

# Hierarchy and Americans, A Long Love Affair

We have leaders, in the USA, it's always been that way. I don't believe in some magical, fairyland communal or egalitarian America that was free from hierarchy. The settlers who occupied the land through Siberia and Asia did so in tribal societies some of which were patriarchies, and some of which were matriarchies. The invading Europeans all arrived from their own feudal or quasi-democratic traditions—they were not free from the assumptions or rules of their parents or grandparents, though they may have loathed them.

The original American settlers – whether the Native Americans or the Europeans – were all people who called someone master, and elevated that person above the rest, for a variety of reasons. They had to, in order to survive.

Even so, after several generations of European immigrants arrived in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and following certain intellectual innovations in political and moral thought in Europe, a choice was made. Many of the colonists decided to create a new system of government, based on the idea that white, male humans all had some inherent dignity apart from their financial responsibilities. While that dignity has often been couched in financial terms, the original statement of human rights—*life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*—is idealistic and totally (by luck or design) abstract.

Those white men revolted against their political masters, the kingdom of Great Britain. They fought British soldiers, German

mercenaries, and neighbors who disagreed with them. With the help of France, the pro-humanism white supremacist European colonists won, and the United States of America was born.

Since then, people have extrapolated a great many things from that original idea about human dignity—that it should apply to non-white people, and also that it should apply to women. These notions seem self-evident to most today, but were not at the time. Every one of those social revelations (black humans are entitled to these rights, female humans are entitled to these rights, etc.) depends on a single, overwhelming and revolutionary idea: that government owes something to the people it serves, because it *is* the people it serves.

In the US, we have yet to reach even an approximation of that ideal. One reason behind this inability to think or view government as belonging to the people is that in word and thought, we consistently place ourselves below elected political representatives.

This problem comes down to an infatuation with hierarchy. No single factor—not the electoral college, not gerrymandering, not money in politics—is more dangerous or damaging to democracy than the tolerance for giving titles and honorifics to people who serve as elected or appointed officials in whatever it is we call the American democratic experiment. “Secretary Clinton,” “President Trump,” “Senator Cotton,” “The Honorable Clarence Thomas.” Our use of titles—our enthusiastic desire to label and categorize damns us as authoritarian collaborators, as servile scum to be used and abused at any and every opportunity.

And abuse by the authorities is precisely what happens in America, routinely. Our elected leadership and their political appointees use and harm us. Who can blame them? We tell them that they're powerful, and that exploitation is okay. Not just okay: good.

If we want to reform our system, the first thing to do is to strip every politician of their title. Him, her, they – the titles must go. In their place, we should mandate that they be addressed using insulting and offensive nicknames, the more humiliating the better, to be used whenever and wherever possible. The potential criticism that this is what Trump did to be elected might be countered by pointing out that now that he has become elected, he would be subjected to precisely the same obligatory disrespect he has encouraged, which seems like something he doesn't like.

More precisely, elected and appointed citizens with political power, for their part – members of Congress, judges, the President, members of the Presidential cabinet—should address every U.S. citizen as “sir” or “ma’am.” They must also say, upon greeting an American citizen: “you’re stronger, smarter, and more beautiful/handsome than I am. Because I am weak and stupid and look like shit, like actual dogshit.” If they fail to say this, it should be legal and necessary to kick them—not too hard, but not soft, either. In the ass—like they are a dog, that has annoyed you. When doing so, you (the citizen) must say something like “I’m kicking you with my foot instead of slapping you because one uses one's foot to kick a dog or some other unclean thing. I don’t want to get my hand filthy by touching you.” Elected representatives should address felons convicted of brutal and appalling crimes as “brother”

or "sister." Nonviolent felons should be addressed as "sir" or "ma'am."

Elected representatives should be on a similar social plane as felons. If you don't agree with me, you're a coward, a fool, a slave, and you're destroying our democracy.

Why do our elected representatives need titles? What does it do for them? Is it necessary to remind them that they have power, or responsibility? No, that's a silly argument, obviously they have power and responsibility. They know that. What they don't know is that the power and responsibility is totally, completely contingent on their service to citizens. They forget this in the way that they speak to us, in the way that they live, in the influence they wield. They forget this, living in a democratic society, by insisting (institutionally, officially, or personally) that they be addressed by some form of title. That they believe honor or respect is their *due* as a Senator or Cabinet Member.

Absurd, untrue, obscene.

People in the military understand that they serve the country—they swear oaths to the same. They address civilians as "sir" and "ma'am" in part because doing so preserves the essential hierarchy of violence in America—citizens are above soldiers, politically and socially, and should be. In turn, soldiers are given some tangible benefits, while (in most practical terms) being treated like dogs, made to wear silly uniforms, and subjected to the real prospect of a quick death. We can do the same for elected and appointed representatives,

but as the consequences are so much greater for the politicians who can do things like declare war or authorize military intervention, those politicians should be treated with accordingly less respect than soldiers.

I say "soldiers" because the proliferation of titles for different types of soldiers—"marines," "sailors," airmen" "SEALs" and so forth is more of this servile and appalling, totally inappropriate impulse to set apart and above. If you're in the military, you're a soldier. People who believe otherwise are willing idiots at best, and dangerous radicals at best, attempting to subvert and destroy democracy. Stop using any word other than "soldier," immediately.

Furthermore, as much as Americans secretly despise soldiers—they do, unarguably, despise them, passionately and secretly, as all great passions are secret passions—soldiers are still offered a measure of public respect. Soldiers offer to die, which is pretty generous of them, considering, so they get monuments and speeches. Politicians never offer to die for their country, although we'd all be better off if most of them did—not offer, die, I mean—so we should give none of the tongue-in-cheek, superficial and almost entirely bogus support we say we give to "the troops" to politicians.

"Shitheel" or "Shit-for-brains" would be a good title for people serving in Congress. "Hey Shit-for-brains Cotton. You really have Shit-for-brains." Whether you agree with Tom Cotton's politics or not (I don't, but that's beside the point), you see the benefit. He remembers that in spite of his representing a constituency, it's everyone's duty to tell him what a total, complete, utter disgrace he is for being in politics. If you don't like my example of Tom Cotton, don't

worry, it applies equally to Tammy Duckworth, someone for whom I have a great deal of respect, whose politics are 100% diametrically opposed to Cotton's. Basically, pick someone in Congress today—anyone. It works.

Now, I don't want to peg the title to a specific phrase—"Shit-for-brains" is insulting now, but give it a couple years and people would be trying to make it into a mark of honor or distinction. Really, people in Congress should just be called whatever you call a drunken, stupid, lying, criminal sack of decrepitude. Today it's "shit-for-brains," but tomorrow it could be something totally different.

The president would have a worse title, because the president has more power than any single congressperson. When addressing Congress, however, the president would obviously say "brothers" or "comrades" or "collectively, my equal."

People who work for Congressmen and Congresswomen, as well as those working for a president's cabinet or the President should not be addressed under any circumstances. They should be ignored, and if anyone hears them speaking, they should be kicked and called a dog, and otherwise belittled. If any of these people acquire prominence simply by working with or for a powerful person—Clinton's aide Huma Abedin comes to mind as an excellent example of this, as do all of Trump's children and Obama's former Chief of Staff, Rahm Emmanuel—they can be kicked on sight. What happens later in their career does not matter, so that Rahm Emmanuel's becoming Mayor of Chicago does not mean he's suddenly immune to being kicked, or having voting-age citizens scream "you shit, you fucking worthless piece of shit, I own you" while kicking him, so close to Emmanuel that spit flies off their mouth and onto his face—no,

that just means now he's Mayor of Chicago, but also these earlier bad things are still happening to him.

Caveat: as a politician you can't hit back or say anything while being kicked or screamed at except "I'm sorry, you're right citizen, I'm sorry." And it better fucking sound sincere.

## **Some Bullshit Counterarguments, Easily Dismissed**

Here are some counterarguments against my wise scheme. Firstly, there could be concern that people elected or appointed to leadership positions would get depressed by getting called bad names or kicked, and do a worse job—especially without any positive reinforcement. I would point out that in the military, especially during training, I and every other soldier in training were subjected to every horrible name one can imagine and worse, and made to know both that we had no right to expect anything, but also that what we were doing was very important. What I saw in training and at the unit level, on a tactical level, was that the very best people did not care about what they were called, and worked very hard to earn the respect of their peers. Only when you got away from that small, personal level, only when you left “the tribe” did things begin to break down, did rank and tabs or awards become more important than actions. In any case, I did not see verbal abuse as dissuading good people from working hard—in fact, it seemed like a stimulant.

Another counterargument could be that using vile language to describe American leadership would encourage citizens to do actual violence to them, or to murder them. This is an excellent point, but not, I think, a counterargument. On the contrary, I believe that if a clever human like Hillary Clinton had been called “Shit-for-brains” or “garbage-taint-scumheart” or whatever else people wanted instead of “Madam Secretary,” it could have helped guide her political evolution in a more productive direction than the trashcan of history, where she and her philosophy have ended up. Ditto Donald Trump, obviously.

In other words, the violence of words would signal in plain language to officials that, in fact, they were, at all times, very close to their end, and that, [like the character of Nick the Greek in \*Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels\*](#), they’d have to work very, very hard to avoid that actual (rather than threatened) end.

Another criticism could be that this practice or habit would lead to an increase in violence in society overall, and a desire to use harmful language in general. I don’t think this is a valid criticism, because people tend not to enjoy using violence under any circumstances—violence is profoundly unsettling. People who love hierarchy want us to believe that the alternative to hierarchy is violence, but of course that assertion is as hypothetical as the assertion that communism is practical. The requirement to describe elected leadership and their political representatives as “Shit-for-brains” or “Shit-soul” or “Stupid-Fascist-Fuckup-Fucker” would not suddenly result in many people cursing in public all the time. Rather, it would serve as a kind of caution to everyone living in the society: but for the grace of god and hubris, there go I. Furthermore, human decency would protect those elected

leaders who truly worked for the people from the worst outrages. Politicians would see that working for the *good* rather than for each other or themselves would result in ameliorated negative interactions. Rather than curse at them in public or in private, citizens would just try to ignore interacting with them in general, so as not to hurt their feelings or stop the good work they were doing. This would only happen with the best of them, though. The sign of a great leader would be that people only grudgingly (rather than enthusiastically) made remarks that in other circumstances would be slanderous about their person and personal lives. Good leaders would be allowed to do their good work.

A final counterargument would be that this situation would dissuade people from getting into politics. I disagree—I think it would dissuade all but the most sturdy people from getting into politics, people who do not depend on titles and honorifics to describe their authority as do our cousins in Europe or Asia or Africa. If you don't mind getting called every horrible, insulting phrase under the sun—if you don't mind hearing your mother and father and sister and brother and wife and children abused in the most horrifying, borderline criminal, graphic detail imaginable, politics shouldn't be for you. If you want someone to address you as “Ambassador such-and-such” or “Secretary so-and-so” or “Mr./Mrs. President,” there are many other countries in the world that will accommodate this type of (to my American thinking) nauseating pander: this should not be how we do things in America. Bowing and scraping and elevating the most servile and precious, the most proud among us to positions of leadership—it is below us, individually and collectively.

Let's choose instead to call our elected leadership and their political appointees what they are: shit-for-brains, asshole-

grease. Down with hierarchy, up with democracy!