise the interest of their country to guarantee that of Israel’s. Clinton and Obama exemplify this. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) wrote, “Obama has always enjoyed strong Jewish support since entering state politics in Illinois in 1996, although some in the pro-Israel establishment are wary of his calls to negotiate with rogue states such as Syria and Iran.” JTA, of course, nonchalantly substitute the word ‘Zionist’ for ‘Jewish’, but that’s another story.

While supporting Israel, right or wrong, is business as usual for US politicians, Huckabee’s advent — described as the “second coming” of Ronald Reagan by a producer at an Iowa TV station, is the truly alarming trend. He cannot simply be dismissed as a lunatic Armageddonist who thinks that he can win an election; he actually captured the Republican endorsement in Iowa.

Huckabee knows well how to carry the momentum to the next destination — he needs to keep up the religious fervour, as narrow-minded and irrational as it may be. We are told that this is what voters are expecting. To win, like a good filmmaker, Huckabee must deliver.

Life can indeed resemble the movies, but in the case of US elections the movie has become so familiar and predictable that it’s no longer even entertaining.

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