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John Edwards: Trial Lawyer to the Underclass

By [Terry Michael](#)

Just when I thought I was about to lose my lunch over recent gushing reviews of John Edwards' anti-poverty agenda, first by *The Economist* and then by *Washington Post* columnist E.J. Dionne, the ONION came to the rescue.

"John Edwards Vows to End All Bad Things by 2011," America's self-described "finest news source" reported in its lead story. In an imaginary dispatch from Ames, Iowa, the ONION revealed the North Carolina presidential candidate is trying to jump-start his faltering campaign with "a promise to eliminate all unpleasant, disagreeable, or otherwise bad things from all aspects of American life by the end of his second year in office."

Apparently, a low budget satirical tabloid knows a political huckster when it sees one, while a couple of mainstream media sources are seduced by blond ambition.

"He strides into an Iowa primary school where more than a hundred people have skipped their lunch to hear him," *The Economist* begins its Edwards swoon in its July 19 edition, predicting that "the Democrats' presidential platform will be shaped by Mr. Edwards's plans."

That wisdom was followed the next day by Dionne's tribute: "John Edwards may be running third...but he has already changed the national conversation on a crucial issue." Observing that in 2007 "the poor are less politically invisible," Dionne concludes that the Edwards agenda "gives a new war on poverty at least a fighting chance. Edwards deserves some credit for that."

The uber-ambitious Edwards may deserve some credit, but it's for his chutzpah in positioning himself as trial lawyer to the underclass -- the seedy second act of his 2004 incarnation as attorney for the victims of middle class angst.

If you need convincing about his political conversion to anti-poverty warrior, recall what *The New York Times* reported June 22, when they revealed, from tax filings, that Edwards established "a nonprofit organization with the stated mission of fighting poverty." But his Center for Promise and Opportunity raised \$1.3 million in 2005 and "the main beneficiary...was Mr. Edwards himself," to fund early campaign travel.

If the political journalism respect being shown to this latter-day P.T. Barnum weren't so laughable, it would be serious.

If Democrats are loony enough to buy the reactionary left-liberal, complete-the-New-Deal, wealth re-distributionist economics that Edwards is hustling, we (I'm a libertarian Democrat) risk blowing a nearly sure thing in 2008.

The middle class in this country is not falling behind. It is suffering from the psychological turmoil of "The Age of Abundance," as Brink Lindsey describes it so well in his recent book. America's working class is working.

And the impoverishment of our underclass is not the result of a failure of federal government largesse. Nor is it the legacy of rampant white racism. It's what the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan was so maligned for writing truthfully in the late '60s: a break-down of the family and the loss of nurturing values inherent in having two married parents. Or, to update Moynihan, two gay parents, or one loving single parent, skillfully caring for the children he, she and/or they produced or adopted.

The only serious Democratic candidate who seems to get this is Barack Obama. Instead of pandering to those Democrats whose minds were left somewhere in the Age of Aquarius, the Illinois senator, as Dionne wisely noted in the piece I faulted above, "stresses personal and parental responsibility."

If we Democrats are serious about ending the government dependent underclass poverty we helped create with our misguided War on Poverty forty years ago, let's hope what Obama stresses gets stressed in our 2008 platform.

If, however, we get sidetracked by the feel-good populism Edwards is peddling, we not only risk losing an election. We'll once again fail those children trapped in underclass hell.

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