

Summer 2008

No Human Being is Trash

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No Human Being is Trash.

<http://hrlibs.blogspot.com/2008/07/no-human-being-is-trash-erica-jongs.html>



Erica Jong, writing at [Huffington Post about GOP VP candidate, Governor Sarah Palin](#):

"White trash America certainly has allure for voters. Some people think rednecks are more American than Harvard educated intellectuals of mixed race."

Jong's remarks indicate a violent classism among liberal intellectuals that leaves no room for the working class poor. Jong indicates that "Harvard education" is the top of the U.S. education experience and then demonstrates her sense of classist hierarchy that ranks people according to socioeconomic status and other class markers such as weapons.

Neither of my parents finished high school. My Irish father enlisted in the Navy after Pearl Harbor when he was in 9th grade. He was a hunter and member of the American Legion. He bowled. He belonged to a union. My Latina mother worked part-time at a dime store. We lived in trailer parks. We did not have indoor plumbing or bathing

facilities. We could not use the public library because we lived outside of the city limits. The experience of childhood poverty has stayed with me. Jong reminds me that there is a portion of smart educated people who would have seen me as trash.

In Sanford Berman's essay, "[Classism in the Stacks: Libraries and Poverty](#)," he states: **The hostility—or at least lack of sympathy—toward low-income people manifests in various barriers and kinds of discrimination. All together, the prejudice and what flows from it—the belief and the acts—can be called “classism”: favoring one class over another, valuing middle & upper classes more highly than people at or below the poverty level.**

When I read how people like Jong feel about people who grew up like me I can't help but wonder if I've thought I was part of a club to which I will never belong. I had the great good fortune to attend public schools in Illinois and was able to attend a public college (University of Illinois at Chicago Circle).

No, I don't think Sarah Palin is the kind of candidate who believes what I believe ...but the attacks on her family and personal reproductive choices seem to me a product of classism by writers like Jong.

In librarianship we have a tradition of fighting against social exclusion and providing service to everyone. We have policies and programs for poor and homeless people. The classist attacks on Palin and the socio-economic groups that writers like Jong imply she represents reveal a class system based on an ivy league education and disdain for everyday people like those in the grief-stricken communities of Columbine, Colorado or Red Lake, Minnesota

Jong, hypocritically ingenuous, uses a photoshopped falsehood to bolster her classist argument: "the photo of Sarah Palin in a stars and stripes bikini, toting an automatic weapon. It says more than any Op-Ed or blog. Hot broad with cool weapon. [Every school shooter's dream of womanhood](#). Alas, the photo is photoshopped, but true in spirit."

Through this long election season this [Librarian](#) is mindful that all people --especially poor people --deserve library service. Maybe, like me, books and a good public education will make a difference in their lives. But if smart, verbal people like Jong are classist against poor "trash" there will be continuing social exclusion and less understanding.