

At Clinton wedding: The American aristocracy flaunts its wealth

By Patrick Martin
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The wedding of Chelsea Clinton and Marc Mezvinsky, a multimillion-dollar affair held on an estate on the Hudson River, was a demonstration of the deep and unbridgeable social gulf in America. In a society on the brink of full-scale depression, the US financial aristocracy mounted a display of extravagance that seemed almost calculated to evince indifference to the plight of the vast majority of the population who are struggling to survive from day to day.

The corporate-controlled American media gushed without restraint or apparent shame about the “royal wedding” and the “princess bride,” doing its part to celebrate and legitimize the aristocratic principle, i.e., the belief of a tiny, self-absorbed and complacent layer at the top of American society that it is entitled to the best of everything.

According to the admiring press reports, the direct cost of the wedding was between \$2 million and \$3 million—roughly 50 times the annual income of the typical American family. The big ticket items included: \$750,000 for catering; \$600,000 for tents and other temporary structures; \$250,000 for flowers; \$40,000 for entertainment; \$20,000 for the vegan, gluten-free cake; \$20,000 for the Vera Wang dress worn by the bride, who was adorned with \$250,000 worth of jewelry.

As one breathless press account described the scene: “Adding to the elegance, the driveway at the lavish Astor Court Estate, a sprawling mansion built for John Jacob Astor IV where the ceremony will take place, is being widened to accommodate limousines. The portable toilets on site, equipped with hot water and music, cost \$15,000. Even the electricians working at the event will be high-class, adhering to a tuxedo dress code.”

The federal government likely spent even more, since

it provides security to both the former president and the current secretary of state, the father and mother of the bride. The Federal Aviation Administration closed the air space over the mid-Hudson Valley from 3 p.m. Saturday to 3:30 a.m. Sunday, citing the priority of what it called the “VIP Movement.” This also cleared the skies for the fireworks that followed the early evening nuptials.

The bulk of those in attendance were reported to be friends of the bride and groom, many from among the gilded youth employed on Wall Street, where Mezvinsky works now (first at Goldman Sachs, now at a hedge fund) and Chelsea Clinton formerly did.

Mezvinsky is a product of the Democratic wing of the Wall Street elite. Both his mother and father were Democratic members of Congress, one from Philadelphia, the other from Iowa. His father later became an investment banker and served a prison term for bank fraud, mail fraud and wire fraud.

The Clintons have become full-fledged members of the financial elite since they left the White House in January 2001. Bill Clinton has reportedly raked in \$130 million over the past decade, including \$65 million just from speaking engagements, mainly to business audiences. His earnings include profits from book sales and lucrative fees earned as an international gladhandler for companies like Yucaipa Corp., the investment vehicle of billionaire Ron Burkle (who paid the ex-president \$15.4 million over six years).

By the standards of Wall Street, of course, such earnings are second-tier, and there is doubtless a section of the ruling elite that looked at Saturday’s hoopla and sneered that the Clintons were doing things on the cheap. Donald Trump spent twice as much on flowers at his latest wedding.

If one sets aside the media frenzy and the security

mobilization, there were doubtless dozens of weddings this summer in the greater New York area that were as expensive, and some much more so. Likewise, for some in this super-rich layer, the \$3.8 million Fifth Avenue condo for the newlyweds would be regarded as no more than a “starter home.”

There was not the slightest critical commentary in the media about such lavish expenditure under conditions of deepening economic and social misery for the society as a whole. Nor did any columnist suggest that such a display was inappropriate amid the official declarations that the United States is entering an era of austerity and “sacrifice”—for the common people, of course, those who depend on Social Security, Medicare, public schools and other social services.

Tens of millions of working people live in extreme financial distress and uncertainty, faced with the threat of layoff, utility shutoff, foreclosure or eviction. The official unemployment rate is 10 percent, while the real rate is closer to 20 percent. Fifty million have no health insurance. The majority of working class families live from paycheck to paycheck.

But so isolated is the ruling elite from these realities that even experienced political operatives like the Clintons have become completely insensitive to the grotesque disparity between their conditions of life and those of the vast majority.

Bill Clinton once boasted of his ability to “feel the pain” of ordinary people. He was first elected president in 1992 at least in part because of the evident indifference of the first Bush administration to an economic crisis much less severe than the current one. But no political “caution” light flashed to suggest that the Clintons should tone down this display of conspicuous consumption in the midst of the biggest slump since the Great Depression.

As for Hillary Clinton, no slouch at populist demagoguery when she barnstormed through poverty-stricken Appalachian counties during her 2008 primary campaign, she was merely taking a weekend off from her job as secretary of state, where she spearheads the predatory and militaristic foreign policy of American imperialism, justifying one bloodbath after another.

The Clinton wedding is a demonstration that the American ruling elite has lost its head. Astor Courts, the estate where it took place, was designed by

architect Stanford White to resemble the Grand Trianon at Versailles. It is no exaggeration to say that the American aristocracy, like its French ancestors before the Revolution of 1789, is, through its recklessness and irresponsibility, paving the way to its own destruction.

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