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### Janeane Garofalo



Janeane Garofalo ushers in a new era

//Words: **Jeff Renaud**

Ever since Janeane Garofalo outed a certain French brand of mineral water as “naïve spelled backwards” in the 1994 slacker comedy *Reality Bites*, America knew she was smarter than the rest of us. Politically charged and wickedly clever, she’s proved it time and time again over the past 15 years, be it as co-host of *Air America’s The Majority Report*, stealing scenes as Lou Thornton on *The West Wing* or delivering a knock-out blow to former White House press secretary Tony Snow on *FOX News Sunday* over the war in Iraq.

Come January, Garofalo will holster her left-leaning guns for at least a day as the woman once named “funniest person in Rhode Island” joins the cast of the Emmy-Award-winning *24* as FBI special agent Janis Gold.

Wiped from a long afternoon shoot, Garofalo boasts she’s doing her own stunts for the FOX TV show. They’re just not that Bauer-ific. “Jack Bauer’s the one who is saving the world. I merely just sit at my computer,” she deadpans. “I don’t do any stunts. I am an FBI agent who sits at a computer most of the time. Well, I guess I do my own typing. But it’s a fake computer. Actually, it’s a real computer. But I’m not really typing anything. I just randomly type. Sometimes I type sentences to occupy my time but for the most part, it’s just random typing.”

Attempting to dig a little deeper into what exactly makes Agent Gold tick, Garofalo confesses there isn’t much to tell. “She’s an FBI agent. She’s new. And she’s a computer whiz, which if you knew me, is absurd. That’s all. There’s really not that much that is distinctive beyond that that I can tell you.”

Where’s Jack Bauer when you need him. He’d get more out of her.

And apparently so would Senator John McCain.

Leading up to the presidential election, the Republican nominee told *Marie Claire* he identified more with Jack Bauer than Jack Nicholson or Bob Dylan because they both “escape all of the time.” And while he drew the line at Agent Bauer’s torture methods, Garofalo says of the comparison, quite simply, “He

wishes.”

“I don’t enjoy any of the right-wing elements of the show and I’m not proud of the torture on the show being utilized by our own nation’s institutionalized policy of torture,” she adds. “In fact, I find it disgusting. Having said that [laughs], this is a fictitious show.” It was widely reported that the lawyers at Guantánamo, who were instructed to come up with new interrogation techniques, found inspiration from 24.

“It’s unfortunate that our government filched ideas from the show to utilize against detainees and it’s unfortunate that some of the show’s creators are right-wingers who supported the Bush-Cheney cabal,” follows Garofalo, who delivers political punches on programs like Real Time with Bill Maher as easily as she delivers punch lines on stage during one of her ever-popular stand-up performances. “Some of them are not here anymore, but I’ve never been happy about that. But I’m not sure they were happy with me, either. It’s a mutual disadmiration society, I suppose with the right-wingers and the liberals.”



Garofalo, who earned critical praise for powerful films like *Steal This Movie* and *The Laramie Project*, says

her strong political views and activist ways have endured a transformation of sorts over the years. Actually, as she explains it, that would be like saying Gregor Samsa went through “a transformation of sorts.”

“I grew up in a very conservative, religious household. And my father’s conservative politics dominated,” says Garofalo. “When I was a little kid, I just took what he said verbatim. I just assumed he was telling me the truth. As I got into junior high and high school, I started feeling that there was something wrong with his vision of the world but I still didn’t say anything. But then when I got to college, I would sort of espouse a lot of the right-wing nonsense that he always indoctrinated us into and finally one time, a friend at college looked at me when we were in a group and said, ‘You’re an asshole.’ And I remember being devastated at the time but she was right. I was espousing this, at-the-time Reagan-era, conservative mythology—those fraudulent narratives and that unkind vision of the world that conservatives have.

“I was just repeating the crap my dad was saying, trying to sound like I knew what I was talking about. That devastating day turned out to be one of the best things that happened to me—even though I was terribly embarrassed and unhappy at the time.” Garofalo was a history major at Providence College, but it was her overall love of learning that led her to a life-long pursuit of knowledge. “I took history courses at college. But it wasn’t that I was interested in it formally, per se. I declared the Civil War and the Reconstruction for some reason. I can’t even tell you why. I don’t even know why. I had to declare something. I guess maybe at the time, I was into the Gilded Age or maybe it was something Mark Twain said. I don’t know.

“I was interested in politics and culture in a more general way. And then in college, like a lot of kids do, I was given a copy of Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*. That’s what really turned it around. And I started to know Chomsky and things like that. And I just became more and more intellectually curious.”

Although she loves politics, really loves politics, Garofalo says she’s never considered running herself. Never. Not even for a minute.

“Oh, God no. [Whispers] No, no, no. That would be awful. First of all, I’m not qualified, which clearly hasn’t stopped others. But I don’t want to be that kind of mediocre. I don’t like when unqualified people run for leadership positions and I don’t want to do it myself.” But while she refuses to seek public office, Garofalo is unwavering in her support that Americans need to get off their collective couches and do something. Anything.

“It’s important to examine life because otherwise, there would be no purpose. There is no purpose to your life, if you don’t try and find meaning or invest it with meaning. I’m not talking about book smarts. It doesn’t matter where you went to school. I’m talking about emotional intelligence or a hunger for knowledge. It just enhances the quality of your life.

“Also, if you don’t try and participate in your own life, then it just happens to you. And unfortunately life is just happening to us a great deal. And it always has been that way since the dawn of time, I’m sure. It’s not new. But it’s just particularly egregious when you have such a transparently, linguistically fraudulent party in power for the last eight years—or really since Reagan—the way they use words to con people. And when you educate yourself, at least you have some type of defense against the con job.”

Garofalo says establishing a first line of defense is simple. Go to Borders. Or better yet, visit your local library. “It’s never well received when someone says, ‘You got to get out there.’ But the only thing I can say is, from experience, pursuing a life of mind through books has enhanced the quality of my life immeasurably and also on the times that I have done activist work, it has also enhanced the quality of my life.

“I don’t do nearly enough and that’s unfortunate because I have some issues with social anxiety, unfortunately, and as I get older, it gets a little bit worse. So it’s sometimes problematic for me to be around groups of people for extended periods of time. And I don’t want to burden them with that so I wind up being by myself a lot more than I used to. But I do find my pursuing a life of the mind has been a source of a lot of joy for me. The thing is, if you always have a book on you, just throw it in your coat or in your backpack or in your purse, whatever it is, take a paperback, it’s easy to carry and you’ll never be bored.

“You never know when nothing is going to happen. You could be in a line and if you’ve got your book, you’re set. It doesn’t matter if you are waiting for a plane or anything. If you have a book, it just enhances the quality of your life.”

And for those of you who don’t want to get off the couch: Check out The Food Network.

“I love watching The Food Network. I don’t cook myself but I love watching food be prepared,” says Garofalo. “I like Iron Chef. I like to watch people discuss cooking. I love the whole ritual of it. I love looking at it but I’m not a good cook. But I love watching The Food Network. Love it. Love it. Love it.

“And I also geek out on The Learning Channel. I like to watch any show about multiple births. I like Jon & Kate Plus 8. And that show 17 Kids and Counting, starring the Duggar family. I like Super Quads. Honestly, I will watch any show about multiple babies even though I myself don’t want to have a baby.”?

#### PHOTO CREDITS

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