

# Joe Biden's Polish Joke

Earlier this year, [Joe Biden gave a lengthy interview](#) to *The New York Times*, a venue as friendly toward Biden as Sean Hannity is to Donald Trump. In the course of this interview, Biden offered the following observation:

Well, look what's happened. Look what started to seep in, beginning and probably even with candidates during our administration. We stopped showing up at the Polish American club. We stopped showing up, and we all went to you, the really smart people. We had a new kind of coalition we were putting together. College-educated women and college men and boom, boom, boom and so on.

Two conclusions seem inescapable: 1) Biden thinks that the Democratic Party walked away from Polish Americans, and 2) Biden does not number Polish Americans among "the really smart people."

In talking this way about Polish Americans, it is unlikely that Biden meant to exclude descendants of the other Eastern European ethnic groups who came to America in large numbers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Indeed, the northeast corner of Pennsylvania, where Biden grew up, has a higher percentage of its population that traces its ancestry to Eastern Europe than just about anywhere else in America.

Biden is from Scranton, the county seat of Lackawanna County. Wilkes-Barre is the county seat of neighboring Luzerne County. The Scranton/Wilkes-Barre PBS affiliate (WVIA-TV) produced a documentary, "[The Extraordinary Journey: The Eastern Europeans of Northeastern Pennsylvania](#)," which notes that 30 percent of the population in Lackawanna, Luzerne, Carbon, and Schuylkill counties traced their ancestry to Eastern Europe. Poles were the largest single ethnic group to immigrate to the region, but Slovaks, Czechs, Lithuanians, Hungarians, and Ukrainians

also came in large numbers.

As the documentary details, the area developed a blended Eastern European culture. A lawyer friend of mine from Luzerne County is a good representation of those in northeastern Pennsylvania. He grew up taking pride in his Lithuanian name, loving the Polish Christmas carols sung at his parish church, and savoring the taste of the Slovak *kolache* baked by his grandmother. His family even makes kielbasa from venison.

Biden has portrayed this race as a contest between Scranton and Park Avenue, yet Biden left Scranton as soon as he could, nearly half a century ago. Park Avenue, on the other hand, has always looked down on Trump's native Queens.

The Eastern Europeans of northeastern Pennsylvania figured out that Biden had little use for them long before he admitted it to *The New York Times*. Four years ago, the region's swing to Trump was instrumental in giving the GOP its first presidential win in Pennsylvania since 1988. Polls suggest that northeastern Pennsylvania remains Trump's strongest area in the state, while *The New York Times* recently ran an [article on the area's embrace of Trump](#), with much focus on Dave Mitchko, a local activist with an eminently Slavic last name.

But Biden wasn't content with simply ditching Scranton. In order to amass the millions Biden has made in "public service," Biden advocated for policies which devastated northeastern Pennsylvania and the many other places which "the really smart people" concluded had outlived their usefulness.

Biden supported NAFTA and Most Favored Nation trade status for Communist China, which resulted in thousands of American factories shutting down, causing millions of American manufacturing jobs to disappear. Biden also supported the Iraq War, a misadventure planned and executed by the type of Republicans who have endorsed his candidacy. That fiasco killed thousands of Americans and grievously wounded many

more, devastated the ancient Christian communities of Iraq, and wasted hundreds of billions of dollars that places such as Scranton could have used.

Now Biden is embracing critical race theory and the concept of "white privilege." This latest project of "the really smart people" promises to work out as well for the people of northeastern Pennsylvania as Biden's earlier brainstorms did. It is absurd to describe Eastern European immigrants who came to northeastern Pennsylvania with nothing as "privileged." Their families were serfs in Europe, and the work they did once they came here was always hard, often debilitating, and sometimes deadly. Mining anthracite coal put bread on the table, but also put coal dust in lungs.

Polish immigrants like my friend's grandfather worked long days deep in anthracite coal mines without masks, respirators, or other basic safety equipment. They would not see the sun, or their children, for months – except on Sundays for Mass – yet they showed up every day, on time, without complaint. My friend's grandfather died from black lung complications at the age of 57 – true senior citizen status by NE PA standards in the 1970s. His remaining retiree buddies toasted his memory with nickel beers at the Polish Club in Dupont, PA, the same type of club Biden admits the Democrats abandoned for the "really smart people." Now he wants to abandon their descendants by accepting the theory that what their families have earned in America is the result of an unfair and underserved "privilege."

Right now, if the polls are to be believed, Joe Biden is enjoying his Polish joke. But maybe people like my friend will end up having the last laugh. If the many descendants of Eastern European immigrants who live in the critical electoral battleground stretching from the old anthracite coal mines of northeastern Pennsylvania to the Mesabi Range of Minnesota end up taking the same dim view of Joe Biden that so many Slavic-Americans who know him best have, the "really smart people"

may end up as blindsided by 2020 as they were by 2016.

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