



# **There's A Lot To Learn From Janet Jackson If You Love America**

## **by Russ Fusco**

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Of the two major parties that dominate American politics, there is a general rubric governing the modus operandi of each.

A textbook liberal Democrat espouses increased government spending and retrenchment of the military to support social reform agendas, is pro-choice, thinks the wealthy elite should pay more taxes, and, in general, identifies the government as an entity ultimately responsible for the welfare of citizens on a very detailed level. A textbook conservative Republican euphemizes the liberal agenda as "big government," which he or she is patently against, supports less involved government, less taxes, and a big military.

But, removed from the realm of dispassionate political analysis, the Democrats are better defined as a bunch of populist scarecrows who hate George W. Bush with a fervor matched only by European soccer fans. They hope that he dies of a tobacco-induced heart-attack while being caught performing lewd sexual acts with all seven big oil companies on an abortionist's operating table.

Meanwhile, your average Republican perceives his "liberal" counterpart as a subhuman species trailing somewhere behind Neanderthal man in the evolutionary chain, who simply doesn't have the wherewithal to realize that he or she is stupid, repugnant, and divorced of any modicum of common sense.

In this way, representatives of both dominant political parties behave less like reasoning advocates for political progress and more like the average American sports fan. Allegiance is sworn not to political purpose, but to an unswerving loyalty to the hometeam, balanced by a vehement hatred of an evil rival.

In the same way that Dodgers fans think that Giants fans are worth killing for the deviance professed in their leanings, so have Republicans and Democrats come to arrange an equally as pejorative view of one another. They don't just disagree, they *hate* each other. And this is a sentiment that exists without exception.

At a recent Democratic Party fundraiser at which both Howard Dean and John F. Kerry were present, Peter Yarrow, formerly of the American folk-rock group "Peter, Paul, and Mary," and an active Democratic party-member, offered his peace-loving insight to soften the growing feud between the two intra-party rivals.

"Let's remember that, despite our differences, we are all here for the same purpose," said Yarrow, "because we love America."

An admirable comment from the composer of "Puff the Magic Dragon" and a man who probably had quite a few bipartisan experiences of his own in the sixties. But he goes on.

"And because we all want to remove the horror in Washington."

It's unfortunate that he didn't stop for a bong hit before opening his mouth that second time. His negative comment sent any sense of the admirable blowin' in the wind.

It is perhaps naïve to suppose that the basement-level name-calling in politics is a product of anything but the fated proclivities of human nature. During his presidency, John Adams accused political rival Alexander Hamilton of being a "monarchist." Though Hamilton, like Adams, was a Federalist, this sort of insult at the time was equivalent to declaring the other's mother so fat she caused tidal waves.

Hamilton himself fell in a duel with Aaron Burr, with whom the issue of mothers was reportedly also a deciding factor. Even canonized Father of America, George Washington, famous for his political ambivalence, was apocryphally remembered to have once referred to the French foreign Minister, Charles de Tallyrand, as a "snooty little bitch."

And things got really out of hand in 1856 when Preston Brooks, House Member from South Carolina, responded to an insult from Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts against his cousin, Senator Andrew Butler, by entering the Senate chamber and beating Sumner senseless with a cane; the woolen breeches popular with Congressmen at the time evidently eliminated the preferred option of giving him a "wedgie."

So politics, if anything, have gotten better rather than worse. But the old rancor subsists, supported neither by reason nor political imperative. It is the driving force behind the public process of electing officials to govern in what we hope will be a fair and levelheaded manner.

Does that make sense? Is the preferred statesman an incarnation possessed of all the wit and swagger of a high-school bully, who will finger the nuclear button, just waiting for that so-and-so Jacques Chirac to take that superior tone just one more time?

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Whether it is or isn't, Americans have fueled the conflagration of pejorative politics. What other politically enfranchised populace could turn the erstwhile mayor of Cincinnati, Jerry Springer, into the king of trash-talk TV? Why do Americans prefer to watch obese ignoramuses on unemployment brag of their infidelities while those filthy-minded Europeans choose instead to make "Baywatch" an international syndicate? Who's the idiot?

It is nothing less or more than the shifting face of our tribal heritage, the same impulse that demands a clamor to the battleflag, whether it be the badge of a local sports team or the banner of a political party. The average American wants nothing more than to belong to a group, to pin on its name or don its sweaty jersey, to take collective credit for its successes and then fill a loose sock full of nickels to bash on the head of its opponents.

What is the patriot in tri-cornered hat but primitive forebear of the modern-day football fan? Rather than riding through the streets decrying tyranny, his invective spews out during the "big game," accompanied by a shrapnel of cheeze-doodles and flare of a beer cozy, not to denounce the king, but to kill the ref!

It is a passion having little to do with principle and less to do with reason. It is an instinct, a genetic program that once had him and his compatriots beating drums in unison around the fire and then running off with clubs and torches to find the bad guy. It is the same sadistic tendency that provided physical education experts the inspiration for dodgeball and gymnasium climbing ropes designed to subject weaklings to the gross inhumanities of herd mentality.

Politics? Who needs politics? This is all about the home team.

This is clearly a destructive mentality. America raises its children to pick sides and raise flags, to see the world as "us" versus "them."

Twenty years ago school children were taught to hate the Russians; not on the basis of politics, but on brand name. Russians are bad guys. And what's wrong with Russians? The world should admire a society whose members can drink potato vodka like kool-aid and find entertainment value in putting a bear on a tricycle.

Then they said to hate the Iranians, but not the Iraqis. Then the Iraqis *and* the Iranians. And then they said, "Forget all of that for now, just hate Martha Stewart." And we all said, "Finally, something we can agree on!" But it didn't last long, because another election year has arrived and the in-fighting along with it, as venomous as ever, while the salient political issues drift away like flotsam on a stream of public forgetfulness.

So America is back to the sidelines, one side staring at the other over the wreckage of a political battlefield. And meanwhile, a remarkable

thing happens on Sunday, February 1st during the Superbowl—Janet Jackson stops time by showing her boob to ninety million Americans entrenched in their living rooms, wearing their jerseys, shouting for the death of the other team.

It is an instant that can not be disregarded and perhaps will require the gulf of a generation to place it into its proper context of importance. For an instant, the instinct for rivalry is forgotten. There is no name-calling, no us-versus-them, no "John F'ing Kerry" or "George Dubya Bush." For a cosmic moment the world stops, focused on a single nakedly revealed mammary gland to the exclusion of all else.

Philosophies shift; Clauswitz is booted out the door by Freud, Odysseus trumped by Oedipus, as an even greater instinct overtakes the first. It is a woman's naked breast on national television. The world can do nothing but stare and then mutter and then scream, but it does so in a single, united voice that clamors through the eons, back to the species' founding moment when everyone got a piece of the wooly mammoth or they'd all freeze to death.

To love America is to thank Janet Jackson. Call it karma or call it "wardrobe malfunction;" it can not be forgotten for what it truly was—an instant unity of every soul in a mutual shock that could only be engendered by the sudden vision of a naked breast on national television. In a declarative moment as lucid as Cicero, Janet Jackson cried out against the moral depravity of team mentality, demanded we cast down our flags and join hands in a heartbeat of shocked revulsion that she provided only as martyred savior.

If it worked during the Superbowl, it will work during the 2004 presidential campaign. America needs Janet Jackson, or preferably LaToya, to be on hand during every live debate, speech, and political discussion. When things start getting mean, out comes the gladiator costume and a Pavlovian opiate for the masses. Vitriol will trickle away like melting ice; politicians will shake their heads and say, "Now where were we on that discussion of budget deficits?"

One mention of Boston Harbor or JFK, and the world finds itself staring at a hypnotic talisman, a sun-shaped nipple ring clamped tightly over an artificially ballooned breast that, by rights of Nature, should be swinging like an empty sock. The instinct of team-rivalry will be gone, supplanted by the uniting outrage of a naked breast, and leaving only the passion for a legitimate discussion of the issues.

America must take its cue from Janet Jackson. Leave aside the unreasoning hate and seek hope in the fact that there is nothing more emotionally significant than a naked breast flopping around for all to see.