

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE – MORE HOLLYWOOD BRAINWASHING

By Don Feder

What's the greatest danger to America – maniac Moslems longing to resurrect the Caliphate, Stalinist states with nuclear arsenals, terrorist sugar-daddies stockpiling doomsday weapons?

Not according to Hollywood. Once again, the entertainment community has brilliantly discerned the real threat to our nation's security in multinational corporations – military contractors doling out campaign cash and exercising shadowy influence over government.

Or, as Denzel Washington's character explains in Paramount's anti-capitalist remake of "The Manchurian Candidate" – Michael Moore meets Ralph Nader -- the clear and present danger is "rich people funding bad science to put a sleeper agent in the White House." Oooh!

In the original "Manchurian Candidate" (1962), the villains were communist operatives. In this DNC remake, the bad guys practically have GOP stamped on their foreheads.

The original opens with a flashback to the capture of a U.S. Army patrol during the Korean War. The GIs are brainwashed by Chinese and Soviet scientists in Manchuria and turned into robotic killers– hence, The Manchurian Candidate.

In director Jonathan Demme's version, the patrol is captured during the 1991 Gulf War. The soldiers, led by the dedicated Capt. Marco (Denzel), are taken to a secret laboratory somewhere in the region, where they're subjected to high-tech mind manipulation – brain implants that control memories and, with the right stimulation, actions.

Raymond Shaw (Liev Schreiber) comes back a Medal of Honor winner, thanks to false memories of his heroism. Shaw is elected to Congress and winds up his party's vice presidential nominee, due to his turbo-charged Machiavellian mother – a United States Senator with the personality of Hillary Clinton, who spouts what the scriptwriter assumes are conservative theories.

At the center of the conspiracy to create “the first privately owned president” is Manchurian Global, “ a supremely powerful, well-connected, private equity fund,” whose directors include Saudi royals, deposed communist dictators, ayatollahs – in short, everyone except Hannibal Lecter in a dinner jacket.

But why Manchurian Global? Is the company incorporated in the Chinese province? Does it trade yak dung in the commodities futures markets? The name, which seems to bear no relation to the company’s operations, is an awkward attempt to tie the plot to the title.

While the remake lacks the taut action or superb acting of the original (it may have been Sinatra’s best performance), it weaves together all of the favorite paranoid fantasies of the fever-swamp left – corporate campaign contributions, Halliburton, Dick Cheney, the Bush family’s Saudi connections, political assassinations engineered in board rooms and – of course – brainwashing.

Says Demme, “This is a movie about political brainwashing, and we’re right back there again now.” Which party do you suppose he’s talking about? Hollywood can only conceive of Republican popularity in terms of mind control.

Adds loony New Ager Jon Voight, who plays the standard-issue noble liberal Senator in the film, “It raises lots of questions and gets us thinking about assassinations and other things we went through and were traumatized by in the 60s.”

This is Hollywood’s stock excuse for propaganda in the guise of entertainment: It gets us thinking – in ways Hollywood wants us to think. Some would call that brainwashing.

“The Manchurian Candidate” could easily be mistaken for a 2 hour and 15-minute Kerry campaign ad.

Even Frank Rich (dogmatically liberal columnist for The New York Times) admits: “I cannot recall when Hollywood last released a big-budget mainstream feature as *partisan* as this one at the height of a presidential

campaign. That it has slipped into action under the media's radar, as discreetly as the sleeper agents in its plot, is an achievement in itself. Freed from any obligations to fact, 'The Manchurian Candidate' can play far dirtier than 'Fahrenheit 9/11.' Assuming that's possible.

Rich also notes that almost everyone connected with the film is a die-hard Democrat, including Meryl Streep (who plays Shaw's mother and performed at a recent Kerry fundraiser) and Paramount chairwoman Sherry Lansing (a major Democratic donor, as is Sumner Redstone, chairman of Paramount's parent company, Viacom). Even un-funny man Al Franken, whose anti-conservative diatribes rival Moore's "documentaries" for sheer shrillness, has a cameo as a cable TV reporter.

The plot aside, "The Manchurian Candidate" is a showcase for liberal idiocy on a variety of issues – from civil liberties to the war on terrorism. Voight's wise/compassionate Senator tells us, "We have helped to engender (*terrorists*) with 20 years of failed foreign policies." (In the movie, the war on terrorism has spun out of control, with U.S. forces engaged everywhere from Indonesia to Africa.)

Here is the bottom line of liberal thinking on terrorism. You could almost put it to music: "We made them hate us. They didn't want to do it. They didn't want to do it."

It's not that Islamic fundamentalists are followers of a deranged ideology masquerading as a religion. It's not that they despise us as unbelievers. It's not that they abhor our values – democracy, liberty, individualism – as Western decadence. It's not that, sitting in their oily sandpits, they resent our power and influence. It's not that they believe the Koran gives them a mandate to conquer and rule us.

For liberals, it's always our fault.

According to this worldview, if we didn't support Israel, if we weren't involved in the Middle East, if we'd hadn't toppled the Taliban regime and Saddam's thugocracy, today, al-Qaeda suicide bombers would be waving little American flags while bin Laden sang "Yankee Doodle Dandy."

The liberal attitude toward terrorism is an extension of a mindset developed in the '60s. After John F. Kennedy, whatever the Soviets did, the left just couldn't bring itself to blame the Kremlin.

Liberals like William J. Fulbright and Eugene McCarthy insisted our anti-communist foreign policy caused Moscow to overreact. Our defense spending fueled an international arms race. The East/West conflict was all an unfortunate misunderstanding. The communists didn't really want to bury us. Peaceful coexistence was indeed possible.

It didn't matter what the Soviets said or did, liberals always found a way to rationalize it.

Now, the left applies the same reality defying logic to the war on terrorism. Hollywood does the training films.

In the 1970s and 80s, when the Russians were rampaging across the Third World, it was easier to find an evangelical Christian portrayed as a good guy than a communist heavy in an action film or drama. Instead, the villains were drawn from PC central casting -- U.S. intelligence agencies, corporate conspirators, generals plotting coups and the ever-present right-wing cabal.

Nothing has changed. Almost three years after the World Trade Center attack, Islamic militants are strictly off limits as bad guys. (No profiling, please.)

In the 2002 Ben Affleck flick, "The Sum of All Fears," the terrorist threat came from neo-Nazis with nuclear weapons. In a world with rogue states like North Korea, China and Iran, only Hollywood could conceive of Armageddon coming from a guy named Fritz with an I-Love-Hitler bumper sticker on his VW, playing with enriched plutonium.

"The Manchurian Candidate" also assumes enemies that don't exist, while studiously ignoring those forces actively seeking America's destruction.

Still, although "The Manchurian Candidate" is clearly intended as an anti-Bush vehicle, it could backfire. After all, it's Kerry who's supposed to be the war hero in this campaign. Say, maybe the memories some shipmates

have of his bravery were implanted? Should we check his shoulder for a microchip or his brain for hot-wiring?

While Shaw's family (old money, three generations in politics) is meant to suggest the Bushs, Kerry – Forbes family connection, Yale graduate, path to power paved with big-money campaign contributions – is hardly an outsider.

With Teresa Heinz Scary (another alpha-female) behind him, the Massachusetts Senator – who seems to have been groomed for the presidency from birth – bears a striking resemblance to the fictional Raymond Shaw.

It never ceases to amaze: Hollywood passes off crude propaganda like “The Manchurian Candidates” as entertainment, then has the audacity to whine about brainwashing.

After “The Day After Tomorrow” (Republicans are precipitating another Ice Age), “The Stepford Wives” (country-club Republicans are turning their spouses into robots), “Saved” (born-again Christians are hypocritical bigots) “Fahrenheit 9/11” (blame Bush for the World Trade Center) and now “The Manchurian Candidate,” the brains of audiences are beginning to resemble shirts whose collars are frayed from too many trips to the drycleaners.