



## FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #120 — APR. 19, 2012

*Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.*  
<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org> [FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com](mailto:FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com)

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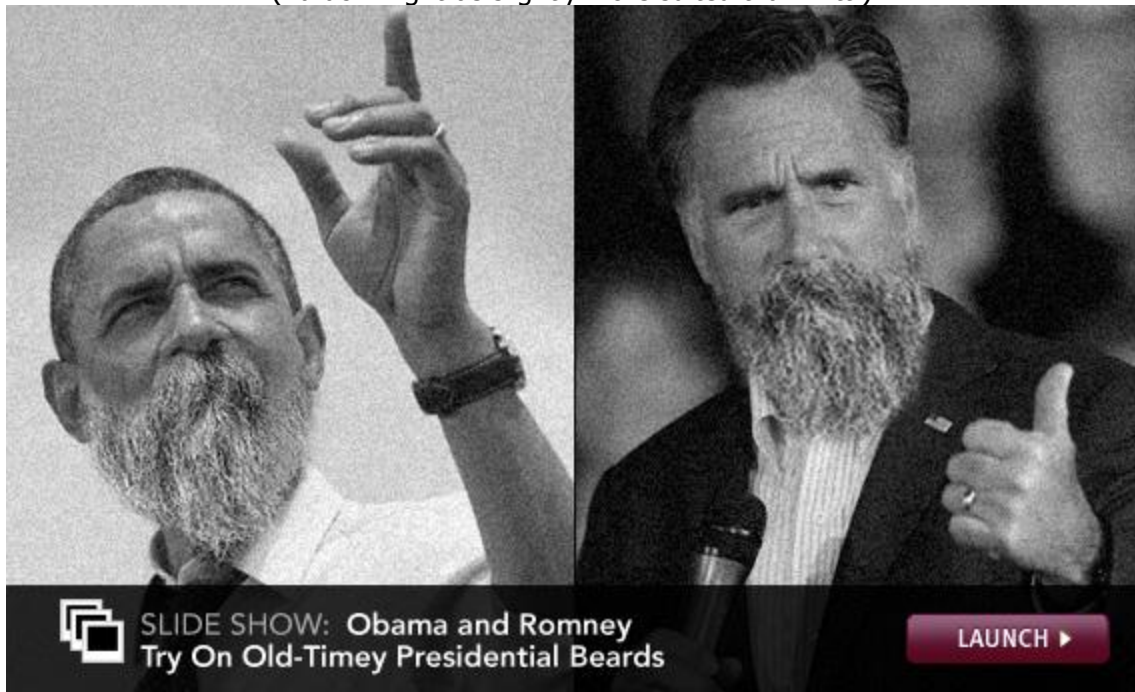
### **Maybe America Needs More Hair?**

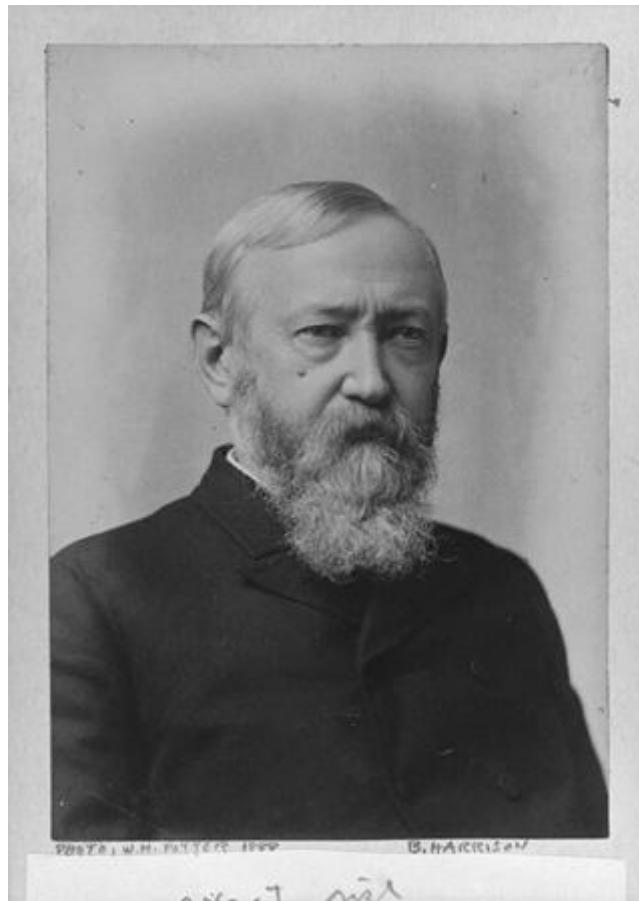
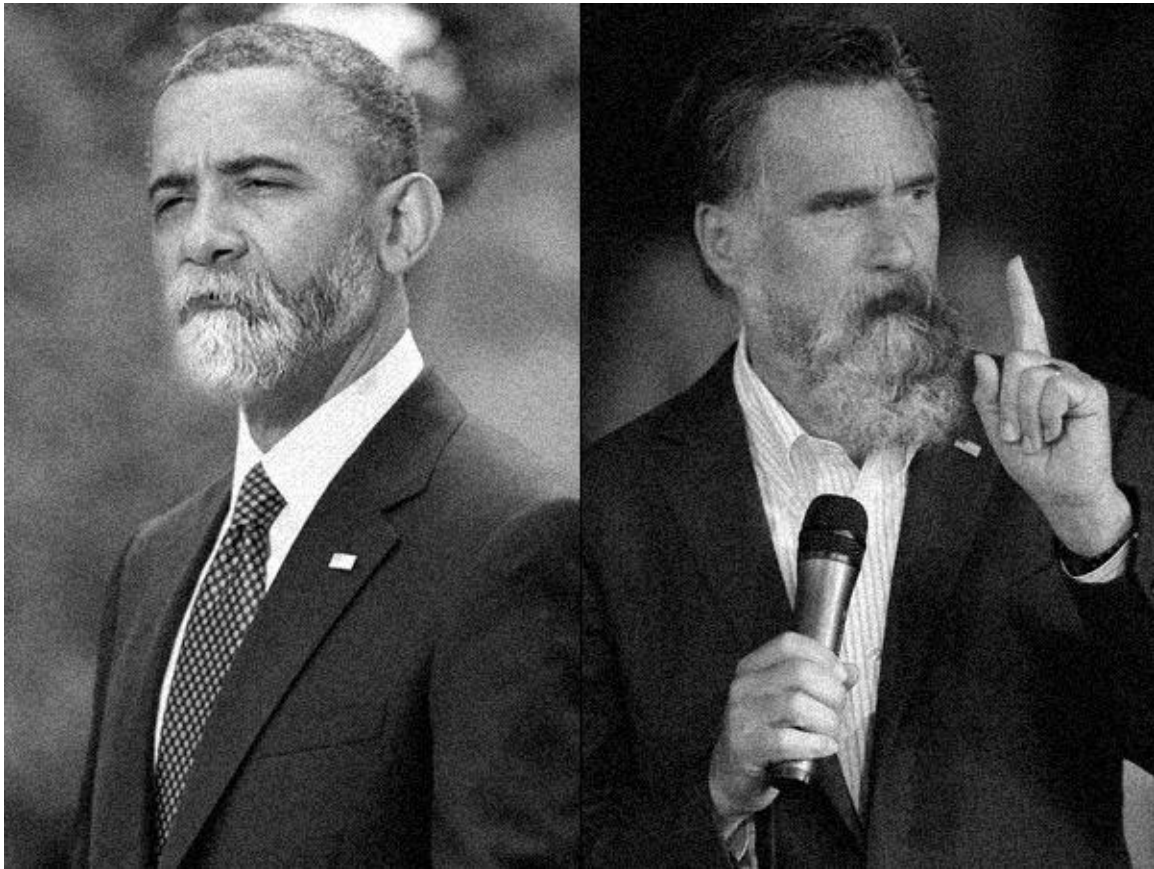
(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Apr. 19, 2012)

In those madcap, boisterous, highly successful days of yore, Presidents wore facial hair. Just think of Lincoln and our other Indiana hero, Benjamin Harrison (not the fort). Perhaps we'd be more respected in foreign circles if our leaders looked more distinguished? Or just a little bit more like Wavy Gravy? In our wildest dreams, the President would pick-up an electric guitar and give a speech something like this:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0\\_EFdod4YDo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_EFdod4YDo).

(Barack might be slightly more suited than Mitt!)





Benjamin Harrison, 23rd president of the United States, 1889-1893.  
([http://www.slate.com/slideshows/news\\_and\\_politics/presidential-beards.html](http://www.slate.com/slideshows/news_and_politics/presidential-beards.html))

"Lincoln Had One. So Did Uncle Sam." by Justin Peters, Slate

Apr. 18, 2012,

([http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/politics/2012/04/beards\\_in\\_politics\\_there\\_hasn\\_t\\_been\\_a\\_bearde\\_d\\_major\\_party\\_presidential\\_nominee\\_in\\_almost\\_100\\_years\\_why\\_single.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2012/04/beards_in_politics_there_hasn_t_been_a_bearde_d_major_party_presidential_nominee_in_almost_100_years_why_single.html))

(Why don't politicians today grow beards?)

Though the gentlemen who vied for the Republican presidential nomination disagreed on many things, from tax policy to contraception to the feasibility of establishing a colony on the moon, there's one critical issue on which they were firmly in accord: facial hair. This was true of the eventual nominees in the last election, and the one before that, and in every other presidential contest going back to 1916. One hundred years ago, two of the four men running for president were proudly hirsute, as were two of the four vice-presidential candidates. Today, the sitting president can't grow whiskers and his challengers wouldn't dare try. When did the beard lose its political prestige?

In his delightful 1930 monograph *Concerning Beards*, Edwin Valentine Mitchell notes that "the fortunes of the beard have always fluctuated through the ages. It flourishes for a time in full splendor, then diminishes in size, and finally disappears altogether, only to burst forth once more in all its former glory." In much of the premodern era, a healthy beard connoted influence and high status; Mitchell says that "one ancient king actually made a terrible scene because the reigning head of another state sent a beardless youth upon a political errand to his court." The opposite is true, too: Men pressed into servitude were often shorn of their beards as a sign of subjugation.

By the time of the Revolutionary War, facial hair had gone out of style in America, explains Victoria Sherrow in her *Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History*. And, indeed, the first 15 U.S. presidents were beardless, though John Quincy Adams did sport a rather nice pair of muttonchops. A sign of the times: In 1830, a man named Joseph Palmer was jailed for a year in Fitchburg, Mass., after fending off four men who attempted to forcibly rid him of his widely loathed beard. (Palmer's gravesite is marked with a monument that reads "Persecuted for Wearing the Beard.")

In the mid-1800s, whiskers made a comeback in American political life—or, as Reginald Reynolds put it in his odd 1950 volume, *Beards*, "a beard was becoming almost as necessary as a Bible to a rising demagogue." Abraham Lincoln began his presidency as a baby-faced rube from rural Illinois, governing a country on the brink of collapse. After growing a beard at the behest of a schoolgirl, he vanquished the South and passed into legend.

Every subsequent president up to William Howard Taft wore some sort of facial hair, except for Andrew Johnson, who was impeached, and William McKinley, who was assassinated. If you wanted the Republican Party's nomination, a beard was as necessary then as a Reagan fetish is now.

That changed in the early 1900s, likely due to the advent of the Gillette safety razor, which debuted in 1903 and eased the performance of what had long been a hated and bloody chore. Soon thereafter, the military banned beards, as they interfered with the seal on gas masks. By 1930, Edwin Valentine Mitchell would write that, "In this regimented age the simple possession of a beard is enough to mark as curious any young man who has the courage to grow one."

In politics, that's been the case ever since. No sitting president has worn facial hair since Taft. Charles Evans Hughes was the last bearded major-party presidential nominee; he lost to Woodrow Wilson in 1916. Today, it's received wisdom that candidates should be clean-shaven. "Except for a brief window from Sept. 11 to 2003-2004, most of the last 15 years in politics have been about change, and a wizened graybeard doesn't really convey change," says Jeff Jacobs, creative director and founder of NextGen Persuasion, a campaign consultancy firm. "In 500 campaigns I've almost never had a conversation with a candidate about whether or not to have facial hair," explains Democratic media consultant John Rowley. "It's almost like conventional wisdom about facial hair has already hit candidates before they even run."

The beard's absence from modern American politics can be partially blamed on the two scourges of the 20th century: Communists and hippies. For many years, wearing a full beard marked you as the sort of fellow who had Das Kapital stashed somewhere on his person. In the 1960s, the more-or-less concurrent rise of Fidel Castro in Cuba and student radicals at home reinforced the stereotype of beard-wearers as America-hating no-goodniks. The stigma persists to this day: No candidate wants to risk alienating elderly voters with a gratuitous resemblance to Wavy Gravy.

A few politicians have managed to win elective office in spite of their hairy visages. Moderate, beard-having Ohio Republican Steve LaTourette has been a House stalwart since 1995. Who liked Rep. David Obey's beard? The voters of Wisconsin's seventh district did: They elected its wearer to 21 consecutive terms before Obey retired in 2011. Sen. Tom Coburn sometimes wears a beard, and its occasional appearance is eagerly awaited by Hill types. Coburn's beard even has its own tribute Twitter account, which boots up whenever the senator's whiskers begin to sprout. (Sample tweet: "i've asked tom to spend a few minutes combing me before tonight's #SOTU, i must maintain my supple virility.")

But mostly, a list of contemporary bearded politicians is a roster of the inept and inessential. There's former New Jersey governor Jon Corzine, who's currently embroiled in a massive financial scandal. Florida Rep. Alcee Hastings was impeached and removed from office while serving as a federal judge in the 1980s. Ex-New York governor David Paterson's three-year tenure did much to improve the fortunes of Saturday Night Live. Cantankerous Alaska congressman Don Young, known as "Mr. Pork," has seemingly been ostracized from the beard community. ("Young is kind of a disgrace to beards around the world," wrote one member of a beard-centric message board). The oddly bearded jurist Robert Bork is the only person in the last 40 years to have his Supreme Court nomination rejected by the Senate. Ben Bernanke is the first beard-wearer to chair the Federal Reserve; he is currently one of the most-loathed men in America.

Sometimes, a beard makes it seem like a politician is either emerging from or embarking on a three-day Smirnoff bender. "A lot of times people associate beards with what happens after you lose a campaign and you let yourself go," says Jacobs. Indeed, one need only picture a dazed, broken Al Gore circa 2001, puffy and bearded like a white-collar woodsman gone to seed, to understand why politicians identify facial hair with failure and shame. There are other negative connotations, too. "One misperception is that somebody who has a beard is lazy and can't be bothered to shave, sort of on par with somebody who's too lazy to brush his teeth," says Phil Olsen, the founder and self-appointed captain of Beard Team USA, who would know. "Some people perceive beards as disrespectful."

When I asked John Rowley if he could think of a circumstance when he might actually advise a candidate to grow facial hair, he paused for a few seconds. "Maybe when people have a lot of scars on their face from an accident," he finally answered.

Barring a surge in the number of disfigured men running for office, voters shouldn't expect the political beard to re-emerge anytime soon. Because the real reason most candidates don't have beards is because most men don't have beards, and there's nothing to be gained by deviating from the mainstream. "Candidates get criticized mercilessly on what their appearance is, so they go to great lengths to get a political uniform down that isn't too distracting," says Rowley. Which makes sense: The last thing a candidate wants is for his crazy beard to distract from his sober, rational message about living on the moon.

And yet, though beards might not be all that common, they're actually well received among the general population. "I do a lot of work with visual communications, facial expressions, how people read faces," says Jeff Jacobs. "Facial hair poses no distraction or causes no aversions whatsoever." Academic research bears this out: In a 1990 paper for the journal *Social Behavior and Personality*, J. Ann Reed and Elizabeth M. Blunk reported "consistently more positive perceptions of social/physical attractiveness, personality, competency, and composure for men with facial hair." More recently, researchers Barnaby J. Dixson and Paul L. Vasey rejected the notion that "facial hair decreases a male's perceived social status because it is associated with traits such as vagrancy." In fact, participants in their study "rated bearded men as having higher social status than clean-shaven men."

Are there any politicians whose campaigns might have been helped if they had worn beards? "You put John Kerry in the room with a well-groomed beard, and it makes it a lot harder for that flip-flopper charge to stick," says Jacobs. "He seems like a guy who changes his positions because they evolve, and because he thinks about things." Former

New Mexico governor Bill Richardson ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2008, only to drop out after getting no traction in Iowa and New Hampshire. Soon thereafter, he grew a beard; if he had had one during the primaries, voters might not have been scared off by his hideous double chin. And despite his name, Jon Huntsman struck this year's Republican primary voters as the sort of person who might faint in terror if invited pheasant-shooting. A beard might have lent his campaign a solidity that it so desperately lacked.

Beards won't take hold in politics, it seems, until a bearded candidate wins a high-profile election. Politicians are unabashed copycats and generally won't try a new campaign strategy until it's been proven to work. Howard Dean's successful use of online organizing in the 2004 presidential primaries paved the way for every digital campaign tactic in use today. Bill Clinton's smooth jazz stylings in 1992 led directly to the "Saxophone Congress" of 1994.

Though the prospective 2016 presidential candidates are, thus far, a beardless lot, there's still plenty of time to establish an exploratory committee for someone like Beard Team USA captain Phil Olsen, who is perhaps the best hope for the future of American political beards. "We love America, and we're growing beards for America," Olsen says of himself and his teammates. Someone's got to.



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<a href="#">20120418-14</a>	20:27	Pam	Re: "Mitt Romney Is Far More Frightening Than Ted Nugent"
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<a href="#">20120418-01</a>	09:57	Pam	Re: "Great News: 'Too Big to Fail' Banks Even Bigger Now" (reply to SteveBA, Apr. 17, 2012)
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Interesting article, and I understand why you sent it, but I don't buy its whole premise. I agree that the banks should be split back into commercial and investment, which would protect "ordinary" account holders. I think the other statistics about the number of hits on the web about this or that are pretty irrelevant. Whatever the hot topic of the day, it's going to get a lot of hits. And it's not a question of either/or. Either Obama cares about the economy and not contraception, or he cares more about contraception than jobs: this is a false dichotomy. We need to decentralize banks (IMHO) AND save GM (whose failure would have ruined our economy, whether you approve of GM or not) AND create jobs (even if this means some of them are govt. jobs; the private sector obviously isn't doing enough) AND get the hell out of Afghanistan AND negotiate with Iran and North Korea AND help small business owners AND make sure everyone has affordable health insurance (the CHEAPEST way would be universal coverage/ single payer). Am I leaving anything out? These are huge problems. NO ONE could have solved them all in three years. I think Obama has done a pretty good job. He's a pragmatist, and he weighs benefits against costs. He realizes that compromise is not defeat. He's not perfect, but he's learned a lot, and he has a steady hand. He doesn't go shooting off his mouth about making the moon a state or invading the Middle East. Who knows what Romney would do? I don't believe he's crazy (unlike others I could name), but he's a bit too trigger happy for my taste--and he has no military experience. I think Hillary has done a far better job than the Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Cheney triumvirate. Obama stands firm vis a vis Iran and North Korea, but he doesn't

threaten Armageddon. Romney sounds like he wants to turn us into Sparta. I think Obama is more like Pericles, admittedly without the military chops. It's a Big Picture, and Obama is acutely aware of that. I'm not sure Romney "gets it."

<a href="#">20120418-08</a>	15:05	SteveG	Re: "Great News: 'Too Big to Fail' Banks Even Bigger Now" (reply to Pam)
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Banks do need a lot of work, but they also have good lobbyists that don't want anything done except repeal what rules do exist. If Obama was not president it would mean that McCain would be president. In all probability we would have troops in Libya, troops or at least air strikes in Syria – neither of which would be funded.

We can argue all day long about any president or any issue, but until lobbying is under control, until corporations/people cannot buy elections through PAC's we sit where we do. Look at today's Friends of the Middle and the quote of Henry Ford – the banking systems has been screwed up for scores of years and will continue for scores of years as government/banks/lobbyists seem to like the status quo.

<a href="#">20120418-12</a>	18:41	SteveBA	Re: "Great News: 'Too Big to Fail' Banks Even Bigger Now" (reply to SteveG)
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You confidently forget Dodd frank bill that he signed was supposed to solve this problem. Your argument that it would have worse with is flawed.

<a href="#">20120418-15</a>	21:34	SteveBA	Re: "Great News: 'Too Big to Fail' Banks Even Bigger Now" (reply to Pam)
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The I point is that Obama is not accomplishing anything positive, in the areas that he promised hope and change. His view is that big government will solve all of our problems. Think of the irony when he blasted the banks and others for having a convention in vegas and 3years later the first lady and family is visiting Vegas on our dime and his GSA is spending millions of our dollars partying in Vegas. The guy is a pure politician and uses any topic for his purpose. He spends more time on contraception than big banks. His Dodd frank bill has created this problem.

<a href="#">20120418-17</a>	23:30	SteveG	Re: "Great News: 'Too Big to Fail' Banks Even Bigger Now" (reply to SteveBA)
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You cannot take 50 years of decreasing banking regulations to be corrected with one bill after an economic downturn such as we had. I do not believe I argued anything would have been worse, but I argued that it would have been different. Every argument is flawed depending on the perspective taken. Obama has not been the best and Reagan was not the best, just saying. All degrees of interpretations are based on one's frame of reference.

<a href="#">20120418-18</a>	23:58	SteveB	Re: "Great News: 'Too Big to Fail' Banks Even Bigger Now" (reply to SteveBA)
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I'm happy you're taking part in the discussion. But what is the problem you have with Dodd-Frank? What problem, exactly, has it created?

I don't see how President Obama has spent any time on contraception, except maybe in his own bedroom. You must be thinking about the news cycles, not the executive branch. And any time spent has been forced by Republican actions the majority of us find reprehensible.

Otherwise, most Democrats, including Mr. Obama, I'm sure, take contraception as a given and don't need to waste any time thinking about it. That's just what Rick Santorum and the Republicans do.

Ya...Republicans never party on the taxpayers' dime. Nobody ever said Democrats aren't guilty of some of the same excesses of power as Republicans, just fewer of them.

[20120418-02](#) 10:34 SteveG Poster: Hermann Hesse Quote

**We kill at every step, not only in wars, riots, and executions. We kill when we close our eyes to poverty, suffering, and shame... In the same way all disrespect for life, all hardheartedness, all indifference, all contempt is, in the eyes of the believer, nothing else than killing. It is possible to kill not only what is in the present, but also what is in the future. With just a little skepticism we can kill a good deal of the future in a young person. Life is waiting everywhere. The future is flowering everywhere. We see only a small part of it and step on much of it with our feet. We kill with every step.**

**~ Hermann Hesse, Nobel Laureate**



[20120418-03](#) 11:06 SteveG Fw: Consumers Union Action: Fight for Your Health Insurance Refunds!

from Consumers Union:

No tax refund this year? Well, we dug around and found health insurance companies could owe consumers big refunds this summer, thanks to the new healthcare law!

One Aetna company is estimated to owe \$46 million to customers nationwide. That's real money back in your pockets.

Savings are adding up in states too. A WellPoint insurer in Missouri may pay out \$29 million to individual and small-business policyholders. And Florida small-businesses using Blue Cross Blue Shield are expecting \$45 million in refunds – a boost to struggling entrepreneurs.

But lobbyists are still trying to undermine this law. Next week House members will take up a bill that will scale back rate cuts and refunds. And your state Insurance Commissioner who helps enforce the law is under pressure to back off as well.

Let the law work! Tell your leaders to support insurance rate cuts and refunds.



Getting a handle on insurance costs is critical for our nation. Insurers now can't spend more than 20 percent of your premium on their administrative costs, CEO salaries and excessive profits. Spend more, and they must lower rates or refund the difference.

Our early analysis found this incentive is working. Countless insurance companies are spending more of your dollars on needed medical care and less on their overhead. And we're discovering more expected refunds and savings each day.

Unfortunately, these savings are under attack right now! Take action now:

<https://secure.consumersunion.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=2651&JServSessionIdr004=r9mcci21i5.app244a>

Insurance companies hate the idea of giving your money back. Make sure they're held to it by having your friends and family join you in taking action. Refunds are due this summer. It's your money, fight for it!

Sincerely, DeAnn Friedholm, YourHealthSecurity.org

20120418-04	13:07	SteveB	"The Importance of Being Sassy"
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"The Importance of Being Sassy" by Sven Eberlein, *Yes! Magazine*/NationofChange

Apr. 18, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/importance-being-sassy-1334755018>)

Since long before Abbie Hoffman dropped dollar bills over the New York Stock Exchange—unleashing hilarity as Wall Street traders scurried to gather up cash—humor has been a potent political weapon. It can expose the absurdities and inequities of consumer society. It doesn't need big bucks to be effective or contagious—Occupy has shown that creativity and imagination can be powerful enough to build a national movement. And the Internet and social networking can allow a well-orchestrated prank to reach millions in minutes. Want to use your wit to confront corporate power? Here are creative and inspiring examples.

#### Truth in Advertising

Corporations may try to influence our perceptions through advertising, but who's to say activists can't give their messages a little editing? San Francisco's Billboard Liberation Front has been "improving" ads for clients ranging from Wachovia Bank to McDonald's for more than 30 years. One recent campaign helped telecommunications giant AT&T refine its message from an obtuse "AT&T works in more places, like Chilondoscow" (Chicago, London, Moscow, get it?) to the more discerning "AT&T works in more places, like NSA Headquarters."

"Not only were we helping NSA cut through the cumbersome red tape of the FISA system, we were also helping our customers by handing over their emails and phone records to the government," read a statement to press from James Croppy, designated by the Billboard Liberation Front as the "AT&T vice president of homeland security."

Other activists have fought back by getting their own ad space. Canadian artist Franke James launched a crowd-funded ad campaign on bus shelters throughout Ottawa, using her visual essays to call out the Harper administration's coddling of dirty oil industries. "It's a great way to change the conversation from consuming stuff to making positive social change happen," says James.

#### Mobbing the Lobby

The mall, the bank lobby, the retail store—the spaces where ordinary people interact with corporations—are ideal locations for political theater that raises awareness.

Reverend Billy and his “Church of Stop Shopping” are a band of activists on a mission to draw attention to the problems of consumerism. Two years ago, they decided to hold their Easter Sunday service at JPMorgan Chase’s Astor Place branch in Manhattan.

“This is a call to bring the earth back to the bank that has financed 80 percent of the mountaintop removal strip-mining in Appalachia,” announced Reverend Billy.

Armed with soil sent by activists from West Virginia’s Coal River Valley, they built a little mountain sculpture in front of the ATMs, singing, “There’s a mountain in my lobby!”

Two months later, Chase announced that it would subject all mountaintop removal financing to more extensive review and revealed that it was no longer serving coal company Massey Energy. The Reverend doesn’t claim credit, but he believes the church’s 18-branch campaign may have been “the mosquito in [Chase’s] tent.”

Similarly, in August 2010, a progressive group called the Backbone Campaign used the floor of a Target retail store to stage a flash mob—and draw attention to the Citizens United Supreme Court ruling that lets corporations give unlimited campaign contributions. (Target gave \$150,000 to the anti-gay, anti-worker candidate for governor of Minnesota.) On a quiet day inside a Seattle Target branch, a group of ordinary-looking people standing beside shopping carts broke into song and dance as a brass band played the 1980s hit “People are People”—with new words and the catchy chorus line, “Target ain’t people, so why should it be / allowed to play around with our democracy?”

The 5-minute, GLEE-style dance party got some of the other shoppers visibly animated and shaking their booties. The YouTube video of the event, created by Agit-Pop Communications, went viral, with over 1.5 million hits.

### Running for Office as a “Corporate Person”

The absurdity of the legal precedent that says corporations are people is hard to ignore. Eric Hensal decided to mock corporate personhood by testing out whether a corporation could run for office. The Murray Hill Inc. for Congress campaign began with a proposal written on a napkin at a Tastee Diner. “I’m driving to meet someone for breakfast one morning, the Citizens United decision comes on, and I’m like, the hell with it, I’m running my corporation for Congress,” says Hensal, owner of the small, Silver Spring, Md., public relations company. “Murray Hill Inc. for Congress puts a boring subject like campaign finance on a human scale,” says Hensal. “People laugh, but they appreciate the underlying truth behind it.”

### Impersonating a Corporation

Enbridge, an oil company with a long record of spills, planning a pipeline more than 700 miles long through pristine British Columbia wilderness—what could possibly go wrong? Enter the Yes Men’s “MyHairCares” campaign, a flurry of fake press releases under the Enbridge name asking more than 1,000 salons across Canada to collect hair to mop up the oil giant’s future spills.

For years, Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, a.k.a. The Yes Men, have been drawing attention to corporate abuses by pretending to be corporate spokesmen. The Yes Lab for Creative Activism’s new “project wizard” allows anyone to cook up the next prank. “Nothing we do is rocket science,” says Bichlbaum. “After coming up with a funny project idea, it’s just a matter of applying elbow grease and connecting with the right people.”

### Mic Check

“Mic check?” someone shouts. “MIC CHECK!” the crowd echoes, almost in unison. After the New York police banned the use of electronic amplification in Zuccotti Park, necessity compelled the first Occupiers to prove that the power of a crowd was enough to amplify the messages of the 99 percent. The simple human microphone has come to signify the Occupy movement’s resilience and adaptability. Now, this cheeky “technology” has become a tool for disrupting business as usual with righteous rants. A crowd begins an almost unstoppable call and repeat. They overpower a luncheon at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce or interrupt Black Friday sales at Walmart to announce to shoppers that “Walmart could fire its employees for the mere mention of forming a workers’ union.”

## Disorder in the Court

What can match the legal power of corporations? At a courthouse in Brooklyn, a simple song was enough to drown out the proceedings. In October 2011, members of Organizing for Occupation (O4O), a group of New York City residents formed to respond to the housing crisis, disrupted a foreclosure auction with a song written specially for the arbiter of (in)justice. "Mrs. Auctioneer," they sang, sadly and beautifully, "all the people here are asking you to hold all the sales right now. We're hoping to survive, but we don't know how." While the singers got escorted out of the courtroom in plastic handcuffs after half an hour, their heroic anthem apparently reached the hearts of potential buyers, and according to reports in Village Voice, only one of the three buildings set to be auctioned that day was sold.

(Sven Eberlein wrote this article for *9 Strategies to End Corporate Rule*, the Spring 2012 issue of *YES! Magazine*. Sven is a freelance writer living in San Francisco, with roots in Germany.)

[20120418-05](#)

13:53

SteveG

Fw: Working America Action: Tell DeMarco: Get Moving to Help Underwater Homeowners!

From WorkingAmerica.org:

One man has been single-handedly blocking urgently needed relief for millions of homeowners caught in the upheaval of the mortgage crisis.

Federal Housing Finance Agency Acting Director Edward DeMarco is an obscure federal bureaucrat most Americans have never heard of. Despite being unknown, he has been the main roadblock to writing off principal for homes that are "underwater." The decision to help underwater homeowners is his to make, and he needs to do it.

With help from supporters like you, we're launching a bold effort to rally Americans to stand up to DeMarco with one clear and urgent message: Get Moving!

We're fanning out across America, going door to door to spread the message and gather petition signatures. And as one of our key supporters, I'm asking you to get the ball rolling by being one of the first to add your name to our petition.

Tell DeMarco: Get moving on relief for underwater homeowners!

[http://action.workingamerica.org/c/575/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action\\_KEY=4211](http://action.workingamerica.org/c/575/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=4211)

Until now, DeMarco has barely considered doing what housing experts and even Congress and President Obama recommend—writing off principal balances for distressed homeowners who owe the bank more than their homes are worth.

Last Tuesday DeMarco signaled he may consider some write-downs. If he means it, this is a step in the right direction. He needs to know homeowners are paying attention. That's why we've set a goal of 4,000 signatures by April 25—the day we'll hand-deliver your petitions directly to Federal Housing Finance Agency headquarters.

With one out of every five mortgages in the nation currently underwater like this, tens of millions of working families need help NOW. It's high time for DeMarco to get moving.

Sign the petition before our 4/25 deadline, and we'll hand-deliver your message.

Ed DeMarco needs to understand one thing: If he's willing to help, he needs to hurry up and get the job done. Together, you and I are going to drive that message home in a big way.

Thanks for speaking out, Christian Norton, Communications Director, Working America

[20120418-06](#) 14:38 SteveG "Marchers Protest Big Banks, Big Salaries in Downtown Yakima"

"Marchers Protest Big Banks, Big Salaries in Downtown Yakima" by Mike Faulk, *Yakima Herald-Republic*

Apr. 18, 2012, (<http://www.yakima-herald.com/stories/2012/04/18/marchers-protest-big-banks-big-salaries-in-downtown-yakima>)

(YAKIMA, Wash.) On Tuesday afternoon when plenty of people were hurrying to file their taxes, Occupy Yakima marched to point out the disparities they see in who pays their fair share to the government.

The group pulled together about 20 protesters to march from Millennium Plaza to the Chase Bank branch at the corner of North Third Street and Yakima Avenue while echoing themes of the Occupy Wall Street movement that caught on across the nation last year.

Protester Melvin Neifert, 36, said similar groups were organizing in front of banks around the country Tuesday as part of a national "Tax Day Protest." Neifert and others said big banks used government bailouts for the benefit of their executives while paying no mind to the livelihoods of their employees or customers.

"We demand the 1 percent pay their fair share," Neifert said, referring to the top 1 percent of income earners in the United States.

Protesters signed a poster-size petition calling on JPMorgan Chase, the national bank under which the local Chase branch operates, to increase compensation for its rank-and-file employees and for the federal Financial Stability Oversight Council to break up the bank's assets because they see it as too large to fairly manage.

"It's more symbolic than anything," Neifert said.

Protester Glenda Phillips, 54, said the stock market crash in 2008 wrecked the investments she'd made for retirement. Now Phillips says she doesn't know when she will be able to retire, while banks, such as Chase, become bigger and more profitable.

"All the dreams I was saving for I'm seeing slip through my fingers," Phillips said.

The local Chase manager said he wasn't authorized to speak to the media. He directed calls to a spokesman in Chicago, who referred calls to a Seattle spokeswoman, who did not return several messages.

Protest organizer Robert Beal, 58, said Occupy Yakima chose the downtown branch because it's the main street version of the large national banks that continue to accrue wealth while average Americans struggle to get by nearly five years after the recession began. Beal said the likelihood of another crash hasn't been reduced, it's greater than ever.

"The incentives to speculate and manipulate markets are still there," Beal said. "They have not changed."

[Way to go, Yakima! –SteveB]

[20120418-10](#) 15:42 Pam Re: "Marchers Protest Big Banks, Big Salaries in Downtown Yakima" (reply to SteveG)

Right on!

[20120418-07](#) 14:42 SteveB View from the Right: "Another Day, Another Administration Witch Hunt"

I'm not sure it can really be done, but I've been pushing for years to end speculation in the oil and commodity markets. All that has to happen is this: If you buy a futures contract, you have to take delivery or face a stiff penalty when you sell. It's that simple, but it must be done in all major markets, which the Chinese are starting to bypass, thus eliminating, for them, the cost of speculation. My plan would have no negative effects on businesses who buy oil and prices would come down. The demand from speculators is artificial and artificially raises prices. This is why the conservatives love them.

"Another Day, Another Administration Witch Hunt" by David Harsanyi, *Human Events*

Apr. 17, 2012, (<http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=50917>)

So many imaginary villains and so little time.

This week, President Barack Obama is taking the fight to "oil speculators" and "market manipulation" (nee "free enterprise"), demanding that traders put up more money for transactions and government ratchet up enforcement and monitoring. "None of these will bring gas prices down overnight," Obama helpfully explained in his news conference. "But they will prevent market manipulation and help protect consumers."

No, they won't. They'd probably hurt consumers, and they would doubtlessly raise the cost of doing business. So for a few hundred words, let's treat populist agitation as if it were earnest policy.

Let's start by being thankful for oil speculation -- no matter what the motivation of those involved might be. To begin with, speculation allows companies with exposure to fluctuating commodity prices to hedge against rising costs by locking in. Sometimes the bet pays off; other times it doesn't. But risk and profit are not yet crimes.

Oil speculation also offers consumers and investors information about the future that can help them make informed long-term decisions. Speculators trade commodities based on the information available in the marketplace. They reflect reality; they don't create it.

But sometimes, unfortunate as it is, prices will rise. "Gouging," the close scaremongering cousin of "speculation," helps persuade consumers not to use what they don't need. It incentivizes to modify behavior -- our driving habits or the size of our cars. We conserve more when prices are higher, so we avoid shortages, and producers intensify their production. (Funny how Democrats get this concept when writing energy policy designed to artificially spike fossil fuel prices.)

The president surely understands, as well. He knows that a fungible commodity's price is driven by demand and geopolitical events beyond the control of speculators or, for the most part, Washington. There are billions of people in China, India and elsewhere who are new consumers of oil -- and they are better off for it. We are better off for it.

Or put it this way: Natural gas prices are trading so cheaply that it's no longer profitable to drill for most companies. According to *Businessweek*, there are only 624 operating drills in the United States, the fewest since April 2002. So I guess natural gas speculators forgot to manipulate the world market this month. Or do oil manipulators only work part time? Confusing.

[But these are drills, not pumping rigs! Sounds like a hell of a lot to me! BrentR? --SteveB]

Where, after all, is the president's evidence that oil speculation is driving up oil prices? The White House "Fact Sheet" on the matter offers plenty of solutions to a problem it hasn't even proved exists. Why are we going to spend another \$52 million -- and who-knows-what in political witch hunt trials -- on a theory that plays on assumptions and flourishes in the progressive blogosphere?

Obviously, much of this is driven by political realities and accusations by Republicans that the president isn't doing enough to curb rising oil prices. George W. Bush also talked about manipulation nonsense, and I'm sure it's gone on forever.



So it's also worth noting that Washington, regrettably enough, already has the power to enact the counterproductive regulations the president is asking for. Nothing needs to be passed. It was only last year when Obama formed a special task force designed to find manipulation in the oil market and to ferret out incidents of gas gouging.

It is rare when Washington gives a topic what it deserves. But the Oil and Gas Price Fraud Working Group has given the American people exactly what the topic deserves: zip.

<a href="#">20120418-09</a>	15:40	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Training Opportunity
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from MoveOn:

The 99% Spring has arrived! Over the past week, hundreds of organizations ran more than 1,000 nonviolent direct action trainings nationwide for more than 45,000 people—all aimed at building a huge wave of progressive action this spring to confront the 1%.

MoveOn members joined allies from labor unions, community organizations, the Occupy movement, environmental groups, and more. We prepared ourselves to take action in the spirit of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. because we all agree that our system is fundamentally broken and we need to create great change.

The trainings last week were inspiring, but don't worry—if you missed them you can still join in right from your computer at home, work, or school! Check out the new online version of the training—and then we'll connect you to actions happening in your area.

Click here to get started training online: <http://training.the99spring.com/training/99spring/>

Thanks for all you do.

—Lenore, Carrie, Robin, Wes, and the rest of the team

<a href="#">20120418-11</a>	16:12	SteveG	Fw: People for the American Way Petition: Tell ALEC's Corporate Sponsors it's Time to Ditch ALEC!
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from People for the American Way (PFAW):

More evidence that PFAW supporters' activism is working: the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) has announced that it is disbanding its "Public Safety and Elections Task Force," the working group responsible for advancing model legislation like the controversial Voter ID and "Shoot First" gun laws that have proliferated around the country. Of course the move is a transparent attempt to stem the hemorrhaging of support ALEC's facing, thanks in large part to the efforts of PFAW supporters like you, but it's big symbolic victory and shows we have them on the defensive.

ALEC's trying to whitewash their role pushing extreme legislation that endangers the safety and lives of Americans - but we won't let them.

ALEC now claims they will only focus on legislation that will 'put the economy back to work,' but will they work to undo the immense harm that have already caused? And it begs the question of how they will use a so called 'jobs agenda' to justify laws -- which they presumably will still be pushing -- that undermine workers' rights, privatize public education, and make it harder to hold corporations accountable for poisoning our air and water or selling us dangerous and defective products. We will continue to work with our friends to shine a light on ALEC's agenda and hold members accountable for supporting that agenda.

Help hold ALEC accountable -- join our petition now to tell companies to withdraw their support from the influential right-wing group!

<http://site.pfaw.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ditchalec&autologin=true>

Yesterday, in another major victory, Blue Cross Blue Shield became the latest company to pull out of ALEC. We are going to keep up the momentum by turning the focus of our next round of grassroots pressure on State Farm.

Despite continued contact with State Farm, the company is not yet showing signs of budging and withdrawing its support for ALEC. It's time to get local with your activism.

After you sign the petition you will be asked to call local State Farm agents and tell them you want the company to cut ties with ALEC.

Hopefully this local, bottom-up grassroots pressure will be what it takes to make State Farm join Blue Cross, McDonald's, Coca Cola, Pepsi, Mars and the other companies who have so far said "enough" to ALEC's destructive right-wing agenda.

Thank you for your activism!

-- Ben Betz, Online Strategy Manager

<a href="#">20120418-13</a> 19:53 Dennis "Mitt Romney Is Far More Frightening Than Ted Nugent"
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This is a very clear discussion of getting and retaining political power:

["Mitt Romney Is Far More Frightening Than Ted Nugent" by Wendy Gittleston, Addicting Info](#)

Apr. 18, 2012, (<http://www.addictinginfo.org/2012/04/18/mitt-romney-is-far-more-frightening-than-ted-nugent/>)

The current Republican party is like a coin. On one side, the head, there is Mitt Romney – cool, detached, almost robotic. On the other side, the tail, there are Rush Limbaugh, Newt Gingrich, Glenn Beck, Rick Santorum, Ann Coulter and Ted Nugent. What people often forget is that they are the same coin.

Do I believe for a moment that Ted Nugent actually wants President Obama to "suck on his machine gun?" Do I take him literally when he tells NRA members to "chop" the "heads off" Democrats? No. He's just doing his job and his job, like many on the right, is to be a professional a\*shole.

I'm not being dismissive of Nugent's rhetoric either. Not only is he encouraging violence among a group of people who like to hide behind their guns, he's preaching anarchy, an idea that is extremely romantic to some. He is encouraging violence. But the real problem with Nugent isn't that he said the words he said. It is that he is invited to say the words he says. In a nutshell, Nugent is a distraction.

Mobutu Sese Seko of Gawker wrote a brilliant piece about racism on the right and the right's reaction to the killing of Trayvon Martin. In the piece, Seko quotes the former RNC Chairman, Lee Atwater, who apparently had **some sort of end-of-life "come to Jesus moment" of honesty:**

**You start out in 1954 by saying, "Nigger, nigger, nigger." By 1968 you can't say "nigger"—that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me—because obviously sitting around saying, "We want to cut this," is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than "Nigger, nigger."**

Conservatism, by definition, indicates a longing for days past. The two essential facts that Republicans want us to forget are that the power structure in the United States is still largely white and male and that they are personally and financially invested in seeing that it stays that way.

Right after the inauguration of President Obama, I interviewed a white supremacist, or as he liked to call himself, a white separatist. While his words were vile, I found his candor almost refreshingly honest. He was proud to call himself a racist. He was proud of what he called "an innate instinct" to protect his own race.

Most people aren't overtly racist. Most don't wear hoods. Most don't illustrate their points with the barrel of a gun. Most white people don't hate minorities, but that doesn't mean that the majority of white people believe that minorities are their equals. Most men don't hate women, but it doesn't mean that the majority of men (of all races) believe that women are their equals.

I'm pretty sure that Mitt Romney doesn't hate women or minorities, in the same way that I'm pretty sure he didn't hate Seamus the dog or the thousands of employees he has laid off during his career. He simply feels that they are less important than those who are white, male and most importantly, monied.

Ted Nugent is dangerous in that he could be putting a few lives at risk. Mitt Romney, Paul Ryan, John Boehner, Mitch McConnell and the rest of the Republican establishment are dangerous because they kill millions through legislation. In the last 10 years, 8000 people have died in Republican wars. Every year, 45,000 people die for lack of health care. Republicans loathe the idea of men marrying men or women marrying women, but they believe that women in abusive marriages should be left to their own devices.

In just one year, Republicans have introduced 916 bills which are designed to keep women pregnant and poor, a deadly combination. Women earn 77 cents for every dollar a man earns. Romney is non-committal on the issue of equal pay, but his party isn't; they are just fine with the discrepancy.

Racial policies have been more subtle, but no less damaging. Like Atwater said, they are abstract. In the United States, there are two clear sets of standards. When a white person wears a hoodie, it's to stay warm. When a black person, especially a young man, wears a hoodie, it's a sign that he's up to no good. **There are now more black men in prison than were enslaved in 1850.** Many are there for drug offenses. There is absolutely no evidence that black people do more drugs or deal more drugs than white people, but they are six times more likely to be arrested for drugs and 11 times more likely to be imprisoned. The ugly reality of law enforcement is that if a police officer wants to find a reason to arrest someone, they usually will. They are far more likely to find that reason if the "perp" is black or Latino. The ugly reality of the judicial system is that white juries are more likely to convict a black person than a white.

Economic policies are even more dangerous. Any policy that benefits the wealthy at the expense of the poor will have a greater impact on minorities and women. Raising college tuition rates while lowering available financial assistance, impacts minorities and women. Cutting safety net programs impacts minorities and women. Reducing access to birth control and abortions helps create a cycle of poverty. Cutting back on teachers and police officers impacts minority communities.

The deservedly maligned John Edwards often said that there are two Americas and he was absolutely right. There are the elite and there is everyone else. All of the power and most of the money resides in the hands of just a few. Racist, sexist and homophobic policies protect that power. Violent rhetoric inflames the passions necessary in convincing a good portion of Americans that the racist, sexist and homophobic legislation is necessary to protect their own ways of life.

Ted Nugent, Rush Limbaugh and their ilk play a vital role in Republican politics. Compared to the crazies, the Republican establishment looks sane. As long as they look sane by comparison, they'll have the support to pass any number of insane pieces of legislation.

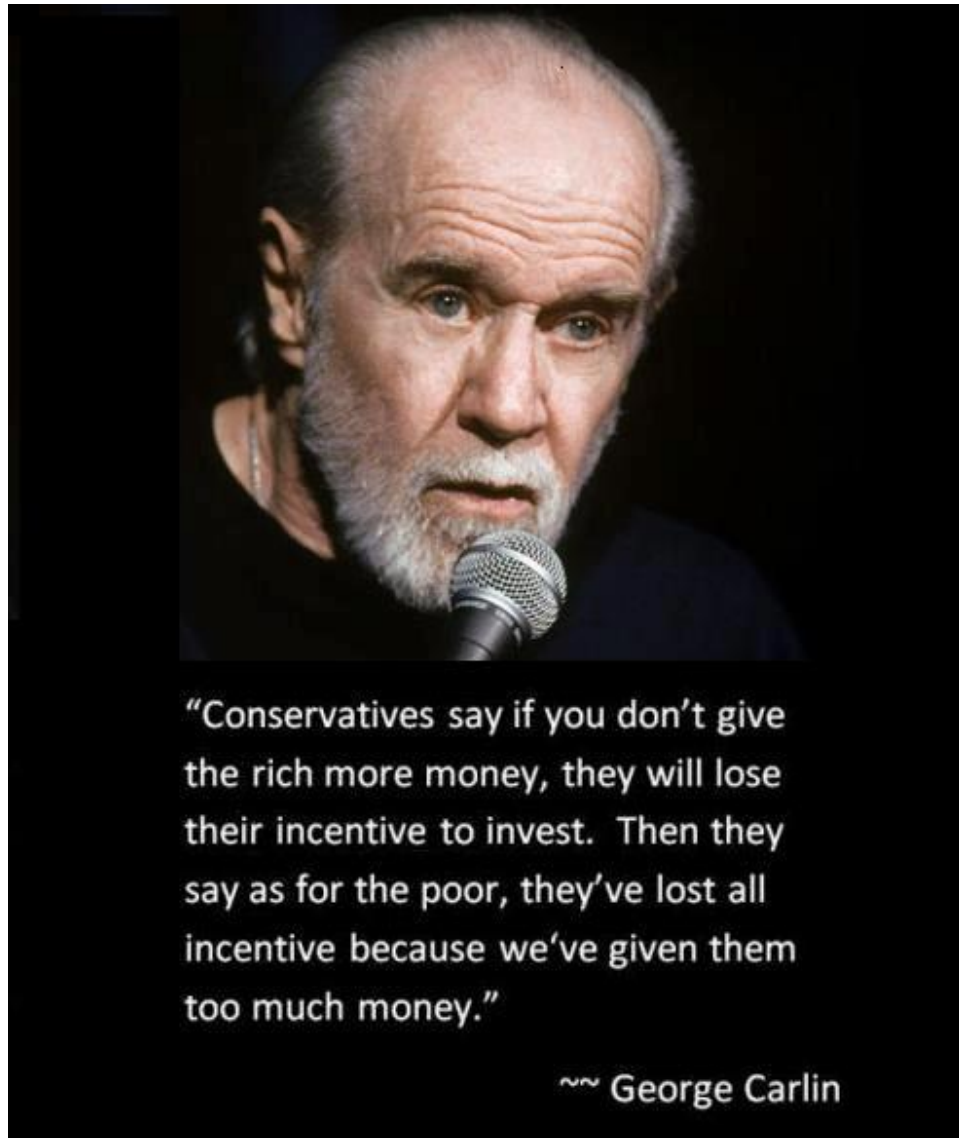
That's why Romney, when he weakly distances himself from Nugent and Limbaugh, only addresses their tone. It is the tone that he wants us to object to. He's fine with the sentiment. As long as the elite can keep us hating each

other, they get to protect their own power while legislating away ours. If there are a few casualties along the way, it won't matter. We don't matter.

[20120418-14](#) 20:27 Pam Re: "Mitt Romney Is Far More Frightening Than Ted Nugent"

Have you ever noticed that right-wing arguments usually employ the "you're another" fallacy? My pot may be black, but what about your black kettle? And suddenly we're arguing about kettles or communism or freeloaders or whatever. Republicans argue like pool balls. Democrats argue like clams digging into the sand. The rest of us are ostriches, wishing the whole sorry scene would just go away. A little cheery note to end the day on.

[20120418-16](#) 21:44 SteveG Poster: George Carlin Quote



<http://www.cubbybear.com/>



—Friends of the Middle,  
Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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