

# Politics As Reality TV

Contributed by James Preston Allen  
Friday, 12 November 2010

## Politics As Reality TV

By James Preston Allen, Publisher and Executive Editor

Share

Since the infamous televised debate between John F. Kennedy and Richard (I'm not a crook) Nixon in the 1960 Presidential Election, the nation has huddled around the electronic hearth of the TV set to be entertained by the spectacle of American politics. As a child of the first TV generation, this had a huge impact on my understanding of the influence of the media on politics. In the first few years, we seemed to think of presidential debates more like televised Lincoln versus Douglas bouts that we read about in our history books. But this was not to last. Things soon devolved with the advent of political TV advertising. Advertising soap was converted into political attack ads often meant to confuse and distract rather than illuminate. It's only gone down hill ever since.

This recent round of mid-term election is perhaps a new high for the low slung art of political advertising. Not only was more money spent especially by those recently freed corporations, who the Supreme Court has deemed to have the same right of political speech as individuals, but it has also unleashed the horrified fear of this country's

unions to defend what gains they have made over

the past 30 years against the onslaught of right-wing attacks. What has changed is how the media has played this, reported this and ultimately

profited from this huge outlay of cash as free

speech.

What is both annoying and sarcastically humorous is how these political ads, mostly on TV,

have evolved from being something akin to bad

Borax commercials, to highly

evolved infomercials issuing

vindictives and slander (the later being legal in the game of politics). The

sophistication of political propaganda has become so good, meaning

bad, that by the time voters actually

get down to voting, it is far from clear

what they are reacting to because of

the mixed messages, canceling each

other out. This was most prominently

played out in the Brown versus

Whitman and Boxer versus Fiorina

campaigns to the point that many potential voters simply turned off the

tube or voted early to avoid the mind boggling

jingoistic verbal jihad. But you know I think "we

the people" wouldn't have it any other way.

Americans like a good fist fight whether in a

boxing ring, on the field or court of your favorite

sport. We have this voyeuristic instinct to watch

while something unscripted happens and we all

look on in horror and surprise and say, "Gawd did

you see that?" We have in fact become increasingly bored with the highly scripted and orchestrated forms of TV violence to the point of

evaporating any true sense of suspended disbelief and only really pay attention to the reality TV of the freeway car chase waiting to see

the next reality star crash, shot or beaten by

the police. Enhanced with flyover helicopter

commentary, much like a sports caster calling the balls and strikes.

This year's political reality TV included the bizarre to the inane. The witch from Delaware to the looney toon odd ball Democrat in Georgia and then of course the self-demonizing characters of Meg and Carly, the billionaire duo, running in our own special show of "I've never done this before, but let me buy my new job." As Californians, we are just a bit more jaded about people waving money in our faces than they are in Kentucky or Ohio. But hey, we always seem to be a sucker for a B movie star. But this new fascination with reality TV as politics will probably soon become the next phenomenon. Think of it— a Hollywood producer rounds up a group of ex-CEO's and failed actors and documents their attempt at become politicians. Could turn out better than American Idol or The Apprentice. Sarah Palin is the perfect reflection of this come from nowhere and know nothing "new reality" TV personality.

Sadly, sooner rather than later, America is going to elect another idiot to run this country. After we finally fix what's wrong, they'll run it into the ditch with another war and tax breaks for the rich who don't need them.