

playing a game of fashion, was perhaps less a cause of the relative decline of the Vanderbilt fortune than the down-swing of the railroad economy. Cf. Wayne Andrews, *The Vanderbilt Legend*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1941. George D. Widener, son of P. A. B. Widener, became a stockholder in 23 companies and was president and director of 18. He was an active type of economic man in that he was involved in 1902 in a suit for fraud for praising a weak company so that he could sell his stock in it and get out before it failed. Cf. *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, 2 April 1912 and *Philadelphia Press*, 23 September 1902.

Of the modern-day family managers there is, for instance, Vincent Astor – the great-grandson of John Jacob Astor – who may be an enthusiast for yachting and automobile racing, but he disappointed society editors in their search for the idle life of scandal when, at the death of his father, he quit Harvard and, at the age of 21, began to improve the value of the Astor land in New York City. Young Vincent changed the management policy by abolishing many tenements and attempting to bring middle and upper-class clientele to Astor land, thus, of course, increasing its value to him. Cf. Harvey O'Connor, *The Astors*, New York: Knopf, 1941, p. 336. And the daily decisions of John D. Rockefeller III involve the disposition of millions of dollars; he has a full-time job for which he was trained: philanthropic work on an international scope. Moreover, he has been active as a director in many American corporations, including the New York Life Insurance Company and the Chase National Bank.

- 18 See *The New York Times*, 1 August 1954, pp. 1, 7.
- 19 On the vicious circle of poverty and the withdrawal from success, see Mills, *White Collar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 259 ff.
- 20 See Myers, *History of the Great American Fortunes*, pp. 634 ff.; Lewis Corey, *The House of Morgan* (New York: G. Howard Watt, 1930); and John K. Winkler, *Morgan the Magnificent* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1930).
- 21 See Harvey O'Connor, *How Mellon Got Rich* (New York: International Pamphlets, 1933) and *Mellon's Millions* (New York: John Day, 1933); Frank R. Denton, *The Mellons of Pittsburgh* (New York: Newcomen Society of England, American Branch, 1948); and *The New York Times*, 30 August 1937, p. 16.
- 22 Quoted in *Time*, 1 June 1953, p. 38.
- 23 See *The New York Times*, 2 February 1944, p. 15.
- 24 See *The New York Times*, 7 June 1948, p. 19.
- 25 See Wallace Davis, *Corduroy Road* (Houston: Anson Jones Press, 1951).
- See also the testimony of James D. Stietenroth, former chief financial officer of the Mississippi Power & Light Co., in regard to the Dixon-Yates contract, reported in the Interim Report of the Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary on Antitrust and Monopoly on Investigation Into Monopoly in the Power Industry, *Monopoly in the Power Industry*, U.S. Senate, 83d Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955), pp. 12 ff.
- 26 Cf. Frederick Lewis Allen, *The Lords of Creation*, p. 85.

Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There

David Brooks

David Brooks is a senior editor at the *Weekly Standard*, a contributing editor at *Newsweek*, a correspondent for the *Atlantic Monthly* and a commentator on National Public Radio and the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*. He was formerly a reporter and editor at the *Wall Street Journal*. He writes often about the intersection of culture and economics in American life and is the author of the book *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There*.

Without much fuss or public discussion, the admissions officers wrecked the WASP establishment. The story at Harvard, told by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray in the relatively uncontroversial first chapter of *The Bell Curve*, epitomizes the tale. In 1952 most freshmen at Harvard were products of the same WASP bastions that popped up on the *Times* weddings page: the prep schools in New England (Andover and Exeter alone contributed 10 percent of the class), the East Side of Manhattan, the Main Line of Philadelphia, Shaker Heights in Ohio, the Gold Coast of Chicago, Grosse Pointe of Detroit, Nob Hill in San Francisco, and so on. Two-thirds of all applicants were admitted. Applicants whose fathers had gone to Harvard had a 90 percent admission rate. The average verbal SAT score for the incoming men was 583, good but not stratospheric. The average score across the Ivy League was closer to 500 at the time.

Then came the change. By 1960 the average verbal SAT score for incoming freshmen at Harvard was 678, and the math score was 695 – these are stratospheric scores. The average Harvard freshman in 1952 would have placed in the bottom 10 percent of the Harvard freshman class of 1960. Moreover, the 1960 class was drawn from a much wider socioeconomic pool. Smart kids from Queens or Iowa or California, who wouldn't have thought of applying to Harvard a decade earlier, were applying and getting accepted. Harvard had transformed itself from a school catering mostly to the northeastern social elite to a high-powered school reaching more of the brightest kids around the country. And this transformation was replicated in almost all elite schools. At Princeton in 1962, for example, only 10 members of the 62-man football team had attended private prep schools. Three decades earlier every member of the Princeton team was a prep school boy.

Why did this happen? Nicholas Lemann provides the guts of the answer in his book *The Big Test*. It's a remarkable story, because in many ways the WASP elite destroyed itself, and did so for the highest of motives. James Bryant Conant was president of Harvard after World War II, and so sat at the pinnacle of the Protestant Establishment. Nonetheless, Conant was alarmed by the thought that America might develop a hereditary aristocracy consisting of exactly the sort of well-bred young men he was training in Cambridge. Conant dreamed of replacing this elite with a new elite, which would be based on merit. He didn't envision a broad educated populace making democratic decisions. Rather, he hoped to select out a small class of Platonic guardians who would be trained at elite universities and who would then devote themselves selflessly to public service.

To help find these new guardians, Conant enlisted Henry Chauncey, a graduate of Groton and Harvard, an Episcopalian, a descendant of Puritan stock. Chauncey didn't have Conant's grand vision of what society should look like, but he did have a more distilled passion — for standardized tests and the glorious promise of social science. Chauncey was an enthusiast for tests the way other technoenthusiasts have fallen in love with the railroad, or nuclear power, or the Internet. He believed tests were a magnificent tool that would enable experts to measure people's abilities and manage society on a more just and rational basis. Chauncey went on to become the head of the Educational Testing Service, which created the Scholastic Aptitude Test. And so to a degree rare among social engineers, he was actually able to put his enthusiasm into practice. As Lemann observes, we are now living in a world created by Conant and Chauncey's campaign to replace their own elite with an elite based on merit, at least as measured by aptitude tests.

Conant and Chauncey came along during an era uniquely receptive to their message. The American intellectual class

has probably never been so sure of itself, before or since. Sociologists, psychologists, and macro-economists thought they had discovered the tools to solve personal and social problems. Freud's writings, which promised to explain the inner workings of the human mind, were at the peak of their influence. The McCarthy controversy mobilized segments of the intellectual class. The launching of Sputnik made educational rigor seem vital to the national interest. Finally, John F. Kennedy brought intellectuals into the White House, elevating intellectuals into the social stratosphere (at least many of them thought so).

Conant and Chauncey were not the only academics who rose up to assert intellectual values against those of the WASP Establishment. In 1956 C. Wright Mills wrote *The Power Elite*, a direct assault on the establishment if ever there was one. In 1959 Jacques Barzun wrote *The House of Intellect*. In 1963 Richard Hofstadter wrote *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, a sprawling, confident broadside by an academic superstar against the "practical" classes, both rich and poor. In 1964 Digby Baltzell, of the University of Pennsylvania, wrote *The Protestant Establishment*, a book that introduced the term WASP and detailed the establishment's intellectual and moral failings. Though largely sympathetic to WASP ideals, he argued that the WASP elite had become a self-satisfied caste that was unwilling to bring in enough new talent to replenish the ranks. By and large, these academics wanted the universities to serve as meritocratic and intellectual hothouses, not as finishing schools for the social elite. Faculty members demanded that admissions officers look at the legacy applications more critically.

The WASPs had fended off challenges to their cultural hegemony before, either by simply ignoring them or by counterattacking. The first half of the century brought what historian Michael Knox Beran calls the "risorgimento of the well-to-do." Families like the Roosevelts adopted a tough, manly ethos in order to restore vigor and self-

confidence to the East Coast elite and so preserve its place atop the power structure. In the 1920s, sensing a threat to the "character" of their institutions, Ivy League administrators tightened their official or unofficial Jewish quotas. Nicholas Murray Butler at Columbia reduced the proportion of Jews at his school from 40 to 20 percent in two years. At Harvard, President A. Lawrence Lowell diagnosed a "Jewish Problem" and also enforced quotas to help solve it. But by the late fifties and early sixties, the WASPs could no longer justify such discrimination to others or to themselves. John F. Kennedy's chief of protocol, Angier Biddle Duke, was forced to resign from his favorite men's club, the Metropolitan Club in Washington, because it was restricted.

History, as Pareto once remarked, is the graveyard of aristocracies, and by the late fifties and early sixties the WASP Establishment had no faith in the code — and the social restrictions — that had sustained it. Maybe its members just lost the will to fight for their privileges. As the writer David Frum theorizes, it had been half a century since the last great age of fortune making. The great families were into at least their third genteel generation. Perhaps by then there wasn't much vigor left. Or perhaps it was the Holocaust that altered the landscape by discrediting the sort of racial restrictions that the Protestant Establishment was built on.

In any case, in 1964 Digby Baltzell astutely perceived the crucial trends. "What seems to be happening," he wrote in *The Protestant Establishment*, "is that a scholarly hierarchy of campus communities governed by the values of admissions committees is gradually supplanting the class hierarchies of local communities which are still governed by the values of parents. . . . Just as the hierarchy of the Church was the main avenue of advancement for the talented and ambitious youth from the lower orders during the medieval period, and just as the business enterprise was responsible for the nineteenth century rags-to-riches dream (when we were predominantly an Anglo-

Saxon country), so the campus community has now become the principal guardian of our traditional opportunitarian ideals."

The campus gates were thus thrown open on the basis of brains rather than blood, and within a few short years the university landscape was transformed. Harvard, as we've seen, was changed from a school for the well-connected to a school for brainy strivers. The remaining top schools eliminated their Jewish quotas and eventually dropped their restrictions on women. Furthermore, the sheer numbers of educated Americans exploded. The portion of Americans going to college had been rising steadily throughout the 20th century, but between 1955 and 1974 the growth rate was off the charts. Many of the new students were women. Between 1950 and 1960 the number of female students increased by 47 percent. It then jumped by an additional 168 percent between 1960 and 1970. Over the following decades the student population kept growing and growing. In 1960 there were about 2,000 institutions of higher learning. By 1980 there were 3,200. In 1960 there were 235,000 professors in the United States. By 1980 there were 685,000.

Before this period, in other words, the WASP elites dominated prestige education and made up a significant chunk of all the college-educated population. By the end of this period, the well-bred WASPs no longer dominated the prestige schools and they made up just an infinitesimal slice of the educated class. The elite schools had preserved their status. The proportion of Ivy League graduates in *Who's Who* has remained virtually constant throughout the past 40 years. But the schools maintained their dominance by throwing over the mediocrities from the old WASP families and bringing in less well connected meritocrats.

The rapid expansion of the educated class was bound to have as profound an impact on America as rapid urbanization has had on other countries at other moments in history. By the mid-1960s the

through which
loosening restrictions

middle-aged WASPs still wielded some authority in the corporate world. They still possessed enormous social and political prestige, not to mention financial capital. But on campus they had been overrun. Imagine now you are a young meritocrat, the child of, say, a pharmacist and an elementary school teacher, accepted to a prestigious university in the mid-sixties. You are part of a huge cohort of education arrivistes. Your campus still has some of the aristocratic trappings of the WASP culture, though it is by now a little embarrassed by them. And as you look out into the world, you see the last generation of the Old Guard — still holding key jobs and social authority. They are in the positions of power and prestige you hope to occupy. But they are still living by an ethos you consider obsolete, stifling, and prejudiced. Among other things, that ethos, which emphasizes birth and connections, blocks your ascent. Naturally, you and your many peers, even if you do not think about it deliberately, are going to try to finish off the old regime. You are going to try to destroy what is left of the WASP ethos and replace it with your own ethos, which is based on individual merit.

More broadly, you are going to try to change the social character of the nation. The rise of the meritocrats produced a classic revolution of rising expectations. Tocqueville's principle of revolutions proved true: as social success seems more possible for a rising group, the remaining hindrances seem more and more intolerable. The social revolution of the late sixties was not a miracle or a natural disaster, the way it is sometimes treated by writers on the left and right. It was a logical response to the trends of the crucial years between 1955 and 1965. The components of elite status were due to change. The culture of upscale America was due for a revolution.

The Sixties

"How's our award-winning scholar?" one of the overbearing adults asks the Dustin

Hoffman character, Ben, as he comes down-stairs in the first scene in *The Graduate*. Mike Nichols's movie, which was the top money-making film of 1968, is about an introspective college graduate who has just come back to a rich white suburb in California after finishing a lavishly successful stint at an East Coast school. He realizes, to his horror, the immense cultural gulf between his parents and himself. As Baltzell had anticipated, campus values displaced parental values. In that famous first scene, Ben is cooed over and passed around like a conquering hero by a group of gladhanding, loud-talking WASP elders. Hoffman's face is an oasis of calm amid a riot of Dale Carnegie bonhomie. There's plenty of cocktail party jollity. His mother starts reading out his college accomplishments from the class yearbook. And one of the smug moguls pulls him out to the pool, extends a cloak of self-importance, and tells him that the future is in plastics — a scene that brutally exemplifies the cultural decay of the old order. Millionaire moviemakers tend to be merciless when depicting millionaire businessmen and lawyers, and *The Graduate* casts an un pitying eye on the life of the Protestant elite: the lavish wet bars, the monogrammed golf clothes, the gold watches, the white furniture against white walls, the shallowness and hypocrisy, and in the form of Mrs. Robinson, their lives of cocktail-soaked desperation. Ben doesn't know what he wants out of life, but he is certain he doesn't want that.

In Charles Webb's original novel, the character of Ben Braddock is a six-foot-tall, blue-eyed blond. Mike Nichols first imagined Robert Redford in the role. That casting would have better explained why Mrs. Robinson is sexually attracted to Ben, but it probably would have ruined the picture's prospects. Who wants to identify with a mopey, blue-eyed, blond Adonis? But Hoffman is a sensitive soul, not an Aryan Dick Diver type. So he perfectly represented all the new ethnic strivers who were suddenly pouring through the colleges, facing

New educated youth fixed of old WASP ethos

life in the affluent suburbs, and finding it arid and stifling.

The educated-class rebellion we call "the sixties" was about many things, some of them important and related to the Civil Rights movement and Vietnam, some of them entirely silly, and others, like the sexual revolution, overblown (actual sexual behavior was affected far more by the world wars than by the Woodstock era). But at its core the cultural radicalism of the sixties was a challenge to conventional notions of success. It was not only a political effort to dislodge the establishment from the seats of power. It was a cultural effort by the rising members of the privileged classes to destroy whatever prestige still attached to the WASP lifestyle and the WASP moral code, and to replace the old order with a new social code that would celebrate spiritual and intellectual ideals. The sixties radicals rejected the prevailing definition of accomplishment, the desire to keep up with the Joneses, the prevailing idea of social respectability, the idea that a successful life could be measured by income, manners, and possessions. The educated baby boomers of the 1960s wanted to take the things the Protestant elite regarded as high status and make them low status. The demographic shifts of the 1950s led to the cultural conflicts of the 1960s. Or, as the endlessly impressive Digby Baltzell prophesied in *The Protestant Establishment*: "The economic reforms of one generation tend to produce status conflicts in the next."

What exactly would the sixties student leaders hate about the *New York Times* weddings page of 1959? It's worth making a short list here because the habits of thought that were established when the educated class was in its radical stage continue to influence its thinking now in its hour of supremacy. The student radicals would have detested the couples displayed on the weddings page for what was *perceived* to be their conformity, their formality, their traditionalism, their carefully defined gender roles, their ancestor worship, their privilege, their

unabashed elitism, their unreflective lives, their self-satisfaction, their reticence, their contented affluence, their coldness.

We'll go into greater detail about all these cultural shifts in the pages that follow, but to put it bluntly, the radicals of the 1960s favored bohemian self-expression and despised the earlier elite for its arid self-control. And their effort to tear down the old customs and habits of the previous elite was not achieved without social cost. Old authorities and restraints were delegitimized. There was a real, and to millions of people catastrophic, breakdown in social order, which can be measured in the stunning rise in divorce, crime, drug use, and illegitimacy rates.

And Then Comes Money

The hardest of the hard-core sixties radicals believed the only honest way out was to reject the notion of success altogether: drop out of the rat race, retreat to small communities where real human relationships would flourish. But that sort of utopianism was never going to be very popular, especially among college grads. Members of the educated class prize human relationships and social equality, but as for so many generations of Americans before them, achievement was really at the core of the sixties grads' value system. They were meritocrats, after all, and so tended to define themselves by their accomplishments. Most of them were never going to drop out or sit around in communes smelling flowers, raising pigs, and contemplating poetry. Moreover, as time went by, they discovered that the riches of the universe were lying at their feet.

At first, when the great hump of baby boom college graduates entered the workforce, having a college degree brought few financial rewards or dramatic life changes. As late as 1976, the labor economist Richard Freeman could write a book called *The Overeducated American*, arguing that higher education didn't seem to be paying off in the marketplace. But the information

educated wanted accomplish merit

age kicked in, and the rewards for education grew and grew. In 1980, according to labor market specialist Kevin Murphy of the University of Chicago, college graduates earned roughly 35 percent more than high school graduates. But by the mid-1990s, college graduates were earning 70 percent more than high school graduates, and those with graduate degrees were earning 90 percent more. The wage value of a college degree had doubled in 15 years.

The rewards for intellectual capital have increased while the rewards for physical capital have not. That means that even liberal arts majors can wake up one day and find themselves suddenly members of the top-income brackets. A full professor at Yale who renounced the capitalist rat race finds himself making, as of 1999, \$113,100, while a professor at Rutgers pulls in \$103,700 and superstar professors, who become the object of academic bidding wars, now can rake in more than \$300,000 a year. Congressional and presidential staffers top out at \$125,000 (before quintupling that when they enter the private sector), and the journalists at national publications can now count on six-figure salaries when they hit middle age, not including lecture fees. Philosophy and math majors head for Wall Street and can make tens of millions of dollars from their quantitative models. America has always had a lot of lawyers, and now the median income for that burgeoning group is \$72,500, while income for the big-city legal grinds can reach seven figures. And super-students still flood into medicine — three-quarters of private practitioners net more than \$100,000. Meanwhile, in Silicon Valley there are more millionaires than people. In Hollywood television scriptwriters make \$11,000 to \$13,000 a week. And in New York top magazine editors, like Anna Wintour of *Vogue*, make \$1 million a year, which is slightly more than the head of the Ford Foundation. And these dazzling incomes flow not only to the baby boomers, who might still find them surprising, but to

all the subsequent generations of college graduates as well, most of whom have never known a world without \$4 million artists' lofts, \$350-a-night edgy hotels, avant-garde summer homes, and the rest of the accoutrements of the countercultural plutocracy.

The information age has produced entirely new job categories, some of which seem like practical jokes, though you wouldn't know it from the salaries: creativity officer, chief knowledge officer, team spirit coordinator. Then there are the jobs that nobody dreamed of in high school: Web page designer, patent agent, continuity writer, foundation program officer, talk show booker, and on and on. The economy in this era is such that oddballs like Oliver Stone become multimillionaire moguls and slouchy dropouts like Bill Gates get to run the world. Needless to say, there are still gypsy scholars scraping by while looking for a tenure-track position, and there are still poor saps in the publishing industry parlaying their intelligence into obscenely small paychecks. But the whole thrust of the information age has been to reward education and widen the income gap between the educated and the uneducated. Moreover, the upper middle class has grown from a small appendage of the middle class into a distinct demographic hump populated largely by people with fancy degrees. Within a few years, barring a severe economic downturn, there will be 10 million American households with incomes over \$100,000 a year, up from only 2 million in 1982. Consider the cultural and financial capital of that large group, and you begin to appreciate the social power of the upper middle class. Many of the members of the educated elite didn't go out hungry for money. But money found them. And subtly, against their will, it began to work its way into their mentality.

The members of the educated elite find they must change their entire attitude first toward money itself. When they were poor students, money was a solid. It came in a chunk with every paycheck, and they would gradually chip little bits off to pay the bills.

They could sort of feel how much money they had in their bank account, the way you can feel a pile of change in your pocket. But as they became more affluent, money turned into a liquid. It flows into the bank account in a prodigious stream. And it flows out just as quickly. The earner is reduced to spectator status and is vaguely horrified by how quickly the money is flowing through. He or she may try to stem the outward flow in order to do more saving. But it's hard to know where to erect the dam. The money just flows on its own. And after a while one's ability to stay afloat through all the ebbs and flows becomes a sign of accomplishment in itself. The big money stream is another aptitude test. Far from being a source of corruption, money turns into a sign of mastery. It begins to seem deserved, natural. So even former student radicals begin to twist the old left-wing slogan so that it becomes: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his abilities.

The educated elites not only earn far more money than they ever thought they would but now occupy positions of enormous responsibility. We're by now all familiar with modern-day executives who have moved from SDS to CEO, from LSD to IPO. Indeed, sometimes you get the impression the Free Speech movement produced more corporate executives than Harvard Business School.

What's more amazing is the growth of lucrative industries in which everybody involved is a member of the educated class. Only about 20 percent of the adult population of America possesses a college degree, but in many large cities and suburban office parks, you can walk from office to office, for mile upon mile, and almost everybody in the place will have a sheepskin in the drawer. Educated elites have taken over much of the power that used to accrue to sedate old WASPs with dominating chins. Economists at the International Monetary Fund jet around the world reshaping macro-economic policies. Brainiacs at McKinsey & Company swoop down on corporate

offices run by former college quarterbacks and issue reports on how to merge or restructure.

The educated elites have even taken over professions that used to be working class. The days of the hard-drinking blue-collar journalist, for example, are gone forever. Now if you cast your eye down a row at a Washington press conference, it's: Yale, Yale, Stanford, Emory, Yale, and Harvard. Political parties, which were once run by immigrant hacks, are now dominated by communications analysts with Ph.D.s. If you drive around the old suburbs and follow the collarless-shirt bohemians home from their organic fruit stands, you notice they have literally moved into the houses of the old stockbroker elite. They are sleeping in the old elite's beds. They are swamping the old elite's institutions. As the novelist Louis Auchincloss summarized it, "The old society has given way to the society of accomplishment." Dumb good-looking people with great parents have been displaced by smart, ambitious, educated, and antiestablishment people with scuffed shoes.

The Anxieties of Abundance

Over the past 30 years, in short, the educated class has gone from triumph to triumph. They have crushed the old WASP elite culture, thrived in an economy that lavishly rewards their particular skills, and now sit atop many of the same institutions they once railed against. But all this has created a gnawing problem. How do they make sure they haven't themselves become self-satisfied replicas of the WASP elite they still so forcefully denounce?

Those who want to win educated-class approval must confront the anxieties of abundance: how to show — not least to themselves — that even while climbing toward the top of the ladder they have not become all the things they still profess to hold in contempt. How to navigate the shoals between their affluence and their self-respect. How to reconcile their success

become what they tried to destroy?

with their spirituality, their elite status with their egalitarian ideals. Socially enlightened members of the educated elite tend to be disturbed by the widening gap between rich and poor and are therefore made somewhat uncomfortable by the fact that their own family income now tops \$80,000. Some of them dream of social justice yet went to a college where the tuition costs could feed an entire village in Rwanda for a year. Some once had "Question Authority" bumper stickers on their cars but now find themselves heading start-up software companies with 200 people reporting to them. The sociologists they read in college taught that consumerism is a disease, and yet now they find themselves shopping for \$3,000 refrigerators. They took to heart the lessons of *Death of a Salesman*, yet now find themselves directing a sales force. They laughed at the plastics scene in *The Graduate* but now they work for a company that manufactures . . . plastic. Suddenly they find themselves moving into a suburban house with a pool and uncomfortable about admitting it to their bohemian friends still living downtown.

Though they admire art and intellect, they find themselves living amidst commerce, or at least in that weird hybrid zone where creativity and commerce intersect. This class is responsible for more yards of built-in bookshelf space than any group in history. And yet sometimes you look at their shelves and notice deluxe leather-bound editions of all those books arguing that success and affluence is a sham: *Babbitt*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Power Elite*, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. This is an elite that has been raised to oppose elites. They are affluent yet opposed to materialism. They may spend their lives selling yet worry about selling out. They are by instinct antiestablishmentarian yet somehow sense they have become a new establishment.

The members of this class are divided against themselves, and one is struck by how much of their time is spent earnestly wrestling with the conflict between their

reality and their ideals. They grapple with the trade-offs between equality and privilege ("I believe in public schooling, but the private school just seems better for my kids"), between convenience and social responsibility ("These disposable diapers are an incredible waste of resources, but they are so easy"), between rebellion and convention ("I know I did plenty of drugs in high school, but I tell my kids to Just Say No").

But the biggest tension, to put it in the grandest terms, is between worldly success and inner virtue. How do you move ahead in life without letting ambition wither your soul? How do you accumulate the resources you need to do the things you want without becoming a slave to material things? How do you build a comfortable and stable life for your family without getting bogged down in stultifying routine? How do you live at the top of society without becoming an insufferable snob?

The Reconcilers

These educated elites don't despair in the face of such challenges. They are the Résumé Gods. They're the ones who ace their SATs and succeeded in giving up Merlot during pregnancy. If they are not well equipped to handle the big challenges, no one is. When faced with a tension between competing values, they do what any smart privileged person bursting with cultural capital would do. They find a way to have both. They reconcile opposites.

The grand achievement of the educated elites in the 1990s was to create a way of living that lets you be an affluent success and at the same time a free-spirit rebel. Founding design firms, they find a way to be an artist and still qualify for stock options. Building gourmet companies like Ben & Jerry's or Nantucket Nectars, they've found a way to be dippy hippies and multinational corporate fat cats. Using William S. Burroughs in ads for Nike sneakers and incorporating Rolling Stones anthems into

their marketing campaigns, they've reconciled the antiestablishment style with the corporate imperative. Listening to management gurus who tell them to thrive on chaos and unleash their creative potential, they've reconciled the spirit of the imagination with service to the bottom line. Turning university towns like Princeton and Palo Alto into entrepreneurial centers, they have reconciled the highbrow with the high tax bracket. Dressing like Bill Gates in worn chinos on his way to a stockholders' meeting, they've reconciled undergraduate fashion with upper-crust occupations. Going on eco-adventure vacations, they've reconciled aristocratic thrill-seeking with social concern. Shopping at Benetton or the Body Shop, they've brought together consciousness-raising and cost control.

When you are amidst the educated upscalers, you can never be sure if you're living in a world of hippies or stockbrokers. In reality you have entered the hybrid world in which everybody is a little of both.

Marx told us that classes inevitably conflict, but sometimes they just blur. The values of the bourgeois mainstream culture and the values of the 1960s counterculture have merged. That culture war has ended, at least within the educated class. In its place that class has created a third culture, which is a reconciliation between the previous two. The educated elites didn't set out to create this reconciliation. It is the product of millions of individual efforts to have things both ways. But it is now the dominant tone of our age. In the resolution between the culture and the counterculture, it is impossible to tell who co-opted whom, because in reality the bohemians and the bourgeois co-opted each other. They emerge from this process as bourgeois bohemians, or Bobos.

The New Pecking Order

So when the Protestant Establishment collapsed, it is not as if America became a magical place without elites, without hier-

archies, without etiquette and social distinctions. That may have been true during the age of transition. In the 1970s and through part of the 1980s, it really was difficult to pick out a coherent social order. But that fluidity couldn't last — and it's probably a good thing too. Countries need to achieve new states of social equilibrium, and that has now happened to America. New codes are in place that are different from the old codes but serve many of the same social functions of giving order and coherence to life.

American social life, for example, is just as hierarchical as it was in the 1950s, maybe more so. Hierarchies based on connections have given way. Under the code of the meritocrats, people are more likely to be judged by their posts. Invitations to Renaissance weekends, Aspen Institute seminars, Esther Dyson technology conferences, and exclusive private dinners are all determined by what job you have. If you have a prestigious position, your social life is secure. You will find constant validation by surrounding yourself with people as accomplished as or even more accomplished than you are, and you will come to relish what might be called the joy of summits. If you do not, your social life will always have those awkward moments when someone next to you at dinner turns and asks, "What do you do?"

If you are a visiting name professor from Yale freshly arrived on a small campus to give a guest lecture, you will be taken to dinner at the finest restaurant the town has to offer. But if you are a faculty member at Colgate invited to be a guest lecturer, you'll be dining at the home of your host with her kids. If you are an undersecretary in the Justice Department, you will be the keynote lunchtime speaker at various bar association conferences, but if you move on to some lucrative law firm, you will be lucky to serve on one of the end-of-the-day panel discussions. According to the *New York Observer*, former *New Yorker* editor Tina Brown used to throw parties at which top-rank writers and editors were invited to arrive at eight and lower-

Stock
values +
new lifestyle

ranked writers and editors were told to show up at nine-thirty.

Of course, this does not mean those with the biggest offices automatically earn the highest rank. Your career choice has to reflect the twisting demands of the Bobo ethos. In the 1950s the best kind of money to have was inherited money. Today in the Bobo establishment the best kind of money is incidental money. It's the kind of money you just happen to earn while you are pursuing your creative vision. That means the most prestigious professions involve artistic self-expression as well as big bucks. A novelist who makes \$1 million a year is far more prestigious than a banker who makes \$50 million. A software designer who has stock options in the millions is more prestigious than a real estate developer with holdings in the tens of millions. A newspaper columnist who makes \$150,000 a year will get his calls returned more quickly than a lawyer who makes six times that. A restaurant owner with one successful nightspot will be on the receiving end of more cocktail party fawning than a shopping center owner with six huge malls.

This is the age of discretionary income. People are supposed to forgo earnings opportunities in order to lead richer lives. If you have not forgone any earnings, you just can't expect your status to be very high, no matter how much money you've got in the bank. Professors who are good-looking enough to have become newscasters but chose not to are admired and envied more than professors who had no alternative but to go into the academy. People who have made \$100 million with purportedly anti-commercial independent movies are more prestigious than people who have made \$150 million studio movies. A rock star who goes platinum with a sensitive acoustic album is more admired (and in the long run therefore more bankable) than a rock star who goes double platinum with a regular headbanging album. Media people like Christiane Amanpour and James Rubin will have their wedding featured at the top spot

of the *New York Times* weddings page, whereas ordinary financial analysts will be reduced to paragraph status down below. The guy who dropped out of Harvard to start a software company is asked to give the dinner speech at a grand affair, and sitting next to him will be the Vanderbilt heir who eagerly solicits his attention and has to pay for the dinner.

To calculate a person's status, you take his net worth and multiply it by his antimaterialistic attitudes. A zero in either column means no prestige, but high numbers in both rocket you to the top of the heap. Thus, to be treated well in this world, not only do you have to show some income results; you have to perform a series of feints to show how little your worldly success means to you. You always want to dress one notch lower than those around you. You may want to wear a tattoo or drive a pickup truck or somehow perform some other socially approved act of antistatus deviance. You will devote your conversational time to mocking your own success in a manner that simultaneously displays your accomplishments and your ironic distance from them. You will ceaselessly bash yuppies in order to show that you yourself have not become one. You will talk about your nanny as if she were your close personal friend, as if it were just a weird triviality that you happen to live in a \$900,000 Santa Monica house and she takes the bus two hours each day to the barrio. You will want to perfect a code to subtly downplay your academic credentials. If asked where you went to school, you will reply "Harvard?" with a little upward lilt at the end of your pronunciation, as if to imply, "Have you ever heard of it?" When referring to your stint as a Rhodes scholar, you will say, "While I was in England on a program . . ." In Washington I once asked a transplanted Englishman where he went to school and he replied, "A little school near Slough." The village of Slough is a modest little place west of London. The next town over is called Eton.

Class Rank

Nor is it true that the decline of the old WASP code of morality has left America in a moral vacuum. Some people see the decline of the old Protestant Establishment and mourn our losses: no more chivalry, no more of that keen sense of duty and public service, no more gravitas and deference to authority, no more reticence and self-effacement, no more chastity or decorum, no more gentlemen, no more ladies, no more honor and valor. They see the codes and rules that have fallen away and too quickly assume that we have entered a nihilistic age.

In fact, our morals have followed the same cycle of decay and regeneration as our manners. The old Protestant Establishment and its ethical system faded. There was a period of anarchy. But more recently the new educated establishment has imposed its own set of rules. And it is not clear, especially at first glance, which moral framework is more restrictive, the old WASP ethos or the new Bobo one.

These topics are all in front of us. Suffice it to say, this has got to be one of the most anxious social elites ever. We Bobos are not anxious because there is an angry mob outside the gates threatening to send us to the guillotine. There isn't. The educated elite is anxious because its members are torn between their drive to succeed and their fear of turning into sellouts. Furthermore, we are anxious because we do not award ourselves status sinecures. Previous establishments erected social institutions that would give their members security. In the first part of the 20th century, once your family made it into the upper echelons of society, it was relatively easy to stay there. You were invited on the basis of your connections to the right affairs. You were admitted, nearly automatically, to the right schools and considered appropriate for the right spouses. The pertinent question in those circles was

not what do you do, but who are you. Once you were established as a Biddle or an Auchincloss or a Venderlip, your way was clear. But members of today's educated class can never be secure about their own future. A career crash could be just around the corner. In the educated class even social life is a series of aptitude tests; we all must perpetually perform in accordance with the shifting norms of propriety, ever advancing signals of cultivation. Reputations can be destroyed by a disgraceful sentence, a lewd act, a run of bad press, or a terrible speech at the financial summit at Davos.

And more important, members of the educated class can never be secure about their children's future. The kids have some domestic and educational advantages — all those tutors and developmental toys — but they still have to work through school and ace the SATs just to achieve the same social rank as their parents. Compared to past elites, little is guaranteed.

The irony is that all this status insecurity only makes the educated class stronger. Its members and their children must constantly be alert, working and achieving. Moreover, the educated class is in no danger of becoming a self-contained caste. Anybody with the right degree, job, and cultural competencies can join. Marx warned that "the more a ruling class is able to assimilate the most prominent men [or women] of the dominated classes, the more stable and dangerous its rule." And in truth it is hard to see how the rule of the meritocrats could ever come to an end. The WASP Establishment fell pretty easily in the 1960s. It surrendered almost without a shot. But the meritocratic Bobo class is rich with the spirit of self-criticism. It is flexible and amorphous enough to co-opt that which it does not already command. The Bobo meritocracy will not be easily toppled, even if some group of people were to rise up and conclude that it should be.

Wealth and Poverty in America

A Reader

Edited by
Dalton Conley

 **Blackwell
Publishing**