

The Masking of the Servant Class: Ugly COVID Images From the Met Gala Are Now Commonplace

While AOC's revolutionary and subversive socialist gown generated buzz, the normalization of maskless elites attended to by faceless servants is grotesque.



Glenn Greenwald

14 min ago



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Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), appears at the 2021 Met Gala maskless in her highly fashionable and subversive gown, as masked workers and servants surround her, ensuring her safety and a smoothly running party, on September 13, 2021 in New York City. (Photo by Noam Galai/GC Images)

From the start of the pandemic, political elites have been repeatedly caught exempting themselves from the restrictive rules they impose on the lives of those over whom they rule. Governors, mayors, ministers and Speakers of the House have been filmed violating their own COVID protocols in order to dine with their closest lobbyist-friends, enjoy a coddled hair styling in chic salons, or unwind after signing new lockdown and quarantine orders by sneaking away for a weekend

getaway with the family. The trend became so widespread that *ABC News* gathered all the examples under the headline “Elected officials slammed for hypocrisy for not following own COVID-19 advice,” while *Business Insider* in May updated the reporting with this: “14 prominent Democrats stand accused of hypocrisy for ignoring COVID-19 restrictions they're urging their constituents to obey.”

Most of those transgressions were too flagrant to ignore and thus produced some degree of scandal and resentment for the political officials granting themselves such license. Dominant liberal culture is, if nothing else, fiercely rule-abiding: they get very upset when they see anyone defying decrees from authorities, even if the rule-breaker is the official who promulgated the directives for everyone else. Photos released last November of California Governor Gavin Newsom giggling maskless as he sat with other maskless state health officials celebrating the birthday of a powerful lobbyist — just one month after he told the public to “to keep your mask on in between bites” and while severe state-imposed restrictions were in place regarding leaving one's home — caused a drop in popularity and helped fueled a recall initiative against him. Newsom and these other officials *broke their own rules*, and even among liberals who venerate their leaders as celebrities, rule-breaking is frowned upon.

But as is so often the case, the most disturbing aspects of elite behavior are found not in what they have prohibited but rather in what they have decided is permissible. When it comes to mask mandates, it is now commonplace to see two distinct classes of people: those who remain maskless as they are served, and those they employ as their servants who must have their faces covered at all times. Prior to the COVID pandemic, it was difficult to imagine how the enormous chasm between the lives of cultural and political elites and everyone else could be made any larger, yet the pandemic generated a new form of crude cultural segregation: a series of protocols which ensure that maskless elites need not ever cast eyes upon the faces of their servant class.

Last month, a delightful event was hosted by Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) for wealthy Democratic donors in Napa — the same wine region of choice for Gov. Newsom's notorious dinner party — at which the cheapest tickets were \$100 each and a “chair” designation was available for \$29,000. Video of the outdoor festivities showed an overwhelmingly white crowd of rich Democratic donors sitting maskless virtually on top of one another — not an iota of social distancing to be found — as Pelosi imparted her deep wisdom about public policy.

Pelosi's donor gala took place as millions face eviction, ongoing joblessness, and ever-emerging mandates of various types. It was also held *just five days after* the liberal county government of Los Angeles, in the name of Delta, imposed a countywide mask requirement for “major outdoor events.” In nearby San Francisco, where Pelosi's mansion is found, the liberal-run city government has maintained a more restrictive outdoor mask policy than the CDC: though masks were not required for outdoor exercising

(such as jogging) or while consuming food, the city's rules for outdoor events required “that at any gathering where there are more than 300 people, masks are still required for both vaccinated and unvaccinated people.” Though Pelosi's fundraising lunch fell below the 10,000-person threshold for LA County's outdoor mask mandate, it may have fallen within San Francisco's mask mandate. Either way, it appears arbitrary at best: how would The Science™ of COVID risk have drastically changed for those sitting with no distancing, at densely packed tables, if there had been a few more tables of Pelosi donors? The CDC's latest guidelines for outdoor events urge people to “consider wearing a mask...for activities with close contact with others who are not fully vaccinated.”

Trying to find a cogent scientific rationale for any of this is, by design, virtually impossible. The rules are sufficiently convoluted and often arbitrary that one can easily mount arguments to *legally* justify the Versailles-like conduct of one's favorite liberal political leaders. Beyond the legalities, everything one does can be simultaneously declared to be responsible or reckless, depending on the political needs of the moment. But what was most striking about Pelosi's donor event was not the possibility of legal infractions but rather the two-tiered system that was so viscerally and uncomfortably obvious.

Even though many of the wealthy white donors had no food in front of them and were not yet eating, there was not a mask in sight — except on the faces of the overwhelmingly non-white people hired as servants, all of whom had their gratuitous faces covered. Servants, apparently, are much more pleasant when they are dehumanized. There is no need for noses or mouths or other identifiable facial features for those who are converted into servile robots.

Similar scenes were visible at the even more opulent birthday bash which former President Barack Obama threw for himself to commemorate his 60 years on the planet. Held at his sprawling \$12 million weekend estate on Martha's Vineyard, Obama and 400 of his closest maskless friends spent hours in indoor tents dancing, chatting in close circles, and yelling in each other's ears over the live music. While custom-made masks engraved with Obama's renowned humility were provided to the guests ("44×60"), only the servants were reported to have worn masks. Who can throw a Hawaiian luau-themed party at one of the country's wealthiest retreats in the middle of a pandemic and joblessness crisis while wearing disfiguring masks, however chic and carefully hand-crafted they might be?

Discussing the controversy over Obama's lavish party on CNN, *New York Times* reporter Annie Karni explained that while some of the former president's neighbors found the party objectionable on the grounds of health and/or optics, many adamantly argued that such concerns were applicable only to ordinary people, not the more advanced and evolved species likely to be invited to such an extravagant and exclusive liberal party. Karni described this prevailing mentality with vivid accuracy:

[The controversy] is really being overblown. They're following all the safety requirements. People are going to sporting events that are bigger than this. This is going to be safe. *This is a sophisticated, vaccinated crowd* and this is just about optics. It's not about safety.

An avalanche of similarly repugnant imagery poured forth on Monday night at the most gluttonous and opulent royal court spectacle of them all: the annual Met Gala held by long-time *Vogue* editor-in-chief Anna Wintour. *Town and Country* has lamented that the once-elevated-and-dignified event has become quite gauche ever since it became overrun by cultural celebrities and *nouveau riche* tycoons -- "these days, the gala is a highly commercialized, celebrity-driven media circus that celebrates sensationalist preening by individuals who couldn't be less interested in the museum." Yet despite this degradation, the magazine nonetheless still regards the affair as "the fashion and society event of the year." In 2014, Wintour complained that the event was insufficiently exclusive and raised the ticket prices to \$25,000 per person in order to keep out the riff-raff who had been able to get in the prior year for the middling price of \$15,000 per ticket. Tickets this year cost as much as \$35,000 per person. It is, pronounced Wintour's *Vogue* this week, "the fashion world equivalent of the Oscars."

While event organizers, in an act of noble self-sacrifice and social duty, sadly cancelled the gala in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, Wintour was determined this year not to let unpleasant matters like overflowing ICU wards, ongoing school closures, looming mass evictions, and pervasive mask mandates ruin the immense enjoyment bequeathed to the world's serfs as they watch their beloved bejeweled class pose in designer gowns. Following Pelosi and Obama's examples, a long list of America's most glittering stars bravely risked exposure to a deadly virus by appearing without masks, all to ensure that Americans

would never again be deprived of such a richly gratifying moment for them. Co-chaired by Timothée Chalamet, Billie Eilish, Amanda Gorman, and Naomi Osaka, honorary chairs included Tom Ford, Instagram's Adam Mosseri, and Wintour herself.

Much of the attention on Monday night was devoted to the appearance on the red carpet by Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY). The usual horde of embittered online nay-sayers and envious party-poopers tried implying that there was something incongruous about a socialist politician gleefully participating in the most vulgar tribute to capitalism and social inequality to emerge since the walled-off galas thrown by the French aristocracy at the Palace of Versailles. Some petty, resentful critics even suggested that AOC's latest star turn somehow illustrated what Shant Mesrobian has disparagingly described as "the Squad's brand of highly educated, professional-class cultural leftism," which "now offers elected officials a path to fame and pop culture status that circumvents much of the old, hand-dirtying business of politics," pursuant to which "elected office itself has become merely a stepping stone to social media celebrity" and "maintaining a social media influencer empire rivals, or even surpasses, the priority of being a successful legislator."

Fortunately, many of AOC's most devoted socialist supporters stepped forth with passionate defenses of their leader. As they pointed out, AOC had painted onto the back of her pristine white gown — in perfectly proportioned and tastefully scrolled red ink highlighting the stunning virtues of the designer dress' silhouette -- a leftist phrase, *Tax the Rich*, that not only assaulted the Biden-supporting liberal celebrities in attendance but made them feel endangered in their own habitat, as if their wealth and privilege were being imperiled not from afar but from one of their own, *from within*. Far from being what AOC's dirty and petty critics tried to malign this as being — an attention-seeking, celebrity-building, branding opportunity in which AOC yet again lavished herself in the multi-pronged rewards of the very economic and cultural hierarchies she claims to despise and vows to combat -- she was actually engaged in a revolutionary and subversive act, injecting into aristocratic circles a beautifully artistic yet hostile message.

This was not, contrary to the grievances of her small-minded and jealous critics, AOC reveling in one of Louis XVI's court festivities. Instead, she was *storming the Bastille*: not with weapons or fire but with the graceful designer elegance of the insurgent Marxist renegade, which made her presence all the more deceptively disruptive. While it may have *appeared* that *Vogue*'s perfectly-coiffed red-carpet correspondents and other Met luminaries were gushing with admiration and awe at her bold fashion statement, they were actually shaking with fear over what AOC had wrought. They were quivering with rage and fear, not swooning with delight as it appeared.

Besides, as AOC herself put it with her trademarked class consciousness, the very fact that she can attend the Met Gala while you cannot is proof of the potency of the left-wing movement she leads. Standing next to Aurora James, the designer of her dress, AOC revealed the underlying clandestine strategy of her subversive attendance: “We really started having a conversation about what it means to be a working class woman of color at the Met ... we can’t just play along, but we need to break the fourth wall.”



In a separate exposition, AOC explained that her appearance at the Met Gala was such a watershed moment for working-class politics because it is vital that she not be confined to dreary poor and lower-middle class venues when spreading her fist-raising rebellion. Instead, she must endure the burden of carrying her cause to the world's richest and most privileged elite and the exclusive salons they occupy. Imagine being so unimaginative and myopic as to be unable to recognize and be grateful for AOC's inventive praxis.

The jealousy-driven attacks on AOC by her cultural inferiors were almost certainly driven by various forms of white supremacy, misogyny and colonialism, as AOC said of those who criticized her in 2018 for wearing an expensive designer dress (“women like me aren’t supposed to run for office”) as well

as when she denounced the dismissive and condescending attitudes toward the Squad from Nancy Pelosi (“Nancy Pelosi has been ‘singling out’ freshman congresswomen of color”). Worse, Monday night's traumatic bullying of AOC obscured the far more important fact that, yet again, we saw elites prancing around in the middle of a pandemic maskless, while those paid hourly wages to serve them or desperately try to snap a photo of them were required to keep their pointless faces covered with cloth at all times.



Jennifer Hudson, maskless, attends The 2021 Met Gala, attended to by masked servants, on September 13, 2021 in New York City, as masked paparazzi look on (Photo by Theo Wargo/Getty Images)

COVID rules are now so convoluted that liberals are able to defend their leaders' actions while not even pretending to make sense from a scientific or rational perspective. Many defended Newsom and Obama's maskless partying on the ground that it was all “outdoors,” even though both were actually inside tents and people had been shamed for months for taking their kids to deserted beaches rather than keeping them locked away at home. Liberals argue that it is fine for elites at Obama's party and the Met Gala to remain maskless since they are vaccinated, even as they defend the CDC's new mask directives *for vaccinated people* based on the view that vaccinated people still dangerously transmit the Delta variant to both vaccinated and unvaccinated people alike. They will claim that it is fine for rich Democratic donors at Pelosi's party to sit on top of one other maskless because they are eating even though the video shows they have no food in front of them (they are waiting for the masked servants of color to bring their food)

and even though shoveling food into one's open mouth does not actually create a wall of immunity against transmission of the virus from one's open-mouthed table neighbors. The Met Gala's red carpet is said to be “outdoors” even though it is surrounded by tent walls and other structures, and still leaving the question of why workers need to be masked in the same area.

But all of this stopped being about The Science™ long ago — ever since months of relentless messaging that it is our moral duty to Stay At Home unless we want to sociopathically kill Grandma was replaced overnight by dictates that we had a moral duty to leave our homes to attend densely packed street protests since the racism being protested was a more severe threat to the public health than the global COVID pandemic. One can locate in all of this jumbled and always-shifting rationale various forms of control, shaming, stigma and hierarchy, while The Science™ is nowhere to be found.



Maskless stars Camila Cabello and Shawn Mendes attend the 2021 Met Gala while guided by masked workers, September 13, 2021 in New York City. (Photo by Noam Galai/GC Images)

Even with all of this deceit and manipulation, there is something uniquely disturbing — creepy even — about becoming accustomed to seeing political and cultural elites wallowing in luxury without masks, while those paid small wages to serve them in various ways are forced to keep cloth over their faces. It is a powerful symbol of the growing rot at the core of America's cultural and social balkanization: a maskless elite attended to by a permanently faceless servant class. The country's workers have long been faceless in a figurative sense, and now, thanks to extremely selective application of decisively unscientific COVID restrictions, that condition has become literal.

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