

# Mitt Romney: Man Of The People?

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Mitt Romney thinks that people talk about inequality because they are “envious” of people like him. One can’t help but wonder: Is he bizarrely aloof, or is he just mean? To castigate the rank and file for bringing up the flagrant inequality in our country seems to spawn from both glib heartless-ness and wanton ignorance. Let’s dissect Romney’s peculiar comments about inequality (made to Matt Lauer on 1/11/12):

“I think it’s about envy. I think it’s about class warfare. When you have a President encouraging the idea of dividing America based on the 99% vs. the 1% (and those people who have been most successful will be in the 1%), you have opened up a whole new approach in this country which is entirely inconsistent with the concept of one nation under God.”

Is it possible to fit any more bumble-headed points into the span of a ten-second quote? Let’s look at five things that are wrong with this statement.

**First:** Being concerned about inequality is perhaps one of the most legitimate concerns any informed citizen could possibly have in a civil society. As Wilkinson and Pickett’s landmark book, *The Spirit Level*, showed: Almost all major problems in developed nations, from crime to poor health to social dysfunction, stem from...you guessed it...inequality. Consequently, any responsible citizen would be remiss NOT to talk about this crucial issue. That’s not “envy”, Mitt. It’s called “giving a shit”.

**Second:** It is the upper-upper-class that has waged “class warfare” on the other 99% of the country, not vice versa. It’s just the rest of the country that’s pointing it out...and deciding not to take it anymore.

The rank and file is standing up to the financial elite because—more often than not—the latter has been screwing over the former. This isn’t about concocting some imaginary “warfare” to gripe about. It’s about demanding social justice (a term that seems to be interestingly absent from Mitt’s vaunted Neoliberal lexicon).

The entire message, Mitt, is that we DON’T WANT classes—at least to the degree that we currently have them in America (a degree that is so high as to be quasi-feudalistic). There is a term for having classes: calcified socio-economic stratification. That’s the problem. Can you say “calcified socio-economic stratification”, Mitt?

When a denizen of the nation’s most affluent tier is obnoxious enough to say to the working class, “Heh, you’re just envious!”...how shall the working class reply? This is essentially saying to 99% of the population: “Quit your bitching, and work harder. If you’re disenfranchised, it’s your own fault.”

**Third:** Success? The wealthiest 1% have been “successful” alright, Mitt...but only at a very specific thing: accumulating (and hoarding) more and more money for themselves. They’ve been STUPENDOUSLY successful, in fact, at siphoning the fruits of the nation’s economic activity into their own coffers...even as it means screwing over everyone else.

Is that Mitt’s conception of “successful”?

People like Mitt may be “successful” at making wealth highly concentrated, but they haven’t been very successful at being good citizens. Mitt declares that the 1% are the 1% because they are the most “successful” Americans. This is a queer and vulgar tautology. The plutocrats in Russia could make the same case.

Success at financial acquisition is, perhaps, the least admirable sense of “success”. If this is how Mitt defines “success”, then he obviously puts “contribution to the public good” lower on the priority list. There are sanitation workers who do more for America in a week than many in the 1% have done their entire lives. What say you of that, Mitt?

Perhaps we should stop talking about “success” (something, say, drug-lords can talk about with pride), and start talking about probity, merit, and civic responsibility. Independently of measuring sheer “success”, we must evaluate the sort of things one is successful AT.

Amidst all the lay-offs and bankruptcies, Mitt turned a few companies around (Staples, Dominos, and Sports Authority) and helped secure funding for the Salt Lake Winter Games. Great. That doesn’t qualify him to be a great statesman. What it DOES mean is that he’s savvy at mobilizing financial power to suit his interests—whatever they may happen to be.

**Fourth:** A whole new approach? Sounds good to me! We need a whole new approach to this country. That’s the point, Mitt. The current way isn’t working very well for 99% of the population. (But Mitt doesn’t seem to “get” that....because things have been working swimmingly well for guys like him. So what’s everyone complaining about?)

**Fifth:** Let’s grant Mitt the existence of the Judeo-Christian deity. Fine. If the U.S. is, indeed, one unified nation UNDER that deity, then social solidarity still requires eliminating the calcified socio-economic stratification, and forging a more egalitarian nation. (I wonder: What is it about that great idea that Mitt doesn’t like?) Promoting the general welfare seems to be anathema in the free-market fundamentalist worldview.

So now we must ask: Is it possible for a man to be so out of touch, so aloof, that he hears people voice concerns about the egregiously skewed distribution of wealth and power in the U.S...and cavalierly dismisses them with a “they’re just jealous”? Romney is interested in protecting the moneyed-elite (what he calls “the successful”, as if financial wealth were a barometer for merit). He has made it quite clear that he is not interested in promoting the general welfare...any more than was Bain Capital.

## **THE M.O. OF A CORPORATE HUCKSTER:**

Though he embodies the kind of vulture capitalism that gives capitalism such a bad name, Romney has no apologies for anything he’s done. That’s why he saw fit to go with perhaps the

most obnoxious title for a book in publishing history: “No Apology”. For Romney (as Don Vito Corleone once put it), it’s all “strictly business.” If you’re not one of the winners, then tough luck. Welcome to the big leagues.

Bizarrely, Romney pleads that we mustn’t “put free enterprise on trial”. No? Why not? EVERYTHING should be subjected to critical analysis. That’s what deliberative democracy is about. After what happened in 2008, free enterprise should most DEFINITELY be scrutinized and re-evaluated. Why on earth would someone insist that we NOT critique the systemic flaws of unbridled capitalism? (Hint: Only if someone is hell-bent on maintaining those flaws.) Perhaps we should stop fetishizing the free market, and start candidly assessing its pros and cons.

Mitt Romney’s glib attitude toward the plight of the rank and file is rather odd...until we understand his m.o. Then it all makes perfect sense. (What else to expect from a man smug enough to title his book, “No Apology”? What kind of person doesn’t believe in apologies?) So, if not the 99% of Americans, then WHO IS Romney looking to serve? A look at his top donors may give us a clue:

- Steve Schwarzman, co-chairman of Blackstone Group, the biggest private equity firm of them all. (You mean the Steve Schwarzman who compared Obama’s proposal to raise taxes on the super-rich to Hitler invading Poland? Yes, THAT Steve Schwarzman.)
- Paul E. Singer, the hedge fund magnate
- Billionaire financier and Home Depot founder, Ken Langone
- Wugar baron Pepe Fanjul
- Alex Navab, a top partner of KKR (another private equity powerhouse)
- Anthony Scaramucci (a.k.a. “The Mooch”), chief of the hedge fund, Skybridge Partners
- And, of course, the Koch Brothers

(In case you were wondering, no civil rights organizations have made the list yet.)

Collecting money isn’t the only thing Romney is good at. During his campaign, he has managed to collect a host of lies. “Obama’s policies have made the recession deeper,” he declares—an obvious lie. His pronouncements include the claim that the desperately-needed healthcare reforms (designed to curb the most flagrant abuses of insurance companies and to help the destitute) are to blame for the recession...and that the (very weak) new regulations on the banks have somehow deterred entrepreneurship and inhibited private enterprise...*in all sectors*...and that oversight of corporate power has made the economy worse. Lie. Lie. Lie.

Like most plutocrats, Mitt complains about our “entitlement society”. He is correct about the problem but wrong about the culprits. America does, indeed, have an “entitlement” problem: the **sense of entitlement** of people like Mitt Romney. Mitt claims he wants an “opportunity” society, yet adamantly refuses to do ANY of the things that have been proven to **actually bring about** equal opportunity for everyone (universal access to public goods like high quality education and healthcare). “Opportunity society,” Mitt? Really? What he means to say is that he wants a “society made for opportunists” (like himself)...leaving everyone else to fend for themselves.

Sound like a good plan?

Like all right-wingers, Mitt refers to “entitlements” as a problem, yet stridently defends the largest entitlements of all: the entitlements of the financial sector, of the military-industrial

complex, and of the FPSTI (for-profit sickness-treatment industry). Romney indicting “entitlements” is like a chain smoker lecturing us on lung cancer.

Bizarrely, Mitt deems himself a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, yet adamantly refuses to support policies that would actually help the disenfranchised, the sick, and the needy. Should we have universal access to non-profit public healthcare? What would Jesus do, Mitt? (In the book of Mormon, does Jesus suddenly become a supply-sider?)

According to Romney: Jesus would insist that the poor just wait for prosperity to somehow, someday, “trickle down” from corporate boardrooms. One wonders if Mitt has ever actually read the Gospels...or just chooses to ignore what Jesus actually said.

It probably wouldn't be at the Department of Health & Human Services that Jesus would be upsetting the tables; it would more likely be at the corporate offices of Bain Capital. Mitt doesn't like to talk about social justice, but Jesus would... at least if we take the canonical gospels seriously.

Mitt loves to speak in sweeping generalizations and confidently deliver lofty rhetorical flourishes. Beware of public figures who site aggregates and averages when stating statistics. Quoting stats in this way is almost always misleading. Point in case: Romney loves to point out that the U.S. has one of the highest PER CAPITA incomes in the world. Technically true, but a moot point when it comes to the problems at hand.

Picture a society of ten people, nine of whom earn \$1,000 per year (by *working*, i.e. producing things for menial wages) and one of whom—let's call him Miff—gets \$1,000,000 per year (by speculating on the productive activity of the other nine). Miff then says: “What's everyone complaining about? These nine people should be THANKFUL. They live in a society where the average income is over \$100,000!”

Yes: distribution matters when talking about the fruits of economic activity. When almost all of the economy's “GROWTH” is siphoned off to the wealthiest 10%, there is something amiss. But it adds insult to injury when the super-rich proclaim to the working class: “What's the problem? The AVERAGE income is INCREASING!”

Mitt loves to talk about “prosperity” as a general phenomenon, yet fails to mention: prosperity FOR WHOM. He enjoys referring to “growth”, yet refuses to specify who is and who isn't benefiting from that “growth”. The record makes quite clear who has been making out like bandits...and who has been getting screwed...amidst the last three decades of economic activity.

A couple good ideas: Any time Mitt uses the word “growth”, he needs to specify: cui bono from that growth. Any time Mitt mentions “prosperity”, he needs to specify: prosperity for whom. THEN, when he inevitably says “everybody” (on both counts), he must explain HOW...WITHOUT using trickle-down economics in the explanation.

Alas, Mitt still talks as though “trickle-down” economics were not a perverse myth. He insists, with a straight face, that the better off the super-rich are, the better off the poor will be. As has been clearly demonstrated in the past three decades, this is patently false. So how is it that people still buy such a fraudulent narrative?

Affluent people have obvious selfish reasons to endorse Mitt's supply-side agenda...but why on earth would rank and file people support him?

Decent human beings are familiar with the sage insight that one can judge a society by how well it treats its worst-off. By contrast, plutocrats like Romney insist that we should, instead, all esteem the U.S. based on how well-off its best-off can become. He insists that we then take **averages** in order to brag about how good things are.

Romney uses catch-phrases like "getting the economy back on track" and "making America great again" and "winning the future": captions that would be vacuous verbiage **no matter who** said them. We may recall the empty slogans from 2008's main election: "Country First" and "Change We Can Believe In"...each one utterly meaningless. Mitt's '12 slogan, "Believe In America", is just as meaningless as his '08 slogan, "True Strength in America's Future".

We shall await the next right-wing slogan—presumably something like: "Faith, Freedom, Family, Flags, Founding Fathers, Greatness, Guns, God, Glory, Patriotism, Prosperity, Liberty, Constitution, Courage, Christianity, Capitalism, and More Flags!" Orwell would have been aghast...even as this bumper sticker spans the entire width of an Escalade. To the reactionary mind, such a slogan sounds too good to pass up. After all, what's not to like about all that great-sounding stuff?

(How about the slogan: "No More Slogans"?)

Mitt's fetishization of "the free market" and "private enterprise" is both disturbing and perfectly predictable. Like most plutocrats, Mitt has personally contributed almost nothing to the general welfare (while hoarding a huge fortune for himself).

Mitt often proclaims: "Let's get American working again"...using supply-side economics (i.e. the same economic policy that CAUSED all the problems we currently have). Is this really an enticing idea?

"Let's get rid of entitlement spending!" is the Republican mantra, which simply means: "Let's de-fund basic public infrastructure, eliminate ROTA, and deprive the working class of vital social services...in order to fund tax-cuts for the most affluent." Jesus would be proud of you, Mitt.

It's not that we shouldn't vote for someone like Romney because he's heartless, pompous, smug, and completely out of touch. His cold, patrician attitude is typical of many people who've only known privilege their entire lives. Why, then, shouldn't we vote for someone like Romney? Because we shouldn't ever support a candidate that supports the kind of horrible policies that Romney supports.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

When Mitt says that the working class is envious of people like him, the translation is: "You don't have as much money as me because you don't deserve it. If you were as good as me, you'd be rich too. So stop complaining."

Romney got rich making money on the backs of blue-collar workers. Mitt now favors economic policies that favor wealthy people like himself while leaving everyone else out in the cold. Message to Mitt: We're not jealous of you. We don't wish we were you. We simply wish that people like you would stop telling people like us that we're not as worthy as people like you. That's not envy; that's dignity.

When Mitt says that he knows how to create jobs, he's being tremendously disingenuous. Bain Capital's modus operandi was laying off workers whenever it generated a bigger profit. (Last time I checked, "successful at making boatloads of money for yourself, in whatever way you can" is not a qualification for public servant.)

Take Staples, for example. As the company grew, smaller stationery stores were shuttered. Those job losses are not counted in Romney's "job creation" figures. From an idea of entrepreneur, Tom Stemberg, Staples has grown into a \$24.5 billion company with 89,000 employees worldwide (over 18,000 abroad)—ALL of whom Romney counts in the "100,000 jobs created" figure he likes to brag about.

Hogwash.

Barring Staples, then, Bain was only able to create about 10,000 jobs (MINUS thousands of jobs lost) over the course of a fifteen years? That actually sounds like a pathetic record. Shall we also thank the Walton Family for being praiseworthy "job creators" too? Thank you, Wal-mart! What kind of barometer are we using here, anyway? The fact of the matter is this: At no point was Bain ever focused on job creation.

The purpose of a corporation, we may want to remind ourselves, is not to "create jobs"; it is to maximize profits for its owners by—among other things—keeping the cost of labor at an absolute minimum—in whatever way possible. Job creation, if any, is incidental and entirely expendable. So if corporate profits are to be enhanced by job destruction, so be it. All the better for investors.

The U.S. government is not a corporation, Mitt. A corporation's only real purpose is to enrich its owners—who, here in America, are typically NOT the workers. What in heaven's name does any of this have to do with a man's qualification to be a public servant? Shall we list history's tyrants who were really, really good at "getting things done" and maximizing efficiency? There's so much more to public service than the sorts of things Romney likes to say he's so good at.

Romney's "success" stories aren't as noble as he wants them to sound. Again, he has a very myopic definition of "success": the success of the businessman. Romney has demonstrated time and time again that he doesn't care about lay-offs—so long as they help maximize corporate profits. His summum bonum was never job-creation. It never will be. If Romney defines success in the way that he does, then—*by the exact same logic*—prior to his illegal transgression in the movie, Gordon Gecko would have made the best president in U.S. history.

Chew on that for a minute.

When Mitt proclaims that the U.S. has an "entitlement problem", he's essentially saying that the rank and file don't have a right to vital social services, like healthcare, consumer protections,

labor protections, and environmental protections. He's fine with the fact that most of us did not grow up in a family of privilege, and will never have access to the kinds of resources he's enjoyed his entire life. (Why should he care. That's how the cookie crumbles in the free market.)

As we've learned the hard way, the problem with "entitlements" lies on Wall Street, not on Main Street. Plutocrats like Romney have worked diligently to maintain a rigged system that affords entitlement for corporate executives and the large financial institutions...while denying basic public goods to the rabble.

Corporate entitlements are the "entitlements" that Romney has NO problem with. It's only when the State is used to help out the rank and file that Romney calls "FOUL!" This shows where his priorities (and loyalties) lie.

The financial sector's entitlements, agri-business's entitlements, big pharma's entitlements, for-profit sickness-treatment industry entitlements, big oil entitlements, the entitlements to military contractors: these are all FANTASTIC entitlements, as far as Romney is concerned. However: Basic public infrastructure? Vital social services? Anything that will help out the working class? UNACCEPTABLE.

No apology.

#### **FOR MORE ON ROMNEY'S BRAND OF VULTURE CAPITALISM:**

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