

IT'S SHOWTIME!



IN THE FINAL DAYS OF THE 2004 ELECTION

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Hurry, hurry, hurry! Step right up, ladies and gentlemen! The show has already begun, so take your seats quickly, and get ready for the performance. The scenery is up and the actors are in place, so let's watch them closely as they entertain us with their very best lines and gestures. Be assured that our leading players have rehearsed their roles with the finest of coaches. They are, after all, competing for the most coveted award in the nation, and truly want our attention and admiration.

Because, when the show is over, we all get to vote for the winner!

Check the actors out carefully, so you'll make the right choice. Look closely. Do they really look the part they have to play? Do they sound sincere? Is their phrasing expressive? Do they perspire or squint under hot lights? Are they consistently graceful and suave? Are their coiffed and preened to the nines? Are they slightly too tall, or somewhat too short? Can they say each of their lines in two minutes flat? Take notes. These are important criteria.

Never mind that our nation is falling apart. The show must go on. Never mind that we've been deceived and manipulated so shamelessly. The show must go on. Never mind that there is poverty and homelessness. Never mind that ideology has replaced sanity. Never mind that pollution and corruption rule the day. Never mind that the richest nation in the world is home to millions who cannot survive its deprivations. Never mind that the mightiest nation in the world is terrorizing and brutalizing others. Never mind. The show must go on.

So, stand the players side by side. Which one is the most appealing? Which one is the most charming? Which one works the audience most skillfully? Who has the brightest smile? Who has the most charming wife? Who sounds folksier, and who is aloof and more distant? And with whom, of course, would you rather have a beer? Count the points you give to each. We need a winner very soon.

Never mind who can lead the nation. Never mind who can restore the dignity and respect we have lost around the globe. Never mind who has taken us to a disastrous war, a disastrous economy, a disastrous environment, and has embraced a disastrous disregard for our Constitution. Never mind. It's all about wowing the crowd, and learning the mantras. It's all about handlers and agents and media hype. But never mind, it's all about winning.

The show is almost over. As it unfolds, audience will watch intently. Has one of the actors missed a line? Has one of them uttered a memorable one liner? Has one score a knockout punch with some startling rejoinder? Or maybe, just maybe, will reality creep in before it's too late. Maybe, just maybe, will the voters of this country realize that this is not theater, not fantasy, not make-believe? Maybe, just maybe, when the curtain comes down, and the lights come on, will the real world finally be visible?

For in that real world, at this most crucial moment, perhaps the most consequential in our lives, we will actually be asked to choose a winner. Do we choose the best performer or the best man? Can we afford to absorb the trivia being discussed by the talk show pundits and the network news mavens, or are there far more serious factors to consider? Can we afford to succumb to the spin of the political professionals? Can we afford to ignore the issues and facts and ideas that are before us? Can we afford to ignore the achievements and failures of the players, and the validity of the philosophies they live by? We cannot.

The show, as it must, is about to come to an end. The performances will be over, and the weight of the world will come to rest on the winner we select. That man must be strong and courageous and determined. But he must be equally honorable, trustworthy, and flexible. He must be a leader, not merely look like one. He must know the issues, not merely master catchphrases. He must see the world as it is, not as he imagines it to be. He must be a man of maturity and wisdom, not of arrogance and rigidity. He must be a man who can reach out to the world of nations, not a man who is sheltered from all semblance of reality.

He must be a man who will heal this nation, not pour salt on its wounds.

The voters of this nation must not be blinded by the fanfare of deception that defines the theater, but has no place in real life. This election carries no room for error, and no chance for reprieve.

The problem remains that for many of the electorate there is little on which to base real choices. The pundits would have us believe that the man who best plays the part deserves the prize. We have no playbill with actual biographical data before us. We have no fact sheet against which to check the truth of what we are told.

As a result, those of us who know must help others to know. We have a chance to refer the undecided and the unclued voters to resources that can help them examine the issues carefully and decide where this nation is heading. This is the homestretch in the mother of all races.

Remind people that the choice in this election is not between two performers on the political stage. The choice is between a change in the direction of hope, or four more years of the same, and possibly worse despair we are in today.

Talk to people. Explain the issues. Ask them to think long and hard about their choices. When the curtain comes down after Election Day 2004, the prize winner will be announced to the entire world. On the morning of November 3^d, we will either awaken to an era of recovery and progress, or else we will most certainly descend into an unspeakable extension of Hell. .

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