

## ***This Land Is Your Land!***

### **A Script for a Two-Hour TV or Theatrical Movie**

#### **SYNOPSIS**

*It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* meets a 1991 Gallup study of Americans (conducted and updated by [The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press](#)).

#### **ACT ONE**

Shown in silhouette against the window looking out onto "The Lone Eagle Ranch," an old man holds the receiver of an old-time phone up to his goateed mouth and dictates a telegram to be sent to the 10 men and women in photos on his desk: "The doctors tell me I've got just one week to live. Stop. I do so want to see your face before I pass on. ... I know there is an airline strike across the 48 states but have faith in your good ol' American ingenuity to find a way to make it here before I, uh ... stop ... Upon my word I will give you just what you need the most. ... But I must insist that you honor my last request and travel with the companion I specified previously. Stop. I want all of my family with me at this most fateful hour. Stop. Your loving adoptive uncle—Sam." In XCU is the smiling face of Uncle Sam, saying to himself, "THAT should get that ornery bunch together once and for all!"

At the Birmingham Airport, Faith (a poor, young African-American woman) meets Sterling (a rich, middle-aged white man), stepping out of a private jet. As Sterling stares at the swollen belly

of Faith and Faith stares at his buffalo-lodge hat, they wonder if they really want to make this trip together; but they agree Sam has been "like an uncle to our family" and go.

Disembarking a commercial jet from Honolulu at the Denver airport, Felicity (a cute young Hawaiian woman) is met by Buck (a rough-looking middle-aged white man). In his beat-up pickup truck they weave wildly through traffic, fighting over the radio: He tunes-in Country-and-Western; she tunes-in rock 'n' roll.

In a New York City theatre, Judith (a middle-aged, Jewish lawyer) receives a beep on her pager (during the ballet!). Getting her telegram in the lobby, she meets out front her travel companion, Prudence (a middle-aged Anglo woman). Judith reluctantly agrees to ride in outgoing Prudence's outlandish van—emblazoned with the trappings of a Southern evangelistic TV station—but only to get her things: She insists they then drive to Grand Central Station and catch a train.

On a Minnesota truck-farm, Frank (an elderly Italian-American, in an electric wheelchair) and his son are surprised by "La Cucaracha" played by the horn of a Florida "lowrider" driven by Manuel (a young, beer-bellied Latino). Despite his son's concerns, Frank takes a liking to

friendly, blue-collar Manuel and agrees to ride with him down to the Lone Eagle Ranch.

In the California desert, a bus delivers young, disco-clad Sherry to a circus, "The Smallest Show on Earth!," where she meets its owners, Charity (a 40ish mixed race woman) and her Indian husband, Raj, who enjoy their freedom and making children happy. They plan to pack-up the show after that night's performance and take it on the road, to the Lone Eagle Ranch. Charity offers to let Sherry perform in the show that night—dissolve to C.U. of Sherry in clown-face make-up. Freeze-frame.

## ACT TWO

Meanwhile, in the Rockies, Buck curses his broken-down truck and complains that he doesn't think they'll make it to The Lone Eagle Ranch in time; but Felicity waxes optimistic. To spite her, Buck takes a shortcut into "Devil's Gulch." Ironically, Buck whines that they'll never make it, as he races around the winding road; and Felicity tries to convince him that they indeed will, as she tries to hide her eyes while they dodge falling boulders and deep canyons.

Meanwhile, as they cruise down the interstate in the Midwest, Frank has put on the dashboard (below the dingle-balls) a statue of Saint Christopher (whom he insists is still a saint) and turned on his portable TV (on which is a soap opera, which he curses, although it's his "favorite program"). Frank insists on being navigator, and Manuel gladly defers. With the hours of the day passing in montage, Frank tells his endless stories about "how Ike 'n' I won the war," FDR

and the Great Depression, and his late wife. In XCU the copyright notice on Frank's trusty old map reads "1932"!

Meanwhile, at night under the "big" top of "The Smallest Show on Earth!," Ringmaster Charity introduces a troupe of acrobatic clowns, whose foil is bubbly Sherry. Outside, sparks from the power generator land in some hay next to the tent. Suddenly, as Raj puts "Maharishi" the elephant through his paces, the side of the tent opposite the audience explodes in flames! Charity leads the audience out; and Sherry helps Raj, who has been thrown from the elephant. Hearing the beast's cries for help, Charity rushes back in; and just before the tent collapses in flames, she rides him out to safety. The next morning, inspecting the smoldering (yet insured) remains of the circus, Sherry wonders why Charity risked her own life for that of "just an animal." Charity replies that if you look out for God's creatures, God will look out for you (as we shall see). As for getting to their (presumably) dying Uncle Sam in time, Charity points to a colorful, giant hot-air balloon, tethered nearby.

## ACT THREE

Meanwhile, aboard the private jet, Sterling and Faith are as uneasy about each other as the sturm-and-drang classical music he has playing in the background. When Sterling mentions he made his first fortune in junk bonds, Faith replies under her breath (but not out of earshot), "It figures"; and when Faith mentions she's on welfare, Sterling replies under his breath (but not out of earshot), "It figures." Trying to put on

some other music, Faith finds a CD labeled "Wrap Me Up! Wrap Me Down!"—but it's actually a video-disk and not of rap music as she assumed: Just after Sterling has tried to take the moral high ground with pregnant, unmarried Faith on family matters (His wife, in a photo, was "Miss Deli Loaf 1990"), steamy off-screen music and panting (and video unseen by us) cause Faith to shout, "Lord have mercy!" Jolted out of his seat and switching to auto-pilot, Sterling wrestles with Faith for control of the entertainment center. She calls him a "prevert!," knocks him over the head with her purse, and locks herself in the bathroom. Suddenly, the engines sputter; and alarms sound. "Uh oh," says Sterling.

Meanwhile, Judith and Prudence are eating at a snack stand in Grand Central Station. After going back and forth about all the different sorts of people ("Weirdos," says bumpkin-looking Prudence; "Live and let live," says jaded Judith); family break-ups, AIDS, winos and addicts, etc. ("Moral decay," cries Prudence, wolfing down fatty foods; "Education is better than invasions of privacy," remarks Judith, chain-smoking); and even The Bible ("THE Good Book," demands Prudence; "A good book," retorts Judith), Prudence storms off, unwittingly past a door warning "Danger!" Despite herself, Judith follows to save her.

Meanwhile, over the desert Southwest, Charity is trying to teach Sherry how to pilot the hot-air balloon; but Sherry is bouncing around in the basket to the pop music on her "Walkman." In the distance are some ominous-looking clouds. Charity scolds apathetic Sherry: "What would

you do if something happened to me? It's like the Beatles said, 'Think for yourself 'cause I won't be there with you.' Well, what would you do?" "Let it be," Sherry replies. After going back and forth about taking control—or not—over their own lives, Charity and Sherry realize they are about to fly into a thunderstorm! Despite Charity's valiant attempts to maneuver the balloon and Sherry's crying "Do something! Do something!," the balloon is caught-up in beating rain and tremendous turbulence. Suddenly, a thunderous bolt of lightning bursts the balloon; and the basket—with the screaming occupants—plummets to earth! At dawn, the storm has passed; but Charity and Sherry still clutch each other for dear life in the basket of the balloon, which is now suspended from a tree over a deep canyon. The ropes start to unravel, dropping the basket a bit; but the screams of the women are interrupted by the braying of a mule, which looks down at them from the rim of the canyon. The two women look at each other and then shout up at the apparently laughing animal, "Oh, shut up!" The mule "laughs" and leaves, the ropes unraveling!

#### ACT FOUR

Meanwhile, below Grand Central Station, Judith searches the dark corridors for Prudence. Elsewhere, Prudence journeys ever deeper into the "maze," with ominous rumblings and occasional bursts of steam. Suddenly, she is relieved to hear some high-pitched voices; but soon she is terrified to see an "army" of rats descending upon her! Cornered in a blind alley, Prudence is suddenly pulled up to safety through a manhole and deposited in the discard-

appointed room of a ragged homeless man (of indeterminate race), deep within the bowels of the underground city. He tells her his sad story; and she tells him how she got in this fix, mentioning her traveling companion with whom she has "absolutely nothing in common." He says he can show her the way out, but mentions he could use a pair of shoes: She gives him some money, because "it's the Christian thing to do" not simply because he's some sort of "minority." Meanwhile, Judith finds "the light at the end of the tunnel"—unfortunately, it's a rapidly approaching subway train! Judith runs, throwing off her shoes, which are zapped by the high-voltage rails; but just before the train hits, she disappears down a manhole: She plummets through plumbing and pops out onto a mattress in the room of the homeless man! Judith and Prudence briefly scold each other and then hug, in relief. When Prudence tells Judith how the homeless man has promised to lead them out safely but needs some money for shoes, Judith generously produces some cash for him from her purse but insists that she's giving it to him because "it's the right thing to do" not just because he's some sort of "minority." The homeless man smiles and says to Prudence, "I thought you said you two had absolutely nothing in common." Prudence and Judith follow the homeless man to an eerie corridor next to a boiler room. After he points the way out, he mysteriously disappears. Judith and Prudence condemn this place as a "Hellhole" and run off.

Meanwhile, in the Rockies, Buck and Felicity are at a backwoods railroad track, onto which Buck has driven his truck. As he lets the air out of his tires, she cautions him to heed an old sign

nearby, warning of highballing trains on the steep downgrade. Buck tells her to not believe everything she reads and discounts the sign as the fretting of some government bureaucrat or the lies of some railroad executive. He goads Felicity into getting in the truck by saying they'll probably be too late for their dear old Uncle Sam anyway—something she just cannot accept. As they glide on the rails through the mountains, the two fight over the radio—"bubble gum" vs. "cowpoke" music.

Meanwhile, in the air over the South, Faith beats on the head of Sterling, as he tries unsuccessfully to regain control of the private jet. Sterling lets slip, "Maybe I shouldn't have paid-off that pain-in-the-neck FAA inspector last month." Faith and then Sterling decide to exit, but the safety locker contains just one parachute. As the plane continues to drop from the sky, the two wrestle: "I paid for this parachute, missie!" "And I'm just a helpless woman," as she hits him over the head with her bag. Finally, they bail out together, Sterling wearing the chute and pregnant Faith clutching onto him, each telling the other, "It's YOUR fault!" The jet crashes down into a chicken coop—sending feathers flying—and the pair come splashing down into the mud of a pig sty. A hillbilly family, with father wielding a shotgun, runs in and gets an eyeful: There the two sit, plastered with feathers and staring daggers at each other!

#### ACT FIVE

Meanwhile, at night in the Midwest, Frank and Manuel find themselves lost on a backroad. Manuel discovers that they've been following a

sixty-year old map; however, lacking any better ideas, he agrees to follow it to the next town ahead. Frank turns a happy Country-and-Western song on the radio, and they drive into the dark woods. However, they do not notice a sign warning "NO Trespassing! And this means YOU!—The Knights of White Might Makes Right." As they drive on the bumpy road through the shelterbelt (with mournful cowboy music now on the radio), Frank praising this windbreak but Manuel worrying about his car's shocks, the two encounter some spooky but harmless wildlife. The lowrider finally exits the woods and comes to a stop in a moonlit pasture. However, as Frank and Manuel try to regain their bearings, there is a tremendous explosion nearby ... and then another and yet another! Manuel races their car across the field, zig-zagging to avoid the explosions to either side of them. Suddenly, they find themselves being shot at and chased by goons with machine guns on motorcycles with sidecars and a four-wheel-drive vehicle bearing the swastika-like insignia of the white-supremacist organization. Distracted, Manuel and Frank crash to a stop in a stack of hay. Guarded by the goons, Frank (in his wheelchair) and Manuel (with his arms raised) are confronted by the neo-Nazi goon lieutenant and the goon leader, costumed a la a KKK Imperial Wizard. Although Manuel tries to keep him from spouting off, Frank debunks these "brainless bigots" and badmouths their leader: "Look at that big one: He thinks it's Halloween! What a maroon." As always, the goon leader just growls, from under his white hood. The goons lock Frank and Manuel in a large shed, leave a guard outside, and promise to deal with them in the morning. In the shed,

Manuel hooks-up the wheelchair batteries to the small portable TV, which Frank had smuggled out with him. Suddenly, as he notices a broken-down motorcycle with wrecked sidecar in the shed and as a TV game-show bell sounds, Frank gets an idea. He asks, "Say, Manuel, you're pretty good with your hands, aren't you?" Manuel replies, "I told you my amigo and I built my lowrider from scratch outa parts from the junkyard. Why?" Frank just smiles.

#### ACT SIX

Meanwhile, under Grand Central Station, Judith and Prudence run around a corner into a large room and find themselves right between two gangs—one African American, the other Latino—just about to fight each other. Judith nervously says, "We're all reasonable people here, aren't we? ... What seems to be the problem?" The black gangleader bangs with a baseball bat on the floor and shouts, "This is OUR territory!" The Latino gangleader spraypaints a symbol on the wall and shouts, "This is OUR territory!" A dog nearby lifts its leg by a concrete column. Suddenly, Prudence, exasperated, goes on the offensive, assaulting verbally (and with her purse) the leaders of the two gangs as "Godless creeps!" and ranting on about how their mothers would be ashamed of them. "C'mon, Judith, let's get out of this sewer before I puke," booms Prudence, who takes Judith—as startled as the gangmembers—by the arm and marches her out. After a pregnant pause, the two gangleaders emit some culturally correct shouts and gang-up together to chase after the "loco mammas." Hearing their pursuers, Judith and Prudence turn a corner and come upon the homeless man,

smiling, knowingly (as is his fashion). He quickly leads them down to a left turn in the corridor and points to a discarded roll of Mylar window film. The gangmembers race into the corridor; but in the dim light, all they see ahead of them is an empty, seemingly endless corridor. Suddenly, from the other direction they hear a noise—the dog, left behind, has knocked over some beer cans—and they run off. Cautiously, the homeless man and Judith and Prudence lower a curtain of the mirror-like Mylar, which they had raised by hand at a 45-degree angle to the length of the corridor and hidden behind. After being thanked by Judith and Prudence for saving them, the homeless man smiles and says, "Do know that I helped you because it was the right thing to do and maybe, just maybe, because I felt sorry that you two were minorities down here." As Judith and Prudence turn to look at each other sheepishly, the homeless man once again disappears. As the two women climb a stairway to the daylight, they are watched by an eye of the homeless man looking through a triangular-shaped hole in a door down the corridor, on which is a tattered AMTRAK poster advertising "Get On Track To PROVIDENCE, Rhode ... "

Meanwhile, in the desert Southwest, Charity and Sherry gather their courage to climb up out of the basket hanging over the canyon. Suddenly, they are again interrupted by the braying of the mule, this time with an old Native American riding him. He pulls them up to safety, just before the basket plummets down into the chasm. After thanking the Native American, they ask him how he found them. He says the mule "told" him about their predicament. Sherry turns to Charity and says, "What was that you said

about looking after God's creatures?" The Native American says, "We are all children of the Great Spirit." When informed of their mission to see their dying Uncle Sam, the Native American says, "Ah, I know of your Uncle. There has been much bad blood between his family and mine over the generations." However, he reassures them and offers to help: "If you ladies would like—and the mule is agreeable—you may use one of my wagons and some of my supplies to continue your journey to your uncle: His ranch is not far from here. The mule knows the way." When Charity asks him how he can be so trusting of strangers, the Native American replies, "How do you think we lost this land in the first place? By NOT being a trusting people? ... The mule tells me you two are a bit flakey but with beautiful souls. I trust you will put in a good word for my people with your uncle." Laughing, the mule pulls the women in a wagon down a bumpy road.

Meanwhile, under a full moon at night in the Rockies, Felicity is awakened in the passenger's seat, as Buck slams on the brakes: Their truck comes face to face with a giant grizzly bear on the middle of a railroad trestle, towering over a river gorge. Felicity screams, as the bear and Buck growl viciously at each other. Buck steps on the accelerator of his truck; but with his engine fouling and his wheels slipping (still on the rails), the bear actually pushes the truck backwards. Felicity tries to appease the bear by throwing a peanut-butter sandwich out the window, but the bear just sits down in front of the truck and eats it. Buck pulls the shotgun from the rack in the cab; and although Felicity tries to stop him from shooting the bear, Buck

pushes her aside and aims—the bear runs off in terror. Buck laughs and, while petting his gun, tells her that it's the surest way to get action; but Felicity says, "No, THAT is!" as she points to the headlight of a locomotive ("The Domestic Express") racing down the track behind them. Battling fouled plugs and slipping wheels, Buck finally gets the truck to start down the tracks; but the train still gains on them! Just as they exit the bridge—with the train almost on top of them—Buck whips the steering wheel to the left, which sends the trunk careening off the tracks, shooting down the embankment, and crashing into a thicket. The next morning, in the not-total wreck of the truck, Felicity is awakened by the bear licking her face. She lurches back, awakening Buck. The bear reaches into the truck cab but only to grab another one of her peanut-butter sandwiches, which he munches down before licking his lips and lumbering off. The two look at each other sheepishly, in surprised, confused relief.

Meanwhile, back in the Midwest, it is dawn. Suddenly, the goon guard is awakened by a tremendous roar, immediately after which out through the doors of the shed come crashing Manuel and Frank (shouting "Remember the Alamo!", to the dismay of Manuel): Manuel has fixed-up and is driving the beat-up motorcycle, with Frank's wheelchair jury-rigged as its sidecar! Pursued by the machine-gun-wielding goons on their motorcycle/sidecars, Frank and Manuel escape through the comic hazards of an elaborate obstacle course: One by one, the pursuing motorcycle goons are eliminated by a wall of oil drums, an overhanging net, a barrier of hanging tires, a dummy with flamethrower, a

cable bridge, and a stout swinging rope (You have to read it to "believe" it!). After exiting the obstacle course, Manuel and Frank dodge the goon leaders following in their four-wheel-drive, which, however, hits a land mine in the pasture and flips over and over. Manuel and Frank reach their lowrider, at the haystack: As the two race off, the goon leader hops on the still idling motorcycle/wheelchair and revs it up, only to have it blow-up, leaving him growling blackfaced (in his white hood, no less!).

Meanwhile, back in the South, Sterling and Faith—still with some mud and chicken feathers—sit in adjoining cells in a backwoods jail. With the hillbilly father looking on, the local sheriff reads off the charges: "Reckless piloting of an aircraft, destruction of private property, assault on swine ..." Sterling offers a bribe; but when he mentions he's a bit "cash poor" at the moment and asks if they'd "accept plastic," the sheriff blows up: "What kinda dag blame fool do you take me for, boy?! This some sort of hairbrain 'sting' operation? Yeah. Don't think we haven't heard of such goin's-on out here in the boondocks, cityboy!" Faith asks the sheriff to go easy on Sterling, her "husband," saying he's just nervous with the baby on the way. Grumbling, the sheriff and hillbilly exit. Exasperated at Faith, who's smiling, Sterling gets an idea: The sheriff re-enters, and Sterling convinces him that his "wife" is in labor—Faith goes along with the gag. The sheriff panics ("I don't know nothin' 'bout birthin' no babies!") and drives the two off in the local "ambulance," which doubles as a hearse, complete with (empty) casket in back. As they race down winding, wooded country roads, Sterling suddenly tries to overpower the sheriff

at the wheel (Faith is in back). After hair-raising maneuvers, Sterling finally knocks the sheriff back into the coffin, which, as the hearse swings wildly around a curve, shoots out the back of the vehicle, through the air, down into a rapid river, and over a small waterfall—the sheriff hollering out from inside. Downstream, deep in the woods, the coffin floats lazily up to the still of a pair of moonshiners, testing their finished product. As they cautiously approach the ominous box, the sheriff suddenly throws open the lid, sits up, and moans, "Oh, Lordy!": The drunken moonshiners throw away their jugs and run off screaming into the woods. As Sterling drives the hearse, Faith, in the back, gives another groan; but when Sterling tells her she can let up now, Faith says it's no act and that they'd best get to The Lone Eagle Ranch (just across the state line) soon, because the baby's just not going to wait!

#### ACT SEVEN

It is late afternoon. Outside The Lone Eagle ranch are all the means of transportation that have gotten our characters to this, their final destination. In the large main room of the rustic ranch house, the guests have divided into two "camps" (corresponding to the Republican and Democratic groups in the Gallup survey): On the right side of the room are Felicity, Buck, Prudence, and Sterling; and on the left side of the room are Judith, Frank, Manuel, Charity, and Faith (who is attended to by Sherry and lying back on a sofa—she is about to have her baby). The two groups—their nerves as frayed as their clothing from their harrowing journeys—

are shouting appropriate insults at each other, sometimes individually, sometimes together.

Suddenly, the commotion is silenced by someone shouting, "Stop it!! For the love of God if not me, stop it!" At the head of the room standing tall is Uncle Sam (dressed in his traditional garb, toned down a bit by something of a ranch style). He continues, "You're going to kill this old man—and maybe that new baby coming into the world—with all this fighting amongst yourselves! All of you—every last one of you—is my family." The crowd listens intently as Sam paces about and speaks his climactic "God-and-Country" piece (in 3 pages, punctuated by the labor wails of Faith). After triumphing their virtues and exposing their weaknesses—and, thus, their need to depend upon one another—Sam continues, "As long as we're all coming clean, I have one more confession to make: I'm not actually dying now. I hope you'll forgive my little ... pretext, but I just didn't know of any other way to get you all together." Sam produces a document from his vest pocket and has it passed around the room, "Nevertheless, I will now turn the title to this ranch over to the joint custody of all of you—you will have to talk out the differences amongst yourselves as to its administration and so forth, but THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND ... for all of you and your children and your children's children, in perpetuity. And God help us, don't ever lose it or run it into the ground!" While studying the fine print of the document, Sterling asks, "This is most generous, Uncle; but is this what you meant when you told us you were going to give us 'just what we need the most'?" "Well no,"



explains their adoptive Uncle Sam, "What you need the most is, actually ... EACH OTHER."

After a moment of silence, the family members start to discuss how to run their inheritance; but they again begin to argue, about what to turn it into. Sam shakes his head; cranks up his old gramophone; and walks out, unnoticed.

Suddenly, the crowd is silenced, as Faith lets out one last scream and gives birth to a baby girl.

After the baby lets out a healthy cry, the gramophone starts to play an old recording of Woody Guthrie's *This Land Is Your Land (This Land Is My Land)*. One by one, the family members smile sheepishly and join in singing. Sherry asks, "Well, Faith, what will you call your baby girl?" Faith replies, "Hope." Outside, wearing a cowboy hat and sitting atop his horse, Sam sees his now singing family through a window and smiles, before riding off slowly ... into the sunset.