

# Dobbs: I'm A Populist, Deal With It!

By [Lou Dobbs](#)  
CNN

*Editor's note: Lou Dobbs' commentary appears every Wednesday on CNN.com.*

November 15, 2006

**NEW YORK** (CNN) -- The Democratic victory last week has our political elites in both parties and in the national media squealing like stuck pigs. Way to go, America, we may be on the way.

It seems nothing frightens our free trade and pro-illegal immigration orthodoxies more than putting the common good and the national interest above dominant special interests, corporate America and, of course, our darling elites in both political parties and the media.

The Bush administration long ago took polemics and false choices to a high art form. On the issue of the war in Iraq, this administration has starkly defined our choices, until recently, as "stay the course" or "cut and run." Any critic of our conduct of this war, like me, has been declared unpatriotic. Any critic of this administration's faith-based economic policies that drive its free-trade agenda, like me, has been labeled an economic isolationist.

But now the name-calling and labeling is reaching a new level, and from all quarters. The political, business and media elites have called me a "table-thumping protectionist" because I want balanced and mutual trade, because I want this country to export as much as it imports. They've called me a racist, nativist xenophobe because, in order to win the war on terror, the war on drugs and to stop illegal immigration, I want our borders and ports secured.

Over the past week, pundits and savants of both the left and the right have been trying to simultaneously define me and the newly elected Democratic victors in the Senate and the House by accusing us of being populists. What a dirty little word. Horrifying.

I admit to being, among many other things, a proponent of populism. But I do believe my critics should look up the definition before they sling the word at me like a filthy epithet. On second thought, it may be to them, because a populist is, after all, nothing more than "a supporter of the rights and the power of the people." In fact, I'm a damn proud populist.

Since the election, there's been an incredible confluence of one of the nation's most liberal online magazines -- Slate -- with one of the world's most traditional establishment newspapers -- The Financial Times -- to decry what Slate columnist Jacob Weisberg calls the ascension of the "Lou Dobbs Democrats."

Weisberg decries what he sees as my "economic nationalism" and instructs us that such nationalism "begins from the populist premise that working people aren't doing so well. But instead of blaming the rich at home, it focuses its energy on the poor abroad."

The Financial Times also published Weisberg's column, obviously equally unsettled with the possible turnaround in the new Congress, which could inconveniently lead to some mild discomfort for the Times' corporate masters and some marginal improvement in the lives of America's middle class.

Both Slate and The Financial Times resist saying what I've been saying loudly and clearly: We're in a class war, and our middle class is losing, and losing badly. But I do blame and have blamed the rich, corporate America and our political elites in both parties who have permitted the unabated assault on middle-class working men and women and their families. And by God, I hope they're right about the Lou Dobbs Democrats, and I hope they find some Lou Dobbs Republicans in the fight to return our government to the

people.

I have never blamed the poor of Mexico, China or India for corporate America's avarice and our political elites' cowardice. I blame us for forgetting that the United States is first a nation, and secondly a marketplace or an economy, and I blame us for being taken as fools by both political parties for far too long. It is not nationalism by any stretch of the imagination for me to remind those in power that our political system, our great democracy, makes possible our free-enterprise economy, and not vice versa as the elites continually propagandize.

From the right, The Weekly Standard lamented that the Lou Dobbs Democrats "didn't just attack the GOP's corruption and malfeasance; they embraced a more thoroughgoing economic populism...." The conservative Standard is obviously more upset that the newly elected Democratic senators and congressmen want to focus not only on the corruption and incompetence of the Republicans, but -- God help us -- many of our new officeholders also actually want to see this great free-enterprise democracy work for all Americans. No wonder the orthodoxies on the left and the right are convulsing.

Human Events Online, another conservative publication, attacks my sincerity and conviction with the bizarre notion that because -- as it says -- I can "afford a bottle of Cristal or Dom Perignon" that my concern for the middle class is really nothing more than crocodile tears. Human Events didn't quite get the fact that as flawed as I am, as many mistakes as I've made in my life, the one thing I haven't done is forget that I was born poor, both parents working, and I've never forgotten those who have made my opportunities in this country possible.

Also disturbed by the perturbation in their political universe and liberal orthodoxy, Newsweek columnists Fareed Zakaria and Jonathan Alter attacked my positions on illegal immigration (I'm against it) and border security (I'm for it).

Zakaria refers to "CNN's Lou Dobbs and his angry band of xenophobes" and Jonathan Alter describes those who agree with me as "nativist Lou Dobbsians." But Alter and Zakaria are far too bright to not know better. I've never once called for a restriction on legal immigration -- in fact, I've called for an increase, if it can be demonstrated that as a matter of public policy the nation requires more than the one million people we bring into this country legally each year.

And what does it mean to be a nativist in the United States in the 21st century when ours is the most ethnically and racially diverse society on the face of the earth? Both Alter and Zakaria are smart enough to know the answer to that question, and they know better than to write such drivel. Neither Zakaria or Alter can substantiate their disappointing attempts at labels with a single thing I've ever said or written. I say what I mean and I mean what I say.

What we all need to be about now is honesty and forthrightness. And the truth is, our political, business and media elites have abandoned the cornerstone of this great nation: equality of rights, equality of economic opportunity and equality of educational opportunity.

And, yes, I'm an ardent and fervent believer in the first three words of that radical populist document, which begins with the words "We the People."

*The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the writer.*

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