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## Why Bulworth is Bullfull

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Abstract. This article reviews the film *Bulworth* and uncovers its politically conservative messages.

Films can elicit many types of political effect. They also are unavoidably propagandistic regardless of the intentions of people involved in film development through financing, production, direction, technical support, acting, marketing, distribution, viewing, and reviewing. There may be no significant effect or effects largely congruent with the film's manifest content or latent content. Effects may be congruent with combinations of the manifest and latent or incongruent with all of the above. Effects may be homogeneous across eras, cultures, societies, and population segments or differentially heterogeneous. The complexity of film effect presents a challenge for the intentional propagandizer and unintended fallout for the unintentional.

With the above as prelude, the United States (US) film *Bulworth* directed by Warren Beatty seems intended to expose the hypocrisies of US political dialogue as embraced by most politicians, political pundits, and consumers of political journalism. The vehicle is the presentation of narrative with outrageous disparities between political campaigning as usual and what transpires on the screen. The film most likely succeeds, however, in accomplishing the converse--reinforcing hypocrisies with the latent overriding the manifest.

The film portrays a US senator running for reelection. He once was a liberal in the 1960s and early 1970s radical chic mode of the term and has become--in his eyes--a venal dealmaker coopted by "big business" and "money politics." Even his "perfect marriage and family" is a living lie. Experiencing the pathos of his life's trajectory and the consequences of little sleep and food, he takes out a contract on his own life. The contract becomes its own oxymoron as it "frees him" from what passes as typical political constraints and--with continued lack of sleep--catalyzes "breaking the rules" through emulating several rap cultures in US inner cities, and obviates the need for itself. Interspersed are shocked faces, misdirected anxieties, and satirical juxtapositions. As the narrative continues, breaking the rules becomes making the rules as the senator is electorally successful. As the movie is about to fade into a feel-good finale after the senator's long embrace and kiss with a woman from across the US versions of racial and age divides, he is shot. Telling it like it is not allowed to stand. Or, perhaps, it stands through martyrdom as the film ends with a mantra repeated throughout the film by an African American (what many US citizens term "black") version of a Shakespearean fool or gravedigger--success rides on being a spirit not a ghost.

Yet whether as spirit or ghost, the film's stretch for outrageousness only reinforces hypocrisy as opposed to shattering it. For example, the antebellum images of black females as primarily sexual, custodial, and nurturant are reinforced as all three are repeatedly employed as vehicles of ethnic rapprochement in scenes between Caucasian (what many US citizens term "white") male political operatives and their new black female acquaintances. As another example--in a merger of crypto-Freudianism, proto-liberalism, and crude population genetics--salvation from racism through the realization that we are all the same becomes a paean to hyperfrequent interracial sex. Yet again, the desolation of generations of black lives in inner cities is completely denied as the viewer learns that the

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residents of these cities have not been severely harmed, are largely astute and politically sophisticated, and need only the barest of opportunities to rise above the rape of their communities. And the US senator's intimation that Jews have had and have very significant financial and thematic clout in the Hollywood film industry is portrayed as outrageous even as it is portrayed through that very industry.

Bulworth masquerades as a political film that breaks all the rules. It breaks none of them. Has the same been the case for "new" politics throughout history? (See Beebe, J. (1996). Jungian illumination of film. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 83, 579-587; Berman, E. (1998). The film viewer: From dreamer to dream interpreter. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 18, 183-206; Berman, E. (1997). Hitchcock's *Vertigo*: The collapse of a rescue fantasy. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 78, 975-996; Butler, L.D., Koopman, C., Zimbardo, P.G. (1995). The psychological impact of viewing the film *JFK*: Emotions, beliefs, and political behavioral intentions. *Political Psychology*, 16, 237-257; Roberts, D.S.L., Cowen, P.S., and MacDonald, B.E. (1996). Effects of narrative structure and emotional content on cognitive and evaluative responses to film and text. *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, 14, 33-47; Magliano, J.P., Dijkstra, K., & Zwaan, R.A. (1996). Generating predictive inferences while viewing a movie. *Discourse Processes*, 22, 199-224.) (Keywords: Bulworth, Film, Interpretation.)