

# The Simulation of Democracy

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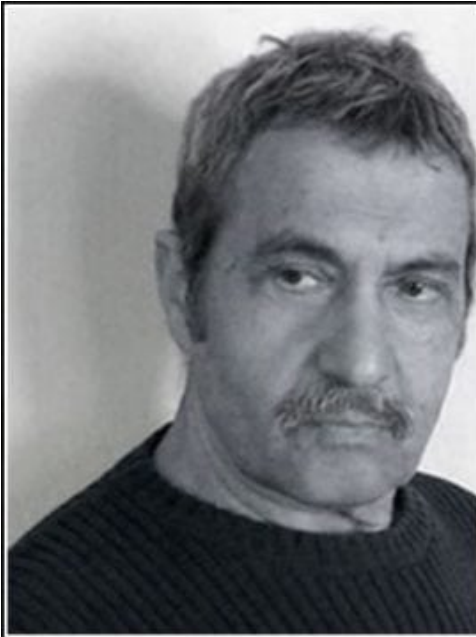
C.J. Hopkins •} [Counterpunch](#)

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One of the most complicated and frustrating aspects of operating a global capitalist empire is maintaining the fiction that it doesn't exist. Virtually every action you take has to be carefully recontextualized or otherwise spun for public consumption. Every time you want to bomb or invade some country to further your interests, you have to mount a whole PR campaign. You can't even appoint a sadistic torture freak to run your own coup-fomenting agency, or shoot a few thousand unarmed people you've imprisoned in a de facto ghetto, without having to do a big song and dance about "defending democracy" and "democratic values."

Naked despotism is so much simpler, not to mention more emotionally gratifying. Ruling an empire as a godlike dictator means never having to say you're sorry. You can torture and kill anyone you want, and conquer and exploit whichever countries you want, without having to explain yourself to anyone. Also, you get to have your humongous likeness muraled onto the walls of buildings, make people swear allegiance to you, and all that other cool dictator stuff.

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The enormous gap between what US leaders do in the world and what Americans think their leaders are doing is one of the great propaganda accomplishments.

— *Michael Parenti* —

AZ QUOTES

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Global capitalists do not have this luxury. Generating the simulation of democracy that most Western consumers desperately need in order to be able to pretend to believe that they are not just smoothly-functioning cogs in the machinery of a murderous global empire managed by a class of obscenely wealthy and powerful international elites to whom their lives mean exactly nothing, although extremely expensive and time-consuming, is essential to maintaining their monopoly on power. Having conditioned most Westerners into believing they are “free,” and not just glorified peasants with gadgets, the global capitalist ruling classes have no choice but to keep up this fiction. Without it, their empire would fall apart at the seams.

This is the devil’s bargain modern capitalism made back in the 18th Century. In order to wrest power from the feudal aristocracies that had dominated the West throughout the Middle Ages, the bourgeoisie needed to sell the concept of “democracy” to the unwashed masses, who they needed both to staff their factories and, in some cases, to fight revolutionary wars, or depose and publicly guillotine monarchs. All that gobbledegook about taxes, tariffs, and the unwieldy structure of the feudal system was not the easiest sell to the peasantry. “Liberty” and “equality” went over much better. So “democracy” became their rallying cry, and, eventually, the official narrative of capitalism. The global capitalist ruling classes have been stuck with “democracy” ever since, or, more accurately, with the simulation of

democracy.

The purpose of this simulation of democracy is not to generate fake democracy and pass it off as real democracy. Its purpose is to generate *the concept of democracy*, the only form in which democracy exists. It does this by casting a magic spell (which I'll do my best to demystify in a moment) that deceives us into perceiving the capitalist marketplace we Westerners inhabit, not as a market, but as a society. An essentially democratic society. Not a fully fledged democratic society, but a society progressing toward "democracy" ... which it is, and simultaneously isn't.

Obviously, life under global capitalism is more democratic than under feudal despotism, not to mention more comfortable and entertaining. Capitalism isn't "evil" or "bad." It's a machine. Its fundamental function is to eliminate any and all despotic values and replace them with a single value, i.e., exchange value, determined by the market. This despotic-value-decoding machine is what freed us from the tyranny of kings and priests, which it did by subjecting us to the tyranny of capitalists and the meaningless value of the so-called free market, wherein everything is just another commodity ... toothpaste, cell phones, healthcare, food, education, cosmetics, et cetera. Despite that, only an idiot would argue that capitalism is not preferable to despotism, or that it hasn't increased our measure of freedom. So, yes, we have evolved toward democracy, if we're comparing modern capitalism to medieval feudalism.

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The problem is that capitalism is never going to lead to actual democracy (i.e., government by and for the people). This is never going to happen. In fact, capitalism has already reached the limits of the freedom it can safely offer us. This freedom grants us the ability to make an ever-expanding variety of choices ... none of which have much to do with democracy. For example, Western consumers are free to work for whatever corporation they want, and to buy whatever products they want, and to assume as much debt as

the market will allow to purchase a home wherever they want, and to worship whichever gods they want (as long as they conform their behavior to the values of capitalism and not their religion), and men can transform themselves into women, and white people can deem themselves African Americans, or Native Americans, or whatever they want, and anyone can mock or insult the President or the Queen of England on Facebook and Twitter, none of which freedoms were even imaginable, much less possible, under feudal despotism.

But this is as far as our "freedom" goes. The global capitalist ruling classes are never going to allow us to govern ourselves, not in any meaningful way. In fact, since the mid-1970s, they've been systematically dismantling the framework of social democracy throughout the West, and otherwise relentlessly privatizing everything. They've been doing this more slowly in Europe, where social democracy is more entrenched, but, make no mistake, American "society" is the model for our dystopian future. The ruling classes and their debt-enslaved servants, protected from the desperate masses by squads of hyper-militarized police, medicated in their sanitized enclaves, watching *Westworld* on Amazon Prime as their shares in private prisons rise and the forces of democracy defend their freedom by slaughtering men, women, and children in some faraway country they can't find on a map, and would never visit on vacation anyway ... this is where the USA already is, and where the rest of the West is headed.

Which is why it is absolutely crucial to maintain the simulation of democracy, and the fiction that we're still living in a world where major geopolitical events are determined by sovereign nations and their leaders, rather than by global corporations and a class of supranational elites whose primary allegiance is to global capitalism, rather than to any specific nation, much less to the actual people who live there. The global capitalist ruling classes need the masses in the West to believe that they live in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and so on, and not in a global marketplace. Because, if it's all one global marketplace, with one big global labor force (which global corporations can exploit with impunity), and if it's one big global financial system (where the economies of supposed adversaries like China and the United States, or the European Union and Russia, are almost totally interdependent), then there is no United

States of America, no United Kingdom, no France, no Germany ... or not as we're conditioned to perceive them. There is only the global capitalist empire, divided into "national" market territories, each performing slightly different administrative functions within the empire ... and those territories that have not yet surrendered their sovereignty and been absorbed into it. I think you know which those territories are.

But getting back to the simulation of democracy (the purpose of which is to prevent us from perceiving the world as I just suggested above), how that works is, we are all conditioned to believe we are living in these imperfect democracies, which are inexorably evolving toward "real" democracy but just haven't managed to get there quite yet. "Real" being the key word here, because there is no such thing as real democracy. There never has been, except among relatively small and homogenous groups of people. Like Baudrillard's Disneyland, "Western democracy" is presented to us as "imperfect" or "unfinished" (in other words, as a replica of "real democracy") in order to convince us that there exists such a thing as "real democracy," which we will achieve ... someday.

This is how simulations work. The replica does not exist to deceive us into believing it is the "real" thing. *It exists to convince us that there is a "real" thing.* In essence, it invokes the "real" thing by pretending to be a copy of it. Just as the images of God in church invoke the "god" of which they are copies (if only in the minds of the faithful), our imperfect replica of democracy invokes the concept of "real democracy" (which does not exist, and has never existed, beyond the level of tribes and bands).

This is, of course, ceremonial magic ... but then so is everything else, really. Take out a twenty dollar bill, or a twenty Euro note, or your driver's license. They are utterly valueless, except as symbols, but no less powerful for being just symbols. Or look at some supposedly solid object under an electron microscope. Try this with a tablespoon. As that bald kid in *The Matrix* put it, you will "realize that there is no spoon" ... or, rather, that there is only the spoon we've created by believing that there is a spoon.

Look, I don't mean to get all spooky. What that kid (among various others throughout history) was trying to get us to understand is that we create

reality, collectively, with symbols ... or we allow reality to be created for us. Our collective reality is also our religion, in that we live our lives and raise our children according to its precepts and values, regardless of whatever other rituals we may or may not engage in on the weekend. Western consumers, no matter whether nominally Christians, Jews, Muslims, Atheists, or of any other faith, live their lives and raise their children according to the values and rules of capitalism. Capitalism is our religion. Like every religion, it has a cosmology.

In the cosmology of global capitalism, "democracy" is capitalist heaven. We hear it preached about throughout our lives, we're surrounded by graven images of it, but we don't get to see it until we're dead. Attempting to storm its pearly gates, or to create the Kingdom of Democracy on Earth, is heresy, and is punishable by death. Denying its existence is blasphemy, for which the punishment is excommunication, and consignment to the City of Dis, where the lost souls shout back and forth at each other across the lower depths of the Internet, their infernal voices unheard by the faithful ... but, hey, don't take the word of an apostate like me. Go ahead, try it, and see what happens.

### Up to You.

^3000US citizens have no real political representation.

We don't live in a democracy. And our freedom is disappearing fast.

I don't want to be ruled by hypocrites, whores, and war criminals.

What about you? Time to push back against the corporate oligarchy.

And its multitude of minions and lackeys.



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Things to ponder

While our media prostitutes, many Hollywood celebs, and politicians and opinion shapers make so much noise about the still to be demonstrated damage done by the Russkies to our nonexistent democracy, this is what the sanctimonious US government has done overseas just since the close of World War 2. And this is what we know about. Many other misdeeds are yet to be revealed or documented.

Parting shot—a word from the editors

The Best Definition of Donald Trump We Have Found



In his zeal to prove to his antagonists in the War Party that he is as bloodthirsty as their champion, Hillary Clinton, and more manly than Barack Obama, Trump seems to have gone “play-crazy” – acting like an unpredictable maniac in order to terrorize the Russians into forcing some kind of dramatic concessions from their Syrian allies, or risk *Armageddon*. However, the “play-crazy” gambit can only work when the leader is, in real life, a disciplined and intelligent actor, who knows precisely what actual boundaries must not be crossed. That ain’t Donald Trump – a pitifully shallow and ill-disciplined man, emotionally handicapped by obscene privilege and cognitively crippled by white American chauvinism. By pushing Trump into a corner and demanding that he display his most bellicose self, or be ceaselessly mocked as a “puppet” and minion of Russia, a lesser power, the War Party and its media and clandestine services have created a perfect storm of mayhem that may consume us all.– **Glen Ford, Editor in Chief, Black Agenda Report**