

The Days Before the Morning After: Whodunit the Media Way

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"All quiet on the Potomac now?" Mitch asks Blanche at the end of the so-called "poker night" in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The same image could be used in the aftermath of the elections. A strange quietness has settled after a vicious campaign. The losers are licking their wounds, making apologies to the world.¹ The winners are busy fighting their internal war on who is going to play the next deal of cards.² Like in poker, a lot was at stake. And cheating was part of the game. Rumors have been circulating about fraud in the elections and the written press has published articles documenting the flaws of the voting system. A research team at UC Berkeley calls for an investigation. Their study shows an unexplained discrepancy between votes for President Bush in counties where electronic voting machines were used versus counties using traditional voting methods³.

Before the dust covers up everything, a closer look at the ground zero of the election rubble might be called for. 2004 is by no means a replay of 2000, even if some bumper stickers and numerous blogs joke about the election being stolen a second time. What was stolen is not the results (even though the allegations concerning fraud should be taken seriously) but the reasons for the results. As Frank Rich suggests, "by near universal agreement, the morning after, these two words [moral values] tell the entire story of the election...like so many other narratives that immediately calcify into our 24/7 media's conventional wisdom, it is fiction" (Rich, p. A1).

What is at stake in this election is an increasingly popular crime in the US: identity theft. Identity theft the days before, in the way the candidates were presented, or should we say "packaged"; and the day after, in the failure to point to the real culprit. The quick elaboration of one theory--or even a "story line", as Rich calls it, is part of a grand narrative--a narrative that has verged on propaganda for many years. If indeed the essence of propaganda is to present promises that are hollow, pit one group of people against another and appeal to the emotions --fear in particular--then we have witnessed an accomplished version of it. The elections have perfectly illustrated what Thomas Frank describes in his book *What's the Matter with Kansas* as "economic blindness" and "hallucinatory appeal"; their results might call us, in his words, "to renounce

¹ See the following site: www.sorryeverybody.com

² See for example the November 23 issue of *The New York Times* on the cabinet reshuffling.

³ For more information, see www.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories

forever our middle-American prosperity in pursuit of a crimson fantasy of middle-American righteousness" (2004, p. 251).

An election generally is about issues. The candidates have a platform. Ideally they present their platform, make some promises and criticize their opponents. At times, the media put the promises in perspective by reminding the viewers of the actual record, or of the economic context, and by providing information about the candidates' background. The feasibility of the promises is usually examined in debates and discussions. And then the results indicate whether people were interested in such and such issues.

Nothing of the sort really happened in the 2004 presidential campaign. The news media coverage is in great part responsible for turning the elections into a contest about persona, a drama of cries and whispers. The backdrop for the show was--still is, always will be, it seems--September 11. 9/11 prevailed as the master issue so pervasive that it does not have to be named directly. It crystallized all other issues, diffused its power in becoming a rhetorical act, and performing terror or anger on demand. Kerry's failure to name it, perhaps, in order to get past it, was critical. His program was about the future: health care, the environment, and education. But the carefully rehearsed narrative that he was faced with was about the past. Therefore, he was attacked on his past: his record, his decision-making process, and his position in and on wars (Vietnam, Iraq). Bush was praised for his past leadership, for "taking a stand" in the wake of the catastrophe. As general Tommy Franks said after endorsing him during the Convention: "George W. Bush is the real thing, he is the real thing. I have seen courage and consistency in him, the courage and consistency to beat them". No matter what the consequences are. The fact that Bush's agenda offered the worst possible future for most Americans had become irrelevant. Nobody wanted to be reminded of the present or the future. Instead, Bush's supporters wanted to be lulled by the call to a "Manifest destiny" that the president has suddenly reactualized, lured into a fantasy land that speaks power and wealth---a siren song so powerful and enticing that it prevents the cries of the countless victims of Bush's disastrous plan for the economy and the environment, and of the war, from being heard.

The article will focus on the way the media, in particular the broadcast media, covered the campaign by carefully orchestrating one narrative, the war on terror, and staging two protagonists: the commander in chief versus the flip flopper. The script read, in the words of Senator Bob Graham, "a triumph of persona over policy".⁴ The cultural work of 9/11 will be analyzed to contextualize the media

⁴ Quoted in *The New York Times*, November 7, p. 24.

discourse during the campaign. The narrative elaborated on the results will be assessed and qualified.

The Days Before

In his book *The Culture of Fear*, Barry Glassner shows how "the news media, rather than their personal experience, provide Americans with their predominant fears" (1999, p. XXI). They distill fear through a technique that Glassner calls "misdirection". The broadcast media indeed provide images in which certain anxieties can be projected--and removed --at the expense of "serious problems which remain widely ignored" (Glassner, 1999, p. XVIII). Glassner shows how this process becomes a strategic tool to push some political agenda while concealing the reality of its consequences.

The media use of 9/11 would provide a good illustration for Glassner's analysis. The cultural work performed by 9/11 seems to maintain the country in a continual state of trauma, and victimhood whereas pressing domestic issues are not being addressed. Powerlessness becomes dramatized, a strategy also used by the conservative right (see Thomas Frank's analysis)⁵. The news media insure that the work of mourning does not take place, and therefore healing cannot happen either. This vivid state of grief has been used for political ends. The response to the attacks was the War against Terrorism. As Samuel Weber points out, terrorism is never "merely a descriptive, constative term: it is an evaluative one" (2002, p. 451). The terrorist is the "enemy of the state" and functions as "its negative justification, so to speak" (Weber, 2002, p. 452). Therefore, "the more powerful the terrorist organization(s), the more powerful the state in its military-political-security functions must become, and correspondingly, the weaker its civilian and civil functions must be made" (Ibid). Since there is a growing gap between the interests of the presidents and chief executives of nation-states and the common good of the populations, enemies "are needed in order to justify the 'sacrifices' demanded of populations subjected to increasing social precariousness" (Ibid). That is precisely the justification used by Condoleeza Rice.

On September, 7, I indeed attended a luncheon at the Oregon convention center with Dr. Rice. She delineated America's plan "to defend the peace": "Our country made a decision" she explained, "America will use its purpose and power to make the world a better place". Asked about the victims of the war, she

⁵ Frank describes how Fox News, the number one twenty-four-hour news channel, "a network that offers its viewers nothing but torture--endless images of a depraved world that, it tells them, they are powerless to correct" (Frank, 2004, p. 237), is instrumental in creating that feeling of victimhood. Their other strategy is to find scapegoats (see the program aired on November 27 called "anti-americanism" where "foreigners" at large are demonized).

responded that it was part of a "sacrifice" in a "historic cause" but that "America will prevail". She reminded the audience: "An act of war was committed against America on September 11 (...) when planes hit the building, it produced a shock in the American psyche (...) we will not be terrorized (...) we as a people responded". She concluded that "there is no return to normalcy". The emotion in the room was palpable.

The memory of that trauma is indeed pervasive. That was the first thing that struck me when I arrived in August for the start of my sabbatical. Pervasive in the media as a reference, a ghost, a threat --or even a fear-mongering device. The whole faith question that is currently widely debated might be explained in relation to that trauma. People are looking for comfort and reassurance. In God. And in their president. To a European observer, this is most puzzling.

Even more puzzling is the collective amnesia on the story of terrorism in America. As Jeffrey Clymer has argued in *America's Culture of Terrorism* "the rich historical and literary discourse of terrorism in America at the turn of the twentieth century belies current notions of terrorism's newness within the United States at the end of the century" (2003, p. 11). He adds: "In the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks, the media again [as in the 1990's] largely avoided relating the attacks to earlier episodes of terrorism in the US...if the massive violence of 11 September made turn for precedents to other events it usually labelled terrorism, it also seems that it was politically important to deem 9/11 attacks terrorism rather than, for example, a crime against humanity"(p. 13). Lastly, he suggests: "The common preoccupation with terrorism's unexpectedness, its 'spasmodic immediacy', makes it into something that can actually cause the rest of our lives to seem orderly. In this respect, the idea of terrorism is an important hegemonic prop in the maintenance of America's capitalist order, since life under late capitalism is notoriously disorderly, rife as it is with economic ups and downs, job losses, and racial divisiveness" (Ibid).

The event is thus decontextualized, with the whole discourse on policies in its wake. The narrative that has emerged is a narrative about exceptionalism, historic moment, sacrifice, and unprecedented times. The narratives that are being submerged are the consequences of the Patriot Act, the jails, the economic ups and downs alluded to by Clymer, the job losses, and even the freedom of art (*The New York Times*, for example, had shown how representations of 9/11 are carefully controlled). 9/11 is framed as the ur-point of the nation, spawning political warfare and conflictual definitions of citizenship. As Lynn Spiegel notes in the *American Quarterly*, "since 2001, the history and memory of 9/11 have in fact become a national battleground" (2004, p. 262).

This issue was doomed to dominate the debates and the campaign. Bush had tried to use images of 9/11 for one of his ads but families of the victims protested. So he can only conjure up the memory of it; by manipulating fear and grief, he numbs his audience's critical distance. Moreover, when he evokes 9/11, Bush locates terrorism in one time and place, turning it into a "spectacle" as Guy Debord would say. For Debord, the "spectacle is simply the common language that bridges this division [isolation of people from one another and from themselves] ... Spectators are linked by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separate, but it unites it only in its separateness" (1995, p. 22).⁶ 9/11 becomes the narrative on terror and its only representative, precluding all other narratives. On the other hand, by presiding over trauma, Bush sets himself in the lineage of Lincoln, a figure whose appeal is great and lasting. Like Lincoln, he seems to propose a vision--a leitmotiv in his speeches--for the nation. The media also constructed the image of Bush taking up Lincoln's visionary legacy.⁷

During the Republican Convention, Bush delineated the project of bringing freedom and peace--the very things that people at home are craving for. The senator from Colorado would say after the elections that people who voted for Bush wanted to be part of that greatness, that goodness. During his speech, Bush uses the grand image of people going to vote in Afghanistan and Iraq in the same way as he had used the image of suffering victims as an "emotional ploy"; Lynn Spiegel explains that "having thereby stirred up viewers' moral indignation and pathos, he then went on to justify his own plan for aggression" (2004, p. 248). The Convention was a repeat of the same strategy--later echoed in the news media discourse.

Domestic issues are dealt with the same vagueness and bombast. After Bush's speech, journalist Mark Shields tried to point out that there is no budget to fund his grand plans. But for the public, there was no time to think or to pause. They were enchanted by a series of nice images, fascinated by the dream machine. Bush's best asset had been his confidence and a stubbornness that was perceived as determination and purposefulness. He projected an image of some fantasized sense of order. His composure and smirk charmed his audience while the cameras didn't show the protesters that were shoved outside the Convention hall. The demonstrators outside the Convention hall, gathered in the streets of New York before Bush's arrival, had hardly received any attention. Bush did not blink. He joked about his grammatical mistakes and his Texan gait--projecting that image of himself as the underdog, a strategy used by the conservatives' propaganda: "While liberals use their control of the airwaves, newspapers, and

⁶ For more on the link between spectacle and terrorism, see Samuel Weber's article.

⁷ For more on Lincoln and his relevancy, see for example Mario Cuomo's *Why Lincoln Matters Today More Than Ever*, Harcourt, 2004.

schools to persecute average Americans (...) the Republicans are the party of the disrespected, the downtrodden, the forgotten. They are always the underdog, always in rebellion against a haughty establishment, always rising up from below" (Frank, 2004, p. 119). The different speakers at the Convention elaborated on the narrative of the rise "up from below". Michael Williams, the former railway commissioner in Texas, said: "America has been a land of opportunity for me because G.W. Bush believed in me a quarter of century ago". His testimony was echoed by Senator Mel Martinez who declared: "Only in America can a 15-year old rise to be in office (...) I have lived the American dream".

Furthermore, Bush suggested that he, alone, could prevent further attacks: since he has taken action, no attack has happened. With the same logic, he portrayed his opponent as 'unfit for command' and people in the room brandished signs that read: "flip flop". The "flip flop" tune would become the rhetoric mantra of the media; an ad showing Kerry windsurfing back and forth was aired shortly after the convention as a visual prop for their character assassination. As Philip Gourevitch notes in *The New Yorker*, "his [Bush's] caricature of Kerry became the prevailing view" (2004, p. 98).⁸

During the first two debates, Kerry would fail to stay clear of the master narrative that had been carefully rehearsed by Bush. Steering an uneasy course between the Scylla of the war in Iraq and the Charybdis of the war on terror, he did not come across as confident. Bush managed to elaborate on the "flip flop" line and cornered him about "his record". With the flip-flop line came the insinuation that, should Kerry get elected, more attacks would immediately hit the country.

The third debate, however, functioned as a sort of reality check. Domestic issues were at stake, and Kerry was well prepared to deconstruct the political tune of the war on terror. He talked about the war on another front: the war on poverty, lack of health care, job loss. After the debate, the polls showed an increase in his popularity. He was declared the winner of the debate--even on the sites of Fox News and CNN--not so much, I think, because of his stand on issues as because he could exude some of that confidence so dear to the American public. Bush, on the other hand, had momentarily lost the gusto and bravado of war; he even blushed at times. But as we will see, the media would soon fix the problem by polishing the image back, restoring its luster to the icon.

⁸ Another part of the caricature involved the phrase "global test" used by Kerry in one of his speeches. Bush seized on the phrase as a frequent target for ridicule and distortion. As Gourevitch explains, "he made it to mean a system of subjugating America's war-making authority to foreigners--the opposite of what Kerry had said" (2004, p. 110). The news media never challenged such an interpretation. On the contrary, they endorsed it and used it with the same diligence and efficiency--and mockery. Even NPR at times!

Meanwhile, Michael Moore's film comes out on DVD. No mention, no reminder. And *Team America: World Police*, directed by Trey Parker and Matt Stone (the creators of "South Park"), is released mid October. The first film about the war on terror and the search for Weapons of Mass Destruction is deemed "one of the funniest movies of the year". The puppets' threads are very visible--the creators wanted it that way--as is the satire that informs the film. But you can also dismiss them as what they are: only puppets! On the one hand, the movie establishes, in the words of Lynn Spiegel about South Park, "such a high degree of pastiche, blank irony, and recombinant imagery that it would be difficult to say that it encourages any particular 'dominant' reading of the war. The laughter seems directed at semiotic breakdowns, perhaps mimicking the way in which news coverage of the war seems to make people increasingly incapable of knowing what's going on"...(2004, p. 258-259). We could add: coverage of the elections is likely to confuse the voters about the candidates' agenda. Journalist Bob Herbert argues that one factor in the elections result is ignorance.

On the other hand, the movie powerfully exposes the violence and excess of the American war on terror; some passages function as visual acting outs, as when the team's planes hit the Eiffel Tower and the Pyramids. It deconstructs the hubris of the American foreign policy. Another interesting moment is when Michael Moore appears in the Team's headquarters and blows himself up with the base. Instead of being a negative portrayal of Moore, it exposes, I think, the explosive impact he has on the current administration's policy of violence and interventionism at all costs. Scatological language points to the inflation of political discourse. The movie has a Rabelaisian tonality. It uses the same strategy of exaggeration and hyperbole to draw an effective satire, in particular about the "WMD", the everlasting object of desire, the reason for the war, as it clearly reminds the audience, therefore voicing an agenda that politicians --who are busy pulling other strings!--have silenced.

Another kind of satire was going on through the political ads. The October 17 issue of the *New York Times* has a front-page article titled "Scary Ads Take Campaign to a Grim New Level" detailing how a confrontational advertising war is waged "with some of the most evocative images and messages seen in presidential commercials in a generation": "at work are direct appeals to fear" (Rutenberg, 2004, p. A 1).

Whodunit

On November 23, the *Times* published the results of a poll indicating, "Americans are worried about the domestic agenda". The article voices a question that outside observers have in mind as it points to a discrepancy between people's

concerns and their votes. What happened? What's the matter, not just with Kansas? But, perhaps, with the news media?

Jameson wrote in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* "despite the many claims that America lost its innocence on 9/11, it was not America but rather its media [that had] lost its innocence" (2002, p. 300). Lynn Spiegel details the role of the media in what she calls an "entertainment war". "Infotainment", as it is also known, has come to sound more like propaganda than news. People's basic survival economic instincts are numbed as their emotions have taken over. Not just fear, but also anger, bitterness, revenge. Frank shows how receptive people have become to the conservative message that has launched a "backlash" he defines as a "crusade in which one's material interests are suspended in favor of vague cultural grievance that are all-important and yet incapable of ever being assuaged" (2004, p. 121). Impossible of being assuaged because shrouded in a cloud of fog, made inaudible by the white noise of sound bites.

The coverage of the presidential campaign relied on the familiar tools of misdirection and simplification. Journalist Carolyn Curiel commented in the NYT: "The Republicans franchised their product, Bush, through the pulpit" (2004, p. A 24). And obviously through the media. Both candidates had indeed become "products"--commodities in the sense that the media form they were given to circulate in media space did conceal their contents. With the commodification came the fetishism through the belief that Bush would resolve terror whereas Kerry would bring about doomsday. Bush's personality became fixated along a few lines, like a stock character in a play--the play of light over darkness maybe. His political rhetoric reified the long cherished notions of freedom, peace, and democracy-- to the point of making them farcical. Kerry was franchised as indecisive, unfit for leadership, aloof. Bergson argued that the essence of the comic was "something mechanical superimposed on to something alive". Very often, the media presentation of the candidates illustrated Bergson's definition. No matter what the candidates would do or say, or what their records were, the tune remained unchanged--divorced from an actual content or context.

The "products" were given some visibility, or a visibility that would replicate itself. By misdirecting the attention away from certain points to focus on others, a whole strategy of advertising was put in place.

First there was the uneven coverage of the conventions. Whereas the Democratic convention was only partly covered, the Republican Convention got more coverage, broadcasting the entire speeches of the different speakers. The commander in chief line and persona resulted in directing the attention away from his own record and away from Kerry 's real record in the Vietnam War. Fake records were manufactured for both in the wake of the caricatured

characterization aired on TV. The campaign of the Swift boats veterans received broad media attention, John O'Neill and Jerome Corsi's book *Unfit for Command* became a bestseller, and a 20 million ad campaign hammering the same ideas was aired repeatedly. The written press (the *Post* and the *Times* in particular) explored the case and corrected some of the allegations made by the veterans. They reported the testimonies of Kerry's crew on the boat. The channels played the ads and never situated the testimonies of the different protagonists in the case. The campaign tarnished the overall image of Kerry and served as a convenient element to create the icon of Kerry as the man you could not trust.

What was concealed thanks to the misdirection process? A range of issues concerning the voting system itself that was addressed by the written press in the weeks preceding the elections. First, a leak concerning the reliability of the machines raised some concern. The Diebold electronic voting machines give no paper receipt; therefore there would be no record of the vote. Furthermore, the machines might not appear user friendly to some voters unfamiliar with such equipment. The issue of fairness was thus raised. The *News Hour with Jim Lehrer* devoted some programs to the subject, which included an interview with an engineer explaining how easy it would be to tamper with the software used in the machines; basically, the machines could become a hacker's paradise. The problem was also talked about on NPR, but not on the major networks.⁹

Moreover issues relating to registration received the same scarce attention on TV. First concerns were expressed about the fact that some criteria used in Florida by the Republicans in 2000 to declare a registration valid had suddenly become "Invalid", in effect disenfranchising lots of potential voters (in democratic counties particularly). The written press and the radio (NPR and Air America) also vented scandals concerning volunteers for the Republican Party who destroyed democratic registration forms. There were also talks about registering under different names. The election process looked more and more biased, inaccurate and unreliable.

Other issues were not raised at all such as the connection between Halliburton and Cheney. There was an attempt by the written press to deal with the issue the week before the election, but the focus then returned to terrorism with the video of Bin Laden. Edwards was the only one to raise the point in the vice-presidential debate, but his question did not receive any attention. Paradoxically, only *Comedy Central*, the program of fake news, proposed an alternative narrative to the bland and consensual discourse of the channels.

⁹ NPR and the written press also dealt with the issue of provisional ballots.

October 25 was a turning point. *The New York Times* published an article about missing explosives in Iraq. Kerry seized on the issue, and even the major networks had to deal with it. But the issue was framed as an "October surprise" and the media echoed Bush's insinuation that Kerry, as a candidate in an election, "would say or do anything to get elected". The channels did not give the evidence presented in the Times, and presented the whole affair as a mystery to be solved, some dirty trick in a campaign without dealing with the larger issues of the war and of the risks caused by the missing explosives. The Pentagon explained that there was no proof that the explosives were still there when the Americans arrived in Iraq. That became the standard narrative, even after an independent channel broadcast a video showing a military unit looking at explosives bearing the seal of the IAEA (which identified them as the missing explosives) on the site where they used to be kept. The issue was dealt in a way that would not undermine Bush's credibility in the war. The story has not received any attention since October 27 when the program was aired. Public opinion, however, was shaken, and the polls indicated an increase in the support for Kerry.¹⁰

On October 29, another episode in the show would bring fear and the war on terror back into the discursive arena. Bin Laden's video appeared on all the networks. The excerpts shown on American TV were different than those shown in Europe. They focused on the menace of more attacks. Suddenly, circumstances allowed a potential fear to become actual again with the appearance of Bin Laden and his threats. The video functioned on the American psyche as a sort of return of the repressed. Bin Laden's existence should have undermined the discourse about being safer; Kerry tried to argue that point. But arguments were not called for. The other narrative line that the media played with was the "intrusion in American politics", whipping up another form of hysteria.

An additional venue for fear and resentment was given pride of place during the last days up into the final weekend preceding the elections: gay marriage and the demise of "American values" in a conflation method widely used by conservative Listservs, as Frank illustrates in his book. It is important to underline that the conflation took place in the context of a particular mood, when feelings of fear were exacerbated in the wake of the video and its dramatization. Comingling issues is a familiar device for the news media; it had turned into a strategy before the attack in Iraq when the media had ventriloquized the tie between 9/11 and Saddam Hussein. To this day, a significant percentage of the American people still believe that Saddam was directly involved in the attacks. Similarly, the equation of democrats and gay marriage was made, despite what Kerry had

¹⁰ Another source to assess that is the Iowa Electronic Market. See the following site: www.biz.uiowa.edu/iem/

clearly said during the third debate. The conflation was facilitated by the fact that, at the local level, some democratic constituencies called to vote no on the constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. This other fear-mongering device was used repeatedly in the last week, crystallizing the attention away from other issues. And, more importantly, as we were soon made to understand, paving the way for the morning after script.

Election night was also a puzzling event to witness from a European perspective. Exit polls were announced midday as elections were still in full swing. As a result, many observers have pointed out that young people, in particular, did not go to vote, thinking that Kerry 's victory was assured. Then during the evening, the major networks were announcing Bush's progress, as people were still standing in line, in particular in Ohio. A significant number of people left, thinking that their votes would not count. Screens were slow to take into account Kerry's progress so that, visually, you had the impression that the entire country had gone to Bush. NBC "gave" Ohio to Bush pretty early, and was proud of its feat afterwards, claiming to be have won the mandate of the American viewership with over 50 million faithful fans!

The Morning After

The media is part of corporate America¹¹. It has adopted the language and the strategy of its owners. Bush, their franchised product, also adopts its language occasionally. In his acceptance speech, he declared: "I have earned political capital and I intend to spend it". One of the known effects of corporate strategy is "externalities". They take place when consequences of actions are born by an exterior party. One could argue that such concept can be useful to understand the post-electoral talk about "moral values". Some journalists at the *Post* and the *Times* soon expressed discomfort at the ready-made, broad explanation that was given to the result on "the morning after". Frank Rich, for example, writes: "Farewell to Swift boats and 'Shove it!', to Osama's tape and Saddam's missing weapons, to 'security moms' and outsourced dads. They've all been sent to history's dustbin faster than Ralph Nader memorabilia was dumped on eBay. In their stead stands a single ambiguous phrase coined by an anonymous exit pollster: 'Moral values'. By near universal agreement the morning after, these two words tell the entire story of the election: it's the culture, stupid" (Rich. 1). Rich remarks that on 'Moral Values', 'its Blue in a Landslide: "if anyone is laughing all the way to the bank this election year, it must be the undisputed king of the red cultural elite, Rupert Murdoch. Fox News is a rising profit center within his

¹¹ See Spiegel for detailed information and references on how a few major corporations own most of the media sources (2004, p. 26)

News Corporation, and each red-state dollar that it makes can be plowed back into the rest of Fox's very blue entertainment portfolio" (Rich, p. 8).

The alternative media represented by the Internet and the bloggers were quick to draw maps ridiculing the explanation.¹² More generally, the Internet did allow, in the words of Spiegel, "for a collective interrogation of mainstream media and discussions among various marginalized groups" (2004, p. 260). It is on the Internet that the first allegations of fraud were covered, disclosing huge discrepancies between the number of cast votes and registered voters, in particular in Florida and Ohio, along with reports of dysfunctional machines. The *Times* and the *Post* followed suit a few days later. To this day, however, the issue has only received fair coverage in the written press. But rumors are spreading. A full explanation is still warranted.¹³

By some miracle, red had become the color of conservatives, and gay marriage would have decided of the election. What the media are covering, of course, is their own role in fabricating and marketing an appealing image of one candidate at the expense of the other. They are now busy covering the elections in Ukraine, talking about fraud *there*. Preparing us, perhaps, for the narrative on the elections in Iraq: on Fox news, the reports are already juxtaposed. On November 23, the front page of the *New York Times* showed the poll on concerns about domestic issues next to a picture of the crowd on the main square of Kiev protesting the elections results, therefore inviting the reader to join in some eerie--yet silent--commentary of one piece of news on the other. On the same day, Taras Kuzio, a guest for *The Newshour with Jim Lehrer*, discussed the elections in Ukraine and said that if Bush were serious about the advance of freedom, he would have to intervene in this case...

What the news media are also responsible for is a far-reaching ignorance that undoubtedly played a major role in people's perception of the candidates. In his article "Voting without the facts", journalist Bob Herbert notes: "The so-called values issue, at least as it's being popularly tossed around, is overrated... I think a case could be made that ignorance played at least as big a role as values. A recent survey by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland found that nearly 70% of President Bush's supporters believe that the U.S. has come up with 'clear evidence' that Saddam Hussein was working closely with Al Qaeda. A third of the president's supporters believe that weapons of mass destruction were found in Irak. And more than a third believe that a

¹² For satirical maps, see the following site: politicalhumor.about.com/library/images/bljesusland. A very popular one divides North America into Jesusland and the United States of Canada.

¹³ CNN aired the first TV program on December 1. *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer* finally devoted part of its program to the issue on December 2.

substantial majority of world opinion supported the U.S-led invasion" (2004, p. A 25). If you want to know the facts, tune to fake news....but *Comedy Central* is supposed to entertain you, as its name indicates, not inform you, isn't?

The Days After Tomorrow

The debate on "moral values" is the tip of the iceberg of the phenomenon described by Frank where a cultural war takes over any concern about economics--"misdirecting" at its best. Another form of hijacking that might cause the demise of middle-class America. This cultural and political shift might be understood as part of the southernization of America. What the maps--satirical or not--revealed was a divided country. There were frequent references to the Civil War in articles and commentaries in the aftermath of the elections. But it seems that, this time, the South is the winner.

The result of the elections might indeed be understood as partaking in the so-called Southernization of America. "What has been called the 'Southernization of America' by the historian John Egerton among others" as Richard Gray explains in *The Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*, "suggests that one response to commodification, and the globalization of the material life, is resistance and even a kind of cultural reversion" (2004, p. 4). Gray adds: "Americans, and not just Southerners, seem to have reacted to the blanding of America, over the last two or three decades, by subscribing to cultural values that simultaneously register their anxiety about change and measure their difference from corporate ethos" (2004, pp. 4-5).

Some aspects of this Southernization could be found in the following elements: the switch to an issue-driven election, an overall conservatism on cultural wedge issues like abortion and gun control, a certain parochialism, and above all perhaps, the feeling of being different: the "us" versus "them" paradigm promoted by Republican discourse would take on a particular Southern ring. The South, as Richard Gray also points out, has built its identity against the "constitutive otherness of the North or the American (...) the South, in whatever terms it is understood, is placed on the boundary" (2004, p. 4).¹⁴ Frank tries to deconstruct the paradox that makes those against the "corporate ethos" vote to support it; he shows how the conservatives dramatize victimhood--you are the victims of a liberal conspiracy plot, and you have to retrieve the power that was taken away from you. So the feeling of being marginalized therefore seems to work as a powerful incentive to vote Republican...while Republican policies will only, of course, marginalize them further. People are growing ever more

¹⁴ He explains: "A familiar set of oppositions performs important cultural work here: 'Southern' vs. 'American'/'Northern'/'Western' (...) =place vs. placelessness=past vs. pastlessness=realism vs. idealism..." (4).

alienated from their own interests and economic reality. Like Blanche in *Streetcar*, they "don't want realism" but "magic"; they might learn, like her, that streetcars and desire belong to different Americas.

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"Two Days Before the Day After Tomorrow" is the eighth episode in the ninth season of the American animated television series South Park. The 133rd episode overall, it originally aired on Comedy Central in the United States on October 19, 2005. In the episode, Stan and Cartman accidentally destroy a beaver dam, which causes a catastrophic flood in the nearby town of Beaverton. To avoid punishment, the boys allow the townfolk to be misled into believing that the dam's destruction was caused by global warming. Morning workouts tend to be completed by those who prefer to check exercise off their list for the day before the rest of the daily to-do list, children's needs, busy gym or decrease in motivation hit them, says Heather Milton, senior exercise physiologist at New York University's performance lab. Many of the women we surveyed are busy parents. If you crawl into bed after a long, difficult day feeling unaccomplished, if all else fails, your early morning workout will be the one thing on the list got done today. Or, in the words of fitness coach and blogger Susie Lemmer, the reasons all boil down to the fact that there is no better way to start your day than knowing you have done something amazing for yourself. So when you start your morning run, your body initially gets its energy from the glycogen stored in your muscles. But as your workout continues, the stores of glycogen or simply, carbohydrates in your muscles are virtually depleted. Working out on an empty stomach is often touted as the best way to burn fat and lose weight. While it is true that running on an empty stomach, if done in the right way, can eventually force your body to increasingly obtain the energy it needs from free fatty acids, this is not the decisive factor in losing weight. This kind of training is particularly suited for morning people who want to get their workout in before breakfast. So if you want to run on an empty stomach, here is what we recommend. Ah, mornings. A good morning routine can really set the productivity tone for the rest of the day. Some days you're dialed into every detail: cooking a big breakfast, experimenting with new hairstyles, trying to meditate. Mike Vardy, productivity writer, speaker, and podcaster, says on his social media, "Look, I'm a night owl" and proud of it. Why? Because despite having many say that my sleeping habits make me less likely to achieve, I prove them wrong. This can be a great way to meditate for the day ahead. Planning the evening before is effective because we have a limited amount of willpower and decision-making ability every day. The thought of making too many decisions in the morning will slow you down and drain your brain for the rest of the day. After a few days, I came to the realization that this might not be the worst thing. One article spelled out the training qualities that often lead to Boston Marathon qualifying times for runners. One of my biggest takeaways? After reading about one bizarre way to train for the morning of a race "wake up, give yourself some time to sit around, grab a bite to eat, and get that final bathroom stop in" I decided to plan out one weekend long run just as I would for my race nearly a month out. A Part of Hearst Digital Media Runner's World participates in various affiliate marketing programs, which means we may get paid commissions on editorially chosen products purchased through our links to retailer sites. ©2021 Hearst Magazine Media, Inc. All Rights Reserved.