

**PEOPLE LIKE US:
SOCIAL CLASS IN AMERICA**

TEACHER'S GUIDE

by

Lora Myers

Contributing Editors:

Julie Hey

Alicia Ellis

&

Amy Foerster

Susan Kempler

Eva Abbamonte

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I. Introduction to *People Like Us: Social Class in America*

People Like Us: Social Class in America tackles a question rarely addressed so explicitly in the popular media: Are all Americans created equal -- or are some more equal than others? Over the course of two hours, the documentary reveals that despite our country's deeply-held ideals of egalitarianism and fairness, our citizens are in fact subject to sharp class distinctions and often insurmountable inequalities of opportunity.

For viewers and students interested in the sociology and culture of the United States, **People Like Us** provides an entertaining introduction to a controversial topic. It does not offer a Marxian analysis of one group's exploitation of another, nor does it celebrate the virtues of the capitalist system. Rather, this popular history presents an outspoken group of Americans from diverse locales and even more diverse socioeconomic groups: privileged New York "WASPS," upwardly mobile African Americans in North Carolina, struggling minimum-wage workers in Ohio, proud Georgia "rednecks," blue-collar suburbanites in New Jersey, cliquey Texas high-school students, and more. Through their portraits, **People Like Us** raises questions about the ways, large and small, in which Americans classify each other, how our inherited social class affects our self-perceptions and our expectations, and how race and other factors complicate an already complex arrangement of social distinctions in our society.

Producers Andrew Kolker and Louis Alvarez, who have collaborated on a series of award-winning documentaries on different aspects of American culture since 1979, found **People Like Us** to be an extremely challenging program to make. Criss-crossing the country to interview hundreds of Americans, they discovered that many of us take our class status for granted, while many others refuse to admit that class differences exist. In making this program, Alvarez and Kolker hope to challenge viewers to rethink their assumptions about class in America and to examine how those assumptions influence their attitudes about their fellow citizens.

People Like Us premiered on the Public Broadcasting System and is intended for a general audience. It is also extremely useful for educators who wish to introduce students to basic concepts about social class and about class distinctions in the United States. **People Like Us** does not pretend to be the definitive documentary about class in America. But it does aim to be a catalyst for discussion and deeper study about the many different issues of class that affect our country economically, socially, and psychologically.

This guide is intended to facilitate that goal. Our suggestions for discussion questions, lesson plans, group projects, theme-based activities, readings, and writing assignments are designed to help viewers explore, in the context of their own experiences and communities, the many thorny issues raised by **People Like Us**.

II. Program Outline

People Like Us: Social Class in America is 124 minutes (2:04) in length. While it's always best to screen the program in its entirety, it can also be viewed in two separate, hour-long sittings: 1) Parts I and II and 2) Parts III and IV.

If class time is limited, you can also show specific short segments to the class. In that case, we recommend that you pre-screen the entire show so that you understand where each segment fits into the whole.

OPENING SEQUENCE

[Running Time: 9 minutes]

- People viewing photographs and commenting on the class of the subjects
- Brief introductions to people of various classes
 - A. Fallen Gentry - an upper-class man who lives in his ancestral home
 - B. Social Climber - a snooty woman who puts down the middle-class
 - C. Working Stiff - a blue-collar business owner who criticizes salesmen in suits
 - D. Social Critic - a high-school teenager who decides who's in, who's out
- A montage of people defining "class"

PART I: BUD OR BORDEAUX?

The Choices You Make Reveal Your Class

JOE QUEENAN'S BALSAMIC VINEGAR TOUR (Santa Monica, CA)

[Running Time: 4 minutes, begins 9_ minutes in]

An author and journalist who grew up working-class casts a satirical eye on the consumption patterns of affluent baby-boomers.

THE TROUBLE WITH TOFU (Burlington, VT)

[Running Time: 10_ minutes, begins 13_ minutes in]

A portrait of a community fight over a new supermarket that is, at heart, a mini-class war.

HOW TO MARRY THE RICH (Los Angeles, CA)

[Running Time: 9 minutes, begins 24 minutes in]

Motivational speaker Ginie Sayles discloses her formula for mixing with the upper classes.

PART 2: HIGH AND LOW

A tour through the landscape of class

WASP LESSONS (Long Island, NY)

[Running Time: 8 minutes, begins 33 minutes in]

Members of the privileged class of Americans known as "WASPs" reveal the tribal markers that help them recognize who truly "belongs."

BOURGEOIS BLUES (Charlotte, NC)

[Running time: 11 minutes, begins 41 minutes in]

Middle class African-Americans offer a perspective on the complicated relationship between race and social class in the United States.

TAMMY'S STORY (Waverly, OH)

[Running Time: 10 minutes, begins 52 minutes in]

A single mother of four, off welfare after eighteen years, struggles to keep her family together and to get along with a son who is embarrassed by her low status.

PART 3: SALT OF THE EARTH
Blue collar life in a white collar world

GNOMES R US (Baltimore, MD)

[Running Time: 3 minutes, begins 1 hour 2_ minutes in]

Pat Gulden, owner of the largest concrete lawn-ornament store on the eastern seaboard, defends a blue-collar decorative tradition.

FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES (Baltimore, MD)

[Running Time: 15_ minutes, begins 1 hour 5_ minutes in]

Middle-class people in Baltimore try to recapture the city's vanishing blue-collar lifestyle at a campy street festival and in local bars.

DON'T GET ABOVE YOUR RAISIN' (Morgantown, KY)

[Running time: 12 minutes, begins 1 hour 21 minutes in]

On a trip back to her old, working-class, Kentucky home, Dana Felty, a Washington journalist, discovers how tough it is to belong to two different worlds.

PART 4: BELONGING
Understanding the rules of the game

ALL YOU NEED IS CASH (The Hamptons, Long Island, NY)

[Running time: 9 minutes, begins 1 hour 33 minutes in]

The lifestyles of the rich and famous are on display at a lavish party in one of New York State's most elite communities.

MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED (Austin, TX)

[Running time: 17 minutes, begins 1 hour 42 minutes in]

On a guided tour of Austin's Anderson High, we see why school is the perfect place to learn about the harsh realities of class in America.

CLOSING SCENES AND CREDITS

[Running time: 5 minutes]

III. Pre-Viewing Activities

People Like Us is self-explanatory and requires no introduction. However, students' enjoyment and comprehension of the program can be enhanced through one or more of the following pre-viewing activities:

1. Brainstorm the many interpretations of the word "class."

What is the meaning of "class"? If necessary, prompt discussion by asking: Is it...

- ... about social and/or economic position?
- ... about income?
- ... about education?
- ... about prestige?
- ... about power and control?
- ... about one's culture?
- ... about taste and lifestyle, regardless of income?
- ... about one's race, religion, or ethnicity?
- ... about one's job?
- ... about one's self-image and attitude about the world?

Briefly discuss common class terminology: upper class or the rich, middle class or bourgeois or white-collar, working class or blue-collar, the poor or the underclass.

- 2. Write on the board:** *The United States of America is a classless and egalitarian society.* Do students agree or disagree with that statement? To stimulate thinking, ask them to consider prisons, educational institutions, housing, jobs, wages/salaries, etc. Ask them to reflect on books they've read or movies they've seen that deal with issues of class.
- 3. Take an anonymous mini-survey.** Prepare small slips of paper printed with six class categories: Upper, upper middle, middle, lower middle, lower, poor. Ask students to circle the group to which they think they belong. Collect the slips, to be tabulated after viewing.
- 4. Encourage** viewers to take notes of the many different ways that people in the program define and think about class. If you wish, tell students they will be asked to write a review of the program that incorporates specific quotes and scene descriptions to support their impressions and opinions.

IV. Post-Viewing Discussion and Activities

Follow-up to Pre-Viewing Activities

1. Ask students to recall the different ways people in the program define class:

It's all about money; it's not about money; it's morals and upbringing; it's good or bad manners -- knowing how to dress, speak, furnish your home, order food in a restaurant; it's the people you grew up with; race has a lot to do with it; it's an ability to live with servants; it's how big your house is; it's mental -- a state of mind; it's an inherited social position; it's looks and popularity; it's the culture

you come from; it's where your daddy works or if your mother came out at the infirmary ball in New York City.

Discuss other observations about class made by the various people who appear in **People Like Us**.

Compare their definitions with those that your students devised during the pre-viewing activity. What are the similarities or differences? After viewing the program, did any students formulate a new opinion about the meaning of this slippery word? What made them change their mind? Can your group devise a workable definition of "class"? Is there a difference between class, status, and lifestyle?

- 2. Reconsider** the question of whether the United States is a classless, egalitarian society.

Elicit viewers' impressions of the range of Americans they saw in the program. Who are the most memorable? Why? What characteristics mark each person as belonging to one social class or another? What were some of their opinions about the class structure of the United States? Were there any statements students strongly agreed/disagreed with?

Broaden the discussion: Why do many Americans deny that class distinctions exist in their country? Why do many consider class to be a touchy subject? Why do classes exist anyway? What are the effects of class stratification on Americans? Does growing up in a particular class affect our self-image and our expectations in life? If so, how?

- 3. Tabulate** results of the mini-survey and discuss findings. Ask students to define their terms and explain why they picked a particular social class. (NOTE: since some people may feel uncomfortable about answering this question, participation in this discussion can be voluntary.) Did they select a particular class because of their parents' income? Their own lifestyle? Education? Aspirations? Family history? Moral values or religious affiliation? Did they change their minds about their own social rank after seeing **People Like Us**? If so, how and why?

Divide the class into groups. Ask each group to discuss the class structure of their community. Are neighborhoods mixed or segregated by class? Which classes live in which areas and go to which schools? Which groups tend to shop at which stores, worship at which religious centers, belong to which clubs? Does any one group hold the power in local government? Are there any venues where various classes intermingle? Are there any class-based issues the community is currently confronting -- for example, in housing, job development, or education?

- 4. Assign** a review. Based on their notes, ask students to write a critique, favorable or unfavorable, of **People Like Us**. What are the program's most important ideas about class in America? Writers should include specific examples of scenes or remarks that were most/least effective in presenting these ideas. Did viewers feel that any one of the classes portrayed was favored over the other? What examples can they cite to support their opinion?

After students have turned in their work, prompt them to compare their critiques with published or on-line reviews of **People Like Us**. In what ways did they agree/disagree with the critics?

Extension Activities

__ **GO TO** www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus **for lesson plan:** "Marketing Class," by William F. Munn, introduces students to sociological criteria for determining class ranking and encourages them to discuss role, status, and social class and apply these terms to their surroundings.

__ **GO TO** www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/resources/index.html **for supplementary reading:** "A Touchy Subject," by Paul Fussell, one of the commentators in the program. This humorous essay is excerpted from Fussell's book, *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System* (Touchstone, 1992). It can also be found in *Created Equal: Reading and Writing About Class in America*, an excellent compendium of interviews, short stories, essays, and memoirs edited by Benjamin Demott (Longman, 1996).

__ **SEE Appendix for Facts On Class:** statistics, charts, and graphs related to social class in America.

V. Segment-Related Questions and Activities

The following questions and activities relate to specific segments of **People Like Us**. We include brief descriptions of each segment to refresh teachers' and viewers' memories. If you wish to review any of them, fast-forward the videotape to the time indicated.

PART I: BUD OR BORDEAUX? **The Choices You Make Reveal Your Class**

Joe Queenan's Balsamic Vinegar Tour (Santa Monica, California)
Begins: 09.27 - Running Time: 4 minutes

Previous societies had to fear death from... Mongols and Vikings and cholera and smallpox, and what we fear most is criticism..."People will think I'm not cool." It's permanent high school. I mean you're 50 years old and you're still worried about what your friends think about your records and stuff like that.

--Joe Queenan, author and columnist

SEGMENT SYNOPSIS: Joe Queenan grew up in a blue-collar family but his success as an author and journalist landed him in the upper-middle class. In an upscale shopping district, he spoofs the pretentious consumerism of affluent Americans by scrutinizing some status-enhancing objects they acquire -- from truffle-laced vinegar to a hammered copper risotto pan. "There's a desire in this country to be perceived as being one step ahead of the great unwashed by doing things that the ... less great unwashed are all doing," Queenan remarks.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What is the meaning of the introductory segment title, *Bud or Bordeaux*? Is it true that our choices in life reveal our class? Are those

choices only about things? Who decides what's in good taste – or not? What is meant by the term “status symbol?” If you can afford to purchase an expensive item – say, a pricey car or a boat – are you automatically elevated in class?

Which of your possessions have *you* acquired, consciously or unconsciously, to enhance your status – designer label clothes or shoes? A car? A piece of jewelry? What items or physical characteristics do you think label the wearer or owner as “low-class?” Why do you think so?

How do you feel about the segment in **People Like Us** that depicts “rednecks” engaging in watermelon-seed-spitting and mud-flopping? Do you think that people of a higher class would criticize *your* taste? How or why? Does it matter to you? Do you agree or disagree with Joe Queenan's perspective on the things that we acquire?

GO TO www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/resources/index.html for supplementary

reading: “Our Climb to the Sublime: The \$5,000 BBQ grill and other milestones,” by Robert Frank (*The Washington Post*, January 24, 1999). The article, excerpted from Frank's book, “Luxury Fever: Why Money Fails to Satisfy in an Era of Excess,” (Free Press, 1998) explores the dark side of America's luxury spending boom.

The Trouble With Tofu (Burlington, Vermont)

Begins: 13.32 - *Running Time:* 10_ minutes

What comes up for me is like I'm in junior high school again and the middle class kids are laughing at my clothes and they're looking at my sandwich and they're saying, 'What's that?' And it's that kind of feeling I think that the people in the neighborhood think they're going to get ... that these people are going to be looking down their nose at them and they're eating white bread.

---Oak LoGalbo, Artist

SEGMENT SYNOPSIS: The City Council has to decide who will build the new town grocery: Shaw's, a national chain of supermarkets, or the Onion River Co-op, a smaller, community-based health food emporium. While the upscale Co-op has promised to accommodate everyone's taste buds, many blue-collar community members clearly resent its members' “snooty” attitude about Wonder bread and other “low-class” edibles. Councilman Tom Smith frames the conflict this way: “When you are invisible in a culture, and low-income people are invisible in this culture, you can't feel good about yourself [or] about the people who are making you invisible....”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Describe the issues involved in the choice of a community grocery store in Burlington, Vermont. What is at the heart of this conflict? Which groups does the program indicate are in favor of the co-op, and which the supermarket? What are their reasons for their choice? How would *you* vote on this issue? Explain *your* choice.

What does bread symbolize in this story? Why does this situation remind Oak LoGalbo of being laughed at in high school? Who was laughing – and why? Have you ever had a similar experience? In what situations? How did you feel?

What does Councilman Smith mean about being "invisible" in this culture? Have you ever felt "invisible" in a class context?

— **GO TO** www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus for lesson plan: "Class and Health: You Are What You Eat," by Lynn Wiegand, an activity that explores the correlation between social class, health, and nutrition.

RESEARCH/WRITE about a conflict in your community over an issue that reflects class differences -- for example, a proposed housing development, a gentrifying neighborhood, construction of a new factory, a school voucher program, a new shopping mall. Bring in articles about the conflict from a variety of sources: the local newspaper, community group publications, interest group newsletters, etc. Compare and analyze each for class bias/perspective.

CLASS PROJECT: Distribute menus (or ask students to collect menus) from a variety of eateries -- from your area's most expensive restaurant to the local greasy spoon. Include one menu with pictures.

In small groups, get students to compare the menus' content, prices, vocabulary, and style of presentation. Are the menus reflective of class differences in the community? How? In what ways does each menu's vocabulary and style reflect a "high" or "low" social class? [For example, observe how a fast-food menu shows either pictures, numbers, or easy-to-remember food names -- like "The Whopper" -- as compared to an elaborately-described entrée from a higher-priced *haute cuisine* restaurant, which may assume foreknowledge of sauces, wines, and foreign languages.]

Ask students to recall if they have felt uncomfortable eating in a "high-class" or "low-class" restaurant. What made them feel that way?

How To Marry the Rich (Beverly Hills, California)

Begins: 23.59 - Running Time: 9 minutes

*I started thinking I must be doing something wrong.
What is it that I am doing wrong to attract the type of
man who doesn't have a job and doesn't have a car?
-- Vessa Rinehart, make-over client*

SEGMENT SYNOPSIS: Author and motivational speaker Ginie Sayles grew up poor but ended up marrying a millionaire. Vessa Rinehart, a museum staffer, yearns for higher social status. In this scene, Sayles reveals to Rinehart a precise formula for mixing confidently with the rich and powerful. While Rinehart clearly believes the elaborate instructions will help her pass for classy, commentator Paul Fussell, author of *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System*, is not so optimistic: "You are for a lifetime in the class in which you grew up."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What is your impression of Ginie Sayles? Vessa Rinehart? What social class does each appear to belong to? Why do you think so? What do you think of Sayles' techniques for moving up the social ladder? Why do you suppose Rinehart wants to change her social class? Is such a transformation possible? Is it, as her mentor claims, basically a question of appearance and style and the distance you stand from people? Or is Paul Fussell correct?

What are the particular pressures and obstacles an individual faces when s/he moves into a different social class? Compare the term "upwardly mobile" with "social climber" -- is there a difference? In what situation is each term usually applied?

Ginie Sayles charges \$1,500 for her make-over service: is it worth the price? Do you think a man would hire Ginie Sayles to transform him? Why/why not?

__ **GO TO** www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus **for game:** "Chintz or Shag," a light-hearted quiz that identifies class affiliation based on taste and style.

PART 2: HIGH AND LOW **A tour through the landscape of class**

WASP Lessons (New York, New York)

Begins: 33.01 - *Running Time:* 8 minutes

I am a member of the privileged American class known as the WASPs, the silver spoon people, the people who were handed things from an early age and stepped into a safe, clean, white world.

--Thomas L. Phipps, writer

SEGMENT SYNOPSIS: In a series of candid and often humorous interviews, members of America's commonly-accepted aristocracy, rich White Anglo Saxon Protestants, reveal their inborn sense of *noblesse oblige*: "We stand better, we walk better, we speak better, we dress better, we eat better, we're smarter, we're more cultured and we treat people better..." Blueblood Thomas Langhorne Phipps joins other insiders in offering a wry introduction to the stereotypical WASP world of Madras pants and fox hunts. But that isn't all there is to it: one upper-class woman insists that "... some people ...could just have a bathing suit on the beach and I'd know they didn't belong."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What does WASP stand for? What does it mean to "belong" to a "WASP" culture? How does the upper middle-class woman judge someone in a bathing suit as "belonging" or not? Do you make the same judgments about people who "belong" to your class or social group? What attributes do you look for?

Are White Anglo-Saxon Protestants indeed our country's "ruling" class? Have other groups -- American-born or immigrant groups -- changed or challenged wealthy whites' social pre-eminence and control in recent years? If so, which groups are emerging as the elite in your community? Do these groups exclude others in the way that the "bathing suit" lady suggests?

In this segment, what sports do we observe the "WASPS" engaging in? What sports do we typically associate with the upper classes? [If you wish to pursue the idea of sports and class, ask: what sports do we associate with the middle classes? The lower classes? For example: polo, golf, tennis, boxing, wrestling, bowling. Why are these sports linked to class?]

Are there white Americans who do not fit the upper-class stereotype? If so, who are they?

— See the **Appendix for statistics:** on poverty and race in America. Note that while the media generally equate poverty with people of color, not surprisingly, in this predominantly white nation, whites make up the largest numbers of the poor.

RESEARCH/WRITE: Have students research and write up a report on the largest pockets of white poverty in the United States. What is the average income in these communities? Employment/unemployment rates? Educational achievements of the residents?

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY: "Exploring Stereotypes" is designed to prompt students to examine their own class-related attitudes. Divide students into three groups. Assign each group one of three class categories: upper, middle, or lower. Ask students to brainstorm "characteristics" -- positive or negative -- that they associate with people in the class they've been assigned. Then compare lists. Which qualities are alike? Which are different? Ask students to explain their reasons for including each quality. Were their choices based on personal experience, hearsay, media portrayals, etc.? Do they think the qualities they chose apply to everyone in that particular class? Are these characteristics based on money? On the type of house someone lives in? On the schools or religious centers they attend? Other factors?

SUPPLEMENTARY READING: Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (Plume, 1993), an autobiographical novel about growing up dirt-poor in the south; and "Bloody Footprints: Reflections on Growing Up Poor White," by Roxanne A. Dunbar, a memoir about her childhood in Oklahoma and her personal journey across class lines (from *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, edited by Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz. Routledge, 1997).

Bourgeois Blues (Charlotte, North Carolina)

Begins: 41.07 - *Running Time:* 11 minutes

Class is a very uncomfortable topic for all Americans and I think it's especially uncomfortable for black Americans. I think it's offensive to some people to think that there is a class structure in black America. I think that's probably rooted in the fact that minorities who have been oppressed in America do not ever want to be perceived as oppressive.

-- Carlotta Miles, psychiatrist

SEGMENT SYNOPSIS: Whites often ignore them or condescend to them; working class blacks label them "bourgie" or "inauthentic." They are middle-class African Americans, roughly 50% of their racial group, and they're in a tight spot. As this segment portrays, they must navigate a minefield of race and class relations and are often torn between their social and economic aspirations and the realities of racism in America. Against the backdrop of a debutante ball, we hear the stories of men and women who are middle class and black. "We should be encouraging our community to strive," observes one investment banker. "Every group in America has come ... with the goal of becoming middle class, so why should we suddenly be the

only group that identifies becoming middle class as this nasty word of calling bourgie-ness?"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What are the relationships between race or ethnicity and class in America? What is the conflict within the black community regarding class identity and racial identity? Is it related to color? Does that conflict exist in any other group in the United States or in your area – for example, among Italian-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, or other ethnic communities? What examples do middle-class African-Americans offer about common white attitudes toward them? About upper-class or lower-class blacks' attitudes? Do you agree with the investment banker's statement? Why/why not?

What is the significance of the Jack and Jill club? Is it an appropriate means for black families to foster social relationships or is it a means of excluding and oppressing other blacks? What do you think of private clubs in general? Do you or does your family belong to one? What benefits or advantages does it offer? What drawbacks?

__ **GO** www.usnews.com/usnews/issue/990215/15grah.htm **for related article:**

Lawrence Otis Graham, one of the commentators in the program, elaborates upon issues of race and class in "Living in a Class Apart: The separate world of America's black elite."

__ **GO TO** www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/resources/index.html **for supplementary**

reading: Langston Hughes' poems, *Low to High* and *High to Low* (from "The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes," edited by Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, Vintage Books, 1995).

CLASS PROJECT: In small groups, students can develop a plan to research the different types of private social organizations that exist in their community (from golf clubs to Elk or Mason lodges to bingo centers to boy/girl scout troops) -- or in their school (from debating societies to various sports groups to drama and arts clubs). Ask students to conduct research into these associations or to interview people who belong to them. In terms of social class, who tends to belong to which club or school organization? Are there social benefits or disadvantages to belonging to such a club? What are the membership requirements? Are there exclusionary policies in force? Are there clubs that attract a mixed group of members, socially or ethnically?

Tammy's Story (Waverly, Ohio)

Begins: 52.21 - *Running Time:* 10 minutes

People at the bottom, they battle the limitations of life like everybody else. If they're not overwhelmed by the dictates of drugs, and violence, and extraordinarily bad schools, they have exactly the same plans that everybody else has. That is, to become the most that they can become, to get the best that they can get for their kids, to encourage their kids to become the best that they can become, and to be the best kind of person they can be.

--Stanley Crouch, critic

SEGMENT SYNOPSIS: In Southern Ohio, Tammy Crabtree, 42, lives in a dilapidated trailer with her four teenagers. After almost two decades of public assistance, she's now off the welfare rolls. But her job cleaning bathrooms at a local Burger King barely pays the bills. Crabtree sees herself as striving to do better and hopes to go to college and become a teacher. But she is labeled "trash" by her neighbors and she is openly dissed by her 16-year-old son Matt, who dreams of moving up the social ladder. "Sometimes I am embarrassed by her," Matt says, "'cause she wears that Burger King outfit every day."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What does it mean to be at the bottom -- culturally, socially, politically, and economically? [NOTE: help students define these terms.] What does it mean to feel "invisible" in the United States? In what ways is Tammy Crabtree invisible, and to whom?

Based on your recollection of her story, reconstruct Ms. Crabtree's family history and the impact of her social class on her aspirations, opportunities, and achievements (or lack of) in life. Why is she considered "trash" by her neighbors? What is her own view of her life and her future?

What is the conflict between Tammy and Matt? How realistic is Matt's belief that he is "classier" than his mother and brother? Realistically, what do you think are Matt's chances of achieving his life goals? What are the obstacles in his path to achievement? If you don't think either mother *or* son will "make it," how do you reconcile that opinion with the American belief that hard work is always rewarded with success? If the Crabtrees were to meet Ginie Sayles (of the How to Marry the Rich segment), could her formula help them rise in class?

— **GO TO** www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/resources/index.html **for supplementary reading:** "Pride, prejudice and the not-so-subtle politics of the working class" by Katherine Boo (from the Washington Post, March 14, 1993) explores the psychological impact of compulsory uniforms on working people.

— **GO TO** www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/resources/index.html **for supplementary reading:** In an excerpt from her book, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (Metropolitan, 2001), journalist Barbara Ehrenreich, one of the commentators in the program, writes about leaving her comfortable middle-class lifestyle behind to work as a contract house cleaner for wealthy residents of Maine.

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: Ask students to research their family's social and economic history. Decide how many generations should be included and formulate interview questions that help students acquire information on family members who changed class. What factors helped them move up? [For example: marriage, a wartime experience, the G.I. Bill, a teacher/mentor, an inheritance, etc.] As a group, compare oral histories and chart the trends that emerge. What factors encouraged or inhibited social mobility? Did increases in income result in higher social status for the family?

PART 3: SALT OF THE EARTH
Blue collar life in a white collar world

Gnomes R Us (Baltimore, Maryland)

Begins: 01:02.25 - Running Time: 3 minutes

Ornamental concrete. People come in and they want to dress up their yard... just a little touch here, a little touch there, but don't overdo it. That ... cheapens everything.

--Pat Gulden, merchant

SEGMENT SYNOPSIS: Pat Gulden runs the largest lawn-ornament store on the Eastern seaboard. As she shows us her inventory of angels, leprechauns, gazing balls, and other fanciful concrete sculptures, she staunchly defends a decorative tradition that some find of questionable taste. "Blue collar people like these little colorful things stuck in between their shrubs," Pat says.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: How do you feel about lawn ornaments? Explain your answer in terms of the class associations that they evoke. Do objects have intrinsic value in terms of class – or are other factors at work? Do you think that class is essentially a question of personal taste? If so, whose taste should prevail? Why do you think so? Where do we get our views about class, anyway?

GO TO www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus for related game: "Name that Class," a humorous quiz that probes attitudes about social distinctions.

Friends in Low Places (Baltimore, Maryland)

Begins: 01:05.22 - Running Time: - 15_ minutes

Middle classes and upper classes ... don't know whether they want to transform [the working class] and make them middle class, or withdraw from them, romanticize them, demonize them. I don't think we've ever quite gotten to the point where we just sort of understand each other.

--John DiIulio, educator

SEGMENT SYNOPSIS: Baltimore was once famed as a blue-collar city with friendly corner bars and waitresses who called everybody "hon." Now, with most of the big factories gone, affluent families are moving into the old neighborhoods – or dropping in from the suburbs for a visit. In the process, the newcomers are transforming the old working-class lifestyle into fun, games, and nostalgia. Middle-class revelers pretend to be stereotypical Baltimore waitresses at an annual "Hon Fest." Suburban kids invade blue-collar bars. Watching them, viewers may get the uncomfortable feeling that condescension can be one of the byproducts when upper classes try to mix with the "regular folk."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What prompts one group to try to enter the world of another? Are the minglers in this sequence celebrating class differences -- or making fun of them? Or both? How do viewers feel about the Hon Fest participants and the dive-bar crawlers?

What is meant by the phrase "Salt of the Earth" in the segment title? What does DiIulio, the segment commentator, mean by his statement? How is the working class romanticized in American culture? Demonized? Think of examples from contemporary films and television shows that portray working class people. Are these portraits accurate? Why/why not?

In what ways and for what reasons do people in higher income groups try to transform the working classes? Is that transformation necessary? Why do you think so?

_ GO TO www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/resources/index.html for supplementary reading: an excerpt from "The Dark Side of Camp" by Gareth Cook, published in the September 1995 Washington Monthly finds that snobbery and mean-spiritedness often fuel campy spoofs of working-class attributes.

WRITING: In an introductory essay to his play, *Major Barbara*, George Bernard Shaw wrote: "What a man is depends on his character; but what he does, and what we think of what he does, depends on his circumstances. The characteristics that ruin a man in one class made him eminent in another."

Ask students to write their interpretation of this quote. What does Shaw mean? Cite an example of behavior that is considered a virtue in one class and a vice in another. For example, compare the idea of an aggressive real estate developer with an aggressive sanitation worker. Both are in business, but their qualities may be judged differently.

Don't Get Above Your Raisin' (Washington, DC & Morgantown, Kentucky)
Begins: 01:21.02 - *Running Time:* 12_ minutes

Getting' above your raisin' is a phrase you hear all the time.... The notion is that you want to change social classes... You try to change social classes, there's this feeling that you're forsaking the family, you're forsaking place, you're forgetting where you came from...and here's this real fear that if you leave, that you'll become ashamed of where you came from.

-- Michael Birdwell, historian

SEGMENT SYNOPSIS: Dana Felty, an ambitious young woman from a working-class background in rural Kentucky, is pursuing a career as a journalist in Washington, D.C. Despite her success, Felty feels guilty about leaving her class and culture behind. As an Appalachian, she's been taught that moving up the ladder is not as important as allegiance to the community. "I think that at the core of a lot of my family, it really felt like I was telling them that I was rejecting them and I was rejecting my home, and everything that had been just the essence of who we were," she says tearfully.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Why does Dana Felty feel conflicted about her life? What are the positive and negative aspects of her upward mobility? What has she gained and what has she lost by leaving her home town and her Appalachian culture?

What is meant by the phrase, "Don't get above your raisin'?" What are the positive and negative aspects of the Appalachian attitude toward personal ambition? Is there a way to reconcile the push to "be all you can be" with the pull to "stay true to your roots"? Have you or has anyone in your family experienced similar conflicts?

Can someone be a member of more than one class? Can individuals be affected psychologically by a change of class? If so, how?

__ **GO TO** www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/stories/index.html **for supplementary readings:** The Web site features a Stories section with numerous letters from visitors to the site who reveal their feelings about moving up or down a notch in class.

__ **GO TO** www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/resources/index.html **for supplementary reading:** Richard Rodriguez, in an excerpt from his memoir, "Hunger for Memory," describes his own inner conflicts as he moved beyond his poor, Chicano roots to become a scholar and a media personality.

RESEARCH/WRITING: Ask students to interview friends or relatives who have moved from one class or culture to another. [You can brainstorm questions as a whole group.] What were the values in the class or culture the subject grew up in? What class or culture does s/he belong to now? How have the subject's values or experiences changed? How does the subject feel about the different worlds s/he belongs to? What tensions exist between the old culture and the new? Have students present their findings to the class or write a portrait of the person interviewed.

PART 4: BELONGING **Understanding the rules of the game**

All You Need is Cash (The Hamptons, New York)

Begins: 01:33.18 - *Running Time:* 9 minutes

There's actually a recipe I can tell you for you to become socially acceptable. You have to go to the right pre-school. It starts that young.

--R. Couri Hay, society columnist

SEGMENT SYNOPSIS: How easy is it to reach the top rung of the social ladder in America? Many writers, from F. Scott Fitzgerald to Tom Wolfe, have examined this question – and revealed that the size of your bank account may not, ultimately, count for much. At a fundraising party, our escort, society chronicler R. Couri Hay, mingles with Hearsts and Rockefellers seeking tips on how to get on the best invitation lists. "My father always said that if something's classy...that it speaks for itself, so you try to never say that something's classy," one woman confides.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Does making a lot of money guarantee acceptance by the elite? Why or why not? What is Hay's recipe for making it into the top echelon of society? Do you agree or disagree? Is this the kind of life you would like to lead? Why or why not?

How does somebody get to be a society columnist? What does their job entail? Do you think R. Couri Hay is upper class or is he from a different class? What makes you think so? If he's an outsider, in what ways would his class influence his perceptions of the rich and the way he reports on their lives?

__ **GO TO** www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus **for related game:** "Identify This!" tests the player's ability to recognize a range of class-related objects.

Most Likely to Succeed (Austin, Texas)

Begins: 01:42.04 - *Running Time:* 17 minutes

Society is really not at all dissimilar to high school. It's the same thing. It's wanting to belong, it's wanting to hang on to a group that you feel is the privileged group ...It's simply a matter of feeling like you belong and that in a way is an affirmation of your existence.

-- David Patrick Columbia, society columnist

SEGMENT SYNOPSIS: Anderson High, a public school in one of Austin's upper-middle-class neighborhoods, proves Columbia's point. Rigid classifications are already in place -- from the "preps" and "jocks" to the "nerds" and "oddballs" to the bused-in "ghetto kids." The segment concludes with a hint that life outside is little different. As one middle class girl protests: " It seems like the people in high school that were ... getting everything handed to them, ...they're the people still doing well because mommy and daddy are pulling out ... as much money as they need to ... it seems so unfair...."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Analyze the program's portrait of Anderson High School. What are the class divisions the teenagers talk about? How closely does this portrait resemble your school? Why is it important for people to feel that they belong to a group? How many students have cultivated friends outside their group?

Do you agree with the statement of the young woman who laments the unfairness of the social order? Is "unfairness" an immutable fact of life? Do you think unfairness can be eliminated? If so, how -- and what role could you play in eliminating it?

What effect, if any, do our textbooks or literature assignments in school (elementary on up) have on our views of class? Do we study class issues in school? Why/why not?

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES:

- A. Divide students into small groups. Assign each group to list the class categories in use in their school -- such as "nerd," "dork," "preppie," or "freshman, sophomore," and so on -- and to brainstorm characteristics, privileges, or drawbacks that are commonly associated with each category. Then compare lists. Ask students to explain their reasons for including each characteristic, etc. Were their choices based on personal experience or hearsay? Do they think the qualities they listed apply to everyone in the category? How do students categorize themselves? Are such labels hurtful or do students shrug them off? How many students in the class have friends from different categories?

- B. Discuss, as a whole group, the class structure of the school, including adults. The different categories will probably break down as follows: 1) Administration; 2) Faculty; 3) Support Staff; 4) Buildings and Grounds Staff; 5) Students.
- C. Ask students to interview one person from *each* category and report their findings to the class. Are there differences in social class among the groups? What class do members of each group identify with? What do they feel about the other groups? Are there privileges to belonging to any of the groups? What are they?

__ **GO TO** www.newyorktimes.com for supplementary reading: See April 25, 2001 article: *Cambridge Journal; Protesters Blooming in Harvard Yard* by Carey Goldberg, which describes how 40 students at Harvard staged a sit-in to demand the school pay its custodial and other workers a 'living wage' of \$10.25 an hour. (note: access to New York Times archives may involve additional charges)

VI. Theme-Based Activities

Following are suggestions for activities that might help students learn how social class intersects with and affects just about everything in our "classless" society.

CLASS AND CASH

I always thought my whole life you work hard and you do ok. ... I didn't realize that some people weren't working so hard and they still had tons of money. How the hell did that happen?

-- Michael Monte, city official

Access to ready money at reasonable lending rates -- through checking accounts, ATM machines, credit cards, and charge accounts -- is one of the privileges often taken for granted by many families in the United States. Think about the benefits that come with credit cards, mortgages, and other forms of buying on time. Low-income communities, however, often play by a different set of financial rules. Paradoxically, in places where cash is scarce, people sometimes pay more to be poor.

__ **GO TO** www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus for Michele Soussou's lesson plan, **Income Levels & Social Class: is it all about cash?** which prompts students to convert class concepts into numbers/charts/statistics.

__ **GO TO** www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/resources/index.html for supplementary reading: "Where to Go When You're Broke," by Brendan I. Koerner, an article about a pawnshop and the folks who do their "banking" there.

CLASS PROJECT: Ask students to imagine they need \$2,000 to purchase a used car. Direct them to gather information about lending from a number of sources: from a bank, a check-cashing store, a pawnshop, a credit card company. What kind of collateral is required? What are the interest rates? What are the penalties for late payment? In small groups, students can compare the costs of borrowing from each of these sources.

CLASS AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

If you're upper middle class you really are grasping opportunities, ... rising through the world. And if you're part of the working class, you may stay at the same factory for thirty years or for your whole life or even for three generations. And that is a totally different mentality.

--- David Brooks, magazine editor

In *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (Princeton, 1995), Jennifer Hochschild presents four components of the dream:

1. The belief that everyone can participate equally and can always start over.
2. The belief that it is reasonable to anticipate success.
3. The belief that success is a result of individual characteristics and that actions are under one's control.
4. The belief that success is associated with virtue and merit.

DISCUSS: Do students agree/disagree with any or all of these beliefs? Why/why not? Do the characters in **People Like Us** convey the idea that the American dream is a reality for most people? Why/why not?

RESEARCH/WRITE: Ask students to interview a family member, relative, or adult friend. Which class did that person grow up in? Did s/he move up in class? To what factors in life does s/he attribute his or her financial or professional success? Individual talent, drive, and persistence? Family connections? Education? A caring mentor? A wealthy spouse? Financial support -- for example, from the family or the government (such as the G.I Bill or a low-interest student loan)? Any combination of the above? Does s/he subscribe to the belief that "If I can do it, everybody can?" Why does s/he think so?

Students can write up the interview as a journalistic profile or tape record it and summarize key points. A follow-up class discussion could center around the questions: Is success in fact "a result of individual characteristics?" In terms of success, are one's actions always under one's control? Or are there other, complicating factors?

CLASS ACTIVITY: In pairs, students can interview each other about their expectations in life. What career do they aspire to? What do they need in terms of money, education, support, social connections, etc. to be successful in that career? What advantages do they already have or lack? What obstacles do they foresee to the fulfillment of their life goals? How can they overcome those obstacles?

CLASS AND HISTORY

It's basically against the American principle to belong to a class. So naturally, Americans have a really hard time talking about the class system, because they really don't want to admit that the class system exists.

--R. Couri Hay, society columnist

Teachers may wish to use **People Like Us** as a springboard for studying class issues in American history. Here are two suggestions for group activities.

- A. The Declaration of Independence asserts that "all men are created equal." Has that ideal ever been realized in the United States? Alexis de Tocqueville seemed to think so. In his introduction to "Democracy in America," published in 1831, he states: *Among the novel objects that attracted my attention during my stay in the United States, nothing struck me more forcibly than the general equality of condition among the people.*

RESEARCH/WRITE: Ask students to examine the reasons Tocqueville found the United States to be so egalitarian. Prompt them to recall the class from which Tocqueville came and the social hierarchies in his native France, in Europe, and in Great Britain. Do they agree with Tocqueville's opinion? Why/why not? Did his observation extend to women, people of color, Jews, and immigrants? What would Tocqueville say if he came back to the United States today?

[TEACHER'S NOTE: As his name suggests, Tocqueville was a French aristocrat who lived through the French Revolution. He knew that most European nations had rigid class boundaries: a citizen was either born upper class, bourgeois, or working class and that's the way s/he stayed, by and large. In the United States, Tocqueville found it remarkable that no one seemed to defer to anyone else in social relations. To his eye, social class on the new continent seemed to be based more on money than lineage. In comparison with the European system, the United States did in fact afford much more social mobility at the time.]

GO TO www.tocqueville.org for biographical information on the writer and excerpts from "Democracy in America."

- B. The sinking of the *Titanic* is a vivid case study of how one's inherited social class can turn out to be a matter of life or death. Passengers were literally put in their "proper" place, from first class to steerage. And when the ship went down, survival wasn't exactly a question of "every man for himself": social position largely determined who would get a seat in a lifeboat.

RESEARCH/WRITE: Compile resource materials on the history of the *Titanic* disaster. [There are numerous books about the *Titanic* in print, including many primary sources: transcripts of hearings, newspaper reports, survivors' accounts, and other narratives.]

Ask students to explore the stratification of passengers and the facilities allotted to each. What were the criteria for loading people into the few lifeboats available? Ask students to compare statistics on who died, by passenger/ crew category/gender.

[NOTE: When the great ship went down in 1912, 60 percent of the first class survived, 40 percent of the second, and only 25 percent of the third. In certain situations, women were given preference over men.]

If everyone has seen the movie *Titanic*, students can discuss the ways in which it presented issues of social class.

CLASS AND THE MEDIA

An old proverb says: "History is written by the winners." The history of our world is being written now, every day, in America's newspapers and magazines, in television news shows and entertainment programs. Who are the winners and who the losers in the daily creation of the historical record? Does class play a role? If so, how does it shape our view of the world?

— **GO TO** www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus for lesson plan: William Munn's "**Class in the Media: Writing a Television Show**" focuses student attention on the way different classes are portrayed in print and in the electronic media. Also see "The Rise of the Educated Class," an excerpt from David Brook's *Bobos In Paradise*. See if Brook's analysis of the wedding announcements in *The New York Times* applies to your local newspaper.

DISCUSS: Have students consider some popular TV shows through the prism of class. Which shows are (ostensibly) about upper, middle or working class characters? How can you tell what class backgrounds the characters are supposed to be from? What jobs do they hold? Are their lifestyles, possessions, and homes reflective of their class? What behaviors are ascribed to members of the different classes? Do characters mix with members of different classes and how are these interactions portrayed? Do the shows seem to promote the idea of the American Dream? Who do you think writes the programs and might the writers' class backgrounds play a role in the presentation of class on TV? What effect do you think the presentation of class on TV has on our understanding of our own class identity?

SUPPLEMENTARY READING: See Linda Holzman's *Media Messages: What Film, Television, and Popular Music Teach Us About Race, Class, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*, (M.E. Sharpe, 2000), an excellent resource that offers ideas for student projects. In particular, see Chapter 3, "Is the United States a Classless Society?" for a variety of student activities.

GROUP PROJECT: Where do we get our ideas about class? Collect one week's worth of your local newspaper or newspapers. Divide students into small groups and give each group one or two editions to read, analyze, and compare. How many stories are about the upper class? Middle class? Poor? What kinds of stories are written about each category? Are the different classes treated differently?

Who are the major advertisers in the newspaper? What items are being advertised? Do these items appeal to a particular class?

To which class do students think the reporters mostly belong? Does a reporter's class affiliation (or race and gender and class) affect objectivity? If so, in what ways?

[TEACHER'S NOTE: This activity can be adapted for local or national television news programs. Students can observe a variety of programs and analyze the class backgrounds/perspectives of the anchors, reporters, and pundits. Or, have students analyze TV advertisements for clues to how the product is marketed to a particular class -- or how the product projects an image of class -- high or low --that it promises to bestow on the consumer.]

SUPPLEMENTARY READING: *Volunteer Slavery* by Jill Nelson (Viking Penguin, 1994). Nelson was the first black woman to write for The Washington Post's Sunday magazine. Her autobiography gives a behind-the-scenes look at class and race bias in action in one of America's most prestigious newsrooms.

CLASS AND EDUCATION

A generation ago, when you sent your kids to private school, it was because you didn't like black people. And now when you send your kids to private school, it's 'cause you don't like poor people. It's all about class, it's all about, "I want my kid to go to school with the right kinds of people so that he can get in to Harvard"...it's all about class.

--Joe Queenan, author and columnist

Americans tend to believe that education is the great leveler of class, an idea that assumes that all Americans get an equal education. But the fact that most public schools are supported by local property taxes guarantees that wealthier communities will have better-financed schools. In reality, high-quality public schools remain, by and large, available primarily to children who live in wealthy communities, while those who live in poor districts are often literally short-changed.

RESEARCH PROJECT: *How do schools get and spend their funding?* Divide students into two groups. Group 1 can devise a plan to research how their school is funded. Group 2 can research the same questions at a school (public or private) in a lower- or higher-class neighborhood or if possible, in another community. [Note: This could perhaps be a long-distance project, with students from a suburban school e-mailing students in an inner-city school for answers.]

After research is completed, compare: What is the operating budget for each school? Where does the money come from? How much is spent on each student? How much is spent on technology and equipment? On teachers' salaries? On extra-curricular activities, like music and art? What are the main sources of revenue for each school? Is there a relationship between property taxes in the community and education? What is that relationship?

GO TO www.nea.org for education statistics: From the National Education Association Web site, teachers or students can download a free annual report of state-level education data, including sources of school revenue, teacher salaries, and per-capita expenditure for the year 2000.

SEE Appendix for additional statistics: on the correlation between income and education.

CLASS AND GENDER

Two segments of **People Like Us** point to the particular class-related issues faced by single or divorced women with children in America. In the program, two African-American mothers link their "low" status as single parents to their exclusion from a high-class black club. Burger King employee Tammy Crabtree struggles to support her four teenagers, apparently with minimal assistance from their father. These

women, and others throughout the country, confront a hard statistic: that the median weekly pay of full-time working women is roughly 75 percent of men's median pay -- and that their children often suffer from the difference. [Source: *Equal Pay for Equal Work Is No. 1 Goal of Women* by Tamar Lewin, The New York Times, September 5, 1997.]

CLASS PROJECT: What happens when class and gender intersect? Ask students to peruse the **Appendix** for statistics on disparities of gender and income. Develop a chart that shows comparisons between the earnings of men and women and divorced men and divorced women. [Note: You can also do a similar exercise based on class and race or class and disability.]

WRITING: Review the Tammy Crabtree segment. Ask students to imagine they are Ms. Crabtree's social worker. Write an assessment of her abilities, her needs, her goals, and the obstacles she faces. Assess what kinds of services or assistance she requires to achieve her goal of raising her children and becoming a teacher. How can she get access to these services?

_GO TO www.newyorktimes.com for related articles on women and income:

A *New York Times* report by Louis Uchitelle, "Lacking Pensions, Older Divorced Women Remain at Work," (June 26, 2001) explores the problems facing women in their sixties who lost their nest egg when their husbands departed and must hang on to their jobs to maintain their household. (note: access to New York Times archives may involve additional charges)

CLASS AND HOUSING

I think we all lose something when we are all divided. I don't want to be stuck in an upper middle class ghetto with all my friends being the same sort of people.... I feel deprived to live in a society that is so segregated by class.

--Barbara Ehrenreich, author

Throughout the United States, urban communities increasingly face rising rents, over-development of luxury housing units, and under-development of subsidized housing for the poor and middle class. In many places, there is an increase in the rise of "gated communities" -- high-priced enclaves that are fenced off from surrounding neighborhoods and patrolled by private security guards. At the same time, the gap between the number of affordable housing units and the number of people who need them is currently the largest on record -- an estimated 5.4 million units [Source: www.nationalhomeless.org].

CLASS PROJECT: Ask students to research different neighborhoods in their community. They can start with the local newspaper ads for rentals and homes for sale. If possible, arrange for students to visit a variety of neighborhoods and report back: what kinds of housing and lot-sizes are available in each? Is there a "gated community" in your area? What are the bylaws of that neighborhood? What is the average price of a home there? What stores or restaurants are in each neighborhood? Are there banks or ATM machines in all areas? Have students compare the price of a staple item (milk, diapers) in stores in each neighborhood.

Based on this research, ask students to create a **community map**. Who are the people who tend to live in the various neighborhoods? In general, what are their

professions -- white collar? Blue collar? Working poor? What differences did students find in terms of costs, facilities, stores, banking outlets, and so forth?

Finally: Are there people in your community who are homeless? Where are they sheltered? What is being done in the community to provide homes for low-income people?

GO TO www.nationalhomeless.org for related link to : A [National Housing Trust Fund](#) that the organization proposes. This fund would subsidize production of new housing and help preserve or rehabilitate existing housing that is affordable for low income people.

GO TO www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus for related link: to PRIZM, a marketing data base that estimates your income and your personal characteristics and tastes based on where you live.

CLASS AND GOVERNMENT

It is a commonly-held belief in our society that every baby born in the United States has the possibility of becoming President -- of literally rising to the top, regardless of his or her humble origins. Does an examination of the historical record support this idea?

GROUP ACTIVITY: Compile autobiographical material about American Presidents in the 20th century. In small groups, ask students to examine the social backgrounds of the men who have held the nation's highest office. Analyze how many were born to families of wealth and privilege and how many rose up from the middle or lower classes. Each group should report its findings to the class and discuss whether class plays a role in the matter of electing our Chief Executive.

GO TO www.census.gov The official site of the U.S. Census Bureau contains reports, statistics, graphs, and other information about the distribution of wealth in the United States.

Appendix

What Is Social Class?

Determinants of Social Class

[Adapted from: Coleman, James S. *A Paradigm for the Study of Social Strata*. 1965/6]

- A. Personal performance
 - 1. Education
 - 2. Occupation
 - 3. Income
 - 4. Awards and achievements
- B. Wealth
 - 1. Amount
 - 2. Source
- C. Social orientation
 - 1. Interactions
 - 2. Class consciousness
 - 3. Value orientation

Variables of Social Class

[Based on a model formulated by social scientist, Max Weber]

- a) Power - The degree to which a person can control other people.
- b) Wealth - Objects or symbols owned by human beings which have value attached to them.
- c) Prestige - The degree of respect, favorable regard or importance accorded to an individual by members of society.

GO TO <http://www.abacon.com/sociology/soclinks/sclass.html>, a Web site with links related to social class, poverty, and inequality.

FACTS ON CLASS

Class Structure In The United States

[Adapted from: Coleman, James S. *A Paradigm for the Study of Social Strata*. 1965/6]

Two Upper Classes

1. Upper Upper - Old Money
2. Lower Upper - New Money

Three Middle Classes

1. Upper Middle - Professional
2. Middle Class - White Collar and Entrepreneurs
3. Working Class - Blue Collar

Two Lower Classes

1. Upper Lower - Unskilled Laborers
2. Lower Lower - Socially and Economically Disadvantaged

Statistics

WEALTH AND POVERTY

U.S. median household income: \$ 40,816
(U.S. Census Bureau, 1999)

Average household net worth of the top 1% of wage earners: \$10,204,000
Average net worth of the bottom 40% of wage earners: \$1900
(Edward N. Wolff, "Recent Trends in Wealth Ownership, 1983-1998," April 2000)

Definition of middle class in terms of income: \$ 32,653 to \$ 48,979
(Economy.Com's The Dismal Scientist, 1999)

Percentage of U.S. children who live in poverty: 20
(U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)

Percentage of U.S. adults who live in poverty: 12
(U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)

Percentage of single mothers who live in poverty: 37.4%
(U.S. Census Bureau, 1999)

Rank of the U.S. among the seventeen leading industrial nations with the largest percentage of their populations in poverty: 1
(United Nations Human Development Report 1998, N.Y.C.)

Portion of U.S. stock owned by the wealthiest 10 % of Americans: 9/10
(Economic Policy Institute, Washington D.C., 1999)

Median hourly wage of a former welfare recipient: \$6.61
(Urban Institute, 2000)

Percentage of former welfare recipients who have no access to a car: 90%
(Surface Transportation Policy Project, 2001)

Bill Gates hourly wage: \$650,000/hr
(Bill Gates Net Worth Page, average since 1986)

EDUCATION

In October 1996, 48.6 % of 16-24 year old high school completers in lower income families were enrolled in college, compared with 62.7 % from middle income families and 78 % from higher income families.

(U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey)

Mean verbal SAT score for children in households with incomes below \$10,000: 427
Mean verbal SAT score for children in households with incomes above \$100,000: 559
Mean math SAT score for children in households with incomes below \$10,000: 446
Mean math SAT score for children in households with incomes above \$100,000: 572.
(SAT Program information, 1998)

Median household income for those less than a 9th grade education: \$17,261
Median household income for those with a 9th - 12th grade education (no diploma):
\$ 21,737

Median household income for high school graduates: \$ 35,744

Median household income for college graduates, B.A.: \$ 64,406

Median household income for college graduates, M.A.: \$ 74,476

Median household income for professional degree holders: \$ 100,000

(U.S. Census Bureau, 1999)

CLASS, RACE, AND GENDER

Median net worth of a White American: \$81,700

Median net worth of an African-American: \$10,000

(Edward N. Wolff, "Recent Trends in Wealth Ownership, 1983-1998," April 2000)

Number of White people living in poverty: 21,922,000

Number of Black people living in poverty: 8,360,000

(U.S. Census Bureau, 1999)

Percentage of men earning poverty level hourly wage: 19.5%

Percentage of women earning poverty level hourly wage: 31.1%

(Economic Policy Institute, 2000)

Males:

White collar: 47% (of workforce), avg hourly wage = \$22.20

Service: 10.4%, avg hourly wage = \$10.92

Blue collar: 40.1%, avg hourly wage = \$13.71

Females:

White collar: 73.4%, avg hourly wage = \$14.90

Service: 15.2%, avg hourly wage = \$8.17

Blue collar: 9.6%, avg hourly wage = \$9.94

(The State of Working America 2000-2001, Economic Policy Institute, statistics are for 2000)

Median Income by type of household:

Family households (all): \$49,940

Married couple families: \$56,827

Female householder, no husband present: \$26,164

Male householder, no wife present: \$41,838

(U.S. Census Bureau, 1999)

ATTITUDE

36 % of those earning \$15,000 a year call themselves middle class.

49 % of those with incomes between \$ 35,000 and \$ 49,999 call themselves middle class

71 % of those with incomes above \$ 75,000 call themselves middle class

(National Center for Opinion Research, 2000)

Percentage of 5000 American adults polled who cited "lack of effort as a reason people are poor: 43 %

Percentage who cited "strong effort" as a reason some people are rich: 53%

(Gallup Poll Social Audit, 1998)

HOUSING

Number of American households that spend more than 50% of income on housing:

14 million

(Habitat for Humanity, 1999)

Number of families or primary individuals who live in mobile homes or trailers: 6.8 million

(U.S. Census Bureau, American Housing Survey, 1999)

Percentage change in the number of rural Americans living in mobile homes between 1980 and 1990: + 52

(Housing Assistance Council, Washington D.C.)

Number of U.S. households earning less than \$10,000/year: 7.6 million

Number of affordable housing units available: 4.4 million

(Low Income Housing Information Service, 1995)

Number of gated communities in America: approx. 20,000 (housing approximately 8.4 million people)

(*Fortress America: Gated Communities in America*, Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, Brookings Institution Press, 1997)

Number of gated communities in 1950: 2,500

(Fortress America, 1997)

Interesting fact: In 1995, homeowners earning more than \$100,000 a year received a total of \$28.9 billion dollars in federal income tax deductions on mortgage interest payments. The entire 1996 budget of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development was only \$19 billion.

("The New Politics of Housing," Peter Dreier, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Winter 1997)

CRIME

Percentage of death row inmates who could not afford to hire a lawyer: 90%
(ACLU, 2001)

ON-LINE RESOURCES

Visit the following Web sites for ideas for further study of class-related issues:

www.PBS.org/Peoplelikeus

The program Web site features articles, essays, games, and other resources that elaborate upon the themes of the show.

www.Inequality.org A Web site devoted to "news, information, and expertise on the divide in income, wealth, and health." Links to many other class-related sites.

Additional Web sites -- from activist groups to think tanks:

www.Acorn.org Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now - an activist group that works to eliminate injustice.

www.calltorenewal.com Call To Renewal - a faith-based network that fights poverty and inequality.

www.census.gov The official site of the U.S. Census Bureau contains reports, statistics, graphs, and other information about the distribution of wealth in the United States.

www.chn.org The Coalition on Human Needs - an alliance of national organizations concerned with public policy affects on low income people, and other vulnerable populations, including women, children, and the disabled.

www.fair.org FAIR - a national group that monitors bias and censorship in the media and advocates for greater diversity of viewpoints and concerns in the press.

www.urban.org The Urban Institute - a nonpartisan economic and social policy research organization.

About the People in People Like Us

You may contact any of the people appearing in **People Like Us** by sending an e-mail to our offices [mail@cnam.com]. Please put the name of the person you wish to contact in the subject heading of your note, and we will make sure they receive it.

BILL BEAR is a plumbing contractor in southern Ohio.

MICHAEL BIRDWELL is a historian at Tennessee Tech University and is an editor of the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*.

DAVID BROOKS is the editor of *The Weekly Standard*, a political magazine, and the author of *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There*.

DAVID PATRICK COLUMBIA is a social chronicler who runs newyorksocialdiary.com.

TAMMY CRABTREE lives in Pike County, in southern Ohio, where she works at a Burger King. She has four children ages 12 to 22.

STANLEY CROUCH is a noted jazz critic, novelist, and newspaper columnist.

JOHN DIJULIO is a criminologist at the University of Pennsylvania who now serves as the head of the White House Office of Faith Based Initiatives.

BARBARA EHRENREICH is an author and columnist. Her latest book is called *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* and features her experiences working at minimum wage jobs.

DANA FELTY hails from Morgantown, Kentucky (pop 2,544). She attended Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio and now works in Washington DC for a journalism foundation.

PAUL FUSSELL is a professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania and author of *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System*.

LAWRENCE OTIS GRAHAM is the author of *Our Kind of People: Inside America's Black Upper Class*.

PAT GULDEN runs the Eastern Seaboard's largest retail outlet for concrete lawn ornaments, located in suburban Baltimore.

R. COURI HAY is a publicist and society columnist in New York City.

BENILDE LITTLE is a novelist who wrote the bestseller *Good Hair*.

CARLOTTA MILES is a psychiatrist in Washington DC.

LANG PHIPPS is a musician and writer from New York City.

JOE QUEENAN is an author and columnist. His most recent book is *Balsamic Dreams: A Short but Self-Important History of the Baby Boomer*.

DAN RODRICKS is a columnist for the Baltimore Sun.

GINIE POLO SAYLES has written *How to Marry the Rich* and *How to Meet the Rich*, and teaches classes across the country on improving one's social situation.

BRYON SMITH is a retired fireman and part-time general contractor in central New Jersey.

TOM SMITH is a teacher in Burlington, Vermont. He served on the Burlington city council.

ROBERT A.M. STERN is an architect in New York City and the Dean of the Yale School of Architecture.

ELEANOR WELLER is an interior decorator in Baltimore who has written *The Golden Age of America's Gardens: Proud Owners, Private Estates, 1890-1940*.

ORDERING INFORMATION

Videocassettes of **People Like Us: Social Class in America**
can be ordered from CNAM Film Library.

Call (800) 343-5540 or write to:

**CNAM Film Library
22-D Hollywood Avenue
Hohokus, NJ 07423**

Additional copies of this guide are available from:

**The Center for New American Media
589 Eighth Avenue, 21st floor
New York, NY 10018**
mail@cnam.com