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Selling Death for Fun and Profit

By William Rivers Pitt
truthout | Perspective

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"For a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back - that's an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple of spots on your hat, and you're finished."

– Arthur Miller, 'Death of a Salesman'

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Sooner or later, if you live in a world without consequences, you will say or do something so utterly reprehensible, so completely beyond the pale, that those who behold your pestiferous splendor will be left, simply, in awe. This world without consequences has been the realm of the Bush administration for three long years.

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They enjoyed umbilical ties to Enron, one of the companies which participated in the gang-rape of our economy, and have suffered no consequences. They gave away the Federal Treasury to the wealthiest of their supporters, compounding the budgetary shock that came in the aftermath of Enron, and have suffered no consequences. They raided Social Security to make up the difference, after promising explicitly that they would not, and have suffered no consequences.

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They made war on a nation that was no threat to the United States, in defiance of practically the entire world, and have suffered no consequences. They lied to the American people day after day after day about the nature of this nonexistent threat, painting pictures of a rain of poison gas from Iraq pelting down on the innocent so as to scare people into line, and have suffered no consequences. They



destroyed the career of a deep-cover CIA agent in retaliation for the exposure of their lies, an agent running a network to keep weapons of mass destruction out of the hands of terrorists, and have suffered no consequences. It is, as ever, the dead and maimed soldiers, along with their families, who have taken on the burden of suffering those consequences.

Pointedly, they stood steward over the most catastrophic attack in American history and have suffered no consequences. They blew past warnings of impending attacks from several allied nations, and likewise blew past warnings of impending attacks from trusted voices within their own ranks, and have suffered no consequences. They have stonewalled each and every step taken towards trying to find out why and how the attack took place, going so far as to attempt to give master secret-keeper Henry Kissinger control of the investigation, and have suffered no consequences. They have blithely slapped down pleas for clarity and truth from the family members of the victims of that dark day, and have suffered no consequences.

So it goes today with the new battery of political ads unleashed by the Bush for President brigade, and with the plans being laid by the GOP for their September convention. When you live in a world without consequences, this is what you are capable of.

"The entire format and actual physical setup could be radically different," said the GOP insider quoted in a March 3rd article in The Hill about the upcoming Republican National Convention in New York City. "They might not even have a podium, or maybe a rotating podium or even a stage that comes up from underground. It would be like a theater in the round, with off-site events that are part of the convention."

"Or," continued this insider, "and this is a real possibility, we could see President Bush giving his acceptance speech at Ground Zero. It's clearly a venue they're considering."

The new ads are wretched enough. Imagine Franklin Delano Roosevelt using images of the Pearl Harbor attacks to frighten people into supporting him, and you will apprehend the gall of these new commercials. A recent editorial cartoon captured the essence of the matter nicely. It showed a grave and headstone reading '9/11 Victims.' Pounded into the soil of that grave is a sign reading 'Vote Bush 2004.' To the side is George himself, hands folded, saying, "What? I thought the sign was tasteful."

From the mouths and hearts of those most affected by the attacks have come denunciations of these scabrous tactics.

"I'm disappointed but not surprised that the President would try to trade on the heroism of those fire fighters in the September 11 attacks," said Harold Schaitberger, General President of the International Association of Fire Fighters. The IAFF represents more than 263,000 full-time professional fire fighters and emergency medical personnel who protect 80 percent of the nation's population. More than 2,900 affiliates and their members protect nearly 6,000 communities in every state in the United States and every province in Canada.

"The use of 9/11 images are hypocrisy at its worst," said Schaitberger. "Here's a President that initially opposed the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and now uses its first anniversary as cause to promote his re-election. Here is a President that proposed two budgets with no funding for FIRE Act grants and still plays on the image of America's bravest. His advertisements are disgraceful."

"Bush is calling on the biggest disaster in our country's history, and indeed in the history of the fire service, to win sympathy for his campaign," continued Schaitberger. "Since the attacks, Bush has been using images of himself putting his arm around a retired FDNY fire fighter on the pile of rubble at ground zero. But for two and a half years he has basically shortchanged fire fighters and the safety of our homeland by not providing fire fighters the resources needed to do the job that America deserves."

"It's as sick as people who stole things out of the place," said Firefighter Tommy Fee of Queens Rescue Squad 270. "The image of firefighters at ground zero should not be used for this stuff, for politics."

"It's a slap in the face of the murders of 3,000 people," said Monica Gabrielle, whose husband died in the twin towers. "It is unconscionable."

Combine that with an image of George W. Bush standing on the bones of our dead in that sacred graveyard to accept the nomination, surrounded by all his failures, bereft of consequences, and that sense of disgusted awe becomes complete.

There is a ray of light in all the muck. There is a ray of light coming from those who have suffered the consequences Bush and his people have managed to avoid. There is a ray of light, and it shines from the

people. Bush is going to New York City to accept the nomination of his party. He will be met by hundreds and hundreds of thousands of everyday Americans, who will raise their voices in a solemn chorus with the firefighters, the police, the EMTs and the families of the victims. In that solemn chorus will be one theme.

How dare you, George? How dare you?

If you stand with the victims, with the soldiers, with the firefighters and police and EMTs, if you stand with outrage in your heart, perhaps the time has come to make some plans. Perhaps the time has come to book a plane, or a train, or a donkey, or whatever, to bring you to New York City this September. The city that never sleeps is as good a place as any to deliver a wake-up call. Actions will, at long last, have consequences.

William Rivers Pitt is the senior editor and lead writer for truthout. He is a New York Times and international bestselling author of two books - 'War on Iraq: What Team Bush Doesn't Want You to Know' and 'The Greatest Sediton is Silence.'

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