

Class Matters Study Guide

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Summary

Class Matters proves that class does matter. Sometimes it's a rather sticky and uncomfortable issue but it's there. As much as most people want to claim a homogenous American culture, there are the traditional classes of the upper, upper-middle, middle and low or working class. However, the wealthy who inhabited such exclusive places in the nation like Nantucket Island off the coast of Cape Cod were the descendants of the Rockefellers, du Ponts, Vanderbilts and other such wealthy iconic families.

Nowadays the Island is being invaded by what is referred to as the hyper-rich. This new class represents the nouveau-riche, those individuals who make a killing on Wall Street or whose innovative concepts result in wealth beyond anyone's imagination. The new rich are outdistancing the old rich. If they aren't accepted into an private country club on the island, they build their own and make it more exclusive and opulent than the one that refused them. Old money is proud of their 45-foot yachts even though 200-foot yachts of the new money sail past them.

While everyone is fascinated by the rich and famous, most Americans are not in that elite class and know they never will be. It doesn't disturb most people; all they want is the chance for a slice of the pie albeit a smaller one. Most Americans believe they are in the middle class although they aspire to climb a few rungs higher up the ladder. They also have the hope that their children will have more success than they do. Upper and middle class parents go to great lengths to make sure that their children receive the best education possible within their means. The upper class has no problem with tuition costs but the middle class have learned to be practical about aspirations for their children's education.

Lower class, or the more politically correct term – the working class, does not have the same options as the middle class. Many work long hours or two jobs just to make it. They don't have time to help their children with homework; their children are often in sub-standard schools in which the system lets its students down. The idea of college is just a fleeting dream in the minds of these parents. Providing the basics, food and shelter, is the focus.

The immigrant class, especially those who are undocumented from Mexico and South America, have the least chance of achieving the American dream. They live in the shadows, fearing exposure will result in deportation. They flounder around from one menial job to another, don't learn English and have carved out their own world within a world with their fellow countrymen. They have the least chance to enjoy the classic story of the immigrant who achieves his dreams and climbs up from the ladder's lowest rung.



Chapters 1 through 3

Summary

At one time in American society, everyone understood class. The rich took cruises, vacationed in Europe and attended services at Episcopal churches. The Middle class drove Ford Fairlanes, settled in the San Fernando Valley and voted Democratic. They didn't take cruises in the Caribbean.

In modern times, there are less signs of class. Most Americans enjoy luxuries and take expensive vacations. It's more difficult to assign class from the clothes they wear, the car they drive or the color of their skin. But class is still a factor in American life. Higher education is linked to class. Although the U.S. at large is more diverse, the rich are isolating themselves. The differences in health care and life expectancy are markedly different by class. Mobility up the economic ladder that once was the dream of everyone is flat.

Class means different things to different people. It is a way for a culture to organize itself. In the nineteenth century, Marx separated the people into two classes but most sociologists acknowledge three class: rich, middle and working class. There are sub-classes within each of the three main classes. Some scholars believe that the concept of class has been rendered useless by the complexity of today's societies. The economy is affording opportunities to the middle class that allows them to enjoy luxuries that were formerly reserved just for the very wealthy. Religion was once a sign of class but that line has also blurred.

However, the bottom line is that class still has an impact on everyone's life. Television shows like American Idol and The Apprentice present an unrealistic image of upward mobility. Globalization and advanced technology have closed factories in the U.S. and eliminated jobs that used to take the lower to the middle class. The loss of manufacturing and factory jobs has caused the rift between the rich and poor to deepen. College degrees are more important than ever. Youngsters from upper-income families represent the highest proportion of students at elite colleges. Rich people are more than ever isolating themselves from the lower classes. The couples in the upper class have fewer children and have them later in life. Children of the wealthy frequently have one parent who works extraordinarily long hours.

The American ideal has never been the idea of a pecking order and that success is the result of skill and hard work and most refuse to concede that they have been immobilized.

Three people in New York City suffered heart attacks around the same time in 2004. Jean Miele was an architect in Manhattan. He collapsed on the sidewalk after a sushi lunch. Will L. Wilson was a utility worker who lived in Brooklyn and just had dinner at an all-you-can-eat buffet. Ewa Gora was a maid who lived in Brooklyn-Queens in a rented



room with her husband when she began feeling ill. The three months that followed illustrated the diverse experience the three people had during their recoveries.

In the cases of the three heart attack victims, Jean Miele was fortunate to be with two colleagues who took immediate action. He was in the care of a cardiologist literally within minutes. Will was taken to a city hospital. When that treatment wasn't successful he was taken to a private hospital. Miele was in the hospital two days; Wilson, five days. Gora refused to let her husband call for an ambulance when she first became ill because it would be too costly. She was given no choice of hospitals and taken to the city hospital. She had to wait two hours before a physician saw her. She was ultimately transferred to another hospital where she stayed two weeks.

Jean Miele was in better shape a year after his heart attack. His diet improved and he lost weight and was exercising regularly. Will Wilson's health had declined since his heart attack. He had gained weight and was suffering from high blood pressure. Ewa Gora returned to work and was besieged with bill collectors over debt not covered by her insurance. Her health declined; she suffered from diabetes, obesity and other serious conditions.

Dan Croteau, a car salesman, and Cate Woolner, his customer, hit it off when he took her and her son for a test drive. Cate contacted him and suggested they have coffee together. They talked on the phone and found that they had a lot in common. There were differences, too. He is a Roman Catholic and she is Jewish. But the bigger difference was that Croteau was from a poor family and Woolner was from a wealthy family.

Neither of Croteau's parents were highly educated and had factory jobs. He quit school and 16 and joined the military. He married his pregnant girlfriend at 19 and had two children by the time he was 24. There was never talk about attending college. Woolner is the daughter of a doctor and a dancer and was college educated. She was raised with all the trappings of the rich. But money never met much to her; she gave away most of a small inheritance she got at 21. She married a psychotherapist and had two sons.

Marriages that cross class lines are on the decline. In more recent years, it is more common for a woman to be better educated than her husband although the opposite had been true for decades. Such relationships are filled with tension since conventional wisdom has always dictated that the man be more educated and the top money earner.

Croteau noticed differences immediately after learning that Woolner had money. He didn't want to feel like a gold digger and made him more reluctant to get involved. His mother-in-law told him that initially she was embarrassed to tell anyone that her son-in-law was a car salesman. After Croteau moved into Woolner's house, she paid him a stipend after he lost his job. The balance of power in the relationship was a touchy subject. Attending a relationship workshop before they married was helpful. Her sons saw her as having the upper hand in the marriage.



Croteau's daughters attended public school while Woolner's sons attended private schools. Croteau didn't last at a job at the prep school his step-sons attended because he was surrounded by Ivy League educated people. He was more comfortable at the job he had at a hospital where there were people with similar backgrounds to his. Croteau found a lack of directness and more nuance when speaking to the Ivy Leaguers and his in-laws.

Woolner felt guilty when she bought her sons cars while the girls were on their own. Croteau and Woolner were both upfront about their differences and the tensions and conflicts that resulted. They are sometimes amazed at how solid their marriage has been.

Analysis

In these chapters, the writers describe what class is and how it means different things to different people. Also described is the impact that class has on one's education and potential for success. While there are less outward signs of class, it is still a fundamental of American society. The lines have blurred somewhat due to the availability of luxury items to the middle class and even the working class. Although there are sub-categories, the three basic classes remain the same as they've been for years: upper, middle and working class.

There is a growing trend for the very wealthy to isolate themselves from the other classes. Birds of a feather flock together and so it goes for the rich. They are different from other classes in that they marry later and have fewer children and have them later in life. The middle class, which most people believe themselves to be part of, will not concede that they cannot move up the economic ladder. It has often been said that Americans all think they are just one deal or one break away from being millionaires.

Another difference that is described in this section is the availability and level of health care that are available to the three classes. Preventive care is something that the very poor do not, as a whole, participate in. There are not good restaurants or health food chains in their neighborhoods which results in poor diets that lead to serious health concerns. Rich people have the best health insurance available. The middle class has good health insurance and the poor have limited health care insurance if any at all.

Marriage between classes does not wipe away diverse upbringing, different perspectives or even different manners. There is also bias usually against a new poor in-law who hate to tell their rich friends that their daughter or son married beneath them.

Vocabulary

paradox, meritocracy, rout, hereditary, heterogeneous, exemplar, quintile, flux, exurban, ominous, regaling, longevity, chronic, hypertension, triage, dithered, philanthropy, abject



Chapters 4 through 6

Summary

Della Mae Justice was born and raised in Pikeville, coal-mining country in the Appalachians. She attended law school despite a background that included living in a house without indoor plumbing, an absent father and fried squirrel often dinner fare. Her mentally ill mother married a truck driver who was hardly ever home. Della always dreamed about leaving Appalachia and managed to attend college and be accepted at a law school. She spent time abroad in France, Scotland and Ireland.

Della moved up the economic ladder quickly from poor to upper middle class. She returned home to practice law and feels she doesn't fit in that world any longer. She saw her old world from two different vantage points. She is middle class but is still learning exactly what that means. She recognizes that coming from a poor socioeconomic group does not afford the same opportunities as children born to the middle class or to wealth.

At 15 she was placed in foster care but was rescued by her successful cousin, Joe, who was also a lawyer. She attended college and met her future husband, Troy Price. He went to law school and got his masters degree in family studies. She joined a law firm but never felt like she belonged. Like her cousin, Joe, she rescued family members from foster care. Her brother's children were placed in the foster program. She is in the commercial law field but devotes a day each week to family court representing families like hers. She has become one of Pikeville's leading citizens although she still battles social anxiety. Della's most important job is raising her niece and nephew and sending them down a good pathway in life.

Working class parents generally teach their children to do as they're told with no questions. Upper and middle class children are taught to ask those questions and to focus on their desires, skills and abilities.

Evangelical Christians are becoming a larger segment of the student population at elite colleges like Brown University. This trend can also be seen in the corporate boardrooms and at private golf clubs. However, they have remained at about 25% of the overall population in the U.S. As a group, evangelicals are raising their socioeconomic status and are nearing the same level in earnings and education as traditional Protestants. "Evangelical" used to be a buzz word for "poor" just as "Presbyterian" was for upper class.

Evangelical CEOs commonly lead prayer sessions with their employees. The influence of the evangelicals can be seen in both American politics and culture. More evangelical students are attending Ivy League universities and forming Christian unions. Since a large portion of America's leaders come out of the Ivy League schools, the impact of evangelical Christianity is sure to have even greater impact in the future. Tim Havens



was a young student at Brown who became a missionary for the Christian Union, an evangelical organization formed by former Cornell student, Matt Bennett.

The GI bill is, in part, responsible for this leveling of the field. It sent generations of evangelicals to college and boosted the prosperity of the evangelicals as a group. The acceptance of the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination is a sign of progress among evangelicals.

Currently one in three Americans dropout of college. In the 1960s, it was one in five. Graduation rates are lower in those college that recruit poorer students. More student graduate come from the upper echelon. The gap between the children of the upper and lower classes is widening. Poor and working-class students are falling behind their wealthy peers. This is occurring when a college degree is more important than ever before.

Many studies support the contention that upward mobility is on the decline. Children are tending to follow in the footsteps of their parents. There is diversity among the students at the best colleges in race, sex and religion but most of those students tend to share upper to middle-class backgrounds. Beyond just being wealthy, rich kids have the benefit of parents who spent hours reading to them when they were little, focusing on their school work and researching universities for the best schools. There was no doubt in the minds of these kids that they had to finish school and graduate.

Many high schools do a poor job in preparing low-income students for college. The cost of tuition scares low-income parents away and levels huge debt on families that qualify for student loans. John T. Casteen III, the president of the University of Virginia, was from a low-income family and knows firsthand that the system makes the false promise to poor students that hard work and good grades will reward them with success.

Affirmative action plays a role in providing opportunity for poor children to attend elite colleges. The process has greatly increased the number of women, blacks and Latinos who attend college. Affirmative action never addressed poor white students but that demographic is beginning to receive focus. Several populous states have banned race-based preferences in their universities and colleges. The U.S. Supreme Court is poised to outlaw the program in the future. Programs based on need and not on race are more popular among the citizenry. The amount of non-graduates is coming to the attention of authorities.

Ironically, because of the disproportionate rate of wealthy students they actually receive a higher percentage of financial aid than do low-income students. Two-year community colleges are designed to prepare students for transfer to a university where they can attain a four-year degree but the large majority of students, only 17% in the mid-90s – do not finish their education.

Children of alumni have the advantage in being accepted at colleges. However, the rejection of women and minorities and making room for prep school graduates are things of the past. Some wealthy families feel their children are at the disadvantage now



because of efforts to diversify college campuses. Their kids must attain higher SAT scores than kids from poor families and regions. Some parents are fighting this requirement in legislatures as geographic discrimination.

College administrators are changing policies from “need blind” to “need conscious.” “Need blind” means that students won’t be punished for seeking financial aid. “Need conscious” means that students will be recognized for overcoming obstacles, including financial ones, in their backgrounds. Elite schools are reluctant to admit a large number of low-income students because it could lower their overall standards. The increase in the number of poor students across the nation has increased only marginally.

Analysis

In this section, the writers focus on a bright young woman who had the misfortune of being born into a poor dysfunctional and even violent family in Appalachia. Luckily a wealthy relative saved the girl from the horrendous foster system when she was taken from her family because of domestic violence. This relative saw that the 15-year-old was bright and had promise. She followed his advice and went to school and ultimately became an attorney. Despite her success, she struggled socially for years. She could not escape the belief, whether real or imagined, that people looked down on her. Her story is a vote of confidence for poor kids who are smart and who could realize the American dream if somebody gave them the chance.

Evangelical Christians are gaining a foothold on the middle and upper-middle class. There is a concerted effort through affluent evangelicals and the Christian Union and other such organizations to increase the enrollment of evangelical students in Ivy League schools. Since most of the nation’s leaders graduate from these elite schools, the influx of evangelical students into these schools promises to have an important impact on business, society and class.

The number of college drop-outs is in the increase. It is felt by some sociologists that the push by society and parents for all kids to attend college is partially responsible for this upsurge. This factor is causing the education gap between rich kids and middle and lower class kids to widen. Most wealthy children who attend college wind up graduating. Affirmative action has been a factor in providing educational opportunities for poor students. There is a growing backlash against this process which could compel the U.S. Supreme Court to outlaw in the future.

Vocabulary

abhorrent, sundering, sanctuary, secular, vanguard, manifest, citadel, anomaly, demographic, meritocracy, stratification, ruthlessly, quixotically

Chapters 7 through 9

Summary

Jeff Martinelli had been married and divorced twice and was a widower once. He had a son who raised his grandson. Jeff's factory job had catapulted him into the middle class. However, when he lost that job and could find no work, he realized that the fate of the workingman without a college degree in the 21st century was a dismal one. His son, Caleb, also has no degree and since high school has gone through a series of six nowhere jobs. The middle class of yesterday has collapsed.

Due to globalization, the American economy has lost six million jobs over the last 30 years. The market value of these unemployed workers has greatly declined. Even those employees who had worked their way up to management in manufacturing companies without a degree had little value to corporations who were looking for employees with higher education. There had long been trouble signs. By the time Martinelli lost his job, a person with a college degree was earning 80% more than he was. The economic future of workers without a degree has a tenuous one.

Choosing not to go to college was not unusual in the 1960s. Mark McClellan had opted out of going on to college which was supported by his physician father. He had worked his way up to a management position in a manufacturing company and made an annual income of \$100,000. However, when the company shut its doors, he had few options. He has vowed that his own son will attain a college degree.

Mexican workers entered the 3 Guys restaurant in New York. It is known as the most expensive coffee shop in the city. While the workers cook, clean tables and wash dishes all day long, a series of wealthy and famous people visit the restaurant as guests. The restaurant is owned by three Greek immigrants. The restaurant is a microcosm of class division in America – the poor workers, the rich clientele and the middle-class owners.

To John Zannikos, one of the owners, he has been a benefactor of the American promise of upward mobility. Juan Manual Peralta, a 34-year-old illegal immigrant who worked at the restaurant for four years before he was fired finds the dream more than elusive. The millions of illegal immigrants will likely never emerge from the shadows they live in. The pool of workers that provide menial labor devalues them and their ability to ascend the ladder of success. Peralta has shifted his dreams for success to his children.

Zannikos never got past the second grade because of the war in Europe. He became a merchant marine and eventually arrived in America with \$100 and no intention of returning home. Peralta finished the eighth grade and borrowed enough money to get him to America. Zannikos took a number of menial jobs and worked his way up and despite being deported once, he resurfaced and eventually bought his first restaurant. He eventually bought and sold a number of restaurants until he purchased the 3 Guys.



He makes \$130,000 a year, his three children attended college and he owns several homes. Peralta is convinced that it is much more difficult for an immigrant to succeed in today's world. He has been in the country 15 years and has little to show for it. He has often worked two jobs just to make it. Immigration has become a divisive political and social problem. Mexicans do not organize in an effort to have a bigger voice in their opportunities because so many are illegal. If they speak up, the chances of being deported increase.

While Peralta had little support in the U.S., Zannikos had the benefit of a Greek community that had settled the Astoria section of Queens. Zannikos had left Greece behind but Peralta maintained strong connections to Mexico. On a return trip to Mexico, he came with a pocketful of money and went home with a wife. He learned how to cook while at 3 Guys; Zannikos and his partners loaned Peralta money so he could get his papers.

It is no longer easy to assess class by one's appearance or the car they drive. Salaries have risen, prices have flattened and credit is easy to come by. BMWs are in the driveways of middle class homes. The wealthy are not above shopping for bargains at Costco or Wal-Mart. People in every class wear jeans. As a result, more expensive status symbols are being manufactured and created for the very wealthy like Hummers and diamond tennis bracelets and \$400 bottles of wine. The rich are isolating themselves from the other classes by taking exotic vacations, hiring personal trainers and employing personal chefs. They send their children to costly tutors and drop thousands on cosmetic surgery. For the wealthy, it's not keeping up with the Joneses – it's keeping up with the Gateses.

The average person doesn't expect to keep up with the Gateses. They just want a share of the good life. Anyone who wants one has a cell phone now, something that used to be exclusively for the wealthy. A PC in every home was made possible when the market was glutted with laptops and PCs causing prices to fall drastically. The same is true with many electronic devices that literally change lives. Globalization has help prices for these items to decline in cost as well. Cheaper models have enabled the middle class to purchase cars of the luxury lines. Cruise lines have bought bigger boats and kept their prices flat so that the average person could afford cruises and they could pile more people on each voyage.

The middle class are also able to participate in the finer things in life because so much is put on credit. Over the last 20 years, credit standards have been relaxed and credit it easier to come by. Low interest rates for mortgages and the creation of the sub-prime lending industry has allowed many people who would not have qualified to buy a home a short while ago become home owners. Credit and loans are offered to people who are not able to repay them. The relaxed standards in the world of finance and the lack of Congressional oversight were responsible in part for the economic turndown of 2008 that almost collapsed the global economy.

Advertisers are aware of the lure of luxury items. The rich can afford them without a problem. But the other economic classes see the same ads. They may splurge on items



they can't do without and struggle with other responsibilities. While a wealthy woman may have a dozen Chanel jackets, a middle class woman can only afford one but sees it as a symbol of wealth and status. Upper middle-class couples who hire babysitters to pick up their children at school are subjugated by wealthy couples who have live-in nannies. The services that the wealthy receive and the pampering they get set them apart from the other classes.

Analysis

Globalization has had a major impact on the middle class. Many factory and manufacturer workers who made decent incomes in the past have seen their jobs dry up and blow away. In the main they are not educated or trained for other work and factory work is hard to come by, especially at the wages these workers became accustomed to. Electing not to go to college in the 1960s was not unusual because there were so many manufacturing jobs that paid big salaries in the past. But those days are gone and a college degree is now essential for upward mobility.

There is a tale of two immigrants in this section. An immigrant from Greece was able to work himself up in the restaurant industry and become one of the owners of an exclusive bistro in Manhattan. Many of his workers were undocumented immigrants from Mexico. Some sociologists feel that Mexican immigrants, like European immigrants before them, will someday be able to attain the American dream. Others feel that there are too many such immigrants making it more difficult for anyone to stand out. Their lack of fluency in English and living in neighborhoods with others just like themselves will keep them from being part of a homogenous America. European immigrants had more support after arriving, there were fewer of them and they blended in physically with other Americans.

Class is something that no longer is discernible by appearance. Globalization has brought the cost of luxury items down so that classes other than the very wealthy can afford them. Car manufacturers like BMW have developed lower cost models but they still have the same logo as the high-end cars. There are knock-offs of expensive purses and apparel made in China at cut-rate prices.

In answer to this blurring of the lines, even more expensive items are being manufactured for the rich like Bentleys and Hummers and \$400 bottles of wine. The rich are distinguishing themselves even further by being slaves to cosmetic surgery and employing personal assistants like trainers and chefs.

Vocabulary

bauxite, façade, assimilated, barrios, consulate, compatriots, cohesive, monotony, commensurate, impediments, illusory, incumbent, emulating, modernity, vestiges, tangible, prosaic

Chapters 10 through 12

Summary

There is a growing demographic of “relos” – upwardly mobile middle management executives who accept frequent transfers to keep moving up the ladder. Their mid-career salary is around \$100K. Most of these relos are white and in their late thirties to mid-forties. New housing developments with homes from between \$300K to over a million cater to their needs and even exceed them. They have no roots – their kids don’t have a “hometown” to call their own. The average stay between transfers is two to four years.

In Alpharetta, a favorite community of relos transferred to Georgia, 75% were born outside of the state and the vast majority is white. Two-thirds of the adults have a college degree and the average salary is \$100K plus. Republican candidates are supported by the largest percentage of the residents. Families look for houses in the over \$300K range and go to great lengths to find the best schools for their kids.

There are attempts by town officials to create an historic element to the city. But it’s a new community and any such attempt results in just an illusion. House builders in the area create historic illusions to new homes for the same effect, perhaps to give the appearance of tradition and legacy. The people in communities like Alpharetta are class and image conscious and compete to outdo one another. Zoning, city planning and the high cost of property have isolated the relos in this type of community from the lower income. The people are comfortable with one another because everyone shares the same lifestyle and goals.

Nantucket Island off the Cape Cod coast has come to be dominated by the hyper-rich. These super wealthy individuals were the result of the great shift in the economy in the 80s and 90s. Many are brash and bold and not shy about flaunting their wealth as testified by their huge and opulent mansions. They are, in the main, a philanthropic breed that wields their influence in social and political issues. They are not seeking the approval of the bluebloods who were born into money. If they are rejected by a private club, they create a more exclusive one of their own. The island has never had a shortage of rich people with a long history of families like the Vanderbilts, Mellons and duPonts having residences there.

A resident of Nantucket, Nina Chandler Murray, is ironically a relative of the Poor family of Standard & Poor’s but there’s nothing “poor” about them. She feels the wealthy used to be more genteel. Now she sees the new rich as boastful and competitive. Her husband paid \$250,000 to join the golf club years before and he doesn’t even play golf. Many of the newly wealthy like Michael Kittredge, who came from a low-income family and was the founder of the Yankee Candle Company, feel they worked hard and are unapologetic about spending however they see fit. Homes, yachts and club memberships are symbols of wealth.



The biggest change with the wave of the nouveau-riche into Nantucket was the cost of housing. The average cost of a house is \$1.7 million. One waterfront mansion replete with elevator and theaters, sold for \$16 million in 2004. Michael S. Egan, founder of Alamo Rent-a-Car built his own baseball field. Roger Penske, founder of the transportation chain, built a faux lighthouse. There are subtle distinctions between old and new money that are quietly emerging on the island. Where clapboard fishermen's cottages once were are huge mansions with tall hedges to keep out prying eyes. In the quaint downtown area, old money shops in different stores and dines in different restaurants than do the hyper-rich. The hyper-rich are influencing the long-standing culture created by the bluebloods. The most obvious division between the two classes is found in private clubs and recreational pursuits. The new rich created the Great Harbor Yacht Club after being rejected by the old Nantucket Yacht Club. The island was formerly dominated by WASP – white Anglo-Saxon protestants. Today there is diversity among the residents. The island now has a synagogue that boasts a congregation of 250 families.

A notable difference between those of old money and the emerging hyper-rich is in attitude. Those with old money are conservative with their spending worried that they won't be able to replace it. The new rich spend lavishly and do not hesitate to spend millions when throwing a party. Many from the new money class spend millions to set up residency on Nantucket but spend very little time there. While there, many transact business when the opportunity presents itself. Old money believes that business should not be conducted on the island. To old money, buying a Chanel dress does mean a person has class.

The price of housing has all but squeezed out the middle-class. The cost of living is impossible for some to meet. Laborers like gardeners and plumbers are flown in every weekday to provide needed services to the wealthy residents. There is a push by the Nantucket Housing Office to tax eight dollars per square foot for every house over 3,000 square feet. If this legislation is approved, the taxes will be used to build houses for families making under \$120,800 a year.

Data by the New York Times indicates that the rich are far outdistancing those who make hundreds of thousands a year. The very top of the economic ladder is represented by just 0.1 percent of all income earners or 145,000 taxpayers who earn at least \$1.6 million a year. The average income for this group was \$3 million in 2002. It is the fastest growing income group in the U.S. Just 338,400 households in 2001 were worth \$10 million or more. Only 14,000 households are in the hyper-rich 0.01 percentile.

The Bush tax cuts helped to enrich them and widen the economic gap with all other groups. The alternate minimum tax has never been adjusted for inflation. The Bush tax cuts affected the vast majority of those earning between \$100K and \$500K. The tax is structured to have fewer impact on those at the very top part of which is due to the leveling of no taxes on investment gains and dividends.

Some economists see overall growth among all groups. While some of the wealthiest individuals in the nation like Warren Buffet and George Soros warn that the lopsided



concentration of wealth can lead to an aristocracy or an oligarchy and repress economic growth. Alan Greenspan, former Federal Reserve chairman, warned that this economic imbalance is not good for a democracy. Recent studies indicate that there is a decline in upward mobility.

Analysis

There is focus on relos in this section. Relos are employees of usually large corporations who are moved or “relocated” often on their way up the corporate ladder where they can achieve upward mobility to the upper-middle class. Neighborhoods are developed specifically targeting this sub-class of middle class families on the way up. They are often pampered and isolated from the rest of the community. Their children have no feeling of having roots and don’t understand the concept of the term “hometown.” The families give up such things as roots and hometowns in an effort to rise to the next class.

Nantucket Island off the coast of Cape Cod has long been a haven for the wealthy. Most of its inhabitants come from old money – the Vanderbilts, Mellons and Rockefellers. They are wealthy but not boastful or brash. In recent years they have been invaded by a new breed of rich – nouveau riche who were also referred to as the hyper-rich. These people with new money are not shy about spending lavishly and boasting about it. They are unsettling to the genteel rich and they are much richer than old money. It’s been quite an adjustment for the old money folks to be relegated to second place in the rich pool.

The economic gap is ever widening. The rich are getting richer and the middle class is grasping to hang onto where it was a decade ago. The Bush tax cuts of the early 2000s were purported to be beneficial to the middle class and poor but in the end helped the very rich – the .01 percentile – the most. The tax cuts put its imprimatur on the economic gap. Even some of the wealthiest people in America, like Warren Buffet and George Soros, warn that this growing inequity is counter to what a democracy is reputed to be.

Vocabulary

itinerant, nomads, stratified, kindred, emblematic, amenities, entrepreneur, palatial, tectonic, philanthropy, accoutrements, tableau, harbingers, assiduously, innovative, aristocracy, oligarchy

Chapters 13 and 14

Summary

Pop culture – books, movies and TV – teach the populace that America is a homogenous, classless society. It is merely burying the truth – not killing it. The truth is still there under all that glitter – there are social classes and moving between them is in the least, tricky. There is not an overt obsession with class as in days gone by. Class in social encounters still rears its ugly head.

Pre-World War II, the movies and books were constant reminders of class divisions. Much of the entertainment was light but there were darker aspects of fictionalized dramas. In Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, written in 1925, class envy leads to murder. Other novels made the reader fear of waking up at the bottom rung of the economic ladder. Such books were intended to strike fear in the hearts of the middle-class. Many authors of the nineteenth century were obsessed with the rich and didn't mention the poor as if they didn't exist. Some of these writers were describing the world they knew, others were just plain snobs.

In many of these books, the worst thing that could happen to a person was experiencing a fall from economic grace. Undine Spragg, a character in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* arrives in New York from Kansas, hoping to marry her way into high society which she does three times. The message is that new money takes on the characteristics of old money very quickly and that deceit and double standards are at the root of class structure.

John O'Hara concentrated on the lives of the upper and upper middle class pre-World War I to the end of World War II. Why did the lower classes like to read about the wealthy? Voyeurism was part of it as was gratuitous sex. It was a way to learn how the other half lived. There are many contemporary novels about moving into the upper and upper middle classes. There are a number of short stories about the poor, the so-called trailer trash, that have become popular. Most dramas present America as a homogenous middle-class in Anywhere, USA. Modern dramas for the most part focus on emotions, relationships and the psyche as opposed to economics. Richard Price has returned to a Dickensian perspective by writing about the struggles of the poor.

Movies of the thirties featured stories about heiresses. In *It Happened One Night*, a young wealthy woman falls for a regular guy. The movies were formulaic in that the poor character teaches the rich character about life. The message was clear – being rich made one stiff, unhappy and phony. Modern movies like *Meet the Fockers* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* have strayed from that formula. Reality TV has become the way that the common folk can learn about the wealthy or the weird. If fame now counts for more than family name fosters the desire to be classy not necessarily high class.



Angela Whitaker was trying to climb out of a past in which she dropped out in tenth grade and wound up on assistance with five children with almost as many men. She was taking her finals for nursing school. Her life would change; she wouldn't be breaking down on the expressway with an old run-down car. She could buy a new one! She and her kids could move out of public housing. Angela could be a role model for her children. But she had to pass the test.

Angela had never done well at tests but had recently become the only woman in her family with a college degree and, with luck, the first nurse. She was intentionally early for the test. The classroom was filling up when she walked to her assigned computer. The test was a \$256 pass/fail exam into the middle class. She had been born into the working class and after a series of bad choices had slid into the welfare class. Her journey back to the doorstep of the middle class had taken her 12 years. There were many ups and downs and many times she didn't think she could persevere but she had to; it was her last chance. She passed her boards, became a nurse and remarried. Although her two older sons were influenced by the early years in drug-fueled neighborhoods and went down the wrong path, Angela is carefully monitoring her young children and sending them down the right path.

The case of a single mother of six on welfare pulling herself out of the abyss is a compelling one. Sociologists try to define what it would take to create more Angela Whitakers. Professor of sociology at Princeton Sara McLanahan believes Angela's story underscores the importance of hard work and marriage. Walter Allen, professor of sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles, feels she lived a kind of Horatio Alger type of American dream. To be successful, most experts agree that a person needs human support and social capital. A single mother like Angela Whitaker had neither. With her children having multiple fathers, the situation was more complicated.

Marriage may supply the mobility necessary for a woman to escape from poverty but alone it is not enough. Having employment and income is crucial for mobility. Professor of sociology at Harvard William Wilson believes that the government should increase support for low-income women who want to attend college. Black was formerly synonymous with poor and white with middle class. Now the lines are blurred but race continues to impact an individual's ability to succeed. Many blacks do earn less than whites and they have no savings or safety net for the tough times.

Christopher Buckley wrote about his nanny who he claimed as a hopeless snob. She was Canadian and the British class-consciousness was part of her upbringing. He had two good friends -- one was a Rockefeller and the other was from a working class family. Buckley's nanny catered to the rich boy and tried to sabotage his relationship with the poor boy. She thought he was common.

Diane McWhorter grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, which was an extremely class-conscious society. A boyfriend broke up with her because her telephone exchange was not that of the elite. It wasn't a place that offered understanding for her father who was at the time downwardly mobile. The white class was the one class whose exclusivity was perpetual.



David Levering Lewis began to understand the concept of social class as a young man growing up in the segregated south. His family was among the “Negro” families of privilege. Both parents were educators. Although his family was in an elevated position, his father stood up with the NAACP against discriminatory policies of the public school system. Lewis recalls that within the next year, his family had gone from the top to a pariah status for betraying the powers that be.

Analysis

The media and the entertainment industry has taught us that the American landscape is basically homogenous – that Americans live in a classless society. We are loyal and true to the Constitution that proclaimed that all men are created equal. But it’s a myth. There are classes and those born into wealth have a leg up on everyone else. Old movies were obsessed with wealth. Every main character had maids, butlers and chauffeurs. Was this image designed to make people work harder to get to the top or was it created to make people envious? Hollywood had its reasons which are now buried in the past. As time went on, the movie industry compromised by focusing on the middle class.

Movies and books of times gone by seemed to pretend that the poor didn’t exist. Only writers like Charles Dickens who was poor and Horatio Alger who was rich seemed to be concerned about the poor and gave them the hope that they could climb out of their abyss. Books and movies usually portrayed the middle class characters to be much wiser than the wealthy individuals who were often taught lessons by the poorer characters. All of it had little to do with real life but these books and movies left indelible marks in the minds of many Americans about class.

A true success story is discussed in the last chapter. The single mother of six was able to escape the projects of Chicago by focusing on school and climbing up the economic ladder. She was still faced with biases and the nearly unattainable dream of climbing up further. Inter-class marriage also has its obstacles but the example in the book emphasizes how being honest and open can help a difficult transition.

Vocabulary

proletarian, transcending, demarcation, aesthetic, patina, voyeurism, disreputable, implicitly, permeable, apartheid, verboten, apocryphal, pertinacity, prepubescent, narcissism, ameliorating, disparities, traversed, circuitous, telemetry, bourgeois, putative, triage, quandary, stratification



Important People

Della Long

Della is successful but worries about her past catching up with her. When she was 15 she was placed into foster care due to domestic violence in the home. The conditions she lived under in foster care for the nine months she was in the program were deplorable. Joe Justice was a successful lawyer and Della's cousin. When he learned that Della was in foster care, he and his wife, Virginia, decided to take her in. Della experienced another shock when she began living in wealth. For the first time in her life, she could have the right clothes but she didn't know what they were. She was shy and unsure of herself in social situations.

Joe and Virginia saw through her social ineptitude to recognize her intelligence. They encouraged her to attend Berea College, a small liberal arts college that accepted children from low-income families with free tuition. She met Troy Price, her future husband, at the college. She earned a fellowship which allowed them to travel in Europe for a year.

On their return, Della entered law school and Troy did his graduate work in family studies. The couple did well and settled into an upper-class lifestyle. Yet Della still felt like an outsider although she had earned her status. She quickly noticed that her colleagues at the law firm she joined had a much broader general knowledge than she did. They had confidence about their future while she felt stuck in the past. Della was shy and reserved but she was tenacious.

She ultimately broke through the barriers, some self-imposed, before her. Just as her cousin Joe had rescued her, Della took in her brother's children. She is dedicated to seeing that they have every opportunity to succeed in life. She took charge of her cousin's law firm when he retired and has become one of the leading citizens of her community.

Angela Whitaker

Angela grew up in a home without a father-figure. By 15, she was seeking the company of men as a substitute for her missing father. By the time she was 23 she had five children and was separated from her husband. She and her five children lived in a crime-ridden neighborhood in Englewood. Every day was a struggle to feed and care for her children. She took up with men to keep her head above water. They never stayed around very long. An article was written about Angela and her oldest son, Nicholas, in the New York Times entitled, "Children of the Shadows." It garnered a lot of attention for the family. But her family lived in squalor in a tenement in a dangerous neighborhood where drugs were big business.



Angela met Vincent Allen, a young man with a college degree and a future. Their relationship was a solid one. He tried to help Nicholas who had become involved with drug dealers. Vincent encouraged Angela to go back to school. It was a challenge to balance her work, children and school but she felt it was her last chance. Angela kept herself completely focused on her education. She didn't even know that Tupac Shakur was killed or that Bill Clinton was impeached. She felt the other students looked down on her. On a test day, she would usually throw up before class. She did well, even making the dean's list several times. She was overjoyed when she received the thin envelope in the mail telling her she passed the boards. Angela and Allen married soon after. She finished nursing school with academic awards in biology and pharmacology. It was a two-year certificate that made her want more.

Angela had more stress than ever. She had six children by then, seven with Allen's 13-year-old son. She was able to give her youngest child, Christopher, more attention than she had her other children; he qualified for the gifted program. Relatives who knew she had a regular paycheck were always asking for loans. She made more than Allen and had to tiptoe around his ego. Despite the fact that she was making \$83,000 annually, she had very little left at the end of the month. To meet all their obligations both Allen and Angela worked long shifts and overtime, shopped at discount stores and forewent vacations.

Angela still wanted to return to school to obtain her four-year degree but time and money were issues. Her ultimate dream was to buy a house. Bad credit from her previous life still impacted her ability to qualify for loans. Her success came too late for her two oldest boys. Nicholas and Willie both dropped out and got into trouble with the law. Allen, who had become a police detective, even wrote Nicholas up a few times in an effort to turn him around. Nicholas and Willie both had a series of low-paying jobs. Willie was shot twice in incident involving drugs. Angela put her foot down. Neither Nicholas nor Willie would be welcome in her home until they straightened out.

Ishtar was the first of Angela's children to receive a high school diploma. It was a proud day for the family. Angela is carefully watching over her younger children and giving them the best guidance she can for the future. She does not want any of them to turn out like her two older sons. She learned firsthand that a degree or certificate are important papers to have and that they can't be taken away. To keep up with expenses Angela took a second job as a visiting nurse. She never had any doubt that the most important thing in her life was family.

Eric Wanner

Eric Wanner was the president of the Russell Sage Foundation which is a social science research center in New York City. It has published a series of articles on the on the social effects of economic inequality in New York City.



Paul W. Kingston

Professor of Sociology Paul W. Kingston at the University of Virginia points out that there are many rungs to the ladder of success and that wealthy kids start out on a rung higher than poor or middle class kids and therefore are at the advantage for having a successful life.

Michael Hout

Michael Hout, Professor of Sociology at the University of California at Berkeley feels that the belief that the U.S. has become a classless society is a naïve notion because inequality is a growing issue in the culture.

Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin represented the exemplar of upward mobility. He was one of 17 children of a candle maker. The society he lived in was young and raw and open to fluidity. It was a rapid rags-to-riches society, one that was promised by the ideal of democracy. During Franklin's days, there was need for much to be accomplished with little resources and even less competition. Starting out on the ground floor is sometimes a trajectory to success.

Tim Havens

Tim Havens graduated from Brown and is the kind of missionary that the Christian Union hope to recruit. He and his mother had been nervous about his attending the liberal university. He immediately saw signs that there was disrespect for God among the students. He stood apart from the other students because he was on a scholarship and couldn't afford the \$45,000 tuition and because of his morals and the religion that guided him. He had to raise \$36,000 for his final year at Brown. Through his fund-raising and hard work at a summer job at a stone supply warehouse he was able to raise all but \$6,000. He wasn't worried; he returned to school and believed that God would "cover" him. He was able to live at Christian Union quarters as a missionary and had plenty left for his tuition for his last year. He planned to go on to medical school after graduation from Brown.

Andy Blevins

Andy Blevins worked at a supermarket warehouse in Virginia after his first year at college. He was from a poor family. His \$6.75 hourly wage was more than either of his parents ever made. He hadn't been doing well at school and decided to take some time off and continue his work at the warehouse where he could make and save money for his return to school. He spent ten years at the supermarket where he was ultimately



reported to management with an annual income of \$36,000. But the dream of higher education never left Andy. He ultimately re-enrolled and is working toward a four-year degree. He recognized that it's hard to return to school after such a long period away from it and that he has quite a challenge ahead of him.

Juan Peralta

Juan Peralta was an undocumented worker from Mexico when he came to the country 15 years before. He eventually had a wife and family to support. Good jobs were impossible for him to come. Sometimes even menial jobs were difficult to secure. He was fired from a restaurant he had worked at for a number of years for fighting.

But Peralta kept his nose to the grindstone – he had no choice. He was able to earn up to \$600 a week if he worked two jobs. If he was terminated, he knew that he could not claim unemployment. He also could not complain about his slum lord because there was no one to go to for him. His children had health care because they were U.S. citizens but he and his wife had no coverage. If they got sick, they paid for care out of their pockets.

Peralta has few regrets. He gambles and drinks a little wasting time and money that he cannot afford to do. Even after 15 years, Peralta speaks little English and his children who are fluent in English must speak Spanish at home. He doesn't regret his decision because life would have been worse for him in Mexico. He has had a series of jobs as cook and dishwasher and barely makes enough to support his family. He has not deluded himself that he can attain the American dream.

Richard Price

A poor Kentuckian transplanted into a poor area of Cincinnati once told Richard Price that he didn't know he was urban-Appalachian until he read it in the paper. People who are pigeon-holed into socio-economic buckets like "slum" or "ghetto" don't think of themselves like that. They think they live in the world because everyone they know is like them. People have to leave their homeland, turn around and look at it from a far to get a meaningful perspective. Price believes that class awareness focuses on outward appearances and experience rather than affluence. In college at Cornell, Price compared his own exoticness to what he perceived to be the exoticness of others. It was his habit to spin tales about his upbringing so much so that he scared people off. He even acquired a Bronx accent. He abandoned his facades after he became an author and a gentleman at a book signing told him that his daughter who attended Bronx Community College spoke better English than he did.

Linda Chavez

Linda Chavez grew up in the mid-1950s and early 1960s in Denver. She wasn't aware of the class system and didn't know her family was poor. Her father, a house painter,



was out of work most of the winter. They shared a bathroom with another tenant who often used up most of the hot water. From those rugged beginnings, Linda Chavez proved that no one is destined to stay in the “class” they were born into. She now has a large house with four bathrooms and never runs out of water.

Gary B. Becker

Gary B. Becker an economist at the University of Chicago who won a Nobel Prize in economics said in a 1987 speech his belief that mobility in the U.S. was at such a high rate that little advantage was passed down by generations. At the time, other researchers agreed that someday soon the grandchildren of the wealthy and those of the poor would be on equal footing. That theory has pretty much been debunked as wrongheaded and naïve.

Bill Clinton

President Bill Clinton raised income taxes for the wealthiest Americans after his predecessor President Ronald Reagan had signed legislation that benefited that same economic group. Clinton also expanded tax breaks for the poor that Reagan had included in his tax reform.

Horatio Alger

People have trusted in the system for many years. There was faith that the American dream could be attained. It is part of America’s self-image that they proudly present to the world. Horatio Alger’s tales came to represent the kind of rags-to-riches success that was America’s promise. Alger was interested in the plight of the poor but he was not one of them. He was a Harvard man who began his writing career after he was stripped of his Unitarian ministry because of allegations of sexual misconduct.

John T. Casteen

University of Virginia president John T. Casteen believed that the system made false promises to students. They sell the myth that hard work is always rewarded. The reality, Casteen asserted, was that working-class students faced obstacles that wealthy students did not. Casteen has taken steps to provide financing and even free tuition to underprivileged students.



Objects/Places

The New York Times

An article in the New York Times in the spring of 2005 published a series of articles on class in America and the influence that it has on one's potential. The conclusions were that class was difficult to discern and that it can have positive and negative impact on people. While there are ostensibly opportunities for everyone to succeed, the majority of wealthy Americans inherited their wealth.

It was a team of writers and correspondents gathered by New York Times executive editor Bill Keller who did the reporting and wrote the chapters of Class Matters.

Hand of Cards

In a metaphor for class, everyone is given the same start. Like a hand of cards that represent education, income, occupation and wealth. These "cards" are the elements that define a person's class. Starting out, a person is the same class as his parents's class. But along the way, he may strengthen his hand and attain cards that move him to another class.

Amherst

Amherst is among elite colleges that are actively adopting programs for enrolling students from lower-income circumstances. Amherst president Anthony W. Marx cited the loss of talent and leadership that the nation will suffer if capable students are shut out from higher education because of income status.

Goldman-Sachs

The new rich are known to work long hours to climb up the economic ladder. In Manhattan, black limos line up in front of Goldman-Sachs each evening at nine. Workers who are striving to make their mark get a free ride home. Until 1976, the limos only waited until 4:30 until it was decided that 4:30 in the afternoon was actually mid-day at Goldman.

Heart Attacks

The incidence of heart attacks can be used as a gage on how class impacts health. The common risk factors of obesity, smoking, fast-food diets, sedentary lifestyle, high blood pressure and stress occur more frequently among the poor and can all contribute to heart trouble. The working class's lack of good health or any health care at all care



keeps them from taking preventive measures that can improve their health and ward off heart attacks.

Evangelical Students

The growing wealth and advanced education of evangelicals is beginning to have an impact on American culture and politics. Vast mega churches are being built to recruit more believers. The Chronicle of Philanthropy's latest list of the top 400 charities includes the Campus Crusade for Christ which is an evangelical student group. It has raised more money than the Boy Scouts of America, the PBS and Easter Seals. Affluent evangelicals are targeting Ivy League schools for their students. It is a sign that more evangelical students will be graduating from elite universities which will impact business, culture and class.

The Christian Union

Matt Bennett, a 40-year-old former Cornell student, had developed the concept of the Christian Union. He directed the Campus Crusade for Christ at Princeton. He saw a stumbling block in recruiting missionaries because evangelicals were reluctant to minister to northeastern liberal students and evangelical ministries didn't pay much. He decided that evangelical students should have their own on-campus residences and raised money to build these homes. He went around the country fundraising for the project and was surprised to meet evangelicals working in important positions in New York and even on Wall Street.

One of Bennett's goals was to raise enough money to have a "healing ministry" because he firmly believed in faith healing. It was a needed entity on campus because of the rampant alcoholism, drug addiction, depression and overeating. Bennett has gathered thousands of donors for this project. Many believed that when evangelicals made it to the middle and upper class that many of them would abandon their religion for the more acceptable Presbyterian or other Protestant religions. That has been the case; the number of evangelical Christians is increasing. However, evangelicals are more and more matching the education and wealth of traditional Protestants. They believe that it is God's will at work.

Relos

The relo class is a sub-class of the middle and upper-middle classes. They are young families whose breadwinner (usually the man) is transferred frequently by a corporation as he climbs up the corporate ladder. The relos are the inheritors of territory formerly held by the itinerant white-collar employees in industries like pharmaceuticals, electronics and information technology of the 1960s. The relos are part of the increasing segregation among the classes. A Brookings Institute study found that populations are increasing in poor urban areas and in affluent suburbs. It is in middle-class communities

that populations are on the decline. In a survey from March 2002 to March 2003, three million people transferred to different cities, states or countries for employers.

Nantucket Island

Nantucket Island is located off the coast of Cape Cod. It has been an exclusive spot for the very wealthy for decades. In more recent years the old bluebloods have been invaded by a new brash breed – the hyper-rich. These newly wealthy interlopers are much richer than the people of “old money” whose families have lived on the island for a century. The hyper-rich are not shy about spending lavishly are bragging about throwing million dollar parties and having 200’ yachts.

The Bush Tax Cuts

During the administration of President George W. Bush individual taxes were greatly slashed. While the President told the country that the taxes were benefiting the poor and middle class, the biggest benefactors of the cuts were the very wealthy. As a result of these cuts the 400 taxpayers earning a minimum of \$87 million now pay the same percentage as those making between \$50,000-\$100,000.



Themes

What Is Class?

Sociologists have tried to provide a definitive answer to this question. However, class can be an elusive thing. One problem in discussing class is that it means different things to different people. It's a matter of perspective. Most Americans would describe themselves as middle class. And if they fall short on the economic parameters of that class, they probably would answer that they are on their way up the ladder and will get there.

Class can be defined in a variety of ways; it is a tribe, a rank, part of culture and even one's taste and appearance. It is a way in which a person can define himself, a way to attain an identity. When speaking in terms of the upper and upper-middle class, it is a way to exclude others. Class can be mean and in the starkness of daylight can subjugate one human to another. When F. Scott Fitzgerald said that the rich were different, Ernest Hemingway responded that they were different – they had more money. But there are differences beyond just money that separates the classes – although money is always part of class distinction.

In recent times, the lines of the classes have blurred a bit. New classes have been created from the fundamental ones. There are the hyper-rich – those with new money who are richer than the rich. There are also the re-lo class – a middle to upper-class whose family must move from one job and city to another in order to move up the corporate ladder toward that pie in the sky – wealth and position.

The lower-class used to be forgotten in novels and movies that concentrated on the wealthy and upper crust. The working class were the people that others didn't want to look at because in an economic collapse they could find themselves there. The immigration class - especially those who are undocumented - live in the shadows and will probably never climb out of poverty.

Though hard work and dedication can help a person achieve upward mobility on the economic scale, those born into wealth have the best chance for a great education and success in life. They begin their lives on an upper rung that others have to struggle to attain.

Upward Mobility

Mobility is largely a thing of the past. People will generally stay in the class in which they were born, a phenomenon that was not true 30 years ago. The wealthy are winning the competition of getting into the best neighborhoods and signing their kids up for the best schools and seeing the best medical specialists. Despite the odds against mobility, the average American has remained hopeful about moving up the ladder of success. The percentage of those who are positive about their chances has increased over the years.



Each succeeding generation believes their lives are better than their parents and that their children's lives will be better than their own. These same people admit that the road to success is a daunting one for the average person. They believe the deck is stacked in favor of the wealthy who they believe have far too much power.

Experts now believe that early mobility estimates were flawed and overstated. Newer, more sophisticated studies indicate that there is very little movement from one stratum to another during a person's lifetime. Mobility still occurs but it is just more infrequent than it was thought to be. A study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston found that there was less economic mobility in the 90s than there was in the 80s and less in the 80s than experienced in the 70s. Liberals believe that early education is a solution while conservatives believe that mobility is higher than reported.

There is disagreement among experts about what the optimal range of mobility is. Ideally it should be high enough to facilitate movement between economic levels but not too high that it would cloud actual achievement and appear to be random.

Why Class Is Fading

Simple economics is behind the signs that class is a thing of the past. Globalization has made former luxury items like cell phones affordable for everyone. Federal deregulation has caused the costs of plane tickets to decline. Corporations are forced to seek markets other than just the wealthy for their products. BMW has less expensive models than earlier. Cruise ships have cut-rate deals. Martha Stewart has designed a line for K-Mart blue light specials.

People in the upper half of the economic spectrum live as well as the top 5% did 50 years before. Businessmen used to be mainly Republican while today they are trending Democratic. People in all political leanings believe that the shift is due to the focus on social issues like gun control and same-sex marriage which has shifted.

Religion was once an indicator of class. However, the increasing affluence in the South has increased the economic standing of evangelical Christians to middle and upper middle class. In today's world religion is not considered a sign of one's class status. Race is no longer a reliable indicator of one's class since African-Americans have also moved into the middle and upper middle classes. Immigrants who do well have distorted old perceptions of class. Big business has seen a rise in diversity. The number of CEOs who attended Ivy League schools has waned. And Protestants are no longer the linchpin in the world of corporate executives.

Health Care, Longevity and Class

Class is an undeniable factor in health care and longevity. Patients experience different emergency care as well as disparities in the households they return to. Class plays a role in the relationships that patients have with their doctors and in the contours of their



struggles to recover. Wealthy people recovering from serious illnesses can afford in-home and even round-the-clock care.

Statistics bear out that the wealthier an individual is the less likely he is to die of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers especially at early ages. Moving down the economic ladder those with less are more likely to suffer from these conditions. The benefits of advancements made in medicine have largely gone to the wealthy and better educated. They are better-insured and more frequently in circles of people who share news about new medical treatments and health concerns. Smoking has declined among the wealthy and flat lined in the lower class.

Stress in jobs in which a person has little control over his work is higher than that of top executives, something that goes against conventional wisdom. Job insecurity, lack of support by superiors and demanding jobs with low pay are also stress producers. The wealthy have strong social networks to support one another in troubled times. The quality of diets have declined among the under-educated and low-income earners who often neglect their health. Poor neighborhoods do not have the choice of good restaurants and grocery stores that focus on healthy food and fresh produce.

The Immigration Class

Political scientists do not agree on the fate of the millions of Mexican immigrants in America today. They debate whether the Mexicans will realize the classic immigrant success story. Some scholars believe that they will eventually do as well as European immigrants did years before who had also faced many barriers to success. It generally takes three generations to overcome the adversities of immigration. Other experts believe that the Mexicans are suffering more discrimination and have less chance to live the American dream than other immigrants. They are considered by some to be transitory workers because their homeland is relatively close. Their illegal status is the biggest obstacle to success.

A Harvard professor of government fears that Mexicans will not assimilate like other immigrants have because they are creating their own culture. Others believe that through elections, leaders will emerge to make their lives better. Going against them is the lack of fluency in English, prejudice, the absence of low-paying factory jobs and the large gap between Mexican and other children in the classroom. Their illegal status is still the biggest challenge facing them.

The amnesty in 1986 helped many Mexicans raise their income levels. However, the problem has built up again and it's worse than ever. There is huge opposition to general amnesty. Many Americans feel that undocumented immigrants should "get in line" like everyone else. Some undocumented Mexicans pay hundreds and even thousands of dollars to scammers who promise to get them legal papers but of course never do.

In the 1980s, Mexican immigrants were mainly seasonal agricultural workers. But an economic downturn in Mexico sent thousands north to the U.S. seeking year-round

work. The immigrants tended to stay away from home more because of tighter border security which placed emotional stress on thousands of Mexican families. In 2005, there was an upsurge of gang activity among Mexican gangs in New York City. Young Mexican men represent the poorest and least educated demographic in the city.



Styles

Structure

Class Matters is comprised of a series of chapters written by different writers and reporters selected by Bill Keller, then executive editor of the New York Times and by Times editor Soma Golden. The Times had taken on the challenge of probing major issues that faced the country in the past by unleashing a team of reporters and writers to dig up the facts. They had addressed the problems of poverty and racism. With Class Matters, they obviously have taken on an issue that is not as “in your face” as race and poverty. But as the title suggest, classism exists, it does have ramifications and it does matter.

Keller explains the project in the Introduction and how it was developed so that it would result in in-depth reporting and hopefully in conclusions that would help society contend with classism. Economics reporter David Leonhardt was assigned to research the question of mobility and Janny Scott a news reporter looked into the impact that class has on health, immigration and child rearing. A team of writers and reporters was gathered to delve further into class and its significance on Americana.

Each chapter is a stand-alone report only connected by the main topic of class. Subjects covered include the impact of class on health, education, immigration and upward mobility as well as the evolution of sub-classes such as relos and the hyper-rich. The reports are back up by interviews with sociologists, political scientists and other experts in the field as well as people who were the benefactors or victims of classism. The resources that the writers used are contained in “Internet Resources” following the last chapter of the book.

Perspective

In the introduction by Bill Keller who was the executive editor of the New York Times at the time of the publication of this book, explains that there were different contributors to each of the book’s chapters. The Times has had a long tradition of taking on big, complicated subjects with a team of writers to dig in and find the facts. In 2000 they took on the subject of race and in 1993 it was poverty.

In 2003 the Gray Lady decided to focus on the subject of class. It was a formidable topic that promised to be a daunting challenge for the writers. Addressing this topic was the brainchild of Times editor Soma Golden who convinced Keller that class had huge impact on the success and failure of all Americans and that it should be explored.

Writer David Leonhardt concentrated on the economics of class while Janny Scott looked at the impact that class had on health, immigration and child rearing. With some of the leg work accomplished, the Times gathered a team of outstanding and dedicated reporters and writers and unleashed them on the subject of class.

Tone

Class Matters was written by a team of New York Times writers and reporters selected by executive editor Bill Keller and chief editor Soma Golden. Being writers and reporters, the perspective of the chapters each of them wrote is from the facts uncovered and the testimonials of those they interviewed. Although there is the hint of emotion and concern that emerges in the stories especially the harrowing accounts of the struggles of the poor and undocumented immigrants... because writers are human.

Each of the chapters written by the various writers are obviously thoroughly research and all-inclusive. The writers are careful to include both sides of each issue. They provide the thoughts and direct quotes of scholars and professors of sociology and political science. From these comments, the writers make it obvious that there are not real conclusions among these experts. For example, some sociologists feel that Mexican immigrants will eventually emerge after their voice become stronger and leaders emerge through elections. However, others disagree and believe that the Mexican immigrant experience will not follow the classic story of the immigrant in America – that they will not climb the economic ladder as did other who also faced huge obstacles to becoming part of the homogenous culture like the Italians, the Greeks and the Polish.

In the main book the writers presented an unbiased look at class in today's world through the lens of religion, bias, economics, education and family status. Moving from one chapter to the next there may be conflicting conclusions because each chapter is written by a different writer who interviewed different people.



Quotes

...class is still a powerful force in American life. Over the past three decades, it has come to play a greater, not lesser, role in important ways.”

-- Author (chapter 1 paragraph 2)

Importance: The author makes the point that class is playing an increasingly growing role in American society.

I think the system is as fair as you can make it. I don't think life is necessarily fair. But if you persevere, you can overcome adversity. It has to do with a person's willingness to work hard, and I think it's always been that way.”

-- Ernie Frazier (chapter 1 paragraph 17)

Importance: Ernie Frazier is a 65-year-old real estate investor who thinks that even though the system is unfair that one can succeed through hard work.

There is not one decisive break saying that the people below this all have this common experience. Each step is equal-sized. Sure, for the people higher up this ladder, their kids are more apt to get more education, better health insurance. But that doesn't mean there are classes.”

-- Paul Kingston (chapter 1 paragraph 24)

Importance: Paul Kingston, Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia, expresses opinion that there are no classes but that the children of wealthy people have a leg up on those from middle class or poor families.

We're creating disparities. It's almost as if it's transforming health, which used to be like fate, into a commodity. Like the distribution of BMWs or goat cheese.”

-- Bruce G. Link (chapter 2 paragraph 12)

Importance: Bruce G. Link, professor of epidemiology and socio-medical sciences at Columbia University, describe the disparity in health care between the educated wealthy and undereducated low wage earner.

Marriages that cross class boundaries may not present as obvious a set of challenges as those that cross the lines of race or nationality. But in a quiet way, people who marry across class lines are also moving outside their comfort zones, into the uncharted territory of partners with a different level of wealth and education, and often, a different set of assumptions about things like manners, food, child-rearing, gift-giving, and how to spend vacations.”

-- Author (chapter 3 paragraph 9)

Importance: People who marry someone from a different class than their own find that there is more than “love” to a relationship. Many societal differences can cause a barrier due to the diverse experiences they have had in life up to that point.



Going to college has become the norm throughout most of the United States, even in many places where college was once considered an exotic destination – places like Chilhowie, an Appalachian hamlet...”

-- Author (chapter 6 paragraph 8)

Importance: The author makes the point that while college attendance is on the increase so are the number of dropouts. The dropout rate in the 1960s was one in five; in current times it has increased to one in three. Perhaps not everyone is college material.

An old joke that Harvard’s idea of diversity is putting a rich kid from California in the same room as a rich kid from New York is truer today than ever; Harvard has more students from California than it did in years past and just as big a share of upper-income students.”

-- Author (chapter 6 paragraph 17)

Importance: The “joke” that Harvard is diverse is exposed by the recruitment of rich kids from all over the country. Perhaps because of the large percentage of non-grads at schools that recruit poor students makes Harvard and other elite schools gun-shy about recruiting students from the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder.

People like having stuff, and stuff is good for people. One thing modernity brought with it was all kinds of identities, the ability for people to choose who you want to be, how you want to decorate yourself, what kind of lifestyle you want. And what you consume cannot be separated from that.”

-- Thomas C. O’Guinn (chapter 9 paragraph 23)

Importance: Professor of advertising at the University of Illinois Thomas C. O’Guinn discusses the trappings of wealth that everyone has access to now. What one presents to the outside world is an image that can be bought. O’Guinn understands the power of advertising in a world in which everyone likes “having stuff.”

What is the American dream? It’s to have a house of your own, the biggest house you can afford, on the biggest lot you can afford, with a great school for your kids, a nice park to spend Saturday afternoon with your kids in, and deep in amenities that get into the trade-offs with traffic.”

-- Karen Handel (chapter 10 paragraph 21)

Importance: Karen Handel, chairwoman of the Fulton County Commission in Alpharetta, Georgia, describes one version of the American dream. For the poor, it usually stays just a dream.

The island, he said, is rapidly dividing into two types of people: ‘the haves and the have-mores.’”

-- Michael J. Kittredge (chapter 11 paragraph 10)



Importance: Michael J. Kittredge, one of the super-rich on Nantucket, describes the class order on the island.

When F. Scott Fitzgerald pronounced that the very rich 'are different from you and me,' Ernest Hemingway's famously dismissive response was: 'Yes, they have more money.' Today he might well add: much, much, much more money."

-- F. Scott Fitzgerald/Ernest Hemingway/Author (chapter 12 paragraph 1)

Importance: This underscores how old money is being far surpassed by the nouveau-riche.

On television and in the movies now, and even in the pages of novels, people tend to dwell in a classless, homogenized American Never-Never Land. This place is an upgrade, but not a drastic one, from the old neighborhood where Beaver, Ozzie and Harriet, and Donna Reed used to life..."

-- Author (chapter 13 paragraph 1)

Importance: The author makes the point that the media and entertainment has painted a picture of American life in its ideal – homogenized and without bias or class. But, of course, that is not reality; it's fantasy.



Topics for Discussion

1

What are the three classes of American society? Why do some say that the classes are disappearing? How has the very wealthy responded to this blurring of the lines?

2

What is upward mobility? Why do some scholars feel that making upward mobility too fluid would be a disservice to those who achieved it and to the culture in general?

3

Define what “need blind” and “need conscious” college admission policies are. Which policy did the state of Virginia decide to follow? How can it be applied?

4

What ramifications face a university who admit a large number of low-income students? How do SAT scores play a role in the admission of wealthy versus low-income students?

5

What is the “re-lo” class? Describe the typical career, lifestyle and wealth of a re-lo.

6

What is the origin of the hyper-rich on Nantucket Island in Cape Cod? How have they carved out their own world? How have the two classes that inhabit the island been described?

7

What barriers do undocumented immigrants face in the United States? Of those challenges, which is the biggest obstacle that lies before them? What various theories are advanced about their chances to attain the American dream by sociologists and political scientists?



8

How has the media and the entertainment world impacted the perception of class in America? How has that changed over the decades?

9

How does the health care that the rich vary with that of the middle and lower classes? Why are there differences?

10

How might religion impact class in America? What is the Christian Union and what goals does it have?