

first expressions of the new educated class ethos, and while the fever and froth of the 1960s have largely burned away, the ideas of these 1950s intellectuals continue to resonate.

Finally, a word about the tone of this book. There aren't a lot of statistics in these pages. There's not much theory. Max Weber has nothing to worry about from me. I just went out and tried to describe how people are living, using a method that might best be described as comic sociology. The idea is to get at the essence of cultural patterns, getting the flavor of the times without trying to pin it down with meticulous exactitude. Often I make fun of the social manners of my class (I sometimes think I've made a whole career out of self-loathing), but on balance I emerge as a defender of the Bobo culture. In any case, this new establishment is going to be setting the tone for a long time to come, so we might as well understand it and deal with it.

1

The Rise of the Educated Class

I'M NOT SURE I'd like to be one of the people featured on the *New York Times* weddings page, but I know I'd like to be the father of one of them. Imagine how happy Stanley J. Kogan must have been, for example, when his daughter Jamie was admitted to Yale. Then imagine his pride when Jamie made Phi Beta Kappa and graduated summa cum laude. Stanley himself is no slouch in the brains department: he's a pediatric urologist in Croton-on-Hudson, with teaching positions at the Cornell Medical Center and the New York Medical College. Still, he must have enjoyed a gloat or two when his daughter put on that cap and gown.

And things only got better. Jamie breezed through Stanford Law School. And then she met a man—Thomas Arena—who appeared to be exactly the sort of son-in-law that pediatric urologists dream about. He did his undergraduate work at Princeton, where he, too, made Phi Beta

Kappa and graduated summa cum laude. And he, too, went to law school, at Yale. After school they both went to work as assistant U.S. attorneys for the mighty Southern District of New York.

These two awesome résumés collided at a wedding ceremony in Manhattan, and given all the school chums who must have attended, the combined tuition bills in that room must have been staggering. The rest of us got to read about it on the *New York Times* weddings page. The page is a weekly obsession for hundreds of thousands of *Times* readers and aspiring Balzacs. Unabashedly elitist, secretive, and totally honest, the “mergers and acquisitions page” (as some of its devotees call it) has always provided an accurate look at at least a chunk of the American ruling class. And over the years it has reflected the changing ingredients of elite status.

When America had a pedigreed elite, the page emphasized noble birth and breeding. But in America today it's genius and geniality that enable you to join the elect. And when you look at the *Times* weddings page, you can almost feel the force of the mingling SAT scores. It's Dartmouth marries Berkeley, MBA weds Ph.D., Fulbright hitches with Rhodes, Lazard Frères joins with CBS, and summa cum laude embraces summa cum laude (you rarely see a summa settling for a magna—the tension in such a marriage would be too great). The *Times* emphasizes four things about a person—college degrees, graduate degrees, career path, and parents' profession—for these are the markers of upscale Americans today.

Even though you want to hate them, it's hard not to feel a small tug of approval at the sight of these Résumé Gods. Their expressions are so open and confident; their teeth are a tribute to the magnificence of American orthodonture; and since the *Times* will only print photographs in which the eyebrows of the bride and groom are at the same level, the couples always look so evenly matched.

These are the kids who spent the crucial years between ages 16 and 24 winning the approval of their elders. Others may have been rebelling at that age or feeling alienated or just basically exploring their baser natures. But the people who made it to this page controlled their hormonal urges and spent their adolescence impressing teachers, preparing for the next debate tournament, committing themselves to hours of extracurricular and volunteer work, and doing everything else that we as a society want teenagers to do. The admissions officer deep down in all of us wants to reward these mentor magnets with bright futures, and the real admissions officers did, accepting them into the right colleges and graduate schools and thus turbocharging them into adulthood.

The overwhelming majority of them were born into upper-middle-class households. In 84 percent of the weddings, both the bride and the groom have a parent who is a business executive, professor, lawyer, or who otherwise belongs to the professional class. You've heard of old money; now we see old brains. And they tend to marry late—the average age for brides is 29 and for grooms is 32. They also divide pretty neatly into two large subgroups: nurturers and predators. Predators are the lawyers, traders, marketers—the folk who deal with money or who spend their professional lives negotiating or competing or otherwise being tough and screwing others. Nurturers tend to be liberal arts majors. They become academics, foundation officials, journalists, activists, and artists—people who deal with ideas or who spend their time cooperating with others or facilitating something. About half the marriages consist of two predators marrying each other: a Duke MBA who works at NationsBank marrying a Michigan Law grad who works at Winston & Strawn. About a fifth of the marriages on the page consist of two nurturers marrying each other: a Fulbright scholar who teaches humanities at Stanford marrying a Rhodes

scholar who teaches philosophy there. The remaining marriages on the page are mixed marriages in which a predator marries a nurturer. In this group the predator is usually the groom. A male financial consultant with an MBA from Chicago may marry an elementary school teacher at a progressive school who received her master's in social work from Columbia.

These meritocrats devote monstrous hours to their career and derive enormous satisfaction from their success, but the *Times* wants you to know they are actually not consumed by ambition. Each week the paper describes a particular wedding in great detail, and the subtext of each of these reports is that all this humongous accomplishment is a mere fluke of chance. These people are actually spunky free spirits who just like to have fun. The weekly "Vows" column lovingly details each of the wedding's quirky elements: a bride took her bridesmaids to get drunk at a Russian bathhouse; a couple hired a former member of the band Devo to play the *Jeopardy* theme song at the reception; another read A. A. Milne's Christopher Robin poems at a ceremony in a former du Pont mansion. The *Times* article is inevitably studded with quotations from friends who describe the bride and groom as enchanting paradoxes: they are said to be grounded but berserk, daring yet traditional, high-flying yet down to earth, disheveled yet elegant, sensible yet spontaneous. Either only paradoxical people get married these days, or people in this class like to see themselves and their friends as balancing opposites.

The couples tell a little of their own story in these articles. An amazing number of them seem to have first met while recovering from marathons or searching for the remnants of Pleistocene man while on archeological digs in Eritrea. They usually enjoyed a long and careful romance, including joint vacations in obscure but educational places like Myanmar and Minsk. But many of the

couples broke up for a time, as one or both partners panicked at the thought of losing his or her independence. Then there was a lonely period apart while one member, say, arranged the largest merger in Wall Street history while the other settled for neurosurgery after dropping out of sommelier school. But they finally got back together again (sometimes while taking a beach vacation at a group home with a bunch of people with cheekbones similar to their own). And eventually they decided to share an apartment. We don't know what their sex lives are like because the *Times* does not yet have a fornication page ("John Grind, a lawyer at Skadden Arps with a degree from Northwestern, has begun copulating with Sarah Smith, a cardiologist at Sloan-Kettering with an undergraduate degree from Emory"). But we presume intimate relations are suitably paradoxical: rough yet soft, adventurous yet intimate. Sometimes we get to read about modern couples who propose to each other simultaneously, but most of the time the groom does it the old-fashioned way—often, it seems, while hot-air ballooning above the Napa Valley or by letting the woman find a diamond engagement ring in her scuba mask while they are exploring endangered coral reefs near the Seychelles.

Many of these are trans-conference marriages—an Ivy League graduate will be marrying a Big Ten graduate—so the ceremony has to be designed to respect everybody's sensibilities. Subdued innovation is the rule. If you are a member of an elite based on blood and breeding, you don't need to carefully design a marriage ceremony that expresses your individual self. Your high status is made impervious by your ancestry, so you can just repeat the same ceremony generation after generation. But if you are in an elite based on brainpower, like today's elite, you need to come up with the subtle signifiers that will display your own spiritual and intellectual identity—your qualification for being in the elite in the first place. You need in-

itations on handmade paper but with a traditional typeface. Selecting music, you need Patsy Cline songs mixed in with the Mendelssohn. You need a 1950s gown, but done up so retro it has invisible quotation marks around it. You need a wedding cake designed to look like a baroque church. You need to exchange meaningful objects with each other, like a snowboard engraved with your favorite Schiller quotation or the childhood rubber ducky that you used to cradle during the first dark days of your Supreme Court clerkship. It's difficult to come up with your own nuptial wrinkle, which will be distinctive without being daring. But self-actualization is what educated existence is all about. For members of the educated class, life is one long graduate school. When they die, God meets them at the gates of heaven, totes up how many fields of self-expression they have mastered, and then hands them a divine diploma and lets them in.

The Fifties

The *Times* weddings page didn't always pulse with the accomplishments of the Résumé Gods. In the late 1950s, the page projected a calm and more stately ethos. The wedding accounts of that era didn't emphasize jobs or advanced degrees. The profession of the groom was only sometimes mentioned, while the profession of the bride was almost never listed (and on the rare occasions when the bride's profession was noted, it was in the past tense, as if the marriage would obviously end her career). Instead, the *Times* listed pedigree and connections. Ancestors were frequently mentioned. The ushers were listed, as were the bridesmaids. Prep schools were invariably mentioned, along with colleges. The *Times* was also careful to list the groom's clubs—the Union League, the Cosmopolitan Club. It also ran down the bride's debutante history,

where she came out, and whatever women's clubs she might be a member of, such as the Junior League. In short, the page was a galaxy of restricted organizations. A description of the gown took up a good portion of the article, and the description of the floral arrangements was also exhaustive.

As you read through the weddings page of that time, sentences jump out at you that would never be found on today's weddings page: "She is descended from Richard Warren, who came to Brookhaven in 1664. Her husband, a descendant of Dr. Benjamin Treadwell, who settled in Old Westbury in 1767, is an alumnus of Gunnery School and a senior at Colgate University." Or "Mrs. Williams is an alumna of Ashley Hall and Smith College. A provisional member of the Junior League of New York, she was presented to society in 1952 at the Debutante Cotillion and Christmas Ball." Even the captions would be unthinkable today: "Mrs. Peter J. Belton, who was Nancy Stevens." (The *Times* would only use that past tense caption today for people who have had sex change operations.)

The paper, more reticent, did not list ages in those days, but the couples were clearly much younger; many of the grooms were still in college. A significant portion of the men had attended West Point or Annapolis, for this was a time when the military academies were still enmeshed in the East Coast establishment, and military service was still something that elite young men did. The section itself was huge in the late fifties. On a June Sunday it could stretch over 28 pages and cover 158 weddings. The ceremonies were much more likely then than now to have taken place in old-line suburbs—such towns as Bryn Mawr on Philadelphia's Main Line or Greenwich in Connecticut, Princeton in New Jersey, or the haughtier towns around Chicago, Atlanta, San Francisco, and elsewhere across the nation. The section was also, predictably, WASPier. About half the couples who were featured in the

pressed enough that an educated person can feel a sense of benevolence while appreciating the beauty of their iconography. Sometimes it will be the religious objects of an oppressed culture that will be displayed in an educated home: Amazonian figures, Native American totems, Egyptian deities, animistic shells, or Shinto statuettes. It is acceptable to display sacred items in an educated person's home so long as they are from a religion neither the host nor any of his or her guests is likely to profess.

We educated elites surround ourselves with the motifs of lives we have chosen not to live. We are busy meritocrats, but we choose goods that radiate pre-meritocratic calm. We march into the future with our Palm Pilots and cell phones, but we surround ourselves with rootsy stuff, the reactionary and the archaic. We guiltily acknowledge our privileges but surround ourselves with artifacts from the less privileged. It's not that we're hypocrites. It's just that we're seeking balance. Affluent, we're trying not to become materialists. Busy, we're trying not to lose sight of the timeless essentials. So we go around frantically shopping for the accoutrements of calm. We dream of building a home where we can finally sit still and relax, a place we can go where our ambition won't follow.

In this spirit we sometimes even reintroduce the old WASP styles into our eclecticism. The WASPs may have been racist and elitist. They may have been the establishment that we Bobos destroyed. But at least they weren't consumed by ambition. So when we look at those calm beautiful faces in the Ralph Lauren ads, we can't help feeling that they have something we long for. And so mixed in with our multicultural decor may be an item or two that could have come right out of the New York Yacht Club, maybe a faded leather chair or a dark wooden desk. The WASP Establishment is dead, and irony of ironies, the Protestant Establishment has been transmogrified into one

of those extinct cultures destroyed by the march of technology and progress.

Rule 6. Educated elites are expected to spend huge amounts of money on things that used to be cheap.

As part of our effort to free ourselves from the corruptions of money, we in the educated elite spend a lot of time distancing ourselves from the moneyed elite, the people who are richer than us but less well educated. The members of the money class pour resources into big luxury items, like yachts and jewelry. They go in for products the lower classes could never purchase, such as foie gras, caviar, and truffles. But we in the educated elite go in for products the money classes would never purchase. We prefer to buy the same items as the proletariat—it's just that we buy rarefied versions of these items that the members of the working class would consider preposterous. So we will buy chicken legs, just like everybody else, but they'll likely be free-range chickens that in life were treated better than Elizabeth Taylor at a health spa. We'll buy potatoes, but we won't buy an Idaho spud. We'll select one of those miniature potatoes of distinction that grow only in certain soils of northern France. When we need lettuce, we will choose only from among those flimsy cognoscenti lettuces that taste so bad on sandwiches. The beauty of such a strategy is that it allows us to be egalitarian and pretentious at the same time.

Accordingly, we end up paying hugely inflated prices for all sorts of things that used to be cheap: coffee at \$3.75 a cup, water at \$5 a bottle, hemp clogs at \$59 from Smith & Hawken, a bar of soap at \$12, an Italian biscuit for \$1.50, a box of gourmet noodles for \$9.95, a bottle of juice for \$1.75, and lemongrass at a few bucks a stalk.

Even our white T-shirts can run to \$50 or more. We spend our money on peasant goods that are created in upscale versions of themselves. We are able to cultivate ever finer tastes about ever more simple things.

Rule 7. Members of the educated elite prefer stores that give them more product choices than they could ever want but which don't dwell on anything so vulgar as prices.

Members of the educated class are distinguished not only by what they buy but by how they buy. It's commonly observed, for example, that almost nobody in an upscale coffeehouse orders just a cup of coffee. Instead, one of us will order a double espresso, half decaf-half caffeinated, with mocha and room for milk. Another will order a vente almond Frappuccino made from the Angolan blend with raw sugar and a hint of cinnamon. We don't just ask for a beer. We order one of 16,000 microbrews, picking our way through winter ales, Belgian lagers, and blended wheats. Thanks to our influence on the market, all the things that used to come in just a few varieties now come in at least a dozen: rice, milk, tomatoes, mushrooms, hot sauces, breads, beans, and even iced tea (there are now at least 50 flavors of Snapple).

This is because educated people refuse to be merely pawns in a mass consumer society. Others may buy machine-made products or live in identical suburban tract homes or buy vulgar replicas of earlier vulgar mansions or eat conventional apples. But members of the educated elite do not want to be found to be derivative in their shopping oeuvre. We do not plagiarize our purchases. Shopping for us isn't just about picking up some stuff at the store. Rather, it is precisely by selecting just the right pasta

bowls (hearty, not delicate; muted, not cute; Sieneese, not Wedgwood) that an educated person can develop his or her own taste. In the realm of the Bobos, you become the curator of your possessions. You can, for example, be the Bernard Berenson of the mantelpiece, exercising your exquisite judgment in the realm of living room decor. You can choose candlesticks and picture frames that are eclectic and subversive—an array of statuettes and clocks that is at once daring and spontaneous yet also reflects an elegant unity of thought. You can push the boundaries of fireplace discourse, experimenting with new andirons and firewood formations. Each item you display will be understood to have been a rare "find." You will have picked it out from one of those new stores that organize themselves like flea markets. Thousands of less cultivated shoppers will have gone over it before but lacked the wit to stop and appreciate its ironic emanations. But there it sits on your mantel, a lasting tribute to your taste and slight eccentricity. If T. S. Eliot were alive today and of a mind, he'd open a chain of home furnishings stores called Objective Correlatives, and each object in them would be the physical expression of some metaphysical sentiment.

Nor is it ever enough just to buy something; one has to be able to discourse upon it. That is why, for example, the Lands' End catalogue doesn't just show off, say, a nice tweed jacket. It has little bits of text all around describing the Celtic roots of tweed, relating an interesting 14th-century legend about tweed, explaining why the best lambswool is sheared in the first six months of a lamb's life, and noting that the jacket is made by adorable old men with lined faces. The Lands' End people surround their advertisement with edifying articles by such writers as Garrison Keillor to let us know that the document we hold in our hands is not merely a catalogue but is actually more like one of those money-losing highbrow magazines.

In this and myriad other ways, the companies that sell to us have developed careful marketing strategies for people who disdain marketing. They help make shopping seem a bit like an honors project at Bennington College. We don't just look for a toothpaste. We assign ourselves a curriculum in toothpaste-ology. We learn about all the different options: whitening (we feel guilty that we are vain), gum protection (which is responsible), baking soda (organic and virtuous sounding, if perhaps a bit rough on the enamel). Then we study the brand names, musing over the big corporate brands, like Crest and Colgate, and the charming and socially conscious brands, like Tom's of Maine, which seems to be made by such nice, unpretentious people. And it's only when we are feeling tired and lazy at the airport store that we just go ahead and pick the toothpaste that has the nicest box.

The companies that appeal to educated consumers not only are informing us about things but are providing a philosophic context for their product. Coffee shops like Starbucks decorate their wall trim with texts—the apt Emersonian maxim or the ironic comment from Napoleon. Grocery stores provide brochures delineating the company's notions about community. Ice cream companies now possess their own foreign policy doctrines. These stores offend us if they dwell overmuch on utilitarian concerns—such as what a great bargain we are getting—but they win our loyalty if they appeal to our idealistic hopes. Volvo advertises a “car that can not only help save your life, but help save your soul as well.” Toyota counters with a slogan for its line of trucks that reads, “Haul some concrete. Move some lumber. Save the world.” Johnnie Walker Scotch announces, “In a Crass and Insincere World, Something That Isn't.” The ABC Carpet & Home store on 19th Street and Broadway in New York endorses Keats's dictum “I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the heart's affections and the

truth of the imagination.” I don't know what that means, but it sounds elevated.

The Rowenta company doesn't just try to persuade us that its irons really press out wrinkles. It sends out little catalogues called “The Feng Shui of Ironing.” “In Feng Shui terms,” the literature informs us, “a wrinkle is actually ‘tension’ in the fabric. Releasing the tension by removing the wrinkle improves the flow of ch'i.” Similarly, the enlightened Williams-Sonoma catalogue doesn't try to flog us morally neutral sausages. The sausage links it advertises derive, the catalogue informs us, from the secrets of curing that Native Americans taught the first European settlers in Virginia (the mention of Native Americans gives the product six moral points right off the bat). The “sausages are made from pure pork and natural spices, using family recipes passed down through the generations.” This is not some Upton Sinclair jungle but a noble lineage of craftsman sausage makers, and we members of the educated elite are willing to pay \$29.50 for 24 little links in order to tap in to this heritage. Shopping, like everything else, has become a means of self-exploration and self-expression. “Happiness,” as Wallace Stevens wrote, “is an acquisition.”

Nor is it only our own selfish interests that we care about on our shopping forays. We want our material things to be bridges that will allow us to effect positive social change. We select our items from catalogues that have plain models in free-flowing dresses. It is by choosing just the right organic fiber shirt in the perfect tone of earth brown (the production of which involved no animal testing) that we use our consumption power to altruistically improve the world. We dine at restaurants that support endive cooperatives, and browse through department stores that have been endorsed by size-rights activists. We have put our Visa cards at the service of environmental concerns and so created a cleansing consumerism. And we

put them away for the same reason. Some members of the educated elite can categorize their friends on the basis of which reason they give for boycotting tuna.

We members of the educated elite attach more spiritual weight to the purity of our food than to five of the Ten Commandments. And so we insist upon natural ingredients made by pesticide-averse farmers who think globally and act locally.

Midas in Reverse

Marx once wrote that the bourgeois takes all that is sacred and makes it profane. The Bobos take everything that is profane and make it sacred. We have taken something that might have been grubby and materialistic and turned it into something elevated. We take the quintessential bourgeois activity, shopping, and turn it into quintessential bohemian activities: art, philosophy, social action. Bobos possess the Midas touch in reverse. Everything we handle turns into soul.

3 _____ Business Life

I'M HOLDING up traffic. I'm walking down the street in Burlington, Vermont, and I come to a corner and see a car approaching, so I stop. The car stops. Meanwhile, I've been distracted by some hippies playing Frisbee in the park, and I stand there daydreaming for what must be 15 or 20 seconds. The car waits.

In a normal city cars roll through these situations; if they see an opening, they take it. But this is Burlington, one of the most socially enlightened cities in America, and drivers here are aware that America has degenerated into a car-obsessed culture where driving threatens to crush the natural rhythms of foot traffic and local face-to-face community, where fossil-fuel-burning machines choke the air and displace the renewable energy sources of human locomotion. This driver knows that while sitting behind the wheel, he is ethically inferior to a pedestrian like me. And to demonstrate his civic ideals, he is going to make damn