

Divide And Conquer: The Government's Propaganda Of Fear And Fake News

By John and Nisha Whitehead - The Rutherford Institute, April, 2024

"It is the function of mass agitation to exploit all the grievances, hopes, aspirations, prejudices, fears, and ideals of all the special groups that make up our society, social, religious, economic, racial, political. Stir them up. Set one against the other. Divide and conquer. That's the way to soften up a democracy."— J. Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit*

"Nothing is real," observed John Lennon, and that's especially true of politics.

Much like the fabricated universe in Peter Weir's 1998 film *The Truman Show*, in which a man's life is the basis for an elaborately staged television show aimed at selling products and procuring ratings, the political scene in the United States has devolved over the years into a carefully calibrated exercise in how to manipulate, polarize, propagandize and control a population.

Take the media circus that is the Donald Trump hush money trial, which panders to the public's voracious appetite for titillating, soap opera drama, keeping the citizenry distracted, diverted and divided.

This is the magic of the reality TV programming that passes for politics today.

Everything becomes entertainment fodder.

As long as we are distracted, entertained, occasionally outraged, always polarized but largely uninvolved and content to remain in the viewer's seat, we'll never manage to present a unified front against tyranny (or government corruption and ineptitude) in any form.

Studies suggest that the more reality TV people watch—and I would posit that it's all reality TV, entertainment news included—the **more difficult it becomes to distinguish** between what is real and what is carefully crafted farce.

"We the people" are watching a lot of TV.

On average, Americans spend five hours a day watching television. By the time we reach age 65, we're watching more than 50 hours of television a week, and that number increases as we get older. And reality TV programming consistently captures the largest percentage of TV watchers every season by an almost 2-1 ratio.

This doesn't bode well for a citizenry able to sift through masterfully-produced propaganda in order to think critically about the issues of the day.

Yet look behind the spectacles, the reality TV theatrics, the sleight-of-hand distractions and diversions, and the stomach-churning, nail-biting drama that is politics today, and you will find there is a method to the madness.

We have become guinea pigs in a ruthlessly calculated, carefully orchestrated, chillingly cold-blooded experiment in how to control a population and advance a political agenda without much opposition from the citizenry.

This is how you persuade a populace to voluntarily march in lockstep with a police state and police themselves (and each other): by ratcheting up the fear-factor, meted out one carefully calibrated crisis at a time, and teaching them to distrust any who diverge from the norm through elaborate propaganda campaigns.

Unsurprisingly, one of the biggest propagandists today is the U.S. government.

Add the government's inclination to monitor online activity and police so-called "disinformation," and you have the makings of a restructuring of reality straight out of Orwell's 1984, where the Ministry of Truth polices speech and ensures that facts conform to whatever version of reality the government propagandists embrace.

This "policing of the mind" is exactly the danger author Jim Keith warned about when he predicted that "information and communication sources are gradually being linked together into a single computerized network, providing an opportunity for unheralded control of what will be broadcast, what will be said, and ultimately what will be thought."

You may not hear much about the government's role in producing, planting and peddling propaganda-driven fake news—often with the help of the corporate news media—because the powers-that-be don't want us skeptical of the government's message or its corporate accomplices in the mainstream media.

However, when you have social media giants colluding with the government in order to censor so-called disinformation, all the while the mainstream news media, which is supposed to act as a bulwark against government propaganda, has instead become the mouthpiece of the world's largest corporation (the U.S. government), the Deep State has grown dangerously out-of-control.

This has been in the works for a long time.

Veteran journalist Carl Bernstein, in his expansive 1977 *Rolling Stone* piece "The CIA and the Media," reported on Operation Mockingbird, a CIA campaign started in the 1950s to plant intelligence reports among reporters at more than 25 major newspapers and wire agencies, who would then regurgitate them for a public oblivious to the fact that they were being fed government propaganda.

In some instances, as Bernstein showed, *members of the media also served as extensions of the surveillance state, with reporters actually carrying out assignments for the CIA. Executives with CBS, the New York Times and Time magazine also worked closely with the CIA to vet the news.*

If it was happening then, you can bet it's still happening today, only this collusion has been reclassified, renamed and hidden behind layers of government secrecy, obfuscation and spin.

In its article, "How the American government is trying to control what you think," the Washington Post points out "Government agencies historically have made a habit of crossing the blurry line between informing the public and propagandizing."

This is mind-control in its most sinister form.

The end goal of these mind-control campaigns—packaged in the guise of the greater good—is to see how far the American people will allow the government to go in re-shaping the country in the image of a totalitarian police state.

The government's fear-mongering is a key element in its mind-control programming.

It's a simple enough formula. National crises, global pandemics, reported terrorist attacks, and sporadic shootings leave us in a constant state of fear. The emotional panic that accompanies fear actually shuts down the prefrontal cortex or the rational thinking part of our brains. In other words, when we are consumed by fear, we stop thinking.

A populace that stops thinking for themselves is a populace that is easily led, easily manipulated and easily controlled whether through propaganda, brainwashing, mind control, or just plain fear-mongering.

Fear not only increases the power of government, but it also divides the people into factions, persuades them to see each other as the enemy and keeps them screaming at each other so that they drown out all other sounds. In this way, they will never reach consensus about anything and will be too distracted to notice the police state closing in on them until the final crushing curtain falls.

This Machiavellian scheme has so ensnared the nation that few Americans even realize they are being brainwashed—manipulated—into adopting an "us" against "them" mindset. All the while, those in power—bought and paid for by lobbyists and corporations—move their costly agendas forward.

This unseen mechanism of society that manipulates us through fear into compliance is what American theorist Edward L. Bernays referred to as "an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country."

It was almost 100 years ago when Bernays wrote his seminal work *Propaganda*:

“We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of... In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons...who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind.”

To this invisible government of rulers who operate behind the scenes—the architects of the Deep State—we are mere puppets on a string, to be brainwashed, manipulated and controlled.

All of the distracting, disheartening, disorienting news you are bombarded with daily is being driven by propaganda churned out by one corporate machine (the corporate-controlled government) and fed to the American people by way of yet another corporate machine (the corporate-controlled media).

“For the first time in human history, there is a concerted strategy to manipulate global perception. And the mass media are operating as its compliant assistants, failing both to resist it and to expose it,” writes investigative journalist Nick Davies.

So where does that leave us?

Americans should beware of letting others—whether they be television news hosts, political commentators or media corporations—do their thinking for them.

A populace that cannot think for themselves is a populace with its backs to the walls: mute in the face of elected officials who refuse to represent us, helpless in the face of police brutality, powerless in the face of militarized tactics and technology that treat us like enemy combatants on a battlefield, and naked in the face of government surveillance that sees and hears all.

As I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* and in its fictional counterpart *The Erik Blair Diaries*, it's time to change the channel, tune out the reality TV show, and push back against the real menace of the police state.

If not, if we continue to sit back and lose ourselves in political programming, we will remain a captive audience to a farce that grows more absurd by the minute.

ABOUT JOHN W. WHITEHEAD

Constitutional attorney and author John W. Whitehead is founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His most recent books are the best-selling Battlefield America: The War on the American People, the award-winning A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State, and a debut dystopian fiction novel, The Erik Blair Diaries. Whitehead can be contacted at staff@rutherford.org. Nisha Whitehead is the Executive Director of The Rutherford Institute. Information about The Rutherford Institute is available at www.rutherford.org.