

John Edwards' "Other America"

Democratic presidential hopeful moves into 28,200 square foot mansion

Tom Eley, Tom Carter
14 April 2007

"Today, under George W. Bush, there are two Americas, not one: One America that does the work, another America that reaps the reward. One America that pays the taxes, another America that gets the tax breaks. One America that will do anything to leave its children a better life, another America that never has to do a thing because its children are already set for life. One America—middle-class America—whose needs Washington has long forgotten, another America—narrow-interest America—whose every wish is Washington's command. One America that is struggling to get by, another America that can buy anything it wants, even a Congress and a President . . ."

These were the words of current contender for the Democratic presidential nomination John Edwards in Des Moines, Iowa, when he was the vice presidential nominee on John Kerry's 2004 presidential ticket.

The *Carolina Journal* recently reported that John Edwards a short time ago moved into a 28,200 square foot North Carolina mansion valued at over \$6 million. The house is the largest in Orange County, which includes Chapel Hill and the campus of the University of North Carolina.

While Edwards has attempted to cultivate an image as a defender of working people, his sprawling mansion leaves no doubt as to which of the "two Americas" the presidential hopeful inhabits. The multimillionaire candidate, whose personal wealth is estimated at \$60 million, is in fact both a political representative and a member in good standing of a financial elite that has grown fabulously wealthy over the past three decades as a result of class war policies carried out against workers in the US and the world over.

Edwards exemplifies the basic fact that, whatever its posturing, the Democratic Party is a party of, by and for the American ruling class.

The *Carolina Journal* described the appointments and sprawling structure of Edwards' new house, typical of the acquisitive *nouveau riche*:

"The rambling structure sits in the middle of a 102-acre estate on Old Greensboro Road west of Chapel Hill. The heavily wooded site and winding driveway ensure that the home is not visible from the road. 'No Trespassing' signs discourage passersby from venturing past the gate....

"The main house is 10,400 square feet and has two garages. The recreation building, a red, barn-like building containing 15,600 square feet, is connected to the house by a closed-in and roofed structure of varying widths and elevations that totals 2,200 square feet.

"The main house is all on one level except for a 600-square-foot bedroom and bath area above the guest garage. The recreation building contains a basketball court, a squash court, two stages, a bedroom, kitchen, bathrooms, swimming pool, a four-story tower, and a room designated 'John's Lounge.'"

By way of comparison, in terms of square footage Edward's mansion is fully two-thirds the size of an American football field, end zones included. The average American home, according to the National Association of Home Builders, is 2,330 square feet, or a little over 8 percent the size of the Democratic presidential hopeful's home. This average figure is inflated considerably by the presence of enormous mansions such as Edwards'.

John Edwards' "other America" can be found not far from his palatial estate. In Orange County, North

Carolina, over 11 percent of the population lived below the federal poverty level as of 2003. Per capita income in the county is estimated at under \$25,000, or approximately 1/240th the value of the Edwards home and 1/2,400th the value of Edwards himself.

A 2006 survey found that there were 237 homeless people in Orange County, up from 179 in 2004. At least 76 American soldiers from North Carolina have so far been killed in Iraq, and many more wounded, the majority of these from working class households.

Edwards, who made his millions as a personal injury lawyer and is now on the payroll of a powerful Wall Street firm, the Fortress Investment Group, has donned the mantle of a “populist” candidate. He has been assisted in this political gambit by the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, which in 2006 bestowed upon Edwards the Paul Wellstone Award, given out annually to the politician who most faithfully advances the interests of the trade union officialdom.

John Edwards is no friend of the worker. Elected to the Senate in 1998 after spending \$6 million of his own money to defeat incumbent Republican Lauch Faircloth, Edwards distinguished himself as a militarist and reactionary, co-sponsoring Joseph Lieberman’s Iraq war resolution in 2003 and voting in favor of the Patriot Act in 2001.

In 2004, he joined the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, casting himself as an “advocate for the people” while at the same time maintaining his hawkish stance regarding the war in Iraq. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, this campaign netted more than \$33 million dollars in contributions—including \$10 million from lawyers and lobbyists alone.

After he finished second to John Kerry, he was chosen as the vice presidential nominee based in large part on his position on the war. The choice of Edwards, celebrated at the most militaristic-patriotic convention in modern Democratic Party history, helped disenfranchise antiwar voters in the 2004 general elections.

In preparation for the 2008 campaign, Edwards has recanted his vote authorizing the invasion of Iraq in an attempt to channel the overwhelming opposition of Democratic voters behind his campaign. The pro-war Hillary Clinton, who also voted for the invasion, has rebuffed suggestions that she do the same.

This week, Edwards is beginning a tour of the rural south, beginning in South Carolina, where he was born in humble circumstances. This Wednesday, he was at a nursing home in New York to spend the day “walking in the shoes” of Service Employees International Union member Elaine Ellis.

Ellis “reminded me in the most personal terms why I’m running for president of the United States,” Edwards said that night at a dinner at the Hilton Hotel in Midtown, New York. “This woman is so much like the people that I grew up with, who worked in a mill alongside of my mother and father.”

“And if any of us think that the CEOs of these big multinational corporations are going to take care of her, you are living in a fantasy world,” he said.

“Now that doesn’t mean we can’t work with them,” he hastened to add, lest he be misunderstood. “We don’t have to always be at odds with them.”



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