

Substance over Symbolism

By Musafir

Nearly everyone has heard of Nero "fiddling while Rome burned". "If they have no bread, let them eat cake," allegedly uttered Marie Antoinette while the French were starving. The same sense of futility and unreality prevails among our elites on both the Democratic and the Republican sides. The same is true of their mindless supporters who seem euphoric over the symbolism displayed or the monotonous cliché repeated by their equally dead beat leaders.

In June of 2008, while the Midwest was submerged under water, while the middle class was stretched due to unaffordable energy prices, and while the part of the nation was without power because of bad reliability and maintainability on part of our monopolistic utility companies, the privileged and affluent among us were rejoicing over the same-sex marriage and the media was busy covering the right to bear arms and 'Gay Pride' parades around the globe.

The extent of this gratuitous campaign has equally affected the brains of our youngsters. I teach a course in 'Critical Thinking' for the University of Phoenix. As a part of the assignment, my students are supposed to write an essay on any topic related to the crisis facing the United States of America. Out of my 200 students presently enrolled, 98% chose 'same sex marriage, abortion right, sex education, capital punishment, gun control and alternative medicine.' Of course, the Iraq War also made the list. To my dismay, no one talked about deteriorating infrastructure, the monopoly of cable and utility companies, disservice of our service industry, the need for mass transit, rebuilding the Ground Zero or goal-setting for alternative energy.

Symbolism often trumps substance since it captures people's imagination. The fact remains that 12.9 million children now live in poverty in this country. Nearly 3 million children go to bed hungry in the U.S. Millions of Americans do not have health care. Those Americans without health insurance often resort to seeking care in emergency rooms, resulting in extremely high bills that sometimes go unpaid. Nearly 4 million of the elderly are going without medicine so that they can eat. Our government spends hundreds of billions of dollars on

interest payment on the national debt. Compare that to NASA at \$15 Billion, Education at \$61 Billion, and Department of Transportation at \$56 Billion. Our congressional leaders play with public's sentiments using symbolism, but hardly anything gets done by them. They (the Congress) mandated ultra-low sulfur content in diesel fuel. That pushed the processing cost way up, and now diesel fuel in the U. S. is the most costly fuel on the planet. This was a serious blow to the economy and hit low income earners more than anyone else. The above is just one example. Our brainless leaders commit those errors and neglect every day. No one talks about those issues because we are all a part of *The Truman Show* – a world where symbolism rules. If you recall the movie, *The Truman Show* showed us a character who challenged and ultimately escaped from a contrived world. We need to do the same.

There was a time, not long ago, when we set a goal to walk on the moon and achieved that goal. America was building the tallest buildings in the world and had the best highways on the planet. Now those laurels go to Dubai, China, and Malaysia. Our leaders, media and elites have a tendency to focus doggedly on their own specific agenda. Our famous environmentalist, Al Gore is asking us to get inside our basements lest the sky should fall down. Mr. Gore and people like him should be crusading for more off shore drilling, nuclear power plants, development of alternative energy sources, mass transit and making our utility companies accountable for their incompetence and neglect.

I do not mean to single out Mr. Gore. We should ask all our leaders including Mr. Obama, Mrs. Clinton, and Mr. McCain what do they mean by 'bringing change?' Does the 'change' mean making us bisexuals, carry guns, make America a third world country or do they mean having mass transit, a plan for energy independence, making America's infrastructure and service industry the best in the world, balancing the budget and coming together to abate the rising medical cost with a firm plan and a deadline?. We must put substance above symbolism or perish. Just thinking!