

# Newsweek

## Let's Have a Bourbon Party

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Two weeks ago, Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) tweeted, "The Republican Party is no longer the 'wine and cheese' party. It's the beer and blue jeans party." That echoed Sen. Josh Hawley's (R-MO) election night tweet that Republicans "are a working-class party now."

Such a re-conceiving of the Party of Lincoln is a big mistake, and not in terms of policy or even ideology. Setting aside the category error of equating cheese with jeans, there are two serious problems with Jordan's framing.

The first is that there's nothing morally or electorally better about the working class than the professional class that it purports to replace in the Republican coalition. The meek may inherit the earth, but they don't have a monopoly on grace or wisdom—or even on swing votes. Painting them as "deplorables" and ignoring their concerns is an obnoxious political loser, but putting them on a pedestal as the guardians of Americana is a patronizing over-correction.

Which brings us to the second error in the beer-versus-wine framing: that you have to choose, in the first instance, and that those are the only choices. Modern politics has generally seen Democrats win the very poor and the very rich (and the least and most educated) and Republicans the broad middle, with battle lines drawn among the (largely small-town) lower-middle and (largely suburban) upper-middle segments. There have certainly been exceptions, and President Donald Trump scrambled conventional metrics a bit, but elections are still fought among what used to be called "Reagan Democrats," on the one hand, and "soccer moms," on the other.

Parties need to do well enough among both groups to be successful. Even Jordan's home turf, a badly gerrymandered district in north-central Ohio, is more urban than rural, with an average household income of nearly \$75,000. Although Trump drew an inside straight to win in 2016—largely because enough voters in key states didn't want Hillary Clinton picking Justice Antonin Scalia's replacement—his failure in 2020 can be traced to weakness among upwardly mobile suburbanites in states like Arizona, Georgia and Pennsylvania.

Even to the extent that the GOP wants to position itself as a salt-of-the-earth common-sense party, as against the pointy-headed technocratic (and woke-socialist) Democrats, it's awkward to have a leader living in a Manhattan skyscraper and retiring to a gilded resort on Florida's Gold Coast. The Missourian Hawley is trying to position himself as a less incongruous fit for Middle America—whether his role in challenging the Electoral College count will help or hurt that ploy remains to be seen—though there's still some artifice there from the Stanford- and Yale-educated former U.S. Supreme Court clerk.

Ironically, it's the Democratic primaries that traditionally featured a "beer track" and a "wine track"—the factory workers and the faculty workers—and candidates who meld appeals to both, like Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, also heralding success in the general election. Of late, however, the battles within the Party of Jefferson and Jackson have become more ideological, pitting the Left against the far Left. Perhaps it's fitting that the GOP, used to pit establishment moderates against movement conservatives, is now the coalitional party.

In any event, that choice of adult beverages (beer or wine) is, as Obama would say, a false one. To paraphrase his speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, we drink wine at law firm happy hours and we drink beer at Fourth of July cookouts.

Contra the cute political slogans, and at a time when dissatisfaction with both major parties is at record highs, what we really need is a party focused on that most American of adult beverages: bourbon (which coincidentally pairs well with the most American soft drink, Coca-Cola). This would be a group that recognizes there's a time and a place for both beer and wine, but that there's nothing like sitting down with friends—or contemplating life by yourself—over distilled spirits. During the pandemic more than ever, folks look forward to cocktail hour, whether that comes before dinner or after kids' bedtimes.

That's why, for both electoral math and the health of our country, Republicans shouldn't attempt addition by subtraction, cutting out those whose tastes or cultural attributes they adjudge to be patriotically incorrect. Whether gettable Republican voters are more conservative or libertarian, nationalist or cosmopolitan, there should be a big tent (all the better to house beer kegs and wine magnums). Those who RSVP for that party can then debate the proper mix of populism and the appropriate tincture of the child-tax credit.

But please, no more teetotalers.

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