



In the PINES

By T. Lee Brown

Elites, Part One

I bought myself one Christmas-Hanukkah-Solstice-Kwanzaa gift this year, “In Defense of Elitism: Why I’m Better Than You and You’re Better Than Someone Who Didn’t Buy This Book,” by Joel Stein. Being a deep thinker, I naturally based my interest on the book cover, which caught my eye as I wandered through an independent bookstore.

The dust jacket offered an illustration of a trophy buck with a big rack — an image that in my childhood meant, “Here’s what we ate a few months back, and it’s staring at us from the wall,” but in the 2010s became a symbol of wannabe hipster-Northwesterners from places like Minneapolis and San Diego who moved to Portland, grew beards, and wore plaid flannel shirts.

When I was a youth, seeing a guy in a beard and a plaid didn’t suggest I was in the presence of a computer programmer who played dobro while launching an online self-regulating marketplace for artisanal hunting knives. It meant Dad was home, and maybe I could wear his plaid to see a ska-punk or neopsychedelic band

play in somebody’s basement that night in the college town near us. (Sorry, Dad; I stole both your red buffalo plaid and your turquoise-and-blue regular plaid, and wore them until they fell apart, by which time “grunge” had happened and I reluctantly reduced the appearance of plaid flannel in my wardrobe, at least temporarily.)

Anyhoo, the deer staring out at me from the book cover was wearing a top hat and monocle, you know, like the rich guy in the Monopoly game or the snootypants on the front cover of the *The New Yorker*. I proceeded to browse the back-cover blurbs — which both praised and pretended to neg on the book’s contents and author — then the inner back flap. The author photo showed a white man with short brown hair, a faux uptight sneer on his face, propping up an oversized monocle.

His snootiness was quite American, by which I mean he looked like a cross between Thurston Howell III, the millionaire on the old television show “Gilligan’s Island” (the mention of which, if you are in the appropriate demographic, will cause the lyrics, “A three-hour tour...A

three-hour tour...” to become lodged in your brain for the next 72 hours), and Hugh Hefner, who really did wear *le smoking* jacket whilst puttering around the grounds of the Playboy mansion.

Stein’s author bio was mostly about him being difficult to work with on his author photo, and while the juvenile obviousness of the humor caused my eyes to roll, it also made me cackle appreciatively, which interrupted an older woman’s loud monologue about downsizing (“I spent two weeks driving back and forth to Habitat and Goodwill. Two weeks!”), which elicited a fierce glare from her and a silently mouthed “I’m sorry!” from her younger companion.

At this point I suspected the whole book might be pure satire: a down-home American guy roasting the elites, chapter after chapter. Having cut my teeth on *Mad* magazine, I might get a kick out of it.

Then I realized that although I’d heard an awful lot about the terribleness of elites, I wasn’t too sure exactly who they were, other than Hillary Clinton. I’d once been accused of being an elite, but since at the time I

was wearing a muffler, stocking cap, and ski jacket (probably with a plaid flannel underneath) indoors because I couldn’t afford to heat the house that winter, I assumed the accuser thought “elite” meant “struggling middle-class writer,” leading me to believe that the accuser didn’t know what the heck he was talking about.

Maybe by elite, the author of “In Defense of Elitism” meant to invoke the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory which claims that super-fancy, rich Jews are secretly running the entire world and all of its media, and they murdered millions of their own people in a Holocaust in order to, uhh, the reasons for that aren’t entirely clear. So let’s go with the version that says super-fancy, rich Jews are secretly running the entire world and all of its media, and they made up the entire Holocaust, planting fake evidence and fake documentation for decades in order to, uhhhh, the reasons for that aren’t entirely clear, either.

Neither version made much sense in this case because the author’s name was Joel Stein. I’d hate to be racist and make assumptions based on someone’s

name, just like I’d hate to judge a book by its cover — yet I couldn’t shake the suspicion that perhaps the author of this book might himself be Jewish. Maybe the book would be a parody of how non-snooty, non-Jewish, down-home Americans view elite people — up to and including Jews — at the expense of those down-home American goyim/gentiles.

My curiosity piqued (a word I know is elitist because it looks French), I finally opened the book and began to read its contents. It soon became apparent that yes, Joel Stein is Jewish. So is his wife. And their son. And some of their friends in Los Angeles. All of whom seemed scared and horrified by the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Will the book parody elitist literature to talk smack about Trump voters, or will it parody elitist literature to roast the elites themselves? Will Thurston Howell III save the world from a mad scientist and his minions — or will Gilligan and the Skipper drown Thurston in a fit of populist rage? Tune in next week to find out.

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