

BLUE ROSE STUDIOS, INC.

**Wake Up America!**  
**The Dennis Kucinich Story**

**Treatment,**  
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by

Daniel Loewus-Deitch

## INTRODUCTION

*Fade into footage of Dennis Kucinich's "Wake Up America" entire speech from the 2008 Democratic National Convention (about 6 minutes long). See here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lv0smG7ptcM>.*

1. In 2008, Dennis Kucinich gave an animated speech at the Democratic National Convention, endorsing Barack Obama and Joe Biden as they were nominated for the Democratic presidential ticket. In the speech, he lambasts the outgoing George W. Bush Administration for presumably destroying the U.S. economy, engaging in multiple wars to help oil companies and defense contractors make profits, allowing Wall Street and multinational corporations to take over the country, and spying on American citizens. He then implies that the Democrats will reverse these trends and bring back peace and prosperity to the nation.

*Montage of archive network news and C-SPAN footage clips involving Kucinich appearing somber and serious, including: TV interviews, House floor speeches, oversight committee interrogations, live readings of articles of impeachment against Cheney and Bush, etc. These will be followed by TV news story clips, late-night talk show host monologues, presidential debates, newspaper story snapshots, blog quotes, and other artifacts that make Kucinich appear to be ridiculous, crazy, comical, or simply far out of the mainstream. Interview excerpts with political scholars, pundits, supporters, and detractors will be intermixed within the montage, as well as voice-of-God narration.*

2. Just who is Dennis Kucinich? He is clearly a polarizing political figure. Far-left, anti-war progressives, who are disgruntled with centrist, mainstream Democrats, tend to revere and idolize him as a politician who they see as a true champion for social justice and the rights of average Americans. At the same time, his opponents, as well as many personalities in the mainstream media, tend to dismissively ridicule his extreme stances, quixotic campaigns, eccentric behavior, and quirky personality. What made Kucinich who he is today? How did he rise to national prominence as a symbolic embodiment of the radical left in American politics? How did Kucinich's public life and political history lead to the opposing caricatures of him that exist within mainstream and alternative media, as well as across various blogs, comments, forums, and other new media on the Internet?

## ACT I. WHAT MADE KUCINICH WHO HE IS TODAY?

*Archival video footage and photos: Downtown Cleveland during the 1950s, as well as Kucinich's numerous childhood homes and neighborhoods. Establishing shots: Some of Kucinich's childhood homes as they look today. Establishing shots: The Plain Dealer Offices, St. Michael Hospital (formerly St. Alexis Hospital), Parmadale Family Services, and Kucinich's various schools. Interview excerpts with teachers, friends, and family intermixed along with narration. These may include surviving siblings, childhood acquaintances, neighbors, and former coworkers.*

3. Kucinich grew up in Cleveland in extreme poverty. He lived in 21 different homes as a child, as well as brief stints in the back of a car, and in Parmadale Catholic Children's Home. He was the eldest of 7 children. What was he like as a child? What were people's impressions of him at home, in school, and at work? What do they think of him now as a politician and public figure?

*Interview excerpts with people who lived in Kucinich's ward, back in 1967 and 1969, when he ran for city council. Interview excerpts with others that served on City Council and the State Senate with Kucinich.*

4. At 21, Kucinich ran to become a Cleveland city council representative and lost. He won the next election, however, and beat a longstanding incumbent. He also ran an unsuccessful U.S. representative election before becoming mayor of Cleveland. How was Kucinich perceived during these times? What might he have learned through the campaigns that he lost? Why did people like or dislike him? Kucinich had a mixed reputation, especially during his years as mayor. How did Kucinich's colleagues in the Cleveland City Council and Ohio State Senate view him as a politician, leader, and peer?

## **ACT II. AN ELECTRIC BATTLE: THE "BOY MAYOR" VS. THE WORLD**

*Archival news footage of the great blizzards of 1977 and 1978, as well as the 1978 police strike. Original news interviews with critics of Kucinich in the city council and members of his administration. New interviews with a few of these city workers and politicians who used to work with Kucinich.*

1. When Kucinich took the oath of office as Cleveland's Mayor in 1977, he became the youngest mayor in the country to ever lead a major city. Almost immediately, his single term as mayor turned into an intense drama. It later became recognized as one of the most tumultuous periods in Cleveland's history. It began with 2 major blizzards, a blackout, and a police strike. Kucinich quickly made many enemies in City Council, big business, and even the mafia. He claimed he wanted to clear out the waste and corruption in the Cleveland's city government, but he burned a ton of political capital and critical bridges during this crusade. He was criticized for appointing extremely young, loyalist supporters to a number of top city positions. Many had worked on his campaigns for years, but had little or no relevant experience for the jobs that they were hired to do.

*Archival news coverage of Kucinich firing his police chief on live television and various excerpts from reports on the 1978 recall election. Interviews with citizens who lived in Cleveland at the time. Interviews with members of Kucinich's administration and members of the police force in 1978. Excerpts from this 1978 Tom Snyder interview at Tony's Diner in Cleveland (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtnVjM5pTn4&NR=1>).*

2. Kucinich made more enemies when he publicly fired his police chief that he originally appointed. Eventually his opponents organized a recall election that he won by the narrowest margins.

*Interviews with detectives and police that were involved in uncovering the mafia plot to kill Kucinich. Stock footage of garbage hauling trucks and garbage removal employees working. Pictures and archival footage of mob boss James Licavoli and hit man Thomas Sinito. Archival footage of the 1979 Columbus Day parade. Archival footage and pictures of Tony's Diner in Cleveland. Re-enactment of both assassination plots with narration. B-roll of hospital scenes.*

3. Kucinich angered the local mafia in Cleveland by reviewing all city contracts, many of which were controlled by the mafia. Kucinich's investigation of the garbage hauling contracts, in particular, triggered the mafia to put out a hit on Kucinich.

4. Mob boss James Licavoli hired Thomas Sinito to assassinate Kucinich by shooting him at a Columbus Day Parade. Kucinich ended up missing the parade after he ended up in the hospital with a ruptured stomach ulcer.

5. A second assassination attempt was partially devised to occur at Tony's Diner where Kucinich ate breakfast at the same time every day. The assassin was going to setup in a building across the street from the diner and shoot him as he ate his breakfast or after he exited the diner.

6. Eventually, the plans were discovered by an undercover Maryland State police officer posing as a mafia contract killer. He informed the Cleveland police, who uncovered the rest of the plot.

*Archival footage of Cleveland's Municipal Light building (now known as Cleveland Public Power), as well as current footage of it, both inside and out. Brief narration on the history of Muni Light. Archival and current footage of Cleveland Illuminating Company. Archival footage and current establishing shots of Cleveland Trust Bank. Original interviews, from 1977-1979, with anyone who worked for either utility (if available). New interview excerpts with top-level, former managers at both electric utilities. Scenes from this local Cleveland television news story (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3z0rk5RoP2U>). Archival local network news and public access television coverage of city council debates over whether to sell Muni Light. Interviews with those involved in the floor debates, including George Forbes. Archival footage of George Forbes and others' remarks about Kucinich and the electric utility situation. Archival news coverage of Cleveland being declared in default by Cleveland Trust Bank.*

7. Started in 1907, Cleveland Municipal Light has had a very long history.

8. Cleveland Trust Bank and other established businessmen in Cleveland demanded that Kucinich sell the city's publically owned Municipal Light utility to its private competitor, Cleveland Illuminating Company. They claimed it was unreliable, mismanaged, and a drain on the city. Kucinich refused to sell, insisting that a privatization of the electric utility would significantly raise monthly costs for Cleveland's citizens. Cleveland Trust

Bank threatened to throw the city into default if Kucinich did not agree to the deal. The standoff continued past the deadline that the banks gave and they eventually made good on their threat. Cleveland defaulted in December of 1978. This destroyed Kucinich politically and George Voinovich ousted him in the 1979 mayoral election.

*Establishing shots of New Mexico landscape, Los Angeles, and Graham, Washington. Interview with Shirley MacLaine. Interviews with Kucinich's friends and family. Establishing shots of the radio studio that Kucinich hosted his show from. Excerpts of Kucinich's radio talk show in L.A., as well as a few of the lectures he gave while living out in California.*

9. Through the 1980s, Kucinich lived out west in New Mexico and Los Angeles. While in L.A., he often stayed with his celebrity actress friend, Shirley MacLaine. He worked sporadically as a radio talk show host and a lecturer.

### **ACT III. KUCINICH TAKES THE NATIONAL STAGE**

*Archival footage of Kucinich's 1996 U.S. Representative election victory. Interview excerpts with Kucinich's past colleagues in Cleveland, political scientists, and Plains Dealer reporters discussing their reaction to Kucinich moving on to a national political office and how they feel about him representing one of Cleveland's major districts in Washington. B-roll footage of Washington, DC (including Capital building).*

1. In 1994, Kucinich moved back to Ohio permanently after winning an Ohio State Senate seat. He finally achieved national success when he narrowly defeated a 2-term Republican incumbent in 1996, taking over Ohio's 10<sup>th</sup> district seat.

*Image of Department of Peace bill (document) that Kucinich has sponsored several different times. Archival footage excerpts of Kucinich speeches in which he discusses the establishment of a Department of Peace (e.g. [http://www.archive.org/details/kucinich\\_dop](http://www.archive.org/details/kucinich_dop)). Cable news footage excerpts of Department of Peace being debated (e.g. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fqJenN-R3c>, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ati9GXs8psY&feature=related>). Excerpts from televised Walter Cronkite interview with Kucinich (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BIRE7g5ybo>). Excerpts from this video discussing a Department of Peace proposal in Canada: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jB3VZV9aL98>. Interviews with political science professors and American policy experts who support a Department of Peace, as well as with those who are against such a bureaucracy. Interviews with other senators and representatives who have sponsored such bills in the past. Archive footage of members of Congress who have proposed Department of Peace bills throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Interview with a member of the Costa Rica government about their renaming of the justice ministry to include the word "peace."*

2. One of Kucinich's most famous hallmarks, as a U.S. congressman, has been his repeated legislative attempt to establish a Department of Peace. Kucinich is not the first

to introduce such a bill, since 1793, similar proposals have been laid out by various leaders and other public figures. This idea has also been proposed in other countries, such as Canada. This would include a cabinet-level position that would oversee conflict resolution and non-violent solutions both domestically and abroad. As the U.S. became engaged in wars with Afghanistan and Iraq, following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, many of Kucinich's supporters rallied behind this idea. Opponents of Kucinich have used the Department of Peace proposal as an example to demonstrate that he is far left and out of the mainstream. Some opponents believe that this would just be a redundant, wasteful bureaucracy, fulfilling diplomatic roles and functions that the Department of Defense and Department of State already handle.

*Excerpts from the 2008 Democratic National Convention speech Kucinich gave that was shown at the beginning of the movie. Clips from speeches in which Kucinich sings, tells jokes, and uses poetry (e.g. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGmYhTYLbno>, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ol1OOnVveXk>). Excerpts from television interviews where Kucinich claims that Obama's ordered military action in Libya is an impeachable offense. News coverage discussing Kucinich's interest in running in Washington State if his Ohio congressional district is dissolved via redistricting. Interviews with political science and performance art professors. Interviews with television pundits.*

3. Kucinich understands how to use emotion, humor, and drama to grab the attention of his audience. His supporters and opponents view his antics in very different lights, but there is no doubt that Kucinich is skilled at keeping himself relevant and in the spotlight. Both his performance techniques and the polarizing narratives he generates make him an intriguing, ongoing topic of discussion, for better or for worse. Is Kucinich simply really good at playing the David character within a David and Goliath or does he truly see himself in this manner?

*Archive footage of television interviews and House floor speeches where Kucinich speaks out against the war in Iraq, the bailout of the banks, NAFTA, and healthcare bills that are not single-payer. Archive footage of Kucinich reading articles of impeachment for both Cheney and Bush. Interviews with current or former colleagues (both Republican and Democrat) in the House. Interviews with media pundits who have interviewed Kucinich on television in the past.*

4. While perhaps a bit more subdued, Kucinich still finds a lot of things to stand up *against* in Washington, just like he did when he was mayor of Cleveland. Kucinich likes to position himself as the guy who will come in and clean up all the corruption in the government. This populist approach appeals to his supporters, but he also often alienates and marginalizes himself from those he was to work with everyday within the lawmaking process, including those in his own party.

*Footage of presidential 2004 and 2008 Democratic primary debates and various presidential campaign stump speeches by Kucinich. Interviews with those who worked on Dennis' campaigns. Interviews with people who worked for NBC news in 2008.*

5. In 2004 and 2008, Kucinich ran for president. He never was a legitimate threat in the Democratic primaries but he did participate in a number of the debates. He actually sued NBC for inviting him and then disinviting him to a primary debate in Nevada in 2008. This became one of his motivations for championing the Fairness Doctrine and other media-related issues.

*Interviews with Drew Weston and George Lakoff. Kucinich speeches in which he reframes Republican bills, issues, and positions using his own language. Archive footage of speeches and debates involving Al Gore, John Kerry, and Harry Reid, that are criticized by Weston or Lakoff.*

6. Kucinich seems to embody many of the qualities that Drew Weston and George Lakoff advocate in a progressive politician. Kucinich is good at reframing issues, introducing his own mythology about America and its classical ideals. Yet, while Kucinich manages to consistently maintain an intriguing media persona, he is surprisingly ineffective as a lawmaker. When it comes to building consensus and passing legislation that he champions, Kucinich is rarely successful.

## EPILOGUE

*Heavy narration in this final scene. Montage of footage used earlier in the film, showing him both in defeat and in victory throughout his life career. Interview excerpts with Drew Weston, George Lakoff, and other political science experts in academia and media.*

1. In many ways, Dennis Kucinich is a refreshing, unique, progressive figure within the national Democratic Party. He also has an intriguing life story. At the same time, Kucinich's dogmatism, stubbornness, and historically drama-filled leadership have hampered his ability to more effectively influence the direction of America's national policies. Regardless, Kucinich has proved himself to be a resilient survivor and fighter, who always finds a way to bounce back, even after devastating defeats. He is skilled at reinventing himself, and yet he seems to maintain a philosophical consistency that is rare these days in politics: advocating for peace and social justice. Will Kucinich simply remain a cartoonish caricature of the far left the rest of his political career, or will he someday find a way to overcome his personality flaws and redefine the mainstream in this country? Kucinich continues to win elections because he understands how to leverage the media and emotionally communicate with his base constituents. The question remains, however, whether he will ever learn how to effectively communicate and build consensus with his congressional colleagues.

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