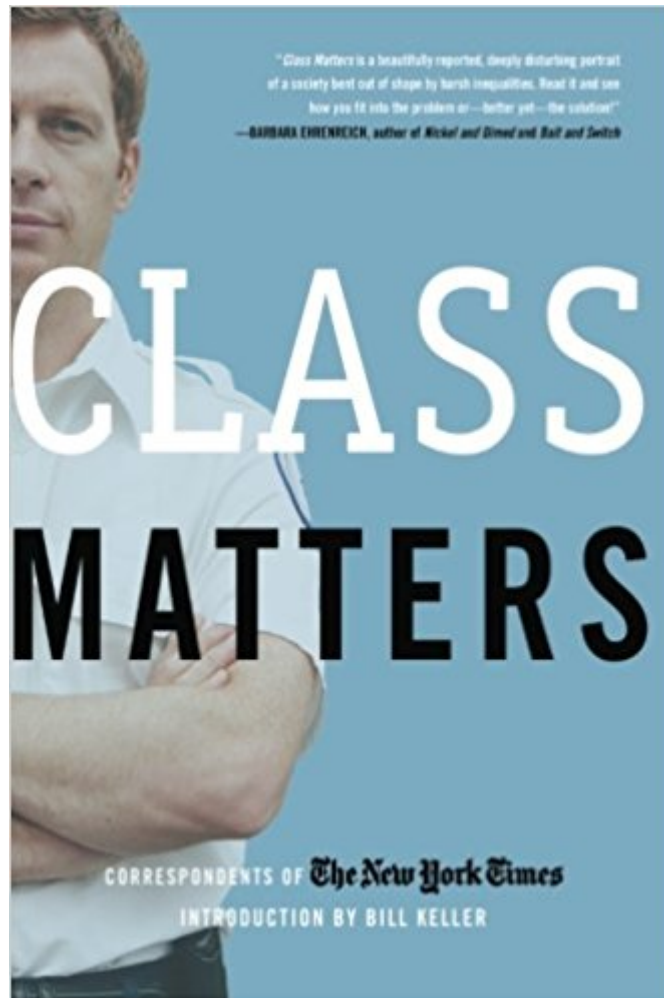




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Class Matters



Synopsis

The acclaimed New York Times series on social class in America—and its implications for the way we live our lives. We Americans have long thought of ourselves as unburdened by class distinctions. We have no hereditary aristocracy or landed gentry, and even the poorest among us feel that they can become rich through education, hard work, or sheer gumption. And yet social class remains a powerful force in American life. In *Class Matters*, a team of New York Times reporters explores the ways in which class—defined as a combination of income, education, wealth, and occupation—influences destiny in a society that likes to think of itself as a land of opportunity. We meet individuals in Kentucky and Chicago who have used education to lift themselves out of poverty and others in Virginia and Washington whose lack of education holds them back. We meet an upper-middle-class family in Georgia who moves to a different town every few years, and the newly rich in Nantucket whose mega-mansions have driven out the longstanding residents. And we see how class disparities manifest themselves at the doctor's office and at the marriage altar. For anyone concerned about the future of the American dream, *Class Matters* is truly essential reading. "Class Matters is a beautifully reported, deeply disturbing, portrait of a society bent out of shape by harsh inequalities. Read it and see how you fit into the problem or—better yet—the solution!"—Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Nickel and Dimed* and *Bait and Switch*

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Customer Reviews

The topography of class in America has shifted over the past twenty years, blurring the lines

between upper, middle and lower classes; some have argued that the concept of class is irrelevant in today's society. While the 14 pieces in this volume (all originally printed as part of a New York Times series) shed light on a different aspect of class, they all agree that it remains an important facet of contemporary American culture and draw their strength by examining class less through argument than through storytelling. The reader, by following three heart attack victims through very different recoveries, by witnessing the divergent immigrant experiences of a Greek diner owner and his Mexican line cook, by tracing the life path of an Appalachian foster child turned lawyer and a single welfare mother turned registered nurse, or by seeing the world from the perspective of the wife of a "relo" (a six-figure executive who relocates every few years to climb the corporate ladder), quickly realizes class is defined by much more than income. The collection has the power of a great documentary film: it captures the lives and ideas of its subjects in lively, articulate prose that, while grounded in statistics and research, remains engaging and readable throughout. The result is neither an attack on the rich nor a lecture to the poor, but a thoughtful consideration of class dynamics. Its empathetic take on this divisive subject and straightforward prose style will make the book of interest to a wide range of readers. Recommended. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

The New York Times team comprises Anthony DePalma, Timothy Egan, Geraldine Fabrikant, Laurie Goodstein, David Cay Johnston, Peter T. Kilborn, David D. Kirkpatrick, David Leonhardt, Tamar Lewin, Charles McGrath, Janny Scott, Jennifer Steinhauer, and Isabel Wilkerson. Bill Keller is the executive editor of The New York Times. Class Matters also includes essays by Christopher Buckley, Diane McWhorter, Richard Price, David Levering Lewis, and Linda Chavez, about their encounters with class when they were growing up.

I loved this book. The dynamics of how economic class effects many aspects of our lives are highlighted well in this book. I like how it is written in a very accessible yet smart way. Too many books either this subject have either an anti corporate America activist slant or a how to guideline for slipping into better economic standing. This book simply tells the story of the people in different economic places which I love. This also succeeded at helping me come to terms with my own biases better as certain stories made me angry simply because the storytelling was simple and a matter of fact. Very conscious raising! I give this book four stars instead of five because the academic in me tends to disregard books without a bibliography. But thoughtful research is interspersed through the book. Though the appendix with the survey is excellent.

I read this book this past summer and I must say that I am quite impressed with the New York Times for telling the unique challenges of Americans across the country. Each segment in the book tells something different. For instance, the chapter on the intricate health care disparity, where a 60 year old man from the upper bracket of society was able to receive fast hospital care immediately after an heart-attack in the middle streets of New York City. His social class position was a buffer to the problems that plague millions of Americans dealing with the same health issue. Also, let's not forget about this man's social connections, which helped with his speedy recovery; he had peers knowledgeable of which hospital to direct him towards that would provide him with immediate heart surgery. The other two subjects were not so fortunate, taking days to receive treatment for the same condition and to be released. Actually, the female subject never received full treatment. This section explained is one of many chapters readers will come to understand about the disparities within our society many involving average Americans. In general, I must say this book has a lot of interesting segments, displaying the many problems, faced by Americans across the nation, that can be blamed by the many complex social and economic issues in America. Conditions such as health care, education inequality, un-employment, single parenthood are all told in this book. After reading, I began to ask how can these problems become absolved? Should it start through enacting policies, fixing the educational system, creating jobs? Many solutions are possible. In general, this book is for readers interested in knowing how people in this country are dealing with predicaments that maybe similar or vastly different from their own.

I bought this book to read along with my 16 year old daughter for a class. We would read the chapters and then discuss it before she wrote her assignment. It brought to light many new topics and such great, interesting, and sometimes sad but uplifting conversations. When I asked her for input on the review she handed me her notebook and said this says it all, I am not writing another review. Her notebook was full of her thoughts about each section of the book, and the many things we had discussed and expanded on. Every evening after dinner we would read and then talk about the things we learned. I personally found the book engaging and food for thought. I love reading, pretty much anything I can get my hands on. This was a educational and enjoyable read.

Class Matters explores income, social class, wealth's causal factors, social class mobility, the reality of the American Dream, old versus new money, class distinctions, types of neighborhoods and enclaves, mixed class marriages, tax policy and the rapidly growing wealth disparity and more. I

especially liked the chapter, "Old Nantucket Warily Meets the New." This book provides insight into the very poor to the Åber-rich and everything in between. It is a fascinating look into social class in America. Each chapter is a separate topic written by a different New York Times contributor. And many real life examples are used to drive the points home. If you enjoy sociology, you will find this book to be a very interesting read.

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