

**THE BLOG**

Pajamahadeen = Chattering Class + Broadband

By Marty Kaplan

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Chris Matthews to Ned Lamont on MSNBC today: What do you think of the pajamahadeen?

Lamont: Huh?

Matthews: The bloggers. They roll out of bed in the morning, they read something in the paper, they blog about it, they talk to each other about it, people blog back, and pretty soon it becomes the buzz.

(Caveat lector: It's my paraphrase, not a transcript.)

It's funny: the entire District of Columbia is built on the exact same process that Chris Matthews describes, except that instead of people using keyboards, they use phones, and instead of blogging, they use their access to print and broadcast media, and to one another.

I lived and worked in politics and journalism in Washington for eight years, and every day, the inviolable morning ritual was that people read the papers, they watched television, and then all day long they called one another to ask, "What do you hear?" The biggest difference between the daily routine of the Beltway chattering class and the blogosphere is that the Gang of 500 (as The Note calls them) has been replaced by the dispersed and inherently more small-d democratic netroots.

The reason that there are just 500 or so in the elite is that the mandarins who belong to it, plus the MSM employers it's parasitic on, keep a de facto ceiling on its membership. But there's no max to the number of cyberchatterers; their impact depends not on a merit badge system, but on their ability to attract readers.

It's ludicrous to distinguish Beltway blowhards from bloggers by the quality of their thinking. No matter what you think about bloggers' smarts, anyone who's taken the trouble to compare credentialed pundits' pontifications with what actually transpires in the real world will be painfully aware of their lack of accountability. The conventional wisdom their groupthink constitutes (including the contrarians, whose act is just as predictable) is way more often wrong than right.

Nor is there a defensible distinction between bloggers and talking heads on the vitriol front; there's manifest parity between the haters online and the celebrity assassins on Fox.

No, the big differences are about branding (the blogosphere hasn't caught up to the household logos yet), and about access. There's nothing the pajamahadeen are up to today that hasn't already been done before, both badly and well, by the priesthood.

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