

Classes are now arbitrarily ranked by income, power and social connections.



INSIDE VIEW

Who's 'Working Class' Anymore?

Class warfare is in the air again—usually a sign that both sides have run out of ideas. The midterms are a battle over who is taking care of the working class. But what is “working class” anyway?

“I think if you have to work to pay your bills, I think that is one definition,” New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani told the New York Times. So almost everyone? Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez explains, “We have to have a workingclass- centered politics.”

But with manufacturing now less than 10% of total employment, who is workingclass these days? Should classes be ranked by income, power, connections? Blue vs. white collar? It's confusing. The five standard academic classifications are upper, upper middle, middle, lower middle and lower. Others like to break the lower class into working class, working poor and underclass. Adding modifiers like “working” is more political spin than socioeconomics. TV host Mike Rowe highlights “Dirty Jobs.” But we don't call those who hold them the dirty class.

Speaking of spin, blogger Charles Hugh Smith came up with a twisted list of 10 different classes with various stages of money, power and prestige that seemingly all hate each other: deep state, oligarchs, new nobility, upper caste (born into it), state nomenklatura (ruling elite), middle class, working poor, state dependents, mobile creatives and gig-economy precariat (meaning no job security). Why not 20 classes? Run that list against actor George Clooney—certainly a mobile creative, but by my count he is in every one of these classes except middle class and working poor.

Most important, classes in the U.S. aren't stagnant, unlike the ancient Indian caste system, which meant, from Brahmins to the Dalits or Untouchables, you were born into your fate in life. While India banned castes in 1950, it added “caste enumeration” to its census in 2025.

In contrast, the U.S. Census measures income growth and economic mobility, movement between classes. Ignore the fictional American caste system touted by socialist fearmongers like Bernie Sanders: “Billionaires get richer while working families struggle.” In 1960 John Steinbeck wrote in Esquire magazine on the failure of socialism: “We didn't have any self-admitted proletarians. Everyone was a temporarily embarrassed capitalist.” We're strivers. Eat that, Bernie.

Rahm Emanuel smartly told Politico, “If you're trying to be a party that recruits people, working class people that go paycheck to paycheck, socialists have been repulsing them.”

Plus, we're barraged with false analysis that the middle class is hollowing out. The largest income group is now the upper middle class. The upper middle was 10% of families in 1979. It's now 31%. Really? Is that from exploitation? Heredity? Heck no. More like hard work. And dual incomes. The middle class is getting richer. Why is that bad?

Moreover, the income ranges of the upper middle class are wide enough to drive a truck through, from

\$109,000 to \$326,000 for a family of two and \$154,000 to \$462,000 for a family of four. Whether any of these folks feel upper middle class is a different matter—it depends on geography. Worse, they have a target on their backs from the politics of envy.

Mr. Mamdani declared, "The best city in the world deserves the best parks, libraries and schools in the world. That's only possible when we all pay our fair share." But that "fair share" is code for pick your pocket—hence a pied-à-terre tax for out-oftowners with second homes in the city.

Kimbal Musk (Elon's brother) sums up the anger at the upper classes in an HBO documentary on the Burning Man desert gathering, which starts again this week: "Wealthism is a cultural challenge in America today and there is a general resentment that has been built up. But we're bad-asses, we go out into the deep whole world, and we kick ass and we come back, and we gift with a vulnerable open heart."

I think he means that the weeklong cosplaying "Mad Max" meets Cirque du Soleil imagined classless "decommodification" utopia needs capitalism's wealth to work. Most tickets run \$775 to \$3,000 plus tax. Then it ends and reality bites. There is no utopia in the "default world" except in socialism-infused fever dreams. Instead, we work.

The working class is larger than Mr. Mamdani thinks and is infused from lower class through the upper class. Ask any CEO how many hours he works. It isn't 40. It's probably more than 80. Elon Musk famously slept under his desk at a Tesla factory. Work ethic knows no class. And I mean that in a good way. Ignore class rhetoric.

By the way, I've always liked the movie-script idea of a virus that wipes out humanity but somehow misses all those attending Burning Man, who then repopulate the earth. I think that's already happened to the Democratic Party.

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