

**Elitism vs. Pluralism:
Of Robert Dahl, the Working Middle Class Vote and the
2008 Presidential Election
by
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Abstract

During the rancor of the Presidential election in 2008, the Republican Party spent a great deal of time posing Democratic Candidate Barack Obama as an elitist, arrogant and aloof Harvard-trained lawyer, based on his comments at a party fundraiser. The question explored in this article is how Obama's comments cast a huge shadow over a long held debate among scholars in the field of political science concerning exactly what type of democracy we have in America. The two sides of this political science debate are known as pluralism versus elitism. A distinguished scholar on the subject is Robert A Dahl who came to the conclusion that America is a pluralist democracy. This essay will review two of Dahl's major works on this theme in order to further evaluate Senator Obama's so called "elitist" comments about the middle class.

Introduction

On April 12, 2008, at a fundraiser in San Francisco, Democrat Presidential Candidate Barack Obama made the following comment about the working middle class' frustration with economic conditions (KC Star, April 13, 2008),

It's not surprising, then, they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustration. For this comment Obama's Republican Party detractors have since referred to him as elitist, arrogant, and an aloof Harvard trained lawyer. In response to the criticisms he added (KC Star, April 13, 2008), The middle class feels like they have been left behind. They feel like nobody is paying attention to what they are going through. And so they pray and they count on each other, and they count on their families. You know this in your own lives, and what we need is a government that is actually paying attention. Government that is fighting for working people day in and day out, making sure that we are trying to allow them to live out the American dream.

National television news anchors and cable political commentators focused on how critics felt Obama was out of touch with the working middle class. The pejorative description of Obama as "elitist" means, "out of touch with the common people." That is, he thinks he is better than everyone else, and puts himself before others. The synonym for the use of the word "elitist" in this instance is "snob." It seems politicians who start sounding "academic" are quickly castigated as being "intellectual," which leads to the charge of "elitism."

Of course television programs gave little substantive time to leading scholars on middle class economic problems, or to professionals who analyze middle class voting patterns, or even to those who write social policy. Allowing for sufficient time to debate any controversial issue that offers coherent conclusions is rare with mass media, especially if it raises the short and long-range prospects for survival of the middle class. The problem with the debate about class disparities is that it leads to subjects like Marxism, socialism, capitalism, and power. It is easier to entertain the masses by using "liberal" or "neo-con" labels or propagandize based on individual personalities.

One of the best-known common folk in America, Garrison Keillor, provided a clear commentary on who is, and who is not elite in the upcoming presidential election (KC Star, August 9, 2008, B7).

It's an amazing country where an Arizona multimillionaire can attack a Chicago South Sider as an elitist and hope to make it stick. The Chicagoan was brought up by a single mom who had big ambitions for him, and he got scholarshiped into Harvard Law School and was made president of the law review, all of it on his own hook, whereas the Arizonan is the son of an admiral and was ushered into Annapolis though an indifferent student.

Having recently completed a couple of courses in graduate school in the rarified field of political science, Obama's comments on April 12th didn't strike me as individually elitist but rather as related to a well known theory of elitism. His comments cast a huge shadow over a long held debate among scholars in the field of political science concerning exactly what type of democracy we have in America. The dichotomous oversimplified sides of the debate are often referred to as pluralism versus elitism.

The striking paradox of Obama's comments about the working middle class is that while providing an example of how our pluralist democracy is failing, his critics are calling him elitist. Their confusion lies with the fact that Obama is opposed to elitist democracy but is considered a snob for raising a point about how our ideally pluralistic governance system repeatedly descends into the elitist form.

It is rare to see anything in the media that critiques what type of democracy we have in the United States, but there are lots of reasons to think a change in the political party at the top of the executive branch of government could have significant influence over which form holds sway. A pluralist democracy stipulates competition between interest groups with a condition of checks and balances in power. Special interest groups link citizens to the government and the strength of each group depends on its numbers. A pluralist democracy is open and works things out through compromise. People who believe this form of democracy actually exists in the United States are sometimes referred to as optimistic, utopianist, or just plain naïve. On the other hand, an elitist democracy, according to elite theorists, finds a small ruling minority and larger numbers without much power. With an elite democracy, the powerful few rarely make decisions in the interest of the masses. Instead, they make decisions in the interest of themselves. Fundamental to elitist theory is the idea that in our capitalist economic system power equals those with the most money. In other words, the people with the most power are generally not elected government officials. Those with money/power are those who own or operate the largest financial corporations. When the elite form of democracy is obvious, it is known as oligarchy. Elitism theorists find our government rule is predominantly driven by those who have power which is evidently not the middle or lower class. People who believe this form of democracy holds sway are sometimes labeled as cynical, Marxist, or communist.

One way to tell what type of democracy holds sway is to examine what economic decisions political leaders and their party platforms stipulate. Evidence for an elite democracy, as touched upon by Obama, would be that the masses become apathetic at the ballot box. On this note, the topic of pluralism and elitism appears worthy of review and further dissection in light of the upcoming Presidential election.

One of the most recognized scholars weighing in on the pluralist side of the debate has been Robert A. Dahl (see his full bibliography at the end of this essay). In two of his famous works, *Who Governs?* Democracy and Power in an American City from 1961, and *Democracy and its Critics* in 1989, Dahl came to the conclusion that America is a pluralist democracy. Dahl's entire career stems from his opposition to C. Wright Mills *The Power Elite* in 1956 and the elitism theorists who followed him. Analogous arguments using different terminology concerning this subject have existed since the replacement of the Articles of Confederation with the present U.S. Constitution in 1791. Ongoing debate between those who optimistically believe we have a pluralist democracy, and those who find failures with the system in order to gain corrections, are at the crux of America's ongoing political, economic experiment. Who knew?

Review of Who Governs?

Few political scientists had thoroughly examined the politics of local city government in 1961 when Robert A. Dahl published the first highly regarded analysis of liberal pluralism in *Who Governs?* Robert and Helen Lynd had studied Muncie, Indiana, in 1937. Floyd Hunter had written a controversial book based on identification and analysis of community leaders in Atlanta in 1953. Both early studies showed that elite economic interests dominated local politics. By the end of the 1950's, the importance of local government, the urgency of "metropolitan problems," and the difficulty of determining city governance were apparent. Dahl's most famous work was an empirically based case study of power in New Haven, Connecticut. What he felt had been left out of earlier studies was an examination of the role of local politicians (Dahl, 1961: p. 6).

Dahl begins with the assumption that if there are great inequalities in the American political system, these should be reflected by the incapacity among different citizens to influence decision-making in their local government. Following are the key questions driving Dahl's research: If there are differences in local capacity, then who governs, and how does this democratic system work amid inequality of resources? (1961: p. 3). The results of his renowned study reveal that New Haven was not ruled by elites, or what he

calls social and economic notables. In so doing, Dahl defined a career as the ruling patriarch of American pluralistic democracy.

Dahl's study is based on 100 politically relevant charts, tables, and graphs that offer an empirically based scientific method. He uses significant amounts of comparative, statistical data with lucid cultural interpretations of New Haven's history, ethnicities, religions, and rituals. The monotony of the text is broken up in the middle of the book when he creates an unusual theatrical or Platonic dialogue between two fictitious observers of New Haven: A makes the case for elitism; B for pluralism (1961, p. 271-73). His structural analysis of city government hierarchy evaluates relations between each "box" and supports interpretation with key interviews that substantiate his position. Each of the twenty-eight short chapters end in a series of questions that lead to the next chapter with discussions and analysis in ways reminiscent of a legalistic framework.

Dahl develops answers to *Who Governs?*, by describing the historical development of New Haven beginning with an elite group of Congregational-Federalists who controlled social, economic, and political wealth from 1784 to 1842. He uses the occupation of mayoralty as an index (1961, Table 2.1 pgs. 12-13), and the percentage of members of Boards of Aldermen and Finance (1961, Table Fig. 3.1 p. 26), to show how the old elite was displaced by a rising group of entrepreneurs around 1840. During this so-called "entrepreneurial transition," political advantage was dispersed among different combinations of people. To be sure, entrepreneurs had erected a structure of business in which achievement was independent of family origin and only slightly overlapped into the highest social standing. The leading entrepreneurs were "dependent on popularity, respect, and sympathetic identification, and needed the vote of rapidly increasing immigrant populations" (1961, p. 31).

Around 1900, the power of entrepreneurs was displaced by "ex-plebes," people who rose from middle- or lower-middle class immigrant backgrounds to elected political offices. The rise of the ex-plebes is consistent with entrepreneurs who "took initiative to include immigrants in becoming citizens," registering them to vote, placing them on party rolls, and providing assistance for overcoming poverty (1961, p. 38). The paradox was how the entrepreneurs lost influence when forced to have the "ex-plebes" run for office. Dahl views this as the key point for understanding how the dynamics of wealth and social standing were split from popular political resources. He refers to this development as the "transition from the old pattern of oligarchy based upon cumulative inequalities to new patterns of leadership based upon dispersed inequalities" (1961, p. 51). In the 1950's another significant transformation took place when the skills of ethnic politics held by the "ex-plebes" gave way to building winning coalitions.

The "hero of the story" is Richard Lee, elected as mayor of New Haven in 1953 based on his skills at building a coalition of ethnic groups for the collective benefit of a city redevelopment plan. Dahl carefully analyzes different sets of decision-makers, social, and economic notables in connection with urban redevelopment, decisions in public education, and major party nominations. He locates 231 socially notable families that were overtly involved with public affairs in New Haven (1961, pgs. 64-67). Of these only two held public education offices, two were in party offices, and 24 occupied the 435 possible urban redevelopment positions. The same type of data is cast toward 238 families considered economic notables: corporate board chairmen, bank or public utility chairs, or others with high property assessments (1961, p. 68-70). The economic notables were slightly more involved with public life: six in political party office, and 48 were in urban redevelopment, but none were public school officials. Dahl finds only 5% overlap among people he classifies as both social and economic notables in 1957-58 (1961, p. 68).

The final blow to the elitist notion that economic notables dominate New Haven consists of a detailed examination of eight major decisions on redevelopment, eight education decisions, and all the nominations for public office in both political parties for seven elections from 1945-1957 (1961, p. 72). Only seven economic notables exerted leadership according to the test conceived by Dahl (1961, p. 73). This data provides a convincing way to show that economic notables operated within the range of political consensus, were consistent with the opinions of the whole community, and influenced but did not totally determine outcomes (1961, p. 84). In contrast to Lynd and Floyd, Dahl found no evidence for conspiracy, control of tax issues, scandals, or any other factors indicating social and economic notables were a ruling elite in New Haven.

Based on the quantitative data in New Haven Dahl hypothesizes a political stratum that is directly involved with politics and therefore in desperate need of expanding a coalition of followers. The apolitical stratum are, "people who are less calculating, strongly influenced by inertia, habit, unexamined loyalties, personal attachments, emotions, and transient impulses" (1961, p. 90). Dahl believes his data suggests these two strata are coming together to make decisions during elections. He further hypothesizes the best form of government is one in which popular control is not unusual and which entails a vigorous and vociferous democracy (1961, p. 101). Again he tests his propositions within the context of New Haven rituals, leaders in urban redevelopment, public education, and other types of influence. In one concrete example he locates the influence of an old "spinster," Miss Mary Gava, who against all odds activated an ad hoc coalition to prevent the construction of metal houses in the Hill Section of New Haven (1961, p. 192). In general he finds Lee's coalition "curtailed old petty sovereignties," "whittled down the chieftains," and provided no evidence for a "clandestine cabal" of economic notables such as was popularized by the "jargon of educated inside dopesters"! (1961, p. 185).

Dahl concludes with thoughtful comments on the use of political resources, sources of stability, and change in democratic regimes. He defines the American democratic creed as universal suffrage, high participation in voting, a competitive party system, and freedom to seek support from the political stratum for one's views (1961, p. 311). The stabilizing factor for a democratic creed in America is widespread consensus for democracy and equality.

Dahl's idea of a modern, dynamic pluralist society is well suited to this middle sized New England town in the 1950's. There are instances where ruling class efforts to control metropolitan government were thwarted, but everything hinges upon his broad choice of social and economic notables in New Haven. One problem is transferring pluralist behaviors to larger more complex cities like Atlanta, Miami, or Dallas. I would have been more convinced if redevelopment had not been a topic broadly favored by the people of New Haven in the 1950's, a period ripe for a pluralist styled democracy. It seems irrelevant to have studied the role of notables in public education since many send their children to private schools. It would be important to know who the members of the chamber of commerce were and what their role in urban development was. By not closing these gaps, Dahl leaves some measure of doubt about the dream of equality in a vital democracy.

Dahl's theory is that when the people recognize deficiencies in American political equality, political leaders will bring different combinations of resources to the table to make things more equitable. His normative position is that economic notables necessarily operate within a political consensus equivalent to the prevailing system of beliefs subscribed by the community (1961: p. 84). He points to the reciprocal realities of power when asserting, "While some leaders surround covert behavior with democratic rituals, certain norms and requirements of legitimacy still influence leaders and their constituents" (1961: p. 89). One strong argument against Dahl is the increasing frustration among voters in the form of not voting or voting on certain candidates based on one or more so-called "values issues." The source of middle class frustrations, according to surveys, is the decrease in good middle class jobs. A good middle class job is defined as having health benefits and a salary that keeps pace with inflation. A key part of the argument supporting the elitist theoretical position is that the largest economic sector in the United States, the middle class, has seen a gradual erosion of its members' economic interests over the last thirty years. While he makes superlative arguments for why a pluralist democratic state exists in America, it would be better if Dahl addressed more of the cultural characteristics that facilitate or retard the development of democracy. When he compares presidential and prime minister systems, he fails to address what conditions have led to more authoritarian leadership behaviors in the United States. Why don't other countries adopt our form of checks and balances? Why don't other democracies adopt the idea of an electoral college? Why is it that obstructionist state departments and committees often produce incoherent policies with unintended consequences?

Dahl's work is helpful for analyzing Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, Marx, Pareto, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville, but it skips realities that need to be confronted if democracy is to progress in democratic countries and expand into non-democracies. Do Americans really share a complacent attitude that reasonableness among politicians will prevail? Are we so content with our system of democracy that we are blinded toward making difficult adaptations necessary to evolve a vital democracy? Why can't we

implement successful ideas from other democratic countries? Dahl's insistence that his work is normative disappoints profound comparisons with other political cultures.

Review of Democracy and Its Critics

Dahl published *Democracy and Its Critics* in 1989, twenty-eight years after his first major work *Who Governs?* This work is more of a seminar on why democracy is the preferred system of governance based on Platonic dialogues. Nearly all chapters seek to address what Dahl calls the "shadow theory of democracy" which is normally consigned to background discussions of democracy (Dahl, 1989: pgs. 3-5, 27). Following are the key questions in the shadow theory of democracy: Who are the people? What do they do? What is political competence in terms of who is qualified to exercise the rights of citizenship? What are the empirical issues of scale and the values ascribed to practices of representation in democratic theory?

Dahl starts with a comparative historical analysis describing two democratic transformations and poses the intriguing idea that a third is occurring. The first transformation was the birth of democracy in the city-state of Athens, which carried over in different forms to the Roman Republic, Renaissance Venice, and Florence. The people in the city-states were called citizens: small-scale homogenous assemblies who actually didn't have the "shadow theory problem" because everyone in the assembly knew each other and had the right to speak to the governing assembly (1989, p. 18). The most challenging problem occurred when leaders became corrupt and the oligarchic element became irretrievably divided from the democratic popular element. There was great pressure in the 17th century for a large-scale democracy that balanced the interests of one with the few, the few with the many, and that handled conflicts of diversity (1989, p. 28). The second transformation evolved the idea of representative government, or modern democratic republicanism beginning in the 18th Century in England, the United States, and continuing today in many countries. Following are the key questions in representative democracy: Should the role of the people be limited? Should the aristocrats be trusted with the welfare of the people? (1989, p. 26). Dahl finds the answer to both questions is no. In his opinion, because the United States was uniquely absent an aristocratic group of "founding fathers," it was decided not to protect monarchical interests and took up Montesquieu's separation of powers: legislative, executive, and judicial (1989, p. 26). With the problem of scale eliminated by representative government, the idea of modern dynamic pluralist democracy in the United States led to new concepts of personal rights, individual freedom, and personal autonomy (1989, p. 30-31). Dahl formulates seven institutions of a polyarchy defined as a political order distinctive of modern nation states (1989: p. 221). The two most general characteristics of a polyarchy are citizenship extended to a high proportion of adults, and the right to oppose and vote out the highest officials in government (1989: p. 220). He finds three growth periods for global polyarchies: 1776-1930, 1950-59, and the 1980's (1989: p. 234). He compares and contrasts voting in presidential or parliamentary elections and restricted suffrage and full suffrage polyarchies in these time frames.

Dahl raises the interesting idea that a third democratic transformation has just started. It is the process of spreading capitalist economic activities to non-democratic societies like in China (1989: pgs. 311-341). Although skeptical about the stability of these developments, he considers it likely that pluralism will gain strength in domestic institutions of established democracies by gradually including more minorities and women in politics.

Dahl uses Platonic dialogue to analyze the key debate between democracy and its critics. This first analysis is Demo versus the Anarchist regarding the question of obedience to the state. Demo takes apart the argument that it is inherently irrational for humans to provide consent to a coercive (to restrain or dominate by force) state (1989: 39-41). Demo asserts that justice, equality, freedom, security, and other values are only found in the democratic pluralistic universe of the state (1989: p. 45). Dahl concludes, "the democratic state cannot completely exorcise coerciveness, it can maximize consent and minimize coercion within limits set by historical conditions and pursuit of other values" (1989: p. 51).

Aristos and Demo are used to answer the question of guardianship, or the idea that "ruler-ship be entrusted to a minority of persons who govern by virtue of their superior knowledge and virtue" (1989: p. 52). Demo obliterates Plato's idea of a Republic, Lenin's argument for a kind of classless society, and Skinner's notion of modern psychological science of behavior as the guardian of knowledge. Demo's argument is that while

guardianship may have occurred with some success in Medicean Florence, with the Venetian Doge, and in Confucian China, “there is no such thing as a science of ruling composed of rationally questionable and objectively determined truths” (1989: p. 74). Dahl emphasizes, “Rulers, no matter how great they are, do not have enough knowledge about the interests of the people” (1989: p. 74). Dahl reveals a penchant for logic and reason by saying, “an imperfect democracy is a misfortune but authoritarianism is an abomination” (1989: p. 77).

Dahl uses the artificial persona of “Majoritarian” (the argument for majority rule) versus “Critic” (those who don’t agree majority rule is democratic) in a debate about majority rule. Critic reminds that majorities have often made erroneous decisions as exemplified by slavery and women’s right to vote. Majoritarian concedes that Critic does considerable damage to the idea of majority rule in theory but in practice finds “no single rule for how collective decisions should be made” and says it “requires a careful appraisal of unique conditions” (1989: p. 162).

Likewise, Dahl’s contrived debate between “Advocate” and “Critic” explores a variety of issues about procedural and substantive justice. Advocate reminds us that we should always ask whether “the injury inflicted on the right to equal consideration outweighs the injury done to the right of people to govern themselves” (1989: p. 191). The historical political order, “is one in which the members, individual and collective, gain maturity and responsibility by confronting moral choices” (1989: p. 192). Advocate is convinced that “people have the collective right to err as with individual autonomy,” and it is “a safe gamble that people will act rightly” (p. 192). When his so called “Modernist” clashes with “Traditionalist” and “Pluralist” on questions about common good, “Pluralist” clarifies how the “essential element of common good of a group would be what they choose if they understood the experience of the result of their choice and the relevant alternatives” (p. 308). The key expectation is that a democratic system must be educated about the consequences of decision making, comprehend if an error has taken place, and be willing to make necessary changes.

“Jean-Jacques” and “James,” presumably Rousseau and Madison, are posed to debate the problem of appropriate boundaries for democratic policy making units (1989: p. 195). Dahl again minimizes theory with a reasonable real world view, “The political units that citizens of a democratic polity can construct for themselves will never correspond to the interests of every citizen, and on balance benefit the interests of some more than others” (1989: p. 209).

Dahl presents a theory for justifying “rule by the people” based on the assumption that ordinary people can govern themselves. His Strong Principle of Equality holds that no members of a collectivity “are so definitely better qualified than the others that they should be entrusted with making collective and binding decisions” (1989: p. 98). He distinguishes this from his Weak Principle of Intrinsic Equality, where “each person must accurately interpret and make known their view on a collective decision-making process” (p. 86). Democracy should condition people to evolve toward moral autonomy: consider the rights and obligations to and of others by engaging in free open discussions about moral judgments (1989: p. 91). This becomes an important normative premise for Dahl: rule by the people promotes the growth of personal autonomy, a moral autonomy, and a mature sense of responsibility just like when a child grows up and leaves the nest (p. 105).

Dahl closes by returning specifically to the subject of Who Governs? “Is domination by a powerful wealthy minority inevitable?” (1989: p. 265-278). He skillfully analyzes the inconsistencies and lack of specificity assigned by scholars to the composition of the political elite, power elite, ruling class, and bourgeois capitalist class (1989: p. 269). Dahl posits his own term, the dominant minority: businessmen, owners, corporate chairman, politicians, government leaders, bureaucracies, intellectuals, and military and police forces (p. 269). He emphasizes how historical differences in composition of the dominant minority crucially alter theoretical and practical outcomes (1989: p. 270). Dahl finds theories of group elitism “have served the myth for autocratic rulers to help disguise the reality of domination and ensure compliance” (1989: p. 265). He disagrees with Pareto’s view that “modern government is a plutocracy of business speculators who profit from political life” (1989: p. 269). Instead Dahl considers big business influence on government only as a matter of those rare corrupt politicians who use position to their advantage. He notes that the economist Pareto, asserted that corporate firms would be forced to adapt their products to the

preference of consumers, yet he failed to see the analogy to political party competition. He adds, "If the dominant minority is a heterogeneous collection of groups with divergent goals, then majority interests will be advanced" (1989: p. 270). A seminal observation in Dahl is that, "elitist theories never consider how non-elites may influence the conduct of political elites" (1989: p. 275). In *Democracy and its Critics*, Dahl once again demonstrates his lifelong skill of arguing that America is the model for a democratic pluralistic creed.

In both books, the widespread consensus for democracy and equality is the result of different citizens being able to influence decision making in their local government and thereby overcoming economic inequalities within a structural system. There are shortcomings, however, that fail to provide real insight into how things actually happen. The internal contradiction exhibited in Dahl is between two theoretical camps of democracy: elitists and pluralists. Elite theorists look at what items money was not spent on. Pluralist theorists look at what it was spent on. Elite theorists examine proposals in which opposition exists to the powerful and not if and when people are in agreement. A central premise of the elitist camp is that holding political office does not equate with power since the wealthiest members of our society with real power never hold public office. How we see a social phenomenon determines not only what we think about the event, but also the way we theorize and develop models for elucidating knowledge.

Dahl refined his democratic bias revealing preferences about how things should happen such as the need for more women and minorities in politics and how it is not inevitable for a powerful minority to end up ruling democratic societies.

The 2008 Election

It is no coincidence Republicans changed their politics and gained power at the same time the middle and upper class income disparities began to escalate in the 1980's (Krugman, p. 1). It has been the Republican Party who has benefited most from corporate lobbyists whose platform has for years favored deregulation of the market economy. Deregulation has led to a loss of good unionized manufacturing jobs, has made it arduous to unionize new service economy jobs, has created a climate where corporations have been allowed to escape enforcement of immigration laws, and has lent to falling real values in minimum wage. What is often overlooked in the rise of power among private corporations over the public good since the 1980s, is how the power of unions have decreased due to Republican Party presidential appointments to the National Labor Relations Board (Krugman, p. 3). It is no coincidence that income distribution moved away from the middle class starting with the union busting of then President Ronald Reagan. There is middle class amnesia or a lack of knowledge that unions have historically always stood for the working, middle class. For the bottom 80% of American worker income distribution, income inequality has been stable or decreasing when there is a Democrat in the White House, while it consistently increases during Republican administrations (Krugman p. 4).

As Judy Ancel, director of the institute for Labor Studies at the University of Missouri at Kansas City has pointed out on the KCUR labor hour, it is neoliberal Republicans that especially use the language of freedom to eliminate constraints on corporate greed. In the late 1970's economic crisis, neoliberals "cooked up" an agenda to dismantle union working condition gains and lower workers wages. The agenda included deregulation of transportation, communications and banking, and elimination of labor-law enforcement. Privatization of government social services, prison, and even war has followed. Neoliberals shrank government with massive tax cuts for the rich, which has made business oversight unaffordable. As Ancel so aptly points out, "free trade" isn't free. She explains, "We may get some lower prices as consumers, but those are canceled out by the millions of good paying jobs with benefits lost, falling wages, loss of tax revenues and increased poverty."

To be sure there has always been a wealthy elite in the United States, but the disparities between rich and poor have increased over the last thirty years. Today, the richest 1 percent own more wealth than the bottom 95%, and the CEOs of large corporations earn more than 500 times what their average employees make (Sanders, p.1). While the rich get richer receiving huge tax breaks during the last eight years, the unemployment rate rose to a nine-year high in 2003. There are now 9.4 million unemployed up 3 million since Bush II became President in 2000 (Sanders, p. 2). Since 2001, we have lost 2.7 million jobs in the private sector including 2 million good manufacturing jobs. From this data the wealthiest 1% generally rule

by the antecedent of influencing who will be elected based on the consequence of economic policies favoring the status quo concentration of wealth.

Other manifestations indicative of the collapse of the middle class include increased hours of work that Americans are forced to perform in order to pay bills (Sanders, p. 2). The average American employee works the longest hours of any worker in the industrialized world and has among the least paid vacation days. In 1973 private sector workers in the United States were paid \$9.08 per hour. Today they are paid \$8.33 per hour. The good jobs have been shipped abroad.

This essay is not to ignore the 33 million people in our country living in poverty, up 1.3 million in the past two years. There are 42 million who lack any health insurance, elderly who can't afford prescription drugs, and veterans who are on VA waiting lists for their health care.

There are several obvious manifestations regarding the political economy of the United States in terms of money transferred to the richest segment of the population, while there is a raging debate about how much of the soaring executive compensation is insider self-dealing and how much centers on market forces. The fact is that political forces supporting strong unions 30 years ago would never have allowed the high executive salaries that exist today. Worker morale is unacceptably less relevant to the employer. A second economic pressure on the middle class starting the 1980s and linked with the rise of Republican Party power has been the exponential rise in use of part-time workers. This happened when developed countries moved from an industrial-based, wealth-producing economy to a service sector, asset-based economy featuring market globalization. This economic timeframe is often referred as the "post-industrialist age" or the so-called "new economy." According to Stanley Aronowitz, the new economy holds tremendous corporate profits, is defined by the amplified practice of business process outsourcing, and has a heightened reliance on the use of part time workers (Aronowitz, p. 303-304). As Dahl puts it, part time workers have become like "building trades workers," who labor for a month or year at one construction site, only without becoming organized by unions (Aronowitz, p. 75, 111). The most startling aspect to the decline of the American middle class is that they have largely been unaware of this transfer of money and have supported the political party that is the root mean cause. According to Michael Lewis-Beck, a co-author of *American Voter Revisited*, Americans are attached to a party more on an emotional level than an on an intellectual level. His book is full of depressing conclusions (Lewis-Beck p. 73). In-depth interviews with 1,500 people during the two most recent presidential elections revealed that the "majority of people don't have many issues in mind when they discuss voting." They get their beliefs from their parents because dealing with political issues is too much of a bother. As a result, they can be easily fooled about what is best for them. Co-author William Jacoby calls the American voter "incoherent, inconsistent, and disorganized about their positions on issues (Lewis-Beck p. 129)." Typically the public is not only unaware of government foreign policy but they also don't understand the most fundamental concepts of our political economy.

Educating the middle class for success is only window dressing for a Republican Party that consistently denounces affirmative action. The United States currently has around 3,900 colleges and universities with 15 million students and total revenues of over \$250 billion. There is intense competition for the best college students diverting scholarships from the needy. According to Michael Mumper, Professor of Political Science at Ohio University, access to public higher education has become more difficult for low-income and disadvantaged students (Mumper, p. 97). This development is occurring at a time of widening financial returns on earning any kind of college degree. The role higher education played beginning in the 1960s when federal government and public colleges developed a plan to promote equal opportunity, started to reverse in the 1980's and now promotes class stratification. Mumper finds this collapse is a combination of misdirected government subsidies in the existing programs, the creation of inappropriately designed new programs, and the changing demographics of college students (Mumper, p. 98).

The average, working, middle-class citizen knows little about propaganda techniques or how he or she has been manipulated because he or she does not grasp the polity of middle class economics, social justice, geography, American and World History. Our education system has a strenuous time competing against a corporatized, misfed mass media, some churches, most politicians, and other so-called authorities. Americans hear the conservative spin or the liberal spin, rarely both, and even more sparingly the truth. It is

impossible for the majority middle class to decipher truth if they never hear it. After years of being conditioned to farce, it is hard to recognize even if they stumble across truths ugly head. The upshot of such naïveté is a new word in Webster's English dictionary, "truthiness," by prized political satirist Stephen Colbert. For anyone with common sense, then, it has become vital to stop trying to make sense in order to make some sense.

Conclusion

As stated before, the Republican Party has characterized Democratic Presidential candidate Barack Obama as elitist, and arrogant, in his attitude toward the middle class. While Obama may appear elitist in the intellectual sense because he went to Harvard, there's no elitism in having a single mom, living off food stamps, or getting to college on a scholarship. What is elitist about a child that did everything we all ask our kids to do?

What is elitist about living in a 3-bedroom condo with a wife and two children up until five years before winning the Democratic Party Presidential nomination? What is elitist about making a speech at the Democratic Party convention that propelled the sales of an autobiography?

In the July 2008 issue of the New Yorker magazine, Ryan Lizza interviewed countless political friends and enemies of Obama and provides a detailed narrative about how he rose to power in the rough and tumble world of Chicago politics as an independent outsider who "mastered the inside game" (Lizza, p.23). From an interview with Obama in the Chicago Reader in 1995, he laid his vision of a political future by saying: People are hungry for community; they miss it. They are hungry for change. What if a politician were to see his job as that of an organizer, as part teacher and part advocate, one who does not sell voters short but who educates them about the real choices before them? As an elected public official, for instance, I could bring church and community leaders together easier than I could as a community organizer or lawyer. Obama has stood by the necessity of grass roots structures that hold elected officials accountable for their actions. He holds a deep and abiding interest in concrete economic development strategies from the bottom up that take advantage of existing laws and structures to create bonds within all sectors of the community. Working as a grass roots political organizer in African American communities is clearly not elitist. His early working experience was at the base of political necessity.

According to Obama's campaign economic policy director, Jason Furman, and the independent website factcheck.org, Obama's current presidential plan does not raise capital gains taxes, income taxes, social security taxes or any other taxes on any family making less than \$250,000. Most families making less than \$250,000 would pay lower taxes as a result of Obama's plans to provide working families with a \$1,000 tax cut and to cut taxes to help families afford health care, college, and childcare. On capital gains, Obama proposes a new top rate between 20-28% for those making more than \$250,000. He would use that revenue from that change to cut taxes for working families helping them to save and invest. Obama's economic strategy, furthermore, functions as the requisite non-elitist Democratic Party platform position for all candidates seeking national congressional seats.

While it may be political rhetoric to talk in favor of unions and against big business in any political campaign, in no way is this argument elitist. The seminal point is that in a pluralist democratic system it is entirely the responsibility of voting public to ensure that our leaders address the shift of global wealth and power toward elites and to push our leaders to fix the fundamental "life" issues of the middle class. The truth is that any chance for our grand American experiment to be realized cannot materialize without a citizenry informed and educated about its cultural history. America desperately needs a middle class that is not bitter about its prospects for help and one that doesn't fall on the myth of rugged individualism. When was the last time Americans voted to increase taxes on the wealthiest people of America and the largest corporations? When was the last time Americans voted for a president who wanted to add new social programs to the middle and poor classes? The most immediate way to make a correction is to support the Democratic Party platform: restoration of the progressive tax on the upper class, the elimination of corporate welfare, and the creation of more social programs most notably health insurance for the poor and middle class. The key difference between our two political parties has never been as clearer when it comes to income taxes and social benefits. The economic and therefore political strings that directly affect the

welfare of the majority middle-class puppet are decisions on taxes and social benefits. Other “life” issues offer supreme distraction from these two fundamental economic policy parameters affecting economic justice for the middle class.

Obama’s argument on April 12th was that since an increasingly frustrated middle class fails to envision relief from either political party regarding the economy, they turn to so called “values issues” in order to make their voting decision. The Republican Party has proven better at using emotional “value issues” to activate the media during elections while clouding Democratic Party pluralist economic values preferable to the middle class. This explains the political puzzle of why American politics has moved right over the last thirty years as society has gotten more economically unequal between the classes.

The Republican Party has been in power during the most harmful and deleterious times to the middle class over the last 30 years. This time, Republicans cannot blame middle class problems on unions, drugs, music, Hollywood, democrats, socialists, communists, or terrorists because none of these by design has contributed to this dramatic economic downturn for the middle class. The very wealthy are enjoying the best years for being very wealthy since the 1920s. The Republican Party is simply not the party of the common people as suggested by Ann Coulter, Rush Limbaugh and their followers. Although they vituperate against the high and the mighty as elitist, their policies of market deregulation and cuts in taxes for the rich, only serve to make the Republican Party candidates guilty by affiliation with the true elitists. It is time to support and enforce the Democratic Party based on their renewed support for the American worker. What becomes clear from the analyses of the American voter is that the most radical idea in America is long-term memory. When it comes to the conundrum of “Who Governs?” perhaps “Who Knows?” is a more significant question.

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