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THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

SURPRISED BY JOY

CROSSING CLASS

The Invisible Wall

Charles D. Brockett & Heather Tosteson
Editors

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DEDICATION

To the gymnasts of class—
those who climb,
those who tumble,
those who do the heavy lifting
with an open heart

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HEATHER TOSTESON

INTRODUCTION

CROSSING CLASS: THE INVISIBLE WALL

For our press, dedicated to Finding the We in Them, the Us in You, class is the biggest elephant in the room. We keep wanting to talk about it and have tried unsuccessfully several times to create an anthology exploring the subject, but the interest wasn't there. However, this year was different. Numerous writers responded. How we are all shaped, individually and as a country, by class and by other potent, often polarizing, categorizations as well, may be a question that is more alive to us now than at other less socially tumultuous times.

A remarkable number of Americans, around 70% in some surveys, consider themselves middle class, although perhaps only 50% would actually meet the economic criteria. This identification with the middle class reflects a strong belief that the United States is a meritocracy, that with hard work we can all get ahead. This remains true despite the rapidly increasing inequality of income and wealth in our country and a rate of social mobility that is actually less than that in many other developed countries (see Appendix on social mobility and inequality). In contrast, 60% of Britons identify as working class when only 25% of them are actually engaged in manual labor and express doubt about the possibility of social mobility even when they have experienced it themselves.

But what we have asked people to think about and write about is not class in the abstract, rather the felt experience of it, which is, whether imagined or real, always personal and narrative.

This is the call we ran for this anthology.

CROSSING CLASS: THE INVISIBLE WALL
CLASS: It's the great unspeakable in a society dedicated to the proposition

that all people are created equal, with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that believes in the redistributive power of personal ambition, hard work, self-intention and self-definition. It might be the most powerful and intractable of social divisions, its effects potent even within culture, race, or gender. Whether we buy in consciously or not, we are all subject to the shaping power of class.

But what exactly does it mean to be shaped by class? How does this shaping affect what we long for, strive for, believe is possible—not just for us but for those around us and the world at large? We are interested in what happens to our understanding of class, of our society and of ourselves, when we cross class boundaries upwards or downwards, willingly or unwillingly, through education, employment, marriage, divorce, friendships and other meaningful relationships, immigration or emigration, illness, economic or political upheaval. How does our experience of class mobility, wanted or unwanted, change our understanding of ourselves, our social relationships, our sense of social agency, our sense of our society? How does it change our understanding of the possibilities and challenges of living out E Pluribus Unum?

We hope you read the stories, memoirs, and poetry here with these questions resonating in mind, resonating with your own personal experience too. As we have read and selected the pieces that make up this book, I've found different scenes from my own life flashing up as well, in both agreement and counterpoise. I've decided to focus on them here because it feels to me the most trustworthy way to ground my own thoughts on class.

"Every time we come here, I feel I am betraying my people," my sixteen-year-old son said, looking out at the large white sprawling country club in Chestnut Hill where we had come to have dinner with my father and his second family.

"You are," I told him. "I'm glad you realize it."

I said this as a striving artist, a working single mom. When we had moved to the Boston area the year before, it was because I was offered a job that would support us and get us out of Mexico where my own poor judgment had sent us. Proximity to my father, who had become more wealth and status-oriented as he aged, and whose children from his second marriage, the same age as my son, had been raised with a very different level of material

wealth and a very different sense of entitlement, was actually a concern to me, not an enticement. I wanted to protect my son from the values this large white building, with its history of restricting its membership to white Christian men, represented. These were certainly not the values I had been raised with, nor the values I lived by, nor the ones I was raising my son to respect. I was relieved to see my son could protect himself.

I had purposefully chosen to live in Watertown, a working community with a high immigrant population, primarily Armenian, partly because of its fantastic fruit and vegetable markets and its complex multicultural vibe, but mostly because it had a high school with an independent school imbedded in it and an enlightened policy to assure its students graduated. They would create an individualized course of study for any student in danger of dropping out. My son, very bright but dyslexic, was increasingly frustrated with school, and I welcomed that assurance.

Within a year, we had invoked that dropout clause, allowing my son to take college level art and writing classes at local universities and to have his other classes through the independent school. He also worked as a host at a pizza parlor in Harvard Square on weekends, a job he got with the help of two resourceful young Armenians he met through his evening art classes, aspiring artists in their twenties, who had been on their own since the age of fifteen. They fostered his drive for self-sufficiency. They taught him how to dress, all the expectations of the job. They taught him how artists pay their rent.

So when my son talked about "my people," these two young men were part of his personal class structure. So was the young African-American cook at the restaurant who confided in him that he would like to be a host, but that he knew that was never going to happen.

"Why does he think that?" my son asked me. "I keep telling him, if I can do it, why can't you?" He would brood on this at night when he came back from work. "I bet his family's income is no different from ours," he said. "So, it's not money. I don't think its that he's black either. There are black waiters there."

He looked around our flat, all the pillows we used for sitting, the raw boards and bricks we still used as bookcases, the used novels and poetry books from my doctoral program that he was reading his way through for the pleasure of it. "These *create* something," he said. "You don't notice it, but there is this set of shared references you're kind of born into. I mean you learn them, but not consciously, so if someone says something, you know what it

I. LIVING CLASS—RIDING THE WAVES

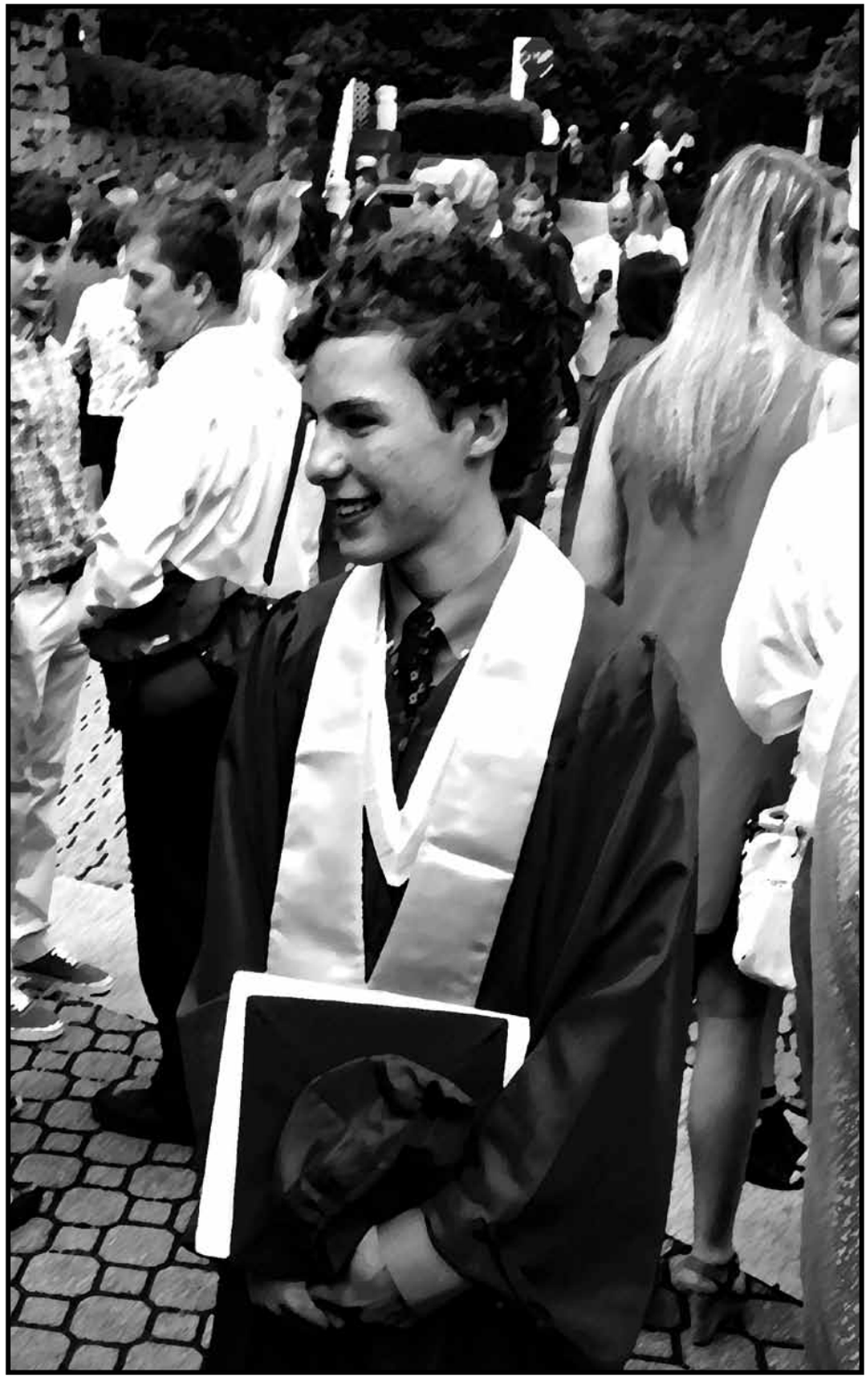
MAIDA BERENBLATT

LOOKING AT UPPER CLASS

As my lifespan becomes longer, memories grow dim but the photographs remain clear. The earliest photo in my album is of my mom standing beside my carriage, wearing a fur coat, reflecting good times. Her black hat has several feathers on the side and I see black gloves covering her hands. I am sitting in my carriage, wearing a jacket, pants, hat and mittens, all in white. The photo is in black and white, but the leaves and trees in the picture spell late fall or early winter. The next photo shows Mom and me in a sparse bedroom with one window on the side of a single bed and a crib; we were essentially homeless while Dad was in a sanatorium recovering from tuberculosis. We were staying for the two years he was away in the house owned by two of his sisters—he had been the youngest of fifteen siblings. Turning the page finds another photo, this one of Mom and me sitting on a swing in front of a cute little house, followed by a photo of Dad and me on a chaise at the beach on a bright, sunny day. Things must have gotten better. That was the rhythm, the twists and the turns in my life's journey.

The following photo reveals my younger sister sitting next to me on the front steps of a different house. It was not clear what house or to whom it belonged. That photo was taken before we moved from Pawtucket, Rhode Island to Boston, Massachusetts then to Claremont, New Hampshire. No one ever explained why or when the moves were to come. Was I too young or the family silent? Actually, no one ever explained anything; I watched the boxes come and then go and heard the words "pack now." There was constant tension and conflict. Sometimes, loud angry fights and at other times, long periods of silence.

One year later there was another big move. We were back in Boston with a new baby brother and an absent younger sister. This time we were in a house living three floors up; I had to climb a lot of steps to get upstairs. The stairs had a creaking, squeaky sound if I stepped in the middle. I tried



MARK PAWLAK

CLASS ACTS

Act I

Wearing overalls on weekdays, painting somebody else's house to earn money? You're working class. Wearing overalls at weekends, painting your own house to save money? You're middle class.

Lawrence Sutton

As newlyweds, Mom and Dad lived with Dad's parents. Their first child, I spent my infancy in that bungalow on Ridge Road in Cheektowaga ("Place-of-crab-apple-trees" in Erie-Seneca). I wasn't quite two years old when they relocated to the Prorok household, Mom's parents, less than a mile away just inside the Buffalo city line. The Polish-Catholic St. John Gualbert parish, to which both Pawlak and Prorok families belonged, straddled the border between the two municipalities. Within its parochial milieu, my parents met, started dating, and eventually married. Their wedding took place in the parish church; a year later, I was baptized there.

Mom was pregnant with brother Chuck when we took up residence in the larger Doat Street house. But the reason wasn't crowding, rather it was the friction between Mom and Grandma Pawlak, a demanding task-mistress. As Mom tells it, she couldn't do anything right in her mother-in-law's eyes. Mom felt belittled by her because she had never learned to cook or sew, or, for that matter, crochet, knit, hang wallpaper, or any of the myriad other skills that Babcia Pawlak deftly executed, all the while nursing her sickly husband. (My Pawlak Dziadek died young from silicosis, a consequence of his job sandblasting castings at a Buffalo foundry.)

I remember almost nothing of Ridge Road in those years, being but a babe. In contrast, I have a wealth of idyllic childhood memories from the bustling Doat Street household that was filled with Polish chatter and the smells of Babcia Prorok's cooking. Mom, the youngest of eight kids, was

II. LOCATING OURSELVES

ANDRENA ZAWINSKI

ON THE ROAD, HIJACKED BY MEMORY

> *We draw our strength from the very despair in which we have been forced to live.*—Cesar Chavez

Riding another lazy Sunday afternoon
along the sun-drenched blacktop stretch
coasting through California's Central Valley,
its pastures peppered by slaughterhouse steer,
its fields dense with migrants—some sporting
United Farm Worker eagles on caps, all of them
packed into growers' whitewashed school buses,
all of them off to bend and hoe, chop and prune,
pick and haul Ag Giants nuts and roots and fruits
for the Walmart Super Centers and Taco Bells.

In the car's backseat, church onion domes
crop up inside my head, their rows of candles
flickering again for all my dead:

For the Ukrainian grandfather, face reddened
from the heat of hot steel, muscles knotted
and clothes grimy, who choked to death
struggling with words in a strange tongue,
lungs dense in smoke and soot, air and water
fouled forging Pittsburgh steel for the Carnegies.

For the Slovak one who carried United Mine Worker
protest pickets to the coal bosses instead of pick and shovel
down into the pitch dark shafts of the Windber mine,
who survived a cave-in, but not being robbed
by the company store and a black lung death.

For my mother, after the assembly line night shift
at Federal Enamel inspecting pots and pans
for dimples and blisters, one hand at the small
of her aching back bent over the Amana. the other
scrambling eggs then scooting my brother and me
off to school neatly dressed with full bellies.

For my father at Pressed Steel welding railroad cars
in the McKees Rocks Bottoms, tagged Cossack
and taunted to jump and spin and kick,
who got lost in a bottle of vodka and thorazine,
another blue collar chasing a middle-class dream.

But the range here today along this California stretch
runs ragged in rain shadow and a watery-eyed sky
looming above tract homes and trailer camp estates,
flashy billboards boasting sprouting condos,
commercial real estate for Nestles' Purina works,
another Chrysler-Jeep dealership, new strip mall
saddling up to wheat and oats and alfalfa,
the Delta's humpback hills carpeted green in spring—
everything predictable, unlike this day trip, hijacked
by memory to detour along a bumpy backroad,
my own breath now so heavy-laden,
my every muscle aching.

HOUSE ENVY

Architects, contractors, general
and sub. From a swallow-you-up
hole in the ground to sconces, shingles, rebar and hinges,
tinted paint, granite and tubs. Where do you want
the light switches? How about this tree? Low flush or
regular? Please sign this change order.

At last we're in. Now what?
Punch lists and heartaches. How can we
not have closet space? What about this leak?
Ninety degrees in the bedroom. Not enough light to cook by.
Get that electrician back here, please!

Friends come looking. Gray tweed
carpet, oh so practical. Red, yellow, even
turquoise. How did they dare skip beige?
With all those stairs, no aging parent could stay here.
Why is his office twice as big as hers? The artwork is
so bold. So cold. All that room for just those two?
I love the view.

I'm quick to tell them it's not perfect.
I always try to share the space. Besides,
it's all my husband's wealth. I used to
be on Food Stamps, long ago. I rarely say
I love the light curling over the kitchen floor,
the mountains from my favorite chair, bright colors

and curves, double showers, big TV.
Roll up the rugs and invite fifty
friends to dance. How lucky can I be?

And still, I envy richer friends whose cabinets
are custom-hewn and dining rooms seat twelve.
Or humbler ones with wind chimes and comfy corners
where you want to sit for hours sipping tea.
Do come in. It's just a house, that's all.

III. CROSSING: ACTS OF IMAGINATION

JANE ST. CLAIR

SECRETS OF MAMA KARDASHIAN

What surprises people about the TV show, *You Guess the Price*, is that their producers do not pick the contestants randomly. Now Shirley Diemski knew this in advance. In fact, knowing how they pick contestants was part of her strategy to get on the show.

Shirley knew that the producers divide the entire audience into groups of twelve, and then they take those little groups into interview rooms. She also knew they're more likely to choose you if you're vivacious or if it's your birthday or if you're wearing an Armed Services uniform or a homemade T-shirt customized with the show's theme. With all this in mind, Shirley got a ticket for the show that fell on her birthday and wore a T-shirt made by her best friend Vera with a hand-painted portrait of the show's host. So it really was no big surprise to her when the show's host, Yip the Lip Serge, yelled, "Shirley Diemski, come on down! You're a contestant on *You Guess the Price!*"

Shirley knew to act surprised and teary-eyed, and to jump up and down as if she'd swallowed a jalapeno pepper. The truth was the only thing that surprised Shirley, who always taped every show to watch after work, was how loud Yip's voice was. He didn't need to yell like that. After all, he had a microphone.

If you're like Shirley and watch the show every day, you also find out that they use the same prizes over and over, so if you're watching the show all the time and taking notes, you get a feel for how much the usual prizes cost, including the big screen TV, the all-expense paid seven-day trip to Cancún, and the smallest American compact car.

So when Shirley went up against three other contestants to guess the price of a big screen TV, the actual retail price and not the price people really pay after they go online and check at Walmart, Shirley guessed $1200. When the highest bid was $1100, all she had to do was bid $1101.

Next Yip Serge asked Shirley if she would like to win . . . *a six-day vacation to Martha's Vineyard! Yes, Shirley, we'll fly you and your guest from Los Angeles to the Franklin Stone Manor, a fabulous resort where you'll experience the lifestyle of the rich and famous! Plus you and your guest will receive two all-day passes to the Bambi Pamper Day Spa for eight full hours of pampering, hair styling, mani-pedis and massage. This fabulous vacation is all yours if you guess the price!*

As Yip the Lip kept blasting Shirley's eardrums, she had only one thought. She was going to win this trip for herself and her daughter Brooke. She pictured them in that Bambi Pamper Day Spa, stretched out on fur-covered tables next to the likes of Barbra S and Hillary RC herself, chatting them up and sipping herbal tea with organic honey. On second thought Shirley decided the spa's tables would not be fur because nobody sharp does fur anymore. Shirley thought how Brooke would be proud of her for once, and how excited she would be when her mother presented her with this fabulous vacation. After all, Brooke could handle Martha's Vineyard. Brooke was so classy, you'd think she was BFFs with Chelsea and Ivanka—either one—Brooke was right up here with them.

The game required Shirley to rearrange the number 7363 to mirror the price of the trip. When she guessed $6753, the prize was hers. Her luck ran out after spinning a roulette wheel that eliminated her for a chance to win the grand prize showcase. It didn't matter for Shirley had won *prizes worth over $8100*, an unbelievable amount when you're only making $21,000 a year as a full-time groomer at PetSmart.

As Shirley and Vera drove from Hollywood back home to Tucson, Shirley phoned Brooke with the good news. Brooke never answered her phone. Brooke was living in New York City and so she hardly ever picked up her phone because there is so much else to do there.

"If she can't go, then you've got to take me," Vera pleaded. "I want that spa day."

"It might even be the spa where Jackie Kennedy went to lose weight," Shirley said.

"Jackie never had to lose any weight," Vera replied, swerving to avoid hitting a coyote, "because she lived on hard-boiled eggs and lettuce. I read that in her nanny's book. But come on, I need that spa more than Brooke."

"The thing is . . ." Shirley began, "The thing is . . . I've been thinking a long time about Brooke and me. About taking a road trip just Brooke and me. I got the idea from watching the Kardashians. Whenever one of the Dash

DANISA BELL

PRINCESS

I once heard Ree Ree Walker call Mandi and her mother poor white trash. It was right out in front of our building at George Washington Carver Homes, Goshen's only housing project. I didn't understand it then, back in 1996, for we were only six and seven, Mandi and I, but Mandi was more than just poor. She was *dirt* poor. And incredibly so. Some nights for dinner she ate jelly sandwiches with Vienna sausages. And once when I spent the night with Mandi, the next morning for breakfast we had butter and sugar on hotdog buns with dill pickles and cold black coffee. Whenever I would go after that, I would sneak food into my overnight bag. One time we had Twinkies and ham slices; another time, a jar of peanut butter and a box of Ritz. And we would fill our bellies late at night under the sheets with a flashlight while her mother slept.

Mandi didn't have a lot of toys like the other kids in Carver Homes. No bike, no Barbie dolls, no nothing really. Just this little fat half baby doll named Ruthie that she almost always carried with her. And Ruthie was always naked. She had chopped-off brown hair and no legs, only arms and hands with shiny purple nail polish where the fingernails would be. And when you laid Ruthie down, one of her eyes would close in that peculiar way that made you think she was winking at you when she wasn't, while the other stayed fixed on the ceiling or the sky, depending upon where you were at the time.

Once though, Candace Taylor, who was ten and liked to boss around us younger kids, and always with her hand on her bony brown hip, told Mandi that she was lucky, rich or poor, toys or no toys, because she was white. "One day you gonna marry a doctor or a lawyer, Mandi, and go to London and Paris. All white people go to London and Paris!"

But Mandi didn't care about being white, or about doctors or the European enticements of London and Paris. "No way, Candace!" she shot back. "Me and Ruthie are staying here! For the rest of our life! We like it here!"

"Yeah, Candace," I chimed in. "She's not going to get married! She just moved here in kinnygarden! And we're blood sisters, see?" I held up the tip of my pinkie finger for her to see the barely visible prick I had made with a safety pin.

"Yeah, see?" added Mandi, holding her pinkie finger in the air next to mine.

"You shut up, Tatiana Williams!" said Candace. "You just think you're better than everybody else!"

"No I don't!"

"Do so! You wanna be white like Mandi. Why don't you just go in the house and read one of those fancy books your momma buys you so you can get skipped another grade again since you know so much!" The other kids exploded into a thunder of laughter and began to nod in agreement with Candace. All but Mandi.

Suddenly I could feel the pain of every dark emotion pulsing through my veins and rushing to the tips of my throbbing fingers. I wanted to lash out at Candace. Tell her she was stupid and didn't know anything, but Candace was bigger and stronger. I looked at Mandi. We were the same. Same height. Same size. We both had ponytails and both liked to pull the cheese off our pizza and eat it last. And now we were sisters, no matter what happened. Now we had the same blood. I took her by the hand, and we went back to our own building to play with Ruthie.

Instead of toys, Corsica Pate allowed Mandi to write and draw on the walls in their apartment with crayons and colored chalk. "A way for her to express herself," Corsica Pate would always say. "Mandi is so creative." But the other parents just shook their heads and said that was one crazy woman. First for living in the projects when she was white, and second for letting that little child scribble up their apartment.

And although she wrote and drew on the walls, what Mandi wanted more than anything else was to be a fairy princess. "Just like Snow White," she would say. "Like at the movies." Mandi didn't have a long flowing gown, or seven dwarves to follow her around, but every day when we came home from school, Mandi would change into her provisional princess outfit her mother had pieced together for her from the Goodwill.

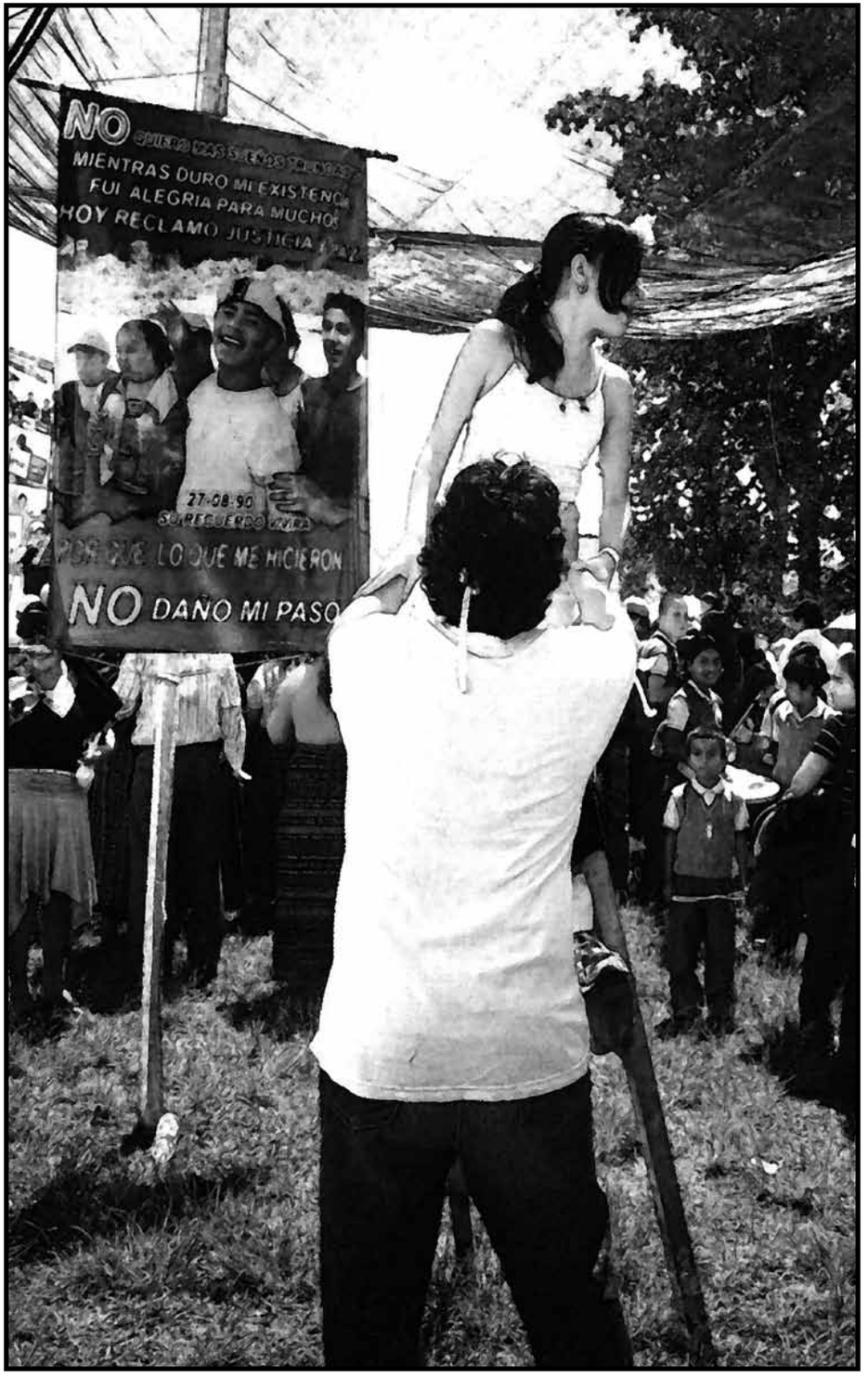
ROBERT STINSON

BRINGING RASPUTIN HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

I had come home for Thanksgiving that first year of college but remember almost nothing about it, except that I drove with an upper-class girl whose number I plucked off the dining hall ride board and who talked on and on about problems she was having with her boyfriend. Halfway home, sensing that my minimal responses betrayed a freshman's innocence, she began discoursing on the shafts, orifices, and fragrant fluids in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem, *Kubla Khan*, glancing at me over the tops of her glasses to suggest there were naughty things a freshman had yet to learn.

This was more interesting than the quiz I was facing after Thanksgiving on another poem, Stephen Vincent Benét's *John Brown's Body*. I had dutifully put that book in my suitcase. But any poem longer than a sonnet seemed more trouble than it was worth. *John Brown's Body* was "an epic poem of the Civil War," our professor had said, "Pulitzer Prize material!" He meant these as selling points, but to me they signaled pages and days of tedium. I remember a sleepy half hour on my bed at home, leafing back and forth, looking for a point of entry and a message for my time—this was the fall of 1960, right after Kennedy's election—and finding neither. Indeed, I thought one place near the end especially sappy. It was where Benét has Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd Lincoln, before they go off to the Ford Theater, talking amiably about what they would do once he left office: "They would go back to Springfield, find a house / Live peaceably and simply, see old friends . . . ." Benét deftly steps around the assassination, letting you imagine it or not as you please. I decided not to and Tuesday of the next week, back on my college campus, deftly failed the quiz. Whatever else I did over Thanksgiving was less memorable than even those few pages.

Coming home for Christmas a month later was different. I remember everything about that, especially, this time, the train. My school was on the Erie Railroad, in Pennsylvania, maybe four hundred miles west of our New



IV. ADVOCACY: WHAT WE FIGHT FOR

MARIAN MATHEWS CLARK

MY STUDY ON STAY-PUTS

You can do your studies on us migratory types all you want. My sister Rose came home from school last year saying that's what you stay-puts call us. I told her you're probably the same guys yelling White Trash Bastards go home when we drive through Salem. She says, no you wouldn't yell at us. She doesn't think you even talk to us. She says you just check up on how many months we don't go to school and how many kids we have and how many weeks we're hungry in the off-season. I ask her why you don't mind your own business but she tells me you're not hurting anybody, just writing up these studies called "Our 1965 Migrant Population" or "Movements of Migrants in the Sixties," that kind of thing, where you put us in categories.

I tell her you're not the only ones who can sniff out what makes types tick. I'm figuring out stuff, too.

She says, Lily, you're thirteen. Nobody'll listen to you.

But what does she know? I'm doing my own study on one of your kind. This girl came straying into our fields a month ago when strawberries the size of Grandpa's tumor were crouching in their bushes, all juicy and red. Just ripe for plucking, my fourteen-year-old brother Louis said, then laughed to himself.

The last five years at strawberry time on Oregon Sunrise Farms the big bosses have hired Marie, this scrawny woman with hair chopped off to her ear lobes, to drive a painted-over school bus into town to pick up a bunch of jack-off kids.

A month ago, when Marie dumps off her first load for the season, this girl I'm doing my study on catches my eye right off. Me and Rose always watch them close, staggering off the bus at seven, an hour after we get here, and dragging themselves over the rows like they don't know where they are. Maybe their mamas stuffed them into Marie's bus while they were asleep. Me and Rose have the types named, and the first day we usually pick out which stay-puts go with which type. Name The Stay-Put is something I came up

with one real bad summer when the sun was beating down hotter than usual and you couldn't roll your pants up because your legs would burn and blister, and dirt and berry juice would creep under the blister and smart like crazy. So you kept your pants rolled down but you felt sweat trickle down your legs all day. Naming stay-puts took your mind off juice and blisters.

This year I have to name them by myself because Rose, who's sixteen, has started hanging around with Butchie, clinging to him too tight to pick much of anything, let alone help me lay out the types. By the end of that first day I have them pretty much lined up, though, except for this one girl I'm doing my study on.

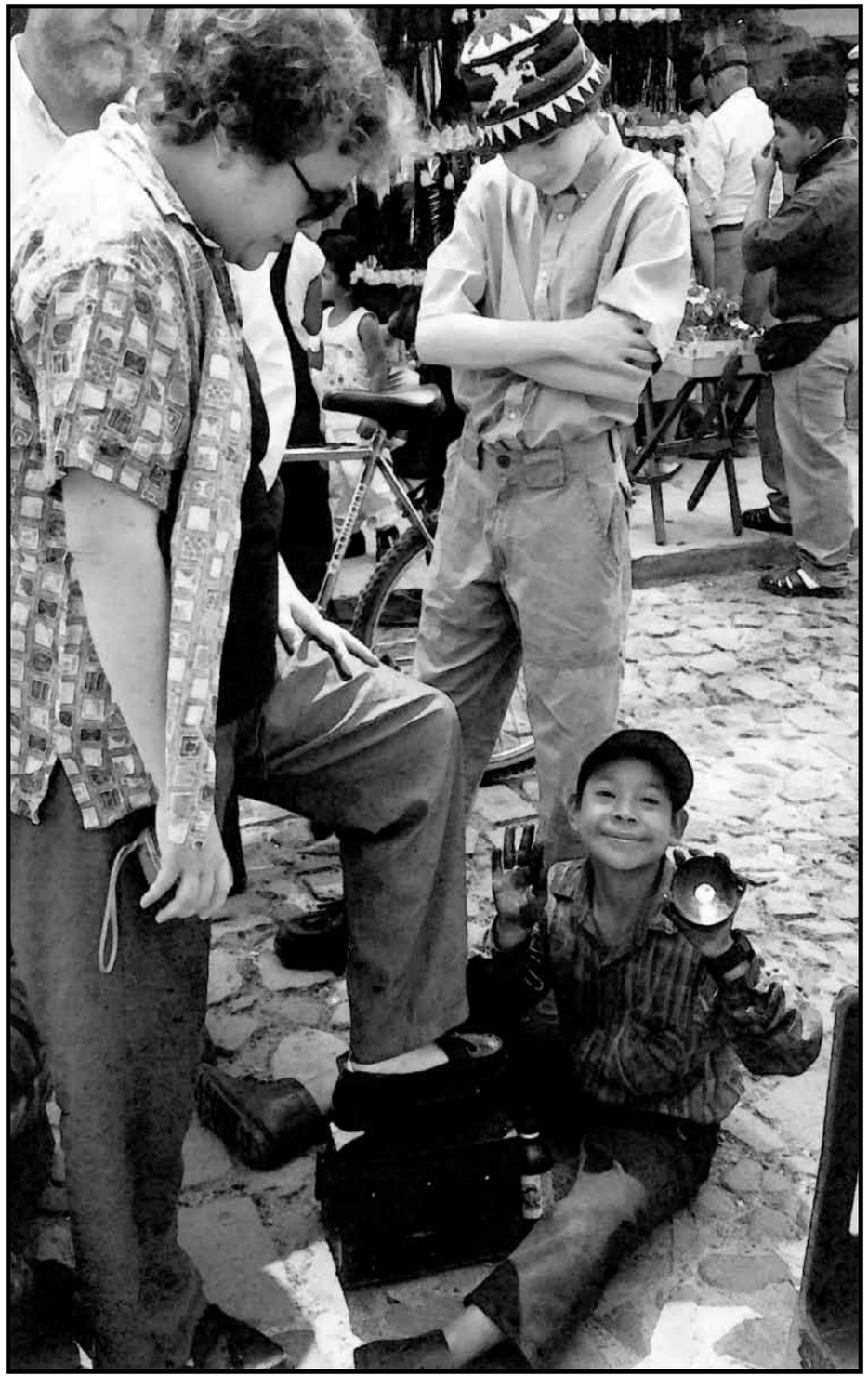
I can tell right off she's not one of the Kick-Asses who Marie will yell at all summer and threaten to can if she catches them throwing berries one more time or smashing bushes when they chase each other over the rows. Last year this Kick-Ass everyone called Red landed in our section with his foot in Louis's flat. Louis told him if he ever saw him close enough to see red, he would beat the crap out of him.

Three days later Marie canned the kid for stuffing the bottom of his flats with dirt, then covering it up with berries. I said that'll show him. Won't show him a thing, Louis said. I reminded him about Ray Halvery in quonset five who got his whole family canned for stealing two flats of raspberries. Ray was crying and the whole family was awful scared.

That's different, Louis said. Kids like Red don't have to worry about coming here year after year, so getting kicked out is nothing to them. I didn't argue with him, but something didn't sit right about the whole thing.

This girl I'm doing my study on doesn't hang with the Gossip-and-Giggle-Girls either. Louis calls them GAGS. They come out here in their little groups and yak all day and cackle over the Kick-Asses stumbling around making fools of themselves. Once I had a row next to a GAG. She yapped with her friends about the extra school outfits she was going to buy with her berry money and how clothes in the stores were running to orange and red and bright colors this year. She said her boyfriend thought she looked best in pale pink, though, so she probably wouldn't buy any new thing unless she wore it at home.

For a minute she sounded like Rose, who moons after some boy every summer. I guess if Butchie said he liked a certain color, Rose might wear it for him, but the only pink thing she has, used to be a white blouse that rubbed up against my red sweatshirt in the wash. Wearing colors for somebody seems



MARK D. WALKER

MY LIFE IN THE LAND OF THE ETERNAL SPRING: THE COFFEE PLANTATION

Though I had lived and worked in Guatemala for seven years, it was a brief encounter with my young daughter, Michelle, on the San Francisco Miramar coffee plantation, perched on the side of the Volcano Atitlán that would determine my direction in life. It was a few days before Christmas, and I was strolling through the Big House when I came upon her in the living room. She stood, her feet planted on the orange tile floor, hugging her new Airedale puppy, Tiky, and gazing with wonder at the Christmas tree twinkling with colored lights and filled with handmade decorations. Below the tree, a number of brightly wrapped packages sat in contrast to the stark white walls. On the wall were a number of photographs of my wife's family members.

It was a perfect holiday moment until I noticed a dozen small children directly behind her pushed up against the screen door which opened onto the patio beyond. A soft evening afterglow highlighted the children, and I couldn't distinguish their faces behind the screen. They stood, dressed in simple cotton shirts, jeans, and flip-flops, silently peering into the room. These were the workers' children, who lived in little block homes below the Big House. The children were all so cute, so inquisitive, so innocent. None of them dared to open the door and come inside to join Michelle or touch the presents; they were relegated to peering in from the outside.

This scene would be branded into my memory as it represented the vast difference between the options open to these children in comparison to my daughter. Because I had married Ligia, the daughter of the *finca* (plantation) owner, Michelle was part of the family. Seeing the workers' children reminded me what it felt like to be on the outside looking in. I'd never be totally accepted by Ligia's grandfather and key family members, nor would I be invited to do anything but occasionally visit the plantation during holidays

ELIZABETH BURTON

DAY AND NIGHT

When Amangul's father invited Grace to an event at the local Xinjiang government center, she wasn't sure what to expect. He was president of the Uyghur part of the university, and therefore an important man in Kashgar. To invite her to see the private performance of a troupe of champion folk dancers was an honor not typically bestowed upon anyone outside government circles, so Grace gladly accepted. It was only as the event drew closer that she discovered Amangul wouldn't be among the attendees.

"It's only for significant people," Amangul had tried to explain. "Like my father; like you."

"But I'm just a teacher!" Grace said. "What's so significant about me?"

"You're American." To Amangul, that explained everything.

When the night arrived, Grace donned her best Western dress and took a taxi to the center. Usually, she either walked wherever she needed to go or took a donkey cart, but something told her she needed to arrive in a more glamorous fashion. And indeed, a uniformed doorman was waiting to help her out of the taxi and direct her to the event.

Feeling a bit of a fraud, Grace entered the plush auditorium she hadn't known existed before. Chinese women in evening gowns circled the room, selecting from a lavish buffet of fruits and Chinese food. Looking down at her own clothes, what her mountain grandmother would have called her "Sunday-go-to-meeting" dress, she almost turned around and left. But Amangul's father, a portly man in his fifties, appeared at her side.

"Welcome!" His smile was genuine and she relaxed a bit. "We have a seat reserved just for you." He took her elbow and steered her gently around the buffet table. "You're our honored guest."

"This is all a bit more grand than I was expecting," Grace said, indicating her dress.

"Nonsense! You look lovely; that blue matches your eyes." He touched

the tip of her nose the way he would a child's, transforming her worried look into a smile. "I am glad my daughter has such a friend."

"Is this our guest?" A Chinese man Grace guessed to be in his forties suddenly blocked their way. She immediately mistrusted him, his manner so smooth she could have slipped on it. "I am Chang, the Deputy Governor." She could tell he assumed she knew the importance of his title, but she could only guess at the privilege that went with it. "It's lovely to meet such a pretty young American friend."

It was all Grace could do not to raise an eyebrow, but she smiled politely. "I'm pleased to be here." She turned to Amangul's father, who was still holding her elbow, "Thank you for inviting me."

"Ah," Chang said. "He did so at my direction, didn't you Abdulsalam?"

"That I did, sir. That I did." His tone was overly deferential, almost toadying, and Grace disliked Chang even more.

The Chinese man, though, didn't seem to sense her discomfort. His laugh was too loud, as if he were trying to make it carry through the room. "Come," he insisted, "Let's show this beautiful lady to her seat."

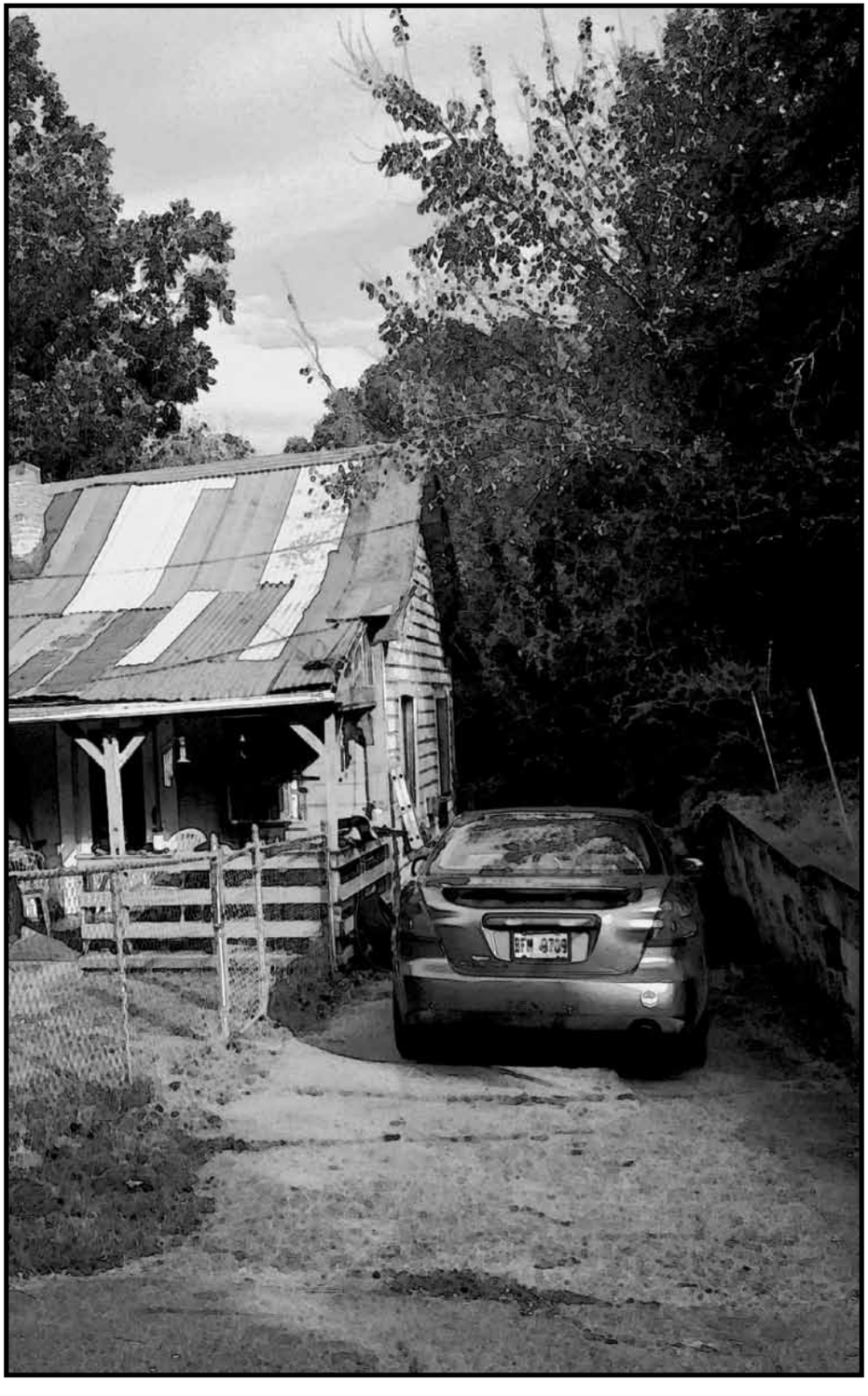
The men fussed over her while she settled into the chair, and she fought the urge to chase their hands away. Where there would have been a fancy rug to eat off of in Uyghur homes, here, Grace sat in front of a delicate table with a fine, red silk tablecloth. Instead of the traditional Chinese presentation of food, though, with selections served on a Lazy Susan turntable in the middle, Grace found herself surrounded by half a dozen small plates including all the selections from the buffet. She was grateful she wouldn't have to mingle with the women in the beautiful dresses.

Her relief was short-lived. An attractive young Chinese woman in an ornate Western-styled gown settled into the chair beside her. "And here is Miss Chao," Chang said. "Two lovely ladies dining together!"

"Hello." Grace smiled at the other woman and extended her hand. "I'm Grace."

The woman looked at her with what could only be disdain, but she took her hand. "Chunhua." Her "It's nice to meet you" was said in perfect English but with little enthusiasm. She reached into her purse and pulled out a pack of American cigarettes, offering one to Grace. When Grace shook her head, she lit her own with a tiny red and gold lighter. Grace swallowed a cough.

Chang and Abdulsalam were seated across the table from Chunhua and Grace. "Dinner first," Chang said, "and then, dancing!" *Dancing* was said



CHARLES D. BROCKETT

APPENDIX: SOCIAL MOBILITY & INEQUALITY

We have always known in the United States that we have had both rich and poor but the essence of the American experience has been the domination of society by our vast middle class. Supposedly this set us apart from the Old World and certainly from the newer countries of the developing world. Each generation could expect to be better off materially than the one before. With more hard work than luck, the enterprising could also climb up the social status ladder, perhaps even up to among the wealthy.

Such social myths take hold because they have roots in reality. Up until recently generational material progress had been the norm. Stories of social mobility are legion, including in this anthology. The U.S. indeed was once more egalitarian than Western Europe.

But as the evidence that follows demonstrates all too clearly, there have been dramatic changes in the United States across the last few decades: inequality has been increasing while social mobility has been in decline. One's chances of climbing the social status ladder are now better throughout much of the rest of the advanced industrial democracies than in the U.S.

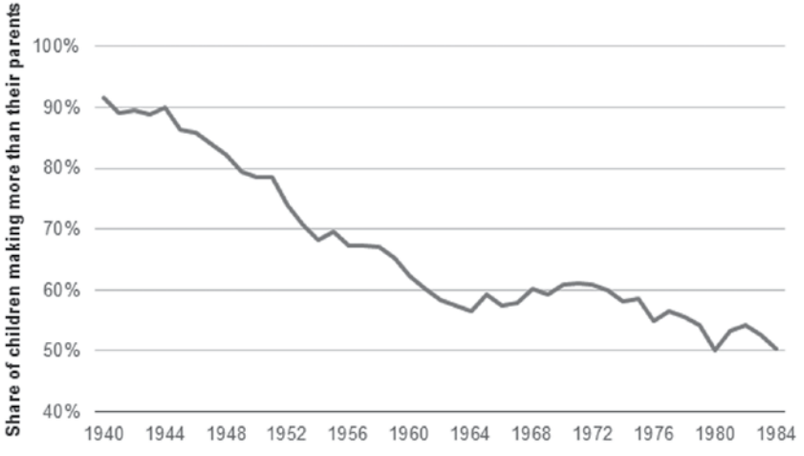
As a society we are increasingly aware of serious strain between our myths and our social reality. Out of that strain comes change. We encourage you to not only consider the following evidence but to follow it back to its source materials. Share this information. Let's make some changes, let's make America more egalitarian again.

Increasing U.S. Inequality Since Late 1960s

The Gini Index is the standard way to measure inequality: the higher the number, the greater the inequality. So, as this graph shows, inequality among U.S. households fell from its high point in 1929 through the New Deal (FDR) period and again with the Great Society (LBJ) in the late 1960s. Since then inequality has rather steadily increased to where this graph ends with 2009 (and has continued increasing since).

Source: Branko Milanovic, "Trends in global income inequality and their political implications." Autumn 2014. Web. Milanovic, formally the World Bank's lead research economist, is a senior scholar with the Luxembourg Income Study Center.

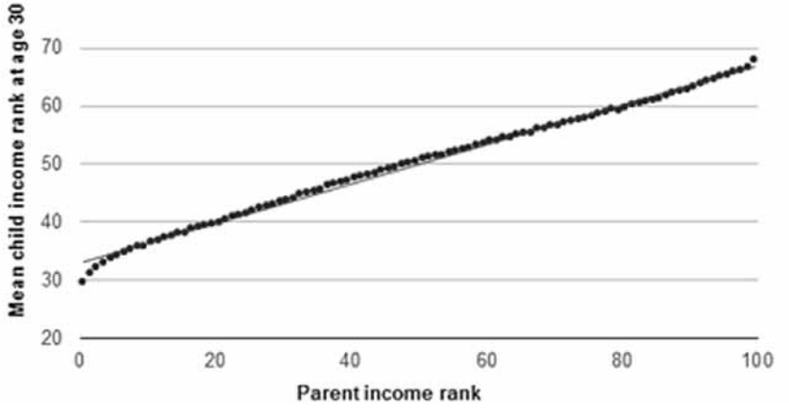
Making Less Than Our Parents



The standard American dream is each generation is better off than that of its parents. For children born in the early 1940s that has been overwhelmingly true: over 90 percent have had incomes greater in real terms (i.e., taking inflation into account) than their parents did at the same age. For those born in the early 1980s, however, only about one half have surpassed their parents income at the same age.

Source: Richard V. Reeves and Eleanor Krause, "Raj Chetty in 14 charts: Big findings on opportunity and mobility we should all know," Brookings. 11 January 2018. Web. A professor of economics at Harvard University, Chetty is a recipient of the Macarthur "Genius" Fellowship and the director of the Equality of Opportunity Project.

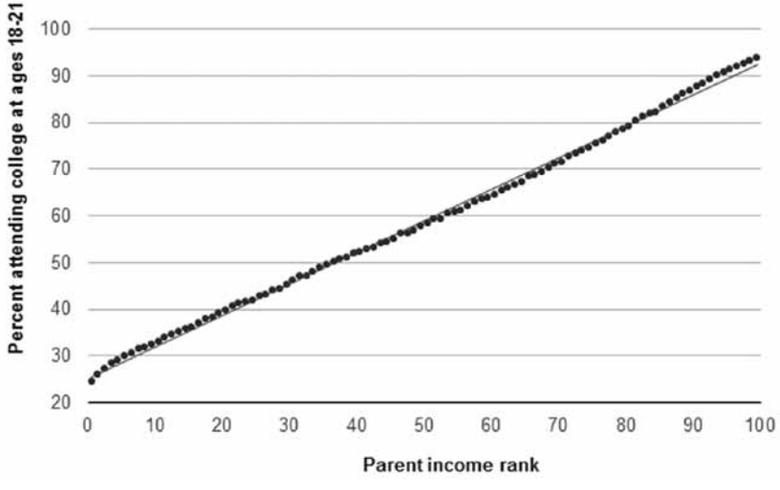
The Inheritance of Income Status



Nonetheless, there remains a strong connection between a child's income status (here measured at age 30) and that of their parents: the higher the parental income compared to that of everyone else (the bottom horizontal axis) the higher the child's income rank (left vertical axis).

Source: Reeves and Krause, "Raj Chetty in 14 charts."

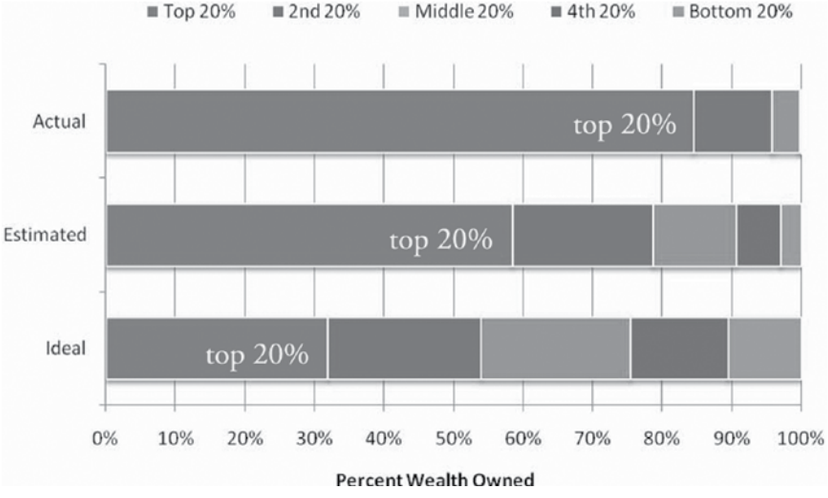
College Attendance Depends on Parental Income



Going to college and especially getting a college degree are among the most important boosts to upward mobility. Unfortunately, the probability of being in college as a young adult (left vertical axis) is tightly tied to parental income, here shown as their income compared to that of everyone else (the bottom horizontal axis).

Source: Reeves and Krause, "Raj Chetty in 14 charts."

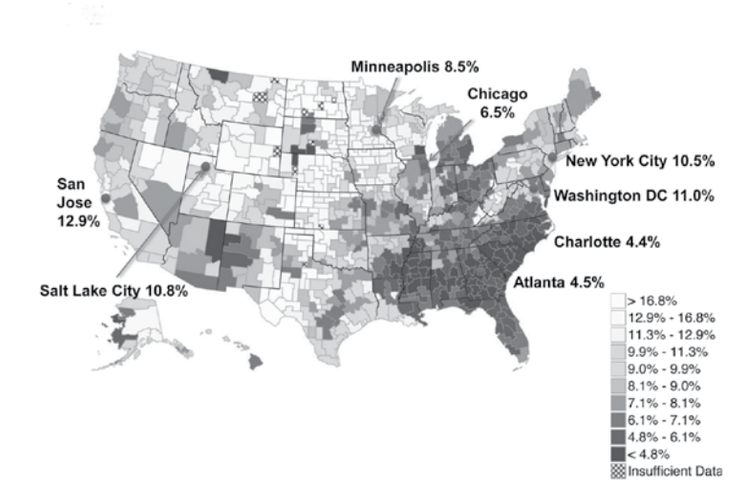
How Should Wealth Be Distributed?



A large representative sample of the U.S. public was asked in 2005 how they thought wealth *should* be distributed in the country (the bottom row, labeled "ideal") as well as what they *estimated* the actual distribution to be (the middle row). The top row provides the *actual* distribution. The top 20% actually possess about 85% of all wealth while the average estimate was about 58% and the ideal about 32%. Further analysis (not shown here) found little difference between Bush and Kerry voters concerning their ideal distribution or between those with less than $50,000 income and those with more than $100,000.

Source: Michael I. Norton and Dan Ariely, "Building a Better America—One Wealth Quintile at a Time," *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2011. 6: 9. Web. The authors are professors at the business schools of, respectively, Harvard and Duke.

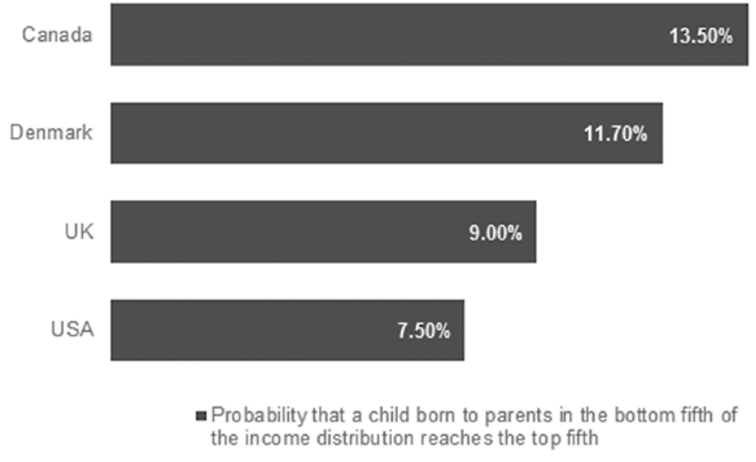
The Geography of Mobility



The lighter the color on this map, the greater the probability of upward mobility for some one in that area, more specifically, the probability of someone starting in the bottom 20% of the income distribution reaching the top 20%. Your chances for upward mobility, for example, are much greater in Iowa and Nebraska than in Georgia and South Carolina and almost three times greater in San Jose than in Charlotte.

Source: Raj Chetty, "Course Materials: Introduction and Geography of Upward Mobility." *Using Big Data To Solve Economic and Social Problems.* Stanford Center on Poverty & Inequality. Web.

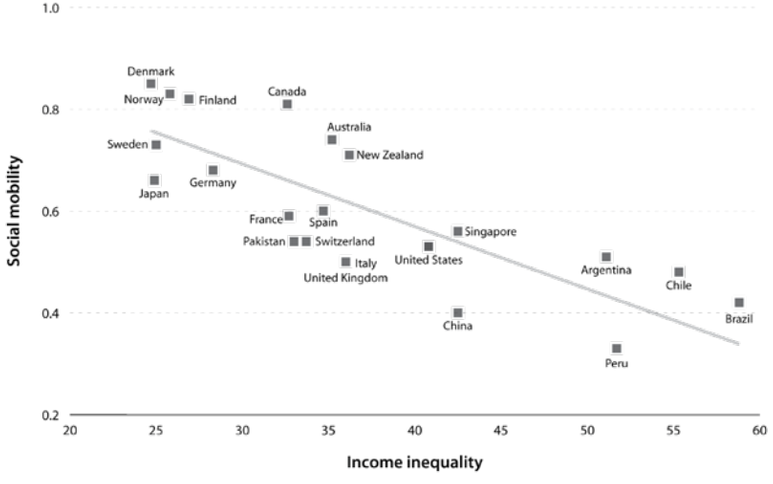
Mobility Is Lower in the United States



Using the same measure of mobility as the previous map, the probability of a person starting life in the bottom 20% of the income distribution reaching the top 20% averages only 7.5% for the United States as a whole (bottom row), about only half that of the probability in neighboring Canada (top row).

Source: Reeves and Krause, "Raj Chetty in 14 charts."

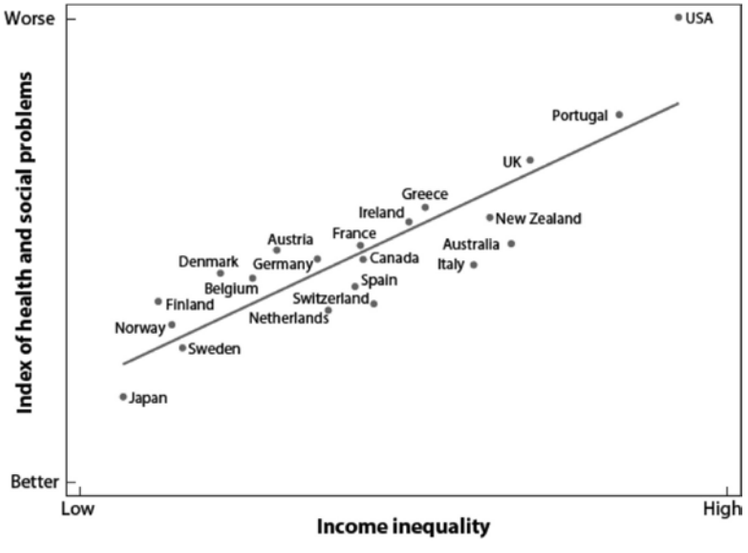
Inequality Is Why U.S. Has Lower Social Mobility



You can find the United States in about the middle of this graph. Social mobility (the vertical axis) is higher in many other countries than in the U.S., which falls at about the same level as not only Italy and the United Kingdom but also Pakistan, Argentina, and Chile. All of the countries with higher social mobility have less income inequality. Notice too that the U.S. has the greatest income inequality of the advanced industrial democracies shown.

Source: Michael Greenstone, et al., "Thirteen Economic Facts about Social Mobility and the Role of Education." Brookings Hamilton Project. Web. Greenstone is the Milton Friedman Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago.

Inequality Gives U.S. More Health & Social Problems



You might miss the USA on this graph—it is by itself in the top right corner with both the greatest income inequality and the most health and social problems of any of the almost two dozen countries included. The problems index combines data on: life expectancy, mental illness, obesity, infant mortality, teenage births, homicides, imprisonment, educational attainment, distrust and social mobility.

Source: Kate E. Pickett and Richard G. Wilkinson, "Income inequality and health: A causal review." *Social Science & Medicine*. 2015. 128: 316-326. Web. Both authors are leading British epidemiologists.