

## Times Watch

# Sunday Mag: Cain 'Seems Like Someone Who...Has Never Opened a Newspaper'

By: Clay Waters

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A hostile New York Times Sunday Magazine profile of GOP presidential hopeful Herman Cain by T.A. Frank suggested Cain was only in the campaign for the money and compared his policy knowledge unfavorably to that of Britney Spears: "...to say that Herman Cain has an imperfect grasp of policy would be unfair not only to George W. Bush in 1999 but also to Britney Spears in 1999. Herman Cain seems like someone who, quite frankly, has never opened a newspaper."

Frank has written for liberal magazines like Washington Monthly and The New Republic, and his long profile of Cain (who Frank never actually spoke with), "[I Still Don't Plan On Going to Any Political-Correctness School](#)," was hostile from the start

As a math major, Herman Cain undoubtedly knew from the start that running for president, if you're already rich **and your main interest is in enhancing your revenue stream, makes no sense as a career move.** Or, to cite the erstwhile presidential contender Mike Huckabee, "Running for president is like sticking your face in the blade of a fan."

In October, Cain had to undo damage from the following: a suggestion to put up an electrified fence on the Mexican border, statements endorsing a woman's right to choose, an apparent unfamiliarity with the terms "right of return" and "neoconservative," a tentative thumbs-up to negotiating with Al Qaeda for prisoners and news stories of a completely mismanaged campaign.

That was before things got tough. Now allegations of sexual harassment have drowned out pretty much anything else related to Herman Cain. And if that's in any way a blessing, it's only because it diverted attention from what may have been some serious violations of campaign-finance laws.

On Oct. 19, Cain (who never agreed to speak with me for this article) released a campaign ad in which Mark Block, Cain's campaign manager, defiantly takes a drag on a cigarette. It was the puff seen round the world. Some people were outraged. Others were amused or annoyed. None of it did any obvious harm to the candidate.

Frank took the time to slime some of Cain's entourage, dredging up controversies involving Mark Block, Scott Toomey, and Jamie Brazil, then summarized:

**With a team like that in place -- one that seems suited less to desks and campaign buttons than to pirate ships and eye patches** -- is it any surprise that Cain's damage-control strategy turned out to be imperfect? And is it any wonder that Herman Cain has shed a lot of high-level campaign staff members, both within his national organization and in crucial early states like Iowa and New Hampshire? Most of these former staff members have signed nondisclosure agreements, and others would speak to me only off the record. None of them recall their former boss as a sexual harasser. But they do speak of a man so egotistical that careful self-policing would never really enter into the realm of consideration.

Frank then really laid it on, in language that made one miss [Matt Bai](#)'s slanted but relatively professional approach to political profiles.

**Let us pause here to make a necessarily severe assessment: to say that Herman Cain has an imperfect grasp of policy would be unfair not only to George W. Bush in 1999 but also to Britney Spears in 1999. Herman Cain seems like someone who, quite frankly, has never opened a newspaper.**

But I suspect Cain's flubs are unrelated to intelligence. In 2010, Julian Sanchez of the Cato Institute set off a lively debate by suggesting conservatives had fallen prey to "epistemic closure," a fancy way of saying that they were getting all their information and opinions exclusively from one another. This may or may not be true of the conservative movement. But it is certainly true of Herman Cain.

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All strange things come to an end, and assuming the traditions of American politics over the past half-century hold up, Republicans will pick a nominee who has already run for national office, someone like Mitt Romney (that is to say, Mitt Romney), and Herman Cain's campaign staff will pack up and head home -- **or perhaps, in some cases, into courtrooms.**

But before that happens, Cain will actually have taught us some of the lessons he claims to be teaching us. This will occur even though no one in politics or journalism takes these lessons seriously -- or believes that Cain takes them seriously either.