



## Dem de la Crème

By Karl Zinsmeister

*The traditional paradigm of Republicans as the party of the wealthy and Democrats as the party of the common man has shifted, with conservative ideology now appealing to greater numbers of the middle class and liberalism dominating among the educational and cultural elite.*

Democrats: the party of the little guy. Republicans: the party of the wealthy. Those images of America's two major political wings have been frozen for generations.

The stereotypes were always a little off, incomplete, exaggerated. (Can you say Adlai Stevenson?) But like most stereotypes, they reflected rough truths.

No more. Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, whole blocs of "little guys"—ethnics, rural residents, evangelicals, cops, construction workers, homemakers, military veterans—began moving into the Republican column. And big chunks of America's rich elite—financiers, academics, heiresses, media barons, software millionaires, entertainers—drifted into the Democratic Party.

The extent to which the parties have flipped positions on the little-guy/rich-guy divide is illustrated by research from the Ipsos-Reid polling firm. Comparing counties that voted strongly for George W. Bush to those that voted strongly for Al Gore in the 2000 election, the study shows that in pro-Bush counties only 7 percent of voters earned at least \$100,000, while 38 percent had household incomes below \$30,000. In the pro-Gore counties, fully 14 percent pulled in \$100,000 or more, while 29 percent earned less than \$30,000.

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As Daniel Henninger has noted in his column for the *Wall Street Journal*, it is "becoming harder by the day to take the Democrats seriously as the party of the common man." The financial pillars for Democrats are now super-rich trial lawyers, Hollywood entertainment executives, and megabuck financiers. Both parties have their fat cats, obviously, but Federal Election Commission data show that many of the very wealthiest political players are now in the Democratic column.

Today's most aggressive election donors by far are lawyers. As of July, law partners had donated \$112 million to 2004 political candidates; by comparison, the entire oil and gas industry donated only \$15 million. And wealthy lawyers now tilt strongly Democratic: 71 percent of their money goes to Democrats, only 29 percent to Republicans.

Wall Street, traditionally thought of as a GOP bastion, is no longer any such thing. Ultra-income brokers and bankers now give heavily to the party of Andrew Jackson. Six of the top fifteen contributions to Democratic nominee John Kerry came from partners at firms like Citigroup, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, and J.P. Morgan.

John Kerry is a perfect embodiment of the takeover of the Democratic Party by wealthy elites. If elected, he would become the richest man ever to sit in the White House. Experts describe his bloodline as "more royal than any previous American President"; his educational path was pluperfect upper crust. And there are now many Democrats like Kerry—from Senator Jon Corzine to

Senator Jay Rockefeller—who are simultaneously at the top of the heap in wealth and on the left in politics.

Migration of the rich and powerful to the Democrats has been so pronounced, John Kerry has actually pulled in much more money than President Bush this spring and summer. Kerry's monthly fundraising totals have routinely doubled or even tripled Bush's sums. And while Bush has relied heavily on flocks of small donors, the money on the Kerry side has come much more from well-heeled individuals like the Hamptons beach-house owners who handed him \$3 million in one day at the end of August.

## Elitism and Ideology

So, which is the party of the people now?

America has a long history of distaste for elitism. George Washington quickly learned that his proud, obstreperous, self-governing Yankee privates, imbued with a powerful "leveling spirit. . . where the principles of democracy so universally prevail," would not be dictated to, but had to be led. From Andrew Jackson to George H. W. Bush, U.S. politicians have known that leaders who put on airs or otherwise separate themselves from ordinary Americans will be penalized by the electorate.

Reinforcing the egalitarian principles on which our government was founded is the fact that America (as Daniel Boorstin pointed out) has traditionally been a culture without a capital. At the time of our founding, more than 95 percent of the population lived outside the major cities, and we continue to be a highly dispersed, localized, and independent-minded people, quite resistant to bossing from the center.

Average Americans believe elitism is not only wrong in principle, but also ineffective. And they are correct. A cross-section of everyday people will generally prove better at solving knotty societal problems than a fraternity of experts—as economics writer James Surowiecki demonstrates nicely in *The Wisdom of Crowds*. Careful observers like Friedrich Hayek noted long ago that ordinary citizens possess forms of knowledge, intuition, and moral sense that make them better collective arbiters of critical national debates than any educated elite. This is not just rabble-rousing, but a time-tested truth that explains much of the success of America and the common people who have come to her shores.

Once upon a time, America's distaste for elitism translated easily into a distrust for conservatism. But today, with country-club Republicans having been swept aside by NASCAR Republicans, there is nothing

undemocratic about American conservatism. Among elites, it is now liberalism that is the dominant creed.

Over the last generation, reports Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington, professional elites have become both "less nationalistic" and "more liberal than the American public. This is revealed by twenty public opinion surveys from 1974 to 2000." One authoritative study of a dozen different elites, including top civil servants, lawyers, religious authorities, military officers, entertainment moguls, union leaders, nonprofit managers, business executives, and media chieftains, found that every one of these groups but two (businesspeople and the military) was two to three times as liberal as the public at large.

It's not as if the Democrats have taken over the top of the socioeconomic ladder and the Republicans the bottom. Rather, Democrats dominate at the very upper and lowest rungs, while Republicans find their following in the middle.

You can see this when slicing the electorate by education as much as by income. At the bottom, school dropouts and unskilled workers are heavily Democratic, but so are grad students and professors on the other end of the educational spectrum. (College faculty groups are the very top financial contributors to John Kerry, according to Federal Election Commission data.) Meanwhile, high school graduates and individuals with bachelor's degrees (the middle) are predominantly Republican.

In the publishing industry, new book imprints and clubs have been founded recently by several major publishers to cater specifically to politically conservative readers (who were previously neglected by booksellers). The publishing industry has been pleasantly surprised by the spending, loyalty, and depth of the non-liberal reading public. The ambitious conservative middle has become a mass market too large and too lucrative to ignore.

So we live in an interesting new era. The Right has become a thinking party, with rich intellectual resources, that is simultaneously dead set against political elitism and cultural snobbery. Conservatism has laid claim to America's quiet but multitudinous middle class. And during the same period, the Left has come to dominate among the overclass and underclass that bracket the conservative middle.

As a result, the old way of thinking about U.S. politics—little-guy Democrats versus wealthy Republicans—is about as accurate and relevant today as a 1930 weather forecast. New fronts have moved in. Expect some major squalls ahead.