

# THE SYMBOLIZING OF DEMOCRACY

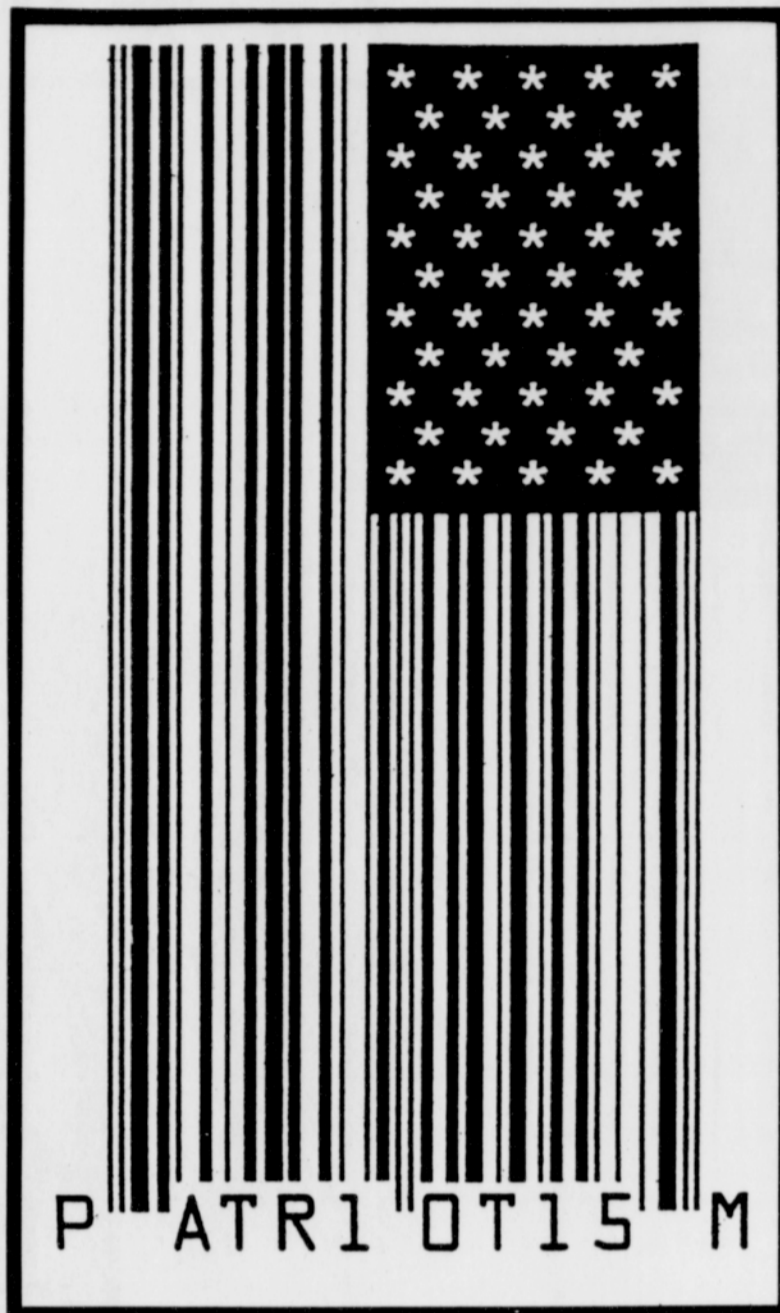
BY MATT WAISANEN

Nothing happens in America until it happens on television. For the last several years, the media has gained the power to shape American politics. Since obtaining this power, the media has been a contributor to the decay of democracy.

As a result of media campaigning, television has replaced the political party organization as the link between the voters and the candidates. Compounded with the problem of media is the grossly high cost associated with campaigning. Only the independently wealthy or party favorites can compete for the nation's highest office. In effect, public elections become nothing more than a symbolic act under the misconception of democracy.

The 1960 presidential debate John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon was the first nationally televised presidential debate. This historic event marked the first time a candidate's image on camera had an impact on the election outcome. Kennedy had wrapped up campaigning in California and was looking tan and healthy. Nixon on the other hand had been recovering from a two-week hospitalization. Those who watched this debate on television agreed that Kennedy had won while those who listened to via radio broadcast placed Nixon as the winner. JFK would later admit that, "It was TV more than anything else that turned the tide." The evidence of the media's influence in this election would change the future of political campaigning.

Since the Kennedy/Nixon debate, political campaigning has evolved into a televised event. People now rely on TV more than any other source for political information. The media has converged into a highly concentrated cartel of information control. As of the year 2000, only six major corporations control the majority of media outlets. As a result of media consolidation and advertising costs, money now drives the election process. The average cost of a Senate seat is \$5 million. The combined cost of the 2000 Presidential campaign aggrandized to over \$3 billion. When this kind of money becomes influential to an election, the general public is not being well represented. Those who get representation are the campaign financing donors. Of all the campaign money raised in the 2000 Presidential elections only 8.2% came from American taxpayers. The majority of this money came from large individual donors and corporations and



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'soft money' donations. This method of financing further divorces constituents from their representatives.

The current lack of regulation on campaign financing is a serious challenge to the integrity of democracy. The current campaign financing system is an open invitation to corruption and deviates the political agenda away from public interests. In addition to the defilements of soft money, a candidate is allowed to spend as much of his or her own money as they wish. The Supreme Court decision on *Buckley v Valeo* held that the "government could not limit individual's rights to spend money on broadcasting views." This also means that private individuals can spend unlimited amounts of money in contrasting those views. Negative ad campaigning is one result of this ruling. By running attack ads, candidates become forced to take defensive measures. The public then becomes overwhelmed by slanderous propaganda instead of being able to develop a cohesive understanding of a candidate's views on real public issues.

The exorbitant cost of effective campaigning has another degrading effect on democracy in that many otherwise qualified third party candidates are unable to compete in the current two party dominated oligarchy. If more than two parties were contending for the vote, it would result in a much more policy-driven campaign. The current system offers the public limited choices and in effect further defines the election process as being reduced to that of a symbolic nature.

In order to preserve the integrity of democracy, we must have campaign finance reform. Campaign finance reform can be fixed by instituting regulations and restrictions on campaign funding. Better yet, we could pass legislation that requires public financing of elections. If the public had to pay for elections out of hard-earned tax dollars, perhaps more would be inclined to participate in the democratic process. Media reform is another area of concern. Equal access to media outlets and public financing would ensure true representation by the public.

One way the individual can make a difference is to join special interest groups that are focused on reforms. We can also write to our representatives to express our concerns about campaign costs and media control. Unless democratic reforms in these two critical areas take place, we will continue to participate in imprudent elections of symbolic reassurance.

Matt Waisanen lives in Astoria but is going back home to New Hampshire for a couple of years.

## NO TO PETROL!

BY DOUGLAS FURY

Gas consumption is among the primary roots of evil, causing harm to all. The roots of petrol consumption are awash in blood and death, such as in the Middle East. Less well known examples are the operations of oil in Nigeria, with fortress style refineries backed by military security forces (Remember Ken Saro-wiwa!); and Texaco in South America, in the very headwaters of the Amazon.

Decades of Texaco drilling in the Ecuadorian Amazon caused massive contamination of the sensitive wetland headwaters, impacting every living thing. During the years of primary operation the main pipeline, built across known faultlines, spilled 16.8 million gallons of crude oil — one and a half times the amount of the Exxon Valdez oil spill — into the pristine tropical rainforests. Texaco forced labor from men of indigenous local communities including the Cofan, Quichua, Secoya and Huaroni. On record are photos of men covered in crude oil holding hemp ropes that they were required to attach to stumps and logs submerged in open crude pits for their removal to facilitate drilling rigs. The men were then "washed" with gasoline. Needless to say, none survive long in such service. (And who has their paws in ANWAR now?)

What about the mixing of alcohol related substances with gasoline? Spillage and leakage is a massive problem at every point of fuel handling. The normally hydrophobic qualities of oily substances (which cause oil to float) are degraded by mixing with alcohol. Petrol-alcohol fuel does not float but instead forms a mixture with water. The result is massive groundwater contamination by mixed fuel substances. The recent scurry by government agencies and industry to protect themselves from

liability for MTBE damages to people, wildlife and the environment illustrates the potency of this horror. All of these facts are inextricably related to water.

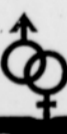
When I look around at what is disastrously produced, procured and profit-driven, it is clear that jingoism, nationalism and ignorance are our greatest problems — but they have the potential for improvement. When people can view high consumption as a subject for embarrassment rather than pride, when siding with the Big Winner doesn't take the form of marching in step with the current military/industrial flagwaving 'bomb 'em to the stone age' shock & awe death machine, then maybe there will be a chance. When being part of the collective source of the most massive exercise of nuclear and biological weapon wielding death-dealing millennial military imperialism, torture, illegal imprisonment, genocide and bombing is finally seen for what it truly is: — Maybe it will become possible to divert the flood of destruction by living to affirm all life, health and happiness.

As humans with voices, we bear the responsibility of understanding the meaning of the message that is written in blood by the voiceless — wildlife, salmon, trees and rivers. We must join together to champion the cause of the very simple foundation core-value, obvious and irrefutable truth for all who live the protection of water resources.

Every political, military, religious, industrial, academic action or exercise must be held up and examined by all to determine the impact on water quality. Water shared by all living things is actually synonymous with life. In Lakota dialects one word: *Mni* = water, life, blood.

Douglas Fury is the *nom de plume* of a "born and raised Oregonian" who lives somewhere on the North Coast.



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