



Elections in America: Millionaires Accusing Each Other of Elitism

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Millionaire lawyers, politicians and journalists are all savaging Barack Obama for being an elitist.

Obama's particular crime in this case was saying that Democrats have done a lousy job of dealing with the concerns of working-class Americans, thus allowing the Republicans to swoop in with their God-Guns-n-Gays brand of politics that scapegoats homosexuals, illegal immigrants and George Clooney as the prime culprits behind blue-collar woes. This is not a particularly new argument, and has been a popular theme in mainstream discourse ever since author Thomas Frank published his excellent book *What's the Matter With Kansas?* in 2004.

Nevertheless, both the media and the rival candidates pounced on Obama's statements and accused him of making "outrageous San Francisco remarks" and of "offending small town America." Worst of all, Obama's words rendered him an "elitist" in the eyes of his critics, which in American political discourse is akin to being a child molester or a Frenchman.

But is Barack Obama really an elitist as his opponents claim? Well *of course* he is -- he's *running for president of the United States!* He wouldn't have gotten this far in life if he'd spent the past 20 years driving a truck or moonlighting as a fry cook at Arby's. Like every other successful politician in the United States, Obama is a member of America's political ruling class, which means that like every other presidential candidate in recent memory, he is typically insulated from the lives of ordinary people. Does Obama really have any idea what it's like to live like a "Real American?" Of course he doesn't, and neither do John McCain and Hillary Clinton! Does any rational person out there believe that Obama, Clinton and McCain spend their free time away from the campaign trail hanging out at Jimmy Ray's Chicken'n'Beer Depot playing darts with the common folk?

In theory, this point should be fairly obvious. Even before getting elected, most politicians made a good deal of money in their careers as lawyers, doctors, actors or oil tycoons -- you know, real salt-of-the-earth sort of work. But for reasons that have long confounded sane people everywhere, our national millionaire press corps gives positive coverage to political candidates who are the most adept at lying about their ability to connect with regular folks. And because it apparently takes too much work for our press corps to sift through the candidates' policy positions to figure out what each of them is actually offering blue-collar voters, we don't even

get rational assessments of politicians' working-class cred. Instead, we get piles and piles of anecdotal evidence.

For instance, any rational observer should be able to discern that George W. Bush has not been a particularly good president for blue-collar people. From the bankruptcy bill that made it harder for Americans to escape debt, to the tax cuts that were tilted heavily toward the uber-rich, to his mercifully-botched scheme to privatize social security, all of Bush's major economic initiatives have been tailored specifically to shaft working-class people in order to benefit really, really, really, really, really rich people. While some major media figures, most notably Paul Krugman, tirelessly pointed this out, the vast majority of our bonehead millionaire pundit class declared Bush to be more in touch with the average American than elitist snobs such as John Kerry and Al Gore.

What were Bush's qualifications for being the Voice of the Common Man, you ask? For one thing, he cleared brush. As the Washington Post reported in 2005, "President Bush's idea of paradise is to hop in his white Ford pickup truck in jeans and work boots, drive to a stand of cedars, and whack the trees to the ground." Cue up the Toby Keith CD, baby, we got a real workin' man on our hands! Also: Bush wore a flight suit. Even though Bush had never actually seen combat of any kind, merely donning a flight suit made him "a high-flying jet star," who was "virile, sexy and powerful" and whose clothing made "the best of his manly characteristic." And finally: President Bush did, in fact, have a pair of testicles, as Peggy Noonan expounded upon rapturously in a 2004 column that she titillatingly titled "He's Got Two of 'Em."

Which brings us back to the recent troubles that Obama has had lying to convince our press corps that he's in touch with the average American. You see, Obama's problems in this area aren't merely confined to his statements about white working-class voters being bitter. For one thing, Obama decided not to wolf down artery-clogging piles of meat-flavored goo when he visited Philadelphia. After all, what could be more authentically American than eating your way to an early death? Also, Obama isn't very good at bowling. Bloomberg columnist Margaret Colson said that Obama's low bowling score was a "doozy" of a mistake, since voters apparently want someone who's good at "looking, acting, or sounding like the locals, eating homemade specialties, even if it's funnel cake and smoked meat products, or wearing a Teamsters or Yankees cap for the first time." Yeah, Barack, come on -- you don't want these people to know that your life is a billion times more interesting than theirs! You're running for president!

These phony proclamations of "elitism" are not unique to Barack Obama, of course. John Kerry got pounded for his Brahmin ways after having the gall to windsurf. Al Gore got trashed in the press corps for sighing during a 2000 debate. Mitt Romney got pummeled for the way he ate pizza, Bush I for ordering a "splash" of coffee. John Edwards? Paid too much for a haircut. Hillary Clinton? Has a phony laugh. And on and on and on and on.

Why is our millionaire pundit class so gosh-darned interested in finding allegedly

"genuine" ruling-class politicians to champion as tried'n'true representatives of Real America? Without subjecting them to intense psychological treatment (not a half-bad idea), I have no way of knowing. But I do know that this seems to be a uniquely American phenomenon in the industrialized world. Most politicians in Europe, Canada and Asia, from what I've seen, are a bunch of technocratic dweebs who spend their campaigns arguing over which of their dweeby technocratic proposals would make their countries better marginally places to live. In other words, they base their campaigns on actual politics rather than bowling scores.

But can you imagine what would happen if Gordon Brown or Nicolas Sarkozy or Angela Merkel tried to show how they were rugged and in-touch with the common man by dressing up in a flight suit or speeding around the countryside in a pickup truck clearing brush? They'd be justifiably laughed out of office, because sane people in other parts of the world don't care whether or not their political leaders drink lager or enjoy watching football on the telly. Heck, just look at Sarkozy! Do you really expect him to pretend that he enjoys hanging out in the countryside with a bunch of dull old grape farmers when he'd obviously rather be going on fancy vacations with his international supermodel wife? And can you blame the guy?

What is so depressing about our press corps' bizarre penchant for picking and choosing which members of the ruling class are "genuine" and which ones are not is that the United States simply cannot afford to have another election decided by this trivial nonsense. For the past eight years, sane people have watched in horror as George W. Bush chain-sawed the country's coffers with tax cuts, trampled over both international and domestic law and inexplicably got us involved in an endless bloody war in Iraq. While I can't claim to speak for Real Americans -- after all, I don't eat cheese steak or clear brush on a regular basis -- I can speak for myself when I say that I don't want my political leaders to be my friends; I only ask that they not actively try to destroy the country and the rest of the world. And at this point, I don't care if our next president is the unholy love spawn of Richie Rich, Thurston Howell and Charles Emerson Winchester III. As long as they can end the Iraq war, provide national health insurance and generally make life in this country stink less than it has under Bush, then they've got my vote.

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