Kathleen Hall Jameison, of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communication, has observed that the problems facing this country are so daunting, so refractory to simple solutions, no politician aspiring to (re-)election dares broach an honest, straight-forward discussion of them for fear of rejection by an alienated, disappointed or disillusioned electorate. As a consequence, our electoral decisions are based largely on side issues - the past, trivia, matters of appearance - rather than those issues of crucial substance urgently confronting the country. Rather than being addressed when they are first perceived and recognized, these issues tend to be buried, only to fester and inflame into crises when they are mature. Americans have become addicted to being shielded from facing unpleasant truths until it is much more difficult, if not too late, to address them effectively. Why?

For many if not most Americans the principal objectives of life are personal comfort, gratification - whether passive or active -, and amusement - whether by self or preferably by others. In general, we are neither comforted, gratified nor amused by difficult, intractable problems, individually or nationally. At best we want solutions, from others, not problems that require our personal attention and action both of which detract from the pursuit of our personal objectives. As our politicians' primary object is (re-)election, not problem solving, they comply with this preference, providing, not realistic, candid appraisals of looming national difficulties, but whatever myths and fantasies they believe their public will swallow. As a youth, I knew a woman who said she was aware some unpleasant things were happening in the world but she'd rather not know about them. It's as though many Americans would rather not confront the unpleasant realities of the world we live in. Why?

The criteria of addiction whether to a substance or a behavior are two:
* ever more craving, and
* symptoms on deprivation.
We are addicted to the prospect of happy issues out of all our afflictions, to the illusion of bright promise for our futures, regardless whether our present behaviors contribute to, or foredoom, very different results.

In the last few decades, generally the most profficient entertainer has won national elections by the creation, support and sustaining of national self-deluding fantasies: that America can do no wrong, that the rest of the world is out to get us, that we are victims of others' unmerited and unjustified animosity. We choose leaders we are 'comfortable' with, not those who tell us unpleasant truths we don't want to hear. Our media, our politicians, excuse our national excesses saying their clientele demands them, yet they steadfastly strive to create that demand to justify perpetuation and propagation of those excesses, whether
material waste, environmental contamination or trashing other nations in
our own, self-indulgent interest.

At a recent political rally, a candidate was praised by the chair as
'very entertaining'. In fact nothing in the candidate's presentation had
provided any evidence of competence for the position to which he aspired
but it sufficed that he was amusing, entertaining. Americans are addicted
to fantasy, escapism, delusional pursuits to avoid confronting the
realities the rest of the world deals with daily. Like Blanche DuBois, we
demand magic above all else to numb ourselves from conscious recognition
of what we are doing, what is being done in our name to ourselves, to
others, to life on this planet, to this planet itself. Our media, our
politicians, slavishly pander to the demands of the electorate to be
reassured, or failing that, distracted, entertained. Our excesses, where
even acknowledged, are excused, saying the American way of life we demand
and seek to impose on others is "non-negotiable".

Orwell wrote that if freedom means anything, it is the right to tell
others things they don't want to hear. Prior to the Second Gulf War, the
consensus of domestic and foreign experts on the Middle East was that
invading and occupying Iraq would be the disaster now playing out. It's
not that our leaders weren't warned; they chose to ignore the expert
opinion and the popular media padded amiably along behind them. Even now,
expert opinion on issues from the world economy to the planetary
environment foretell impending calamities in the near term yet nothing is
said of this in the campaigns of the principal candidates. Why? Why are
our electoral campaigns continually contested on minutae while the 800 lb.
gorillas and 2 ton elephants of difficult, substantive issues, covorting
offstage left are ignored?

We are fond of congratulating ourselves on our 'democracy'. But a
fundamental requirement of an effective, functional democracy is the
presence and predominance of an aware, thinking, responsive electorate.
Perhaps our political system would be better termed 'entertocracy':

Entertocracy: (n) Rule by entertainers or entertainment, with
predictably toxic effect.

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