



Written by [John and Nisha Whitehead](#) on October 26, 2022

Dictatorship in Disguise: Authoritarian Monsters Wreak Havoc on Our Freedoms

“You see them on the street. You watch them on TV. You might even vote for one this fall. You think they’re people just like you. You’re wrong. Dead wrong.” — [They Live](#)

We’re living in two worlds.

There’s the world we see (or are made to see) and then there’s the one we sense (and occasionally catch a glimpse of), the latter of which is a far cry from the propaganda-driven reality manufactured by the government and its corporate sponsors, including the media.



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Indeed, what most Americans perceive as life in America—privileged, progressive and free—is a far cry from reality, where economic inequality is growing, real agendas and real power are buried beneath layers of Orwellian doublespeak and corporate obfuscation, and “freedom,” such that it is, is meted out in small, legalistic doses by militarized police and federal agents armed to the teeth.

All is not as it seems.

Monsters with human faces walk among us. Many of them work for the U.S. government.

This is the premise of John Carpenter’s film *They Live*, which was released in November 1988 and remains unnervingly, chillingly appropriate for our modern age.

Best known for his horror film *Halloween*, which assumes that there is a form of evil so dark that it can’t be killed, Carpenter’s larger body of work is infused with a strong anti-authoritarian, anti-establishment, laconic bent that speaks to the filmmaker’s concerns about the unraveling of our society, particularly our government.

Time and again, Carpenter portrays the government working against its own citizens, [a populace out of touch with reality](#), technology run amok, and a future more horrific than any horror film.

In *Escape from New York*, Carpenter presents fascism as the future of America.

In *The Thing*, a remake of the 1951 sci-fi classic of the same name, Carpenter presupposes that increasingly we are all becoming dehumanized.

In *Christine*, the film adaptation of Stephen King’s novel about a demon-possessed car, technology exhibits a will and consciousness of its own and goes on a murderous rampage.

In *In the Mouth of Madness*, Carpenter notes that evil grows when people lose “the ability to know the difference between reality and fantasy.”

And then there is Carpenter’s *They Live*, in which two migrant workers discover that the world is not as



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it seems. In fact, the population is actually being controlled and exploited by aliens working in partnership with an oligarchic elite. All the while, the populace—blissfully unaware of the real agenda at work in their lives—has been lulled into complacency, indoctrinated into compliance, bombarded with media distractions, and hypnotized by subliminal messages beamed out of television and various electronic devices, billboards and the like.

It is only when homeless drifter John Nada (played to the hilt by the late Roddy Piper) discovers a pair of doctored sunglasses—Hoffman lenses—that Nada sees what lies beneath the elite’s fabricated reality: control and bondage.

When viewed through the lens of truth, the elite, who appear human until stripped of their disguises, are shown to be monsters who have enslaved the citizenry in order to prey on them.

Likewise, billboards blare out hidden, authoritative messages: a bikini-clad woman in one ad is actually ordering viewers to “MARRY AND REPRODUCE.” Magazine racks scream “CONSUME” and “OBEY.” A wad of dollar bills in a vendor’s hand proclaims, “THIS IS YOUR GOD.”

When viewed through Nada’s Hoffman lenses, some of the other hidden messages being drummed into the people’s subconscious include: NO INDEPENDENT THOUGHT, CONFORM, SUBMIT, STAY ASLEEP, BUY, WATCH TV, NO IMAGINATION, and DO NOT QUESTION AUTHORITY.

This indoctrination campaign engineered by the elite in *They Live* is painfully familiar to anyone who has studied the decline of American culture.

A citizenry that does not think for themselves, obeys without question, is submissive, does not challenge authority, does not think outside the box, and is content to sit back and be entertained is a citizenry that can be easily controlled.

In this way, the subtle message of *They Live* provides an apt analogy of our own distorted vision of life in the American police state, what philosopher Slavoj Žižek refers to as [dictatorship in democracy](#), “the invisible order which sustains your apparent freedom.”

We’re being fed a series of carefully contrived fictions that bear no resemblance to reality.

Tune out the government’s attempts to distract, divert and befuddle us and tune into what’s really going on in this country, and you’ll run headlong into an unmistakable, unpalatable truth: what we are dealing with today is an authoritarian beast that has outgrown its chains and will not be restrained.

Through its acts of power grabs, brutality, meanness, inhumanity, immorality, greed, corruption, debauchery and tyranny, the government has become almost indistinguishable from the evil it claims to be fighting, whether that evil takes the form of [terrorism](#), torture, disease, [drug trafficking](#), [sex trafficking](#), murder, violence, theft, pornography, scientific experimentations or some other diabolical means of inflicting pain, suffering and servitude on humanity.

We have let the government’s evil-doing and abuses go on for too long.

We’re being fed a series of carefully contrived fictions that bear no resemblance to reality.

Despite the fact that we are 17,600 times more likely to die from heart disease than from a terrorist attack; 11,000 times more likely to die from an airplane accident than from a terrorist plot involving an airplane; 1,048 times more likely to die from a car accident than a terrorist attack, and 8 times more likely to be killed by a police officer than by a terrorist, we have handed over control of our lives to government officials who treat us as a means to an end—the source of money and power.



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As the Bearded Man in *They Live* warns, “They are dismantling the sleeping middle class. More and more people are becoming poor. We are their cattle. We are being bred for slavery.”

We have bought into the illusion and refused to grasp the truth.

From the moment we are born until we die, we are indoctrinated into believing that those who rule us do it for our own good. The truth is far different.

The powers-that-be want us to feel threatened by forces beyond our control (terrorists, pandemics, mass shootings, etc.).

They want us afraid and dependent on the government and its militarized armies for our safety and well-being.

They want us distrustful of each other, divided by our prejudices, and at each other’s throats.

Most of all, they want us to continue to march in lockstep with their dictates as fearful, controlled, pacified zombies.

This brings me back to *They Live*, in which the real zombies are not the aliens calling the shots but the populace who are content to remain controlled.

When all is said and done, the world of *They Live* is not so different from our own. As one of the characters points out, “The poor and the underclass are growing. Racial justice and human rights are nonexistent. They have created a repressive society and we are their unwitting accomplices. Their intention to rule rests with the annihilation of consciousness. We have been lulled into a trance. They have made us indifferent to ourselves, to others. We are focused only on our own gain.”

We, too, are focused only on our own pleasures, prejudices and gains. Our poor and underclasses are also growing. Injustice is growing. Inequality is growing. A concern for human rights is nearly nonexistent. We too have been lulled into a trance, indifferent to others.

Oblivious to what lies ahead, we’ve been manipulated into believing that if we continue to consume, obey, and have faith, things will work out. But that’s never been true of emerging regimes. And by the time we feel the hammer coming down upon us, it will be too late.

So where does that leave us?

The characters who populate Carpenter’s films provide some insight.

Underneath their machismo, they still believe in the ideals of liberty and equal opportunity. Their beliefs place them in constant opposition with the law and the establishment, but they are nonetheless freedom fighters.

When, for example, John Nada destroys the alien hypno-transmitter in *They Live*, he delivers a wake-up call for freedom. As Nada memorably declares, “I have come here to chew bubblegum and kick ass. And I’m all out of bubblegum.”

In other words: we need to get active and take a stand for what’s really important.

Stop allowing yourselves to be easily distracted by pointless political spectacles and pay attention to what’s really going on in the country.

As I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) and in its fictional counterpart [The Erik Blair Diaries](#), the real battle for control of this nation is taking place on roadsides, in police cars, on witness stands, over phone lines, in government offices, in corporate offices, in public



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school hallways and classrooms, in parks and city council meetings, and in towns and cities across this country.

All the trappings of the American police state are now in plain sight.

Wake up, America.

If they live (the tyrants, the oppressors, the invaders, the overlords), it is only because “we the people” sleep.

ABOUT JOHN & NISHA WHITEHEAD:

Constitutional attorney and author John W. Whitehead is founder and president of [The Rutherford Institute](#). His most recent books are the best-selling [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#), the award-winning [A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State](#), and a debut dystopian fiction novel, [The Erik Blair Diaries](#). Whitehead can be contacted at staff@rutherford.org. Nisha Whitehead is the Executive Director of The Rutherford Institute. Information about The Rutherford Institute is available at www.rutherford.org.



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