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David Boaz

Executive Vice President, Cato Institute; Author, 'Libertarianism: A Primer'

Chavez Draws on Age-Old Smears to Hold on to Power

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As soon as Henrique Capriles won a primary to become the candidate of the democratic opposition against Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chavez, the *Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) that he was vilified in a campaign in Venezuela's state-run media, which insinuated he was, among other things, a homosexual and a Zionist agent.

Homosexual and Jewish, I thought. When they attack him for being rich, they'll have the trifecta of populist prejudices.

And sure enough, they did. Chavez himself [declared](#):

The bourgeoisie have their candidate -- the candidate of the anti-fatherland, of capitalism, of the Yankees. We are going to thrash that bourgeoisie.

Capriles, a Catholic, is in fact the grandson of Polish Jewish immigrants who survived the Warsaw Ghetto. Reuters [describes](#) his politics this way:

Though from a wealthy family, Capriles, the 39-year-old state governor of Miranda province, describes himself as a center-left "progressive" and spends more time in shanty-towns than in his office.... Capriles is an admirer of Brazil's "modern left" model of free-market economics with a strong social conscience.

Chavez, of course, also threw in "the candidate of the Yankees," that is, the Americans. All of these epithets -- homosexual, Jewish, bourgeoisie, and more recently, "American" -- have been staples of illiberal rhetoric for centuries. Liberals -- advocates of democracy, free speech, religious freedom, and market freedoms -- have been tarred as "cosmopolitan" and somehow alien to the people, the Volk, the faithful, the fatherland, the heartland.

German democrats used to say that "anti-semitism is the socialism of fools." Now in many countries we could say that [anti-Americanism is the new anti-semitism](#). They're often found in tandem.

Liberals should denounce these sorts of vile and illiberal attacks, whether they stem from the American far right or far left, [Vladimir Putin](#), [the ruling party in Malaysia](#), or Hugo Chavez.