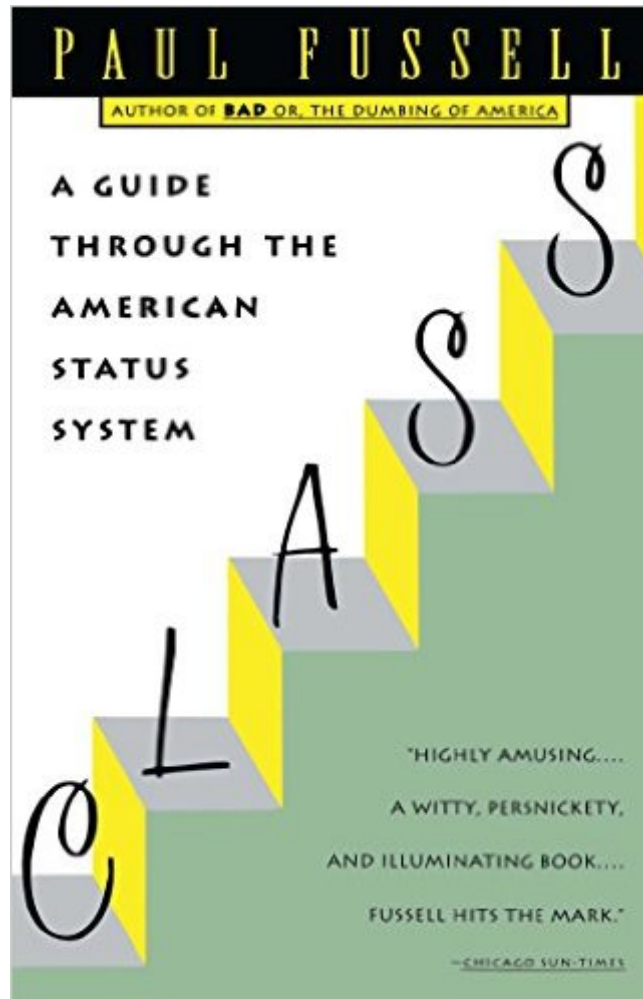


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# Class: A Guide Through The American Status System



## Synopsis

The bestselling, comprehensive, and carefully researched guide to the ins-and-outs of the American class system with a detailed look at the defining factors of each group, from customs to fashion to housing. Based on careful research and told with grace and wit, Paul Fussell shows how everything people within American society do, say, and own reflects their social status. Detailing the lifestyles of each class, from the way they dress and where they live to their education and hobbies, > is sure to entertain, enlighten, and occasionally enrage readers as they identify their own place in society and see how the other half lives.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I read this book some ten years ago, and it struck me as most humorous and overall correct. Although I was born in South America, I have lived and studied in the US, and I have studied and worked in France and the UK. My experience in all these geographies supports Fussell's conclusions. It is true that the higher the social class, the taller and slimmer people tend to be. It is true that the traditional lower (rather than the underclass) and the higher classes have many things in common, among them a deeply ingrained conservatism and a fierce pride in their way of being. In the UK, working class men's clubs are fighting the same fight which was lost a few years ago by the gentlemen's clubs: the right to keep women away from at least some parts of their premises. Many working class people all over the world deride attempts by others of a similar origin to "pass themselves out" as middle class, and regard middle class dress, speech patterns and social habits as feminine and unsound. There is probably no significant difference in the prejudiced, deeply

uncurious mindset of Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh and that of a pensioner his age living in Yorkshire. It is true that strident religious opinions, big hair of unnatural colour and painted nails, or toupees and poorly-fitting jackets are usually the predictor of lower-to lower middle class background, or that high professional qualifications, gym memberships, affiliation with environmental organizations and career ambitions normally denote urban middle class. It might be seen as cruel, even evil, to remark on it, but don't the following terms clearly conjure a mental image of a particular order of things?

Class pervades American life. Each day people judge and rank others by appearance, manners, language, and "taste" in a great societal pecking order. Some of this happens by reflex. For certain people a man in a tank top carries a high "ewww" factor. Others wince at anything monogrammed (a sure sign that the wearer seeks attention). Some may even take offense at compliments while others find the lack of a compliment an affront. It's a complicated game, and not everyone chooses to participate. But for many the game goes unnoticed. This small book provides a good overview of the rules of the American class game. Paul Fussell delineates the choices people make that cause others to judge and categorize them (since people don't choose their race that subject doesn't appear). Everything from clothes, cars, diction, consumption (conspicuous or inconspicuous), education, housing styles, and physique to pets, reading material, jewelry, food, words, sports, interior decorating, grammar, and entertainment receive brutally honest coverage. These characteristics get evaluated through an objective eye and not through the filter of a specific class. For Fussell has nasty things to say about all of the classes, even the uppers. Though the middle class receives the majority of his invective, being the class of snobbery (due to class insecurity). Regardless, none of the classes come out ahead, and none are ranked as "better" or "superior". The book doesn't aim to judge in the way the classes furtively judge each other. It more delineates while it attempts to expose the rules. And in this it excels. While the tabulating of pros and cons continues through the first seven chapters, it slowly becomes clear that Fussell isn't condoning class climbing. "Class" won't help anyone "go up".

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