

# Rich and poor: Meet middle-class America

John Edwards, the millionaire turned populist, suggests that the Paris Hilton case bolsters his argument that there are “two Americas.” Of course for presidential candidate Edwards, targeting the left end of the Democratic Party, everything proves that there are two Americas.

Certainly, Edwards himself proves there is more than one America. After all, not too many of us put their millions into overseas investments, are paid \$500,000 a year to advise a hedge fund and enjoy \$400 haircuts.

But what about the implication of Edwards’ argument — reinforced by the Rev. Al Sharpton, who said last week that the Hilton case had “all the appearances of economic and racial favoritism” — that criminal justice, too, is divided between the privileged and unprivileged?

Well, for openers, differential justice, at least in Los Angeles, is not necessarily based on ethnicity. In 2006, actress Michelle Rodriguez, sentenced to 60 days in jail on a drunk-driving charge, spent just a couple of hours in the can before her lawyers got her released.

Which is to say Paris Hilton, the pouting little rich girl, is being singled out for harsh treatment. Evidently, the presiding judge in this case, Michael T. Sauer, was determined to make an example of her. So when Hilton’s lawyers pulled strings to beat the rap — even though such string-pulling is par for the course — the infuriated Sauer ordered the heiress back to jail.

So score one for middle-class morality. Because John Edwards is wrong. There are not two Americas, rich and poor. There are three Americas: The rich, the poor and those in the middle. It’s the middle class, the Silent Majoritarians who pay their taxes and play by the rules, who ultimately control the politics of this country, thanks to their preponderant voting power.

The rich tend to think they can buy their way out of any jam by hiring lawyers, spin doctors or a month or two at

some deluxe rehab resort. And the poor — at least those nonstrivers who listen to professional grievance-mongers such as Sharpton — often see the law as some sort of imposition on their freedom.

So the rich and the unmotivated poor are oftentimes found in alliance against the middle class. The rich don’t wish to obey, for example, the drug laws, figuring they can afford the consequences of a wastrel lifestyle. And the poor — more precisely, the lumpen underclass — figure they have nothing to lose, so why not enjoy?

Thus, it’s the middle class and those who aspire to be middle class — those who know they need to stay sober to hold a job and make the mortgage — who become the bulwark of conservatism and law enforcement.

And this instinct toward enforcing the law, even against the rich and powerful, has nothing to do with race. A case in point is another judge on the other coast, Reggie Walton. An African-American from a hardscrabble town in Pennsylvania who made his name as a drug law enforcer and appointed to the federal bench by George W. Bush, Walton has always stood for equal justice under the law.

And so, having presided over the conviction of former White House aide Lewis “Scooter” Libby on four felony counts, Walton was unimpressed by the blizzard of special pleadings on Libby’s behalf from big shots that showered into his courtroom. Indeed, like Sauer in the Hilton case, Walton seems to have been annoyed by such obvious finagling on behalf of a privileged defendant. So Walton sentenced Libby to a tough 30 months in the slammer and invited Libby’s big-shot friends to use their legal talents to help less fortunate defendants.

So let justice be done to both Hilton and Libby. And, by the way, let’s remind John Edwards that most Americans are in the middle — not at the top, not at the bottom.

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