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A New Kind of Segregation

*In which I describe how the cultural divide between the new
upper class and the rest of America is being reinforced by
residential segregation that enables large portions of the new
upper class to live their lives isolated from everyone else.*

IN 2009, AMERICA'S leading scholar of residential segregation, Princeton's Douglas Massey, joined by coauthors Jonathan Rothwell and Thurston Domina, published a major study of American residential segregation over the course of the twentieth century.[1] The good news was that racial segregation had receded in the aftermath of the civil rights revolution. Racial segregation was still substantial, but the trend had been in the right direction for almost four decades. The bad news was that socioeconomic segregation had been increasing.

Massey and his colleagues focused on a comparison of households below the poverty line with households that had incomes at least four times the poverty line. Their evidence was not the stuff of headlines. The dissimilarity index for people below the poverty line and families four times above the poverty line in metropolitan areas increased from 0.34 to 0.42 from 1970 to 2000.[2] They also found that the isolation index of college graduates within census tracts increased from 0.19 to 0.36.[3] But if the numbers were obscure, the authors' summary judgment was clear enough: "During the late twentieth century, in other words, the well educated and the affluent increasingly segmented themselves off from the rest of American society."[4] They

were reminded of a phrase coined by Robert Reich when he first described the new class of symbolic analysts back in 1991: "The secession of the successful."

The authors had used a modest definition of *affluence*. At least four times the median poverty line included 42 percent of American families in the 2000 census.[5] The authors had actually demonstrated that people in the middle class on up have distanced themselves from the poor. What about people in the neighborhoods that are *really* affluent and *really* well educated? As you are about to see, they didn't just separate themselves from the poor. They separated themselves from just about everyone who isn't as rich and well educated as they are.

A Tale of Three Cities

Austin, Texas

Austin, Texas, was still a small city when the census was taken in 1960, with a population of just 186,545. It was the state capital and home to the flagship campus of the University of Texas, which gave it some distinction. But Austin was otherwise like other small cities scattered around the state, with an economy based largely on receiving and shipping agricultural products from the surrounding farm country. Some local companies manufactured brick, tile, and bedroom furniture.

The capitol building and the campus were both in the middle of downtown. Austin's wealthiest citizens lived to the west of downtown and north of the Colorado River in four census tracts that comprised 16 percent of Austin's adult population.[6] The median family income in those affluent census tracts was $60,700—roughly the income of an experienced Austin public school teacher in 2010.[7] Thirty-five percent of residents ages 25 and older in those four census tracts had a bachelor's degree or higher—or to think of it another way, almost two out of three adults in Austin's most affluent neighborhoods did *not* have a college education.[8]

Four censuses later, in 2000, Austin had been transformed. The population had grown to 656,562, making Austin the sixteenth-largest

city in the nation. The area adjoining downtown to the west was still the rich part of town, and had expanded even farther west by 2000, but it now housed a different demographic than it had forty years earlier, with a median income of $106,100. The median income in the richest zip code was $211,800.

Education had grown as much as income. Twelve zip codes had BA percentages above 60 percent. The increases in wealth and education went together. The top twelve wealthiest zip codes also boasted ten out of twelve of the best-educated zip codes.[9]

It wasn't just more money and more education in the west half of Austin that made the difference. Austin had become home to some of the trendiest and highest-tech industries in the country. Dell Computer, ranked 48 on the Fortune 500 that year, had its headquarters in Austin. So did Whole Foods Market, which had grown from one small natural food store to a nationwide chain and would enter the Fortune 500 in 2005. A partial list of new-economy companies that located some of their operations in Austin then or in the decade to follow includes Apple, Google, Freescale Semiconductor, Cirrus Logic, Cisco Systems, eBay, PayPal, Intel, National Instruments, Samsung, Silicon Laboratories, and Sun Microsystems. About eighty-five biotechnology companies would locate in Austin by 2010, making it a leading employer in that vibrant new industry.

The technical jobs offered by such employers required not just people with college educations but also very smart people. Occasionally that meant hiring the genius college dropout (the University of Texas had spawned its own exemplar in Michael Dell), but usually employers fished in the ponds where the biggest fish were the most numerous, which meant that the west side of Austin was swarming with executives who had been trained at Rice, Berkeley, Stanford, Duke, the Ivies, and other elite colleges. The Austin campus of the University of Texas had also been transformed. In 1960, it had been known mainly as a party school with a great football team. By 1985, its academic reputation had risen to the point that it was named one of the eight "Public Ivies" in a book listing the best state universities.[10]

Add to that the spouses. The growing educational homogamy since

1960 meant that most of the spouses were drawn from the same pond of the cognitively talented and well educated as the people being hired by the high-tech firms. Family life on the west side of Austin had been transformed in ways that money alone wouldn't produce.

Manhattan, New York

Seventeen hundred miles and a world away from Austin is Manhattan. In 1960 and 2000 alike, New York City was the nation's leading metropolis, and Manhattan was its crown jewel. Then as now, the emblem of New York's wealth was the Upper East Side, extending from Fifth Avenue to the East River between Fifty-Ninth Street and Ninety-Sixth Street.[11]

The rest of Manhattan's neighborhoods were a mélange. Directly north of Central Park was Harlem, the most famous black neighborhood in America. On the southeastern part of the island near the Brooklyn Bridge was the Lower East Side, home to Jewish and Italian immigrants in the early twentieth century and still a white working-class neighborhood in 1960. Scattered to the west and north were the financial district around Wall Street, avant-garde Greenwich Village, the meatpacking district, the garment district, plus a few dozen other ethnically, culturally, or economically distinctive neighborhoods.

Outside the Upper East Side, Manhattan was still predominantly a blue-collar town in 1960. This may not be a surprise for Manhattan north of Central Park, where 67 percent of adults had not completed high school and the median income was just $34,500. But the rest of Manhattan (excluding the Upper East Side) wasn't that much better educated or richer. A majority of adults had not completed high school and the median family income was $39,300. That was lower than the median for the nation as a whole. Apart from that, remember that these are 2010 dollars. Try to imagine raising a family in Manhattan on $39,300 a year.

Now consider the Upper East Side. To some degree, it was already a world apart in 1960. In the census tracts that ran from Fifth Avenue to Park Avenue, median family income was more than $150,000. The

richest of all was the census tract across from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with a median of $176,000. But the Upper East Side from Lexington Avenue to the East River wasn't wealthy. The median family income for the Upper East Side as a whole was just $55,400—far less than the salary of an experienced teacher in the New York City public schools in 2010.[12] Just 23 percent of adults on the Upper East Side as a whole had college degrees.

Fast-forward to 2000. The number of people living in Manhattan had not changed much in the intervening years, but the ways that they made their livings had changed a lot. In 1960, 40 percent of Manhattan's jobs had been industrial. By 2000, that 40 percent had shrunk to 5 percent. By 2000, 15 percent of all jobs in Manhattan were in the financial sector, another 15 percent fell into the category of "professional, scientific, and technical services," and another 9 percent were in a category labeled simply "information." That's 39 percent of all jobs.

That doesn't mean blue-collar work wasn't being done in Manhattan anymore. It just means that by the year 2000, people who lived in Manhattan south of the Nineties weren't doing them. Instead, Manhattan south of the Nineties had turned into an abode for a highly educated, highly paid professional, managerial, and technical class. Even excluding the Upper East Side, the median family income of Manhattan south of Ninety-Sixth Street had risen from the $39,300 of 1960 to $121,400 in 2000. The proportion of adults with college degrees had risen from 16 percent to 60 percent. Within the Upper East Side itself, the median family income had risen from the $55,400 of 1960 to $195,300. The proportion of adults with college degrees had risen from 23 percent to 75 percent.

At street level, life in New York still had the same crackling energy in 2000 as it had had in 1960. Visually, it was far more diverse, its sidewalks even more packed with people from around the world. To the casual eye, it also still seemed to have the same riotous diversity of activity, investment bankers brushing by ConEd workers and street vendors selling hot dogs to advertising executives. But the diversity existed only on the streets. As soon as people entered their office

buildings or their apartments, they were surrounded by colleagues and neighbors who were in the top few centiles of education and income.

Newton, Iowa

Eleven hundred miles west of Manhattan, and another world away, is Newton, Iowa. In 1960, the census listed Newton's population as 15,381. It was the home of the Maytag Company, the washing machine manufacturer, ranked 326 that year in the Fortune 500 list of America's largest corporations.

We don't have educational and income data for the rich part of Newton in 1960 or 2000, because it was too small to have a census tract of its own. But Newton had affluent people—the Maytag Company paid its executives well—and southwest Newton was where almost all of them lived, including Fred Maytag II. His house was larger than others in southwest Newton, but not by a lot. It was notable mostly because it had a swimming pool.

Within three blocks of Fred Maytag's home in each direction lived the owner of the second-largest company in town (the Vernon Company), several Maytag executives, several physicians and attorneys, the publisher of the local newspaper, and two owners of local auto dealerships. Other residents within that three-block radius were the sheriff, whose wife gave piano lessons, the city employee who ran the town's waterworks, a couple of insurance agents, the proprietors of a drugstore, a dry-goods store, and a lumberyard, the high school band teacher, and many low-level white-collar workers and factory workers.[13] There was also the dilapidated house of a recluse known as Over the River Charlie, who kept chickens in his backyard.

Newton was my boyhood home, which I remember fondly, but the description of the people who lived within three blocks of Fred Maytag II is a factual statement of the mix of people in the affluent part of a town that contained one of the five hundred largest corporations in the country. It is a description that could be matched by many American towns and small cities that were home to industrial corporations as of 1960.

Forty years later, Maytag was still on the Fortune 500, at number 368. The corporate headquarters and the plants for manufacturing washing machines and dryers remained in Newton. But things had changed. The new president of the company had decided to live in an affluent neighborhood of Des Moines, thirty-six miles to the west, and other senior executives had followed his example. Those who remained in Newton congregated in high-end housing developments that were populated exclusively by people who could afford to buy the large homes in them, which meant no factory workers, no low-level white-collar workers, and no high school band teacher. Fewer senior executives showed up at the local Rotary and Kiwanis Club meetings, and they were less likely to serve on civic boards or charitable drives. Their spouses were not as active in Newton's school affairs and church affairs. Their children were less likely to attend Newton's public schools.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Maytag also found it increasingly difficult to attract top executive talent. In 1960, most of Maytag's executives had grown up in midwestern towns like Newton. In 2000, Maytag was competing for executive talent with corporations that hired from around the nation, and few of the people who were being recruited wanted to live even in Des Moines, Iowa's big city, let alone in a town of 15,000 surrounded by cornfields.

Elite Neighborhoods and the SuperZips

In different ways, Austin, Manhattan, and Newton all experienced the secession of the successful. But the essence of the change was not geographic separation. Yes, the new wealthy housing developments in west Austin were farther away from downtown Austin than the richest parts of Austin had been in 1960, and the Maytag executives living in Des Moines were certainly farther away from downtown Newton than their predecessors had been. But usually the differences between 1960 and 2000 were ones of density and resources within neighborhoods that had been "the best part of town" for decades.

The Traditional Elite Neighborhoods

America has neighborhoods that have been famous for a century: places like the Upper East Side in New York, Beacon Hill in Boston, and the North Shore of Chicago. To illustrate the magnitude of the change in density of advanced education and the magnitude of income that occurred over the last half century, I assembled data on median family income and percentage of adults with college degrees for fourteen of the most famous "best parts of town" in 1960, and what had happened to those same indicators by 2000. The results are shown in table 3.1.

All fourteen of these elite neighborhoods tell the same story. In 1960, college graduates were still a minority, usually a modest minority, in even the most elite places in the United States. Only Beverly Hills had a median family income greater than $100,000. Over the next forty years, these places, already fashionable in 1960, were infused with new cultural resources in the form of college graduates and more money to pay for the tastes and preferences of an upper class. These infusions were not a matter of a few percentage points or a few thousand dollars. The median income in these fourteen elite towns and neighborhoods went from $84,000 to $163,000—almost doubling. The median percentage of college graduates went from 26 percent to 67 percent—much more than doubling.

The Serendipitous Merits of Using 2000 Census Data

All of the zip code data in this chapter must be based on the 2000 census, because socioeconomic data on zip codes for the 2010 census were not released before this book went to press. I plan to add the 2010 values in any subsequent edition of *Coming Apart.* But in some ways, using the 2000 census has an advantage. I believe that the segregation of the new upper class will prove to be more extreme in 2010 than it was in 2000, but it was already extreme in 2000. The consequences of the segregation of the new upper class are not something for us to worry about in the future; these consequences have been working their way through our society for many years even now. The 2000 census numbers help make that point.

TABLE 3.1. ELITE PLACES TO LIVE IN 1960 AND WHAT HAPPENED
TO THEM BY 2000

	Median percentage of adults with college degrees		Median income (000s of 2010 dollars)	
	1960	2000	1959	1999
New York				
The Upper East Side[a]	23	75	$55	$183
Lower Westchester County[b]	25	58	$87	$155
The Connecticut Corridor[c]	27	65	$90	$191
Boston				
Brookline	21	77	$69	$124
The Western Suburbs[d]	27	70	$75	$157
Philadelphia				
The Main Line[e]	25	64	$83	$140
Washington, DC				
Northwest Washington[f]	35	79	$88	$172
Lower Montgomery County[g]	42	77	$94	$176
McLean/Great Falls	26	74	$74	$180
Chicago				
The North Shore[h]	32	68	$95	$152
Los Angeles				
Beverly Hills[i]	19	56	$115	$158
San Francisco				
Lower Marin County[j]	26	69	$64	$158
Burlingame/Hillsborough	21	54	$89	$144
The Palo Alto Area[k]	28	65	$72	$157
Total	**26**	**67**	**$84**	**$163**

Sources: Bogue file of 1960 Census Tracts and 2000 Census zip code data from American FactFinder on the Census Bureau website.

a. From Central Park to the East River between Fifty-Ninth Street and Ninety-Sixth Street.

b. Eastchester, Greenburgh area, Harrison, Mamaroneck, Pelham, Rye (town and city), Scarsdale.

c. Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, North Stamford, Westport.

d. Concord, Lexington, Needham, Newton, Newton Centre, Newton Highlands, Newton Lower Falls, Newton Upper Falls, Newtonville, Sudbury, Wayland, Wellesley, Wellesley Hills, Weston.

e. Ardmore, Bala Cynwyd, Berwyn, Bryn Mawr, Devon, Gladwyne, Haverford, Malvern, Merion, Narberth, Paoli, Villanova, Wayne, Wynnewood.

f. The neighborhoods west of Rock Creek Park.

g. Potomac and the Maryland portions of Bethesda and Chevy Chase.

h. Evanston, Glencoe, Kenilworth, Wilmette, Winnetka.

i. Except for Beverly Hills, census tracts where the wealthy lived in Los Angeles have changed enough that reconstructing comparable neighborhoods for 1960 and 2000 was not possible.

j. Mill Valley, Sausalito, Tiburon.

k. Atherton, Los Altos, Menlo Park, Palo Alto, Portola Valley, Stanford.

How important are these relatively few elite towns and urban neighborhoods? Hugely so—precisely because they are so few, and yet home to so many in the broad elite and to an even higher proportion of the narrow elite.

Defining the SuperZips

The first step in making that point is to convey how radically elite neighborhoods differ from those in the rest of the country. To do so, I created a score combining education and income for each zip code in the country. The method for creating the scores may be found in appendix B.

These scores are expressed as centiles with the same interpretation as the percentile scores on standardized tests. If you were in the 80th percentile on the SAT, only twenty people out of a hundred who took the SAT got a score as high as you did. If you live in a zip code in the 80th centile, only twenty American adults out of a hundred live in a zip code that has as high a combination of education and income as yours does.

The SuperZips are zip codes in the 95th through 99th centiles. I chose that range in part because the top five centiles contain a population with education and income similar to that of the famous elite neighborhoods shown in table 3.1, with a mean of 63 percent of adults with college degrees and median family incomes of $141,400. Another consideration is that I want the population in the SuperZips to be big enough to catch a large proportion of the new upper class. The top five centiles have an aggregate population of 9.1 million people ages 25 and older—almost four times the 2.4 million people in my operational definition of the new upper class. In all, 882 zip codes qualify as SuperZips.

A Profile of the SuperZips

In appearance, the SuperZips vary widely. A few consist of old mansions in old neighborhoods. Some consist of developments that have been built since the 1980s, with huge houses, much larger than the

traditional mansion, fitted out with every accoutrement that owners with unlimited budgets can think of. Many of these developments are gated or guarded by private security forces, visibly set off from the rest of the area. But a great many of the SuperZips are not visually imposing or set off. The housing stock in Chevy Chase mentioned in the prologue is typical of many. The housing stock mostly dates from the first half of the twentieth century. Many of these homes have recently been enlarged to the limits of their small lots, but others have an unchanged footprint and are no more imposing than homes in zip codes without nearly the wealth of a SuperZip. But even a modest Chevy Chase home can sell for several hundred thousand dollars—just because it is in Chevy Chase.

By definition, most of the people who live in SuperZips are affluent and well educated. They have other advantages as well. Previewing trends for the upper-middle class as a whole that I will present in detail in part 2, inhabitants of SuperZips are more likely to be married than elsewhere, less likely to have experienced divorce, and less likely to have children living in households with single mothers. The men in SuperZips are more likely to be in the labor force than other American men and less likely to be unemployed. They also work longer hours than other Americans. Crime in urban SuperZips is low, and crime in suburban SuperZips is rare.

One of the most distinctive aspects of the SuperZips is their ethnic profile. As of 2000, the 882 SuperZips were substantially whiter and more Asian than the rest of America. Inhabitants of SuperZips were 82 percent white compared to 68 percent of Americans who don't live in SuperZips. Asians constituted 8 percent of the population of SuperZips, compared to 3 percent of Americans who don't live in SuperZips. Meanwhile, blacks and Latinos each constituted just 3 percent of the SuperZip population, compared to 12 and 6 percent, respectively, in the rest of the zip codes.[14]

The 2010 census, which will be available when you read this, will provide a revealing update on how the SuperZips are evolving. Asian Americans have long been represented in elite colleges far beyond their proportion in the population, even though they suffer a systematic disadvantage in the admissions process, and in recent years they

have been joined by growing numbers of top South Asian students.[15] Given the relationship between attendance at elite colleges and the likelihood of living in SuperZips to be described presently, there is every reason to think that Asian representation in the SuperZips grew significantly in the 2000s. But Asians have since the 1960s been seen by whites as "honorary whites," in sociologist Andrew Hacker's sardonic phrase, and an increase in the proportion of Asians in the SuperZips will not change the degree to which the composition of the SuperZips is strikingly at odds with what's going on everywhere else.[16] As I write, about one out of ten American counties has a majority of minorities. The early releases of 2010 census data revealed that Latinos now constitute 16 percent of the population and blacks 13 percent.[17] The year 2010 probably marked the point at which births to white women were a minority of all births. Whites will become a minority of the American population by midcentury if not sooner. But, as of 2000, these historic changes had not intruded upon the SuperZips.

If you want to do a quick check on how much things have changed since 2000, use the American FactFinder tool at the Bureau of the Census website to see what the 2010 racial composition was in these half-dozen SuperZips, all of which matched the average of 82 percent white in 2000: 02461 (Newton Highlands, MA), 10583 (Scarsdale, NY), 20007 (Georgetown, DC), 60657 (Downtown Chicago, IL), 90212 (Beverly Hills, CA), and 94301 (Palo Alto, CA).[18]

The Zip Codes Where the New Upper Class Lives

I have not yet established that the new upper class actually lives in the SuperZips. There are two main possibilities. The first is that I'm wrong to think that the new upper class congregates in such a narrow stratum of American neighborhoods. People in the new upper class look for neighborhoods that they like for idiosyncratic reasons. They want a neighborhood with nice houses and people in a roughly similar socioeconomic bracket, but they sort themselves into prosperous zip codes that are attractive to them for specific reasons such as the length of the commute to their job or the quality of the local schools.

They are willing to trade off being at the top of the income/education ladder in return for these other qualities. The second possibility is that members of the new upper class act as if they are attracted to a single overriding criterion, that the neighborhood be filled with people as rich and smart as possible. And, for the most part, that appears to be what is happening.

To make that point anecdotally, I will continue using the metropolitan area I know best, Washington, DC, and its environs, home to almost all of the nation's narrow elite in the political and policy-making worlds plus many of the narrow elite in the news media.

If you are invited to a dinner party at the home of a member of Washington's narrow elite, the address could conceivably be in Great Falls, Old Town Alexandria, a few neighborhoods in Arlington or Falls Church, or on Capitol Hill, but it would be a surprise if it were. Given only the knowledge that your host is a member of the narrow elite, you can lay big odds that the address will be in Georgetown, the rest of Northwest Washington, Bethesda, Chevy Chase, Potomac, or McLean.

Those communities contain thirteen zip codes.[19] All of them are SuperZips, but that's just the beginning. As of 2000, eleven of those zip codes were in the 99th centile. And not just any part of the 99th centile. Ten of the eleven were in the *top half* of the 99th centile— places with combinations of education and income shared by fewer than five out of every thousand Americans. The other three zip codes among the thirteen had centile scores of 99.4, 98.9, and 98.8.

The neighborhoods I named for the dinner party were not chosen on the basis of their zip codes' centiles. For someone who has been involved in the political or public policy worlds of Washington, those are just the obvious, everybody-knows-that places where the most influential people in Washington live—and those places turn out to be not just SuperZips, but usually in the top half of the top centile.

A more systematic way of identifying where the most successful members of the new upper class live is provided by the profiles of graduates of the Harvard Business School's class of 1979 published for the class's twenty-fifth reunion in 2004.

In 2004, members of the Harvard Business School's class of 1979

were almost all in their fifties and at the peak of their careers. The 547 graduates living in the United States whose zip codes could be determined included 51 CEOs, 107 presidents, 15 board chairs, and 96 others who were directors, partners, or owners of their businesses.[20] In addition, there were 115 who were CFOs, COOs, executive vice presidents, or managing directors. I will consider those 384 to represent people who are extremely likely to fit my operational definition of the broad elite. Figure 3.1 shows where they lived.

FIGURE 3.1. CENTILES OF ZIP CODES WHERE THE HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL UPPER-CLASS SAMPLE LIVE
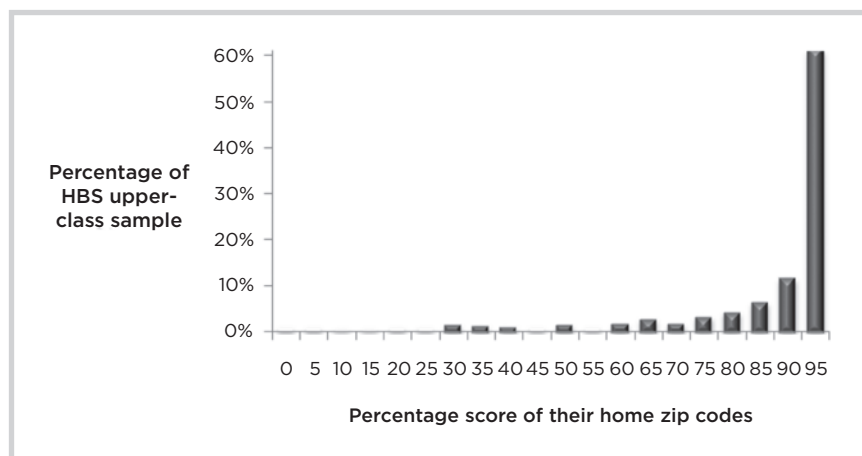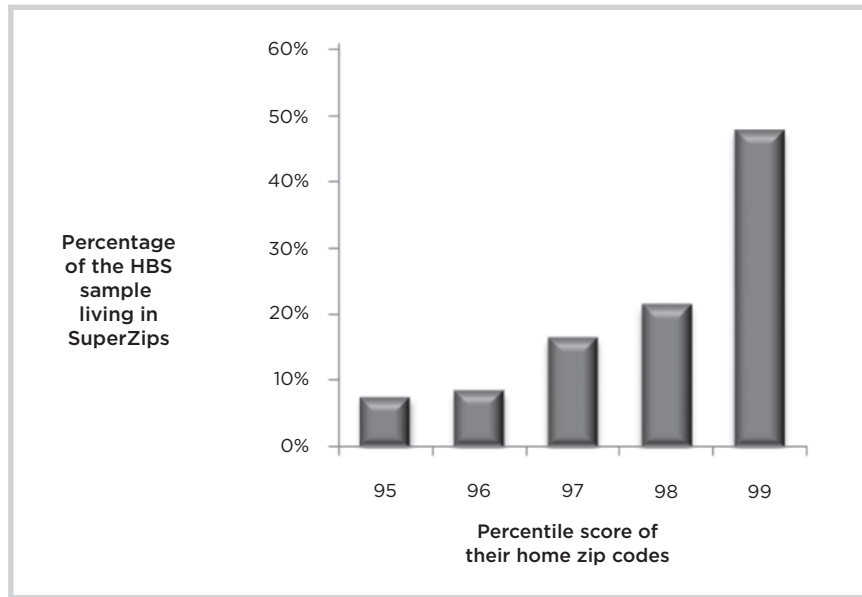

Source: Class of 1979 twenty-fifth reunion profile.

Sixty-one percent of them lived in SuperZips. Most of the ones who didn't live in the SuperZips lived in other places nearly as far out on the right-hand tail of the distribution. Eighty-three percent of the sample lived in zip codes with centiles of 80 or higher.

I chose alumni of the Harvard Business School class with positions that put them among the broad elite as a way of clarifying the discussion. But I needn't have bothered. The profile for their classmates who were merely borderline members of the new upper class was quite similar. Fifty-three percent of the rest of the class lived in Super-Zips and 80 percent lived in zip codes with centiles of 80 or higher.

We can combine the Harvard Business School subsamples to throw more light on the phenomenon I noted anecdotally for Washington: The SuperZips are not equal. Figure 3.2 shows the distribution *within*

FIGURE 3.2. DISTRIBUTION OF CENTILES WITHIN THE SUPERZIPS

Percentage of the HBS sample living in SuperZips (y-axis, 0% to 60%)

Bars:
- 95: ~7%
- 96: ~8%
- 97: ~16%
- 98: ~21%
- 99: ~48%

Percentile score of their home zip codes (x-axis)

Source: Class of 1979 twenty-fifth reunion profile.

the top five centiles of the 61 percent of the Harvard Business School sample who lived in SuperZips.

Remember that the highly successful families buying homes in these elite zip codes didn't have a key matching neighborhoods with centiles that they could consult—it's not like rich people who can go into a wine store with the latest issue of *Wine Advocate* and buy only wines that Robert Parker scored 99 or 100. Rather, they were looking for something that was consistently satisfied by something that the centile score taps into. It was something other than the simple wealth of the zip code. Multivariate analysis reveals that the percentage of adults with BAs played at least as important a role as median income in discriminating between zip codes where the new upper class live and where they don't. That "something" was people like them—affluent, highly educated, and highly successful. They want to live in the very, very best neighborhoods. The evidence from both Washington's elite and the Harvard Business School sample reveals how clearly the new upper class can agree upon what the very, very best neighborhoods are.

The SuperZips Where Overeducated Elitist Snobs Live

On my former block in Washington DC were my next door neigh-
bors (Princeton '57 and Radcliffe '66), the folks next to them
(both Harvard '64) and the people across the street (Yale '71 and
Yale Law '74), plus me (Harvard '66 and Yale Law '69). Just a
typical American neighborhood, in other words.

Michael Barone
Email to the author

The culture of the new upper class carries with it an unmistakable
whiff of a "we're better than the rabble" mentality. The daily yoga and
jogging that keep them whippet-thin are not just healthy things for
them to do; people who are overweight are less admirable as people.
Deciding not to recycle does not reflect just an alternative opinion
about whether recycling makes sense; it is inherently irresponsible.
Smokers are not to be worried about, but to be held in contempt.

The people who suffer from this syndrome have been labeled by
many other Americans as overeducated elitist snobs. The OES syn-
drome does not manifest itself like Margaret Dumont playing society
lady to Groucho Marx. Overeducated elitist snobs may even be
self-deprecating about their cultural preferences. They just quietly
believe that they and their peers are superior to the rest of the popu-
lation, intellectually and in their nuanced moral sensibility.

No external marker lets us define exactly who in the new upper
class does and does not fit this indictment. Those who suffer from the
OES syndrome tend to have high IQs, but lots of people with high
IQs happily munch on double quarter-pounders with cheese and
think that recycling is a farce. In my own experience, political ideol-
ogy is not a reliable guide—I have found condescension toward the
rabble among new-upper-class liberals and conservatives alike.

So we have to find a proxy measure: some population that is not
defined by possessing the OES syndrome, but that is disproportion-
ately dense with people suffering from it. I propose to use graduation
from an elite college. To my fellow alumni of such schools, most of
whom are fine people and who will understandably bridle at this, let

me appeal to you: I'm not talking about all of us, or even most of us (I hope). I'm just saying that the OES syndrome is more densely found in the population of people who graduate from elite colleges than in the college-educated population at large.

Such a relationship is plausible for several reasons. First comes self-selection. Eighteen-year-olds do not end up at Duke or Yale by accident. They have to try hard to be there. In other words, most of them badly wanted as teenagers to be part of an elite institution, with all the implications that attraction to eliteness carries with it.

Second, they are only eighteen years old or thereabouts when they are admitted. They arrive on campus at an impressionable age, eager to fit in with whatever goes along with being a full-fledged member of that elite institution.

Third, the intense competition for admission to elite schools creates a powerful sense of validation. If you've gotten in, you're special, they say to themselves.

Fourth, as demonstrated in chapter 2, high proportions of those who get into elite schools have come from upper-middle-class backgrounds. They have already been socialized into the tastes and preferences of the upper-middle class, with little experience of any other realm of American life. They're more than halfway toward the OES syndrome when they arrive.

Fifth, the culture on elite campuses is intensely Bobo-like. David Brooks's discussion of what he called the "educated class" is saturated with examples associated with elite schools and their graduates, and rightly so.[21]

And so I am interested in seeing where the graduates of elite schools migrate as adults as an indirect measure of where the OES syndrome is most likely to be found.

The primary database I used for this exercise consists of the home zip codes of 14,317 graduates of Harvard, Princeton, and Yale (HPY, for convenience). The years to which the data apply range from 1989 to 2010, when almost all of the subjects were somewhere from ages 39 through 53.[22] The secondary database consists of 1,588 graduates of Wesleyan University, an elite school below the iconic level of HPY, who graduated during the 1970s and whose home zip codes were

obtained as of 1996, when almost all of them ranged in age from 38 to 47. The sources of the data are alumni directories and class anniversary volumes borrowed from graduates of those schools.

As mature adults, fully a quarter of the HPY graduates were living in New York City or its surrounding suburbs. Another quarter lived in just three additional metropolitan areas: Boston (10 percent), Washington (8 percent), and San Francisco (7 percent). Relative to the size of their populations, the Los Angeles and Chicago areas got few HPY graduates—just 5 percent and 3 percent, respectively. Except for the Philadelphia and Seattle areas, no other metropolitan area got more than 1 percent.

Even though I didn't screen the sample for achieved success—just graduating from Harvard, Princeton, or Yale was enough—these alumni lived in zip codes nearly as exclusive as those of the Harvard Business School sample. Figure 3.3 replicates the graph I showed in figure 3.1, using the same scale for the vertical axis, but this time using the entire HPY sample.

FIGURE 3.3. CENTILES OF ZIP CODES WHERE GRADUATES OF HARVARD, PRINCETON, AND YALE LIVE
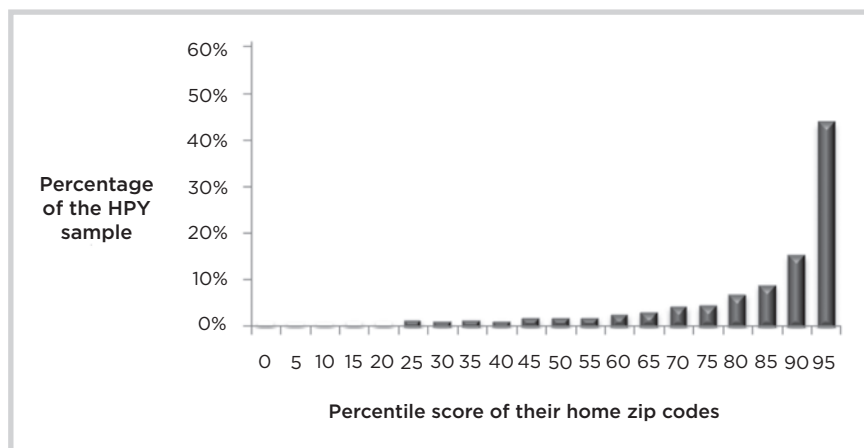

Sources: Various class directories.

The zip codes for all HPY graduates are not quite as exaggerated as those of the upper-class sample of the Harvard Business School, but almost. Forty-four percent of them lived in SuperZips; 74 percent of them lived in zip codes at the 80th centile or higher.

The data from the HPY sample are even more startling than those from the Harvard Business School sample. Everyone in figure 3.1 was a CEO, a CFO, or held some similarly elevated position that meant without doubt that they had enough money to live wherever they chose. But not everyone who enters Harvard, Princeton, or Yale at age 18 ends up a financial success. Many fail to accomplish much in life, and others choose to go into low-paying professions. Figure 3.3 includes all of them. That it is possible to select a sample exclusively on the basis of whether they were admitted to Harvard, Princeton, or Yale as a teenager, knowing nothing else whatsoever about what became of them, and produce the extreme concentration of those people in SuperZips when they were in their forties is remarkable on many counts.

If we were talking about only these three universities, these findings would be trivial. But there is no reason to think that the results are going to be much different for the other schools at the summit, such as Columbia, Stanford, or Duke. This brings us to the sample of Wesleyan graduates. In the most recent *U.S. News* college rankings, Wesleyan was ranked number 12 among liberal arts colleges—definitely elite, but, adding in the top national universities (a separate list from the liberal arts colleges), it is fair to say that Wesleyan is not at the summit. But look at figure 3.4, the third replication of the graph previously shown for the Harvard Business School upper-class sample and the HPY graduates, this time based on the Wesleyan graduates.

FIGURE 3.4. CENTILES OF ZIP CODES WHERE GRADUATES OF WESLEYAN LIVE
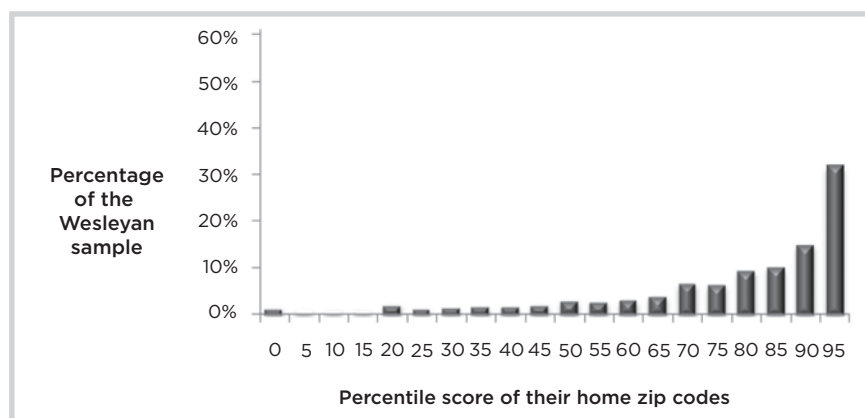
Source: Wesleyan University Alumni/ae Directory 1996.

Thirty-one percent of Wesleyan graduates were living in SuperZips, and 65 percent were living in zip codes at the 80th centile or higher. It would appear that the college sorting machine replicates itself with remarkable fidelity as a residential sorting machine. The hypothesis this suggests—testing it would push this exercise much further than appropriate for the purposes of this book—is that the rank order of colleges by mean SAT scores would be just about the same if ordered by the mean zip code centile of their graduates. If this is the case, then, ceteris paribus, the higher the centile of the SuperZip, the more densely it is populated by graduates of elite colleges and, by extension, the more densely it is populated by overeducated elitist snobs. I encourage others to explore this hypothesis empirically.

As for the phenomenon noted for the Washington elite and the Harvard Business School sample—within the SuperZips, the new upper class clusters at the highest possible centile—a graph based on the alumni from elite schools closely resembles figure 3.2. Among those alumni who lived in SuperZips, 9 percent were in zip codes at the 95th centile, 11 percent in the 96th, 15 percent in the 97th, 23 percent in the 98th, and 42 percent in the 99th.

The Elite Bubbles

If the SuperZips were islands bordered by reasonably ordinary neighborhoods, the segregation of the new upper class from everyone else would be mitigated. But they are not islands.

Recall the principal habitats of the Washington narrow elite—Georgetown, the rest of Northwest Washington, Bethesda, Chevy Chase, Potomac, and McLean. The thirteen zip codes represented by those names are nested within cocoons. Seven of them are completely surrounded by a combination of one another, the Potomac River, and Rock Creek Park. The other six have at least one border with a zip code outside the magic circle. The outsider borders for McLean are zip codes with centile scores of 99, 99, 93, and 98. The outsider zip code bordering Georgetown has a centile score of 99. For Bethesda, the bordering outsider zip codes have scores of 96, 99, and 97. The

outsider zip codes that border Potomac have scores of 96, 96, 97, plus two other zip codes, both rural areas with centiles of merely 91 and 89, the far northwest nub of Potomac's zip code 20854, several miles after leaving Potomac's residential areas behind.

The map in figure 3.5 shows the zip codes in and surrounding the District of Columbia. The zip codes in black are SuperZips, in the top five centiles. Dark gray indicates zip codes that just barely missed qualifying as SuperZips, at the 90th–94th centiles. Light gray is for zip codes that may not be elite by the rarefied standard I am using, but are far above average for the nation as a whole, at the 80th–89th centile. Unshaded zip codes are somewhere below the 80th centile.

FIGURE 3.5. SUPERZIP CLUSTERS AROUND WASHINGTON, DC

Black: SuperZips. Dark gray: zip codes in the 90th–94th centiles. Light gray: zip codes in the 80th–89th centiles. Unshaded: below the 80th centile.

The size of the SuperZip clusters around Washington is the most obvious feature of the map. In all, 931,512 adults ages 25 and older lived in those black zip codes in 2000. The clustering is even more important than the population. Notice how many of the black zip codes are contiguous.[23] Notice also how many of the zip codes bordering on the SuperZips are dark gray, meaning that they are nearly as affluent and well educated as the SuperZips—and conversely, how rarely are the SuperZips bordered by a white zip code that is below the 80th centile. The map seems to indicate that Northwest Washington is not so isolated in that regard, but that's an illusion. Along the border between the SuperZips in Northwest Washington and the nonelite bordering zip codes is Rock Creek Park, which separates the homes in the elite part of Northwest DC from everyone else with the broad, forested expanse through which Rock Creek runs.

The map's real shock for readers who are familiar with Washington will be some of the places that qualify as SuperZips. To someone who lives in the fashionable neighborhoods of Washington, communities such as Gaithersburg, Springfield, Chantilly, and Ellicott City are seen as unexceptional middle-class and upper-middle-class suburbs. But in fact the people in those zip codes have a combination of education and income higher than that enjoyed by all but 5 percent of other Americans. The main features of the new-upper-class culture prevail as widely in those SuperZips as they do in McLean or Georgetown, just on a less expensive scale.

The Washington area has the two critical conditions for the establishment of clusters in which the culture of the new upper class can flourish—a sufficiently large population of new-upper-class members and geographic contiguity of the neighborhoods where they live. Of what other parts of the United States may that be said?

Suppose we define a *cluster* as contiguous SuperZips.[24] In that case, Washington had the largest cluster in the country. As indicated in figure 3.5, it is possible to go from Ellicott City in the north to Springfield in the south without setting foot outside SuperZips, a cluster containing 827,746 adults in the 2000 census, 89 percent of all people in SuperZips in the Washington area.

The New York City area had the most people in SuperZips, though none of the individual clusters was as large as Washington's. Uptown Manhattan was by far the densest cluster, with 486,222 adults in SuperZips bordering the east, south, and west sides of Central Park. A triangle in north-central New Jersey bounded roughly by South Orange, Westfield, Annandale, Long Valley, and Mountain Lakes contained 314,189 adults. Another 246,709 adults lived in suburbs in Connecticut and New York roughly bounded by Greenwich, Granite Springs, Redding, and Westport. SuperZips along Long Island Sound had 194,725 adults. The Westchester area made up a cluster of 119,986 adults.

The third-largest aggregate population after New York and Washington is in the San Francisco area, which had four large SuperZip clusters. Downtown San Francisco had 118,555 adults in contiguous SuperZips plus other singletons. The area to the east of San Francisco, bounded roughly by Berkeley, Clayton, and Castro Valley, had 227,322 adults. Marin County had a cluster consisting of 75,583 adults. The biggest cluster in the greater San Francisco area is superimposed on Silicon Valley. It starts with Burlingame, a wealthy San Francisco suburb, and wends its way south through Palo Alto to Sunnyvale, enclosing SuperZips with 422,907 adults—the third-largest cluster in the country after Washington and Uptown Manhattan.

These clusters still don't completely capture the degree to which much of the new upper class lives in a world far removed from ordinary America. The clusters are defined by contiguous zip codes that are in the 95th centile. But a SuperZip usually borders several zip codes—four, on average—and only one of those need be another SuperZip to keep the cluster going. What is the average centile of *all* zip codes bordering the SuperZips? A very high 86. Even when a bordering zip code is not a SuperZip, it is likely to be nearly as affluent and highly educated.

Specifically, the average centile for people living in the zip codes bordering the SuperZips was at least 90 for 48 percent of them and 80 to 89 for another 30 percent. Another 13 percent had neighboring zip codes whose centiles averaged from 70 to 79, still well above the national average. Only 7 percent of the adults living in SuperZips

bordered on zip codes averaging centiles of 50 to 69, and a minuscule 2 percent of them bordered on zip codes inhabited by Americans who averaged anywhere below the 50th centile.

The result is that people who live in small towns, apparently in the countryside, can actually be part of a large new-upper-class city—it just happens to be a city with a really, really low population density. Take, for example, zip code 01778, centile 99, which serves Wayland, Massachusetts, fifteen miles west of Boston. Wayland has a population of just 13,100. It is a pretty little town, and you drive through sparsely populated countryside to any of the adjacent towns. It doesn't look like an elite bubble worth worrying about. But bordering Wayland are the zip codes for Weston (centile 99), Sudbury (99), Natick (94), Lincoln (99), and the eastern zip code for Framingham (93). The *next* circle of zip codes beyond the adjacent ones include Wellesley (99), Wellesley Hills (99), Dover (99), Needham (99), Sherborn (99), Acton (99), Carlisle (99), Southborough (99), Concord (99), Lexington (99), North Sudbury (98), Bedford (97), Auburndale (98), and Newton Lower Falls (95). Add in this additional set, and Wayland is cocooned among 259,100 people with similarly exalted education and income—a population that would rank Greater Wayland as the sixty-ninth-largest city in the country.

These very large, very well-buffered SuperZip clusters are rare. Just how rare is quickly conveyed by the map in figure 3.6 showing the location of all the SuperZips.

The first thing to emphasize about the map in figure 3.6 is all the white space interspersed with a black dot or two. Of all the clusters of SuperZips, 64 percent consist of a single zip code surrounded by others that are not SuperZips. Furthermore, the neighboring zip codes are much closer to normal than the SuperZip in their midst. Among the 80 percent of the SuperZips that were in clusters of three or fewer, the average centile of the adjacent zip codes was 77—still in the top quartile of the American population, but representing neighborhoods with a lot of variety. In other words, about 80 percent of the SuperZips do not represent the kind of elite bubble, isolated from the rest of America, that I have been describing. The problem is that this 80 percent of

FIGURE 3.6. THE NATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN SUPERZIPS

Scale
No. of adults:
5,000
10,000
100,000
250,000
500,000

Source: 2000 census zip code data from American FactFinder on the Census Bureau website. "Adults" refers to persons age 25 and older. The smallest population visible on the scale used for the map is about 5,000 adults, meaning that about 41,000 adults (0.4 percent of all persons in SuperZips) lived in SuperZips not visible on the map.

SuperZips contains only 21 percent of the people who live in SuperZips. Furthermore, that 21 percent includes few of the people who qualify for the broad elite and almost no one who qualifies for the narrow elite.

This can be said in part because of the definition of both groups. To be a member of the broad elite means being a significant figure in a significant city, and about a quarter of the adults living in SuperZip clusters of three or fewer were not part of any of the fifty largest metropolitan areas. To be a member of the narrow elite is even more constraining. As I noted in the introduction to part 1, it is difficult to hold a nationally influential job in politics, public policy, finance, business, academia, information technology, or the media and not live in the areas surrounding New York, Washington, Los Angeles, or San Francisco. In a few cases, it can be done by living in Boston, Chicago, Atlanta, Seattle, Dallas, or Houston—and Bentonville, Arkansas—but not many other places.[25]

The Harvard Business School sample and the graduates of elite colleges who live in SuperZips let us put some numbers to this definitional necessity. Of the Harvard Business School graduates who held positions that clearly put them in the broad elite, only 8 percent lived in a SuperZip cluster of three or fewer zip codes. The median number of zip codes in their SuperZip clusters was eighteen. Of those who graduated from Harvard, Princeton, or Yale, only 13 percent lived in a SuperZip cluster of three or fewer. The median was fourteen.

Meanwhile, the clusters surrounding the Big Four—New York, Washington, Los Angeles, and San Francisco—accounted for 39 percent of all people living in SuperZips. And those are the clusters in which almost all of the narrow elite and a large proportion of the broad elite live—in large bubbles dominated by their own kind.

Red SuperZips and Blue SuperZips

I promised at the end of chapter 1 that I would eventually take up the political orientation of the new upper class. The SuperZips give us a way to do that.

It is widely accepted, with good reason, that the new upper class is more liberal than the rest of the country. The dominance of liberal views among the faculties of elite universities is well documented.[26] So are the percentages of journalists in the elite media who are self-identified liberals.[27] The liberalism of the film industry is openly proclaimed by its top stars, producers, and directors.[28]

Furthermore, activist liberalism has become much more widespread in the business community over the last few decades, as documented by political scientist David Callahan in *Fortunes of Change*. It's not just the well-publicized cases such as George Soros. The new billionaires of the information technology industry are overwhelmingly liberal, and so are large proportions of the billionaires and centimillionaires in the financial community.

To some degree, this growth of activist liberals in the business community has happened everywhere. Callahan opens his book with the case of Preston Hollow, the exclusive Dallas neighborhood where George W. Bush moved after leaving office. In 2008, Barack Obama raised more money in Preston Hollow's zip code than John McCain did.[29] But while the increasing leftward dominance of American elites is a fact, it can easily be exaggerated.

The SuperZips and the 2004 Presidential Election

Consider the bitterly contested 2004 presidential election. Some places fitted the stereotype. The SuperZips in the San Francisco–Silicon Valley corridor gave John Kerry 70 to 80 percent of the vote.[30] Moving down the coast to Los Angeles, Kerry got a combined 71 percent of the vote in Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, and Malibu. The wealthy suburbs of Boston and the wealthy neighborhoods of Manhattan gave Kerry more than 70 percent of the vote.

But other places didn't fit the stereotype. Outside Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, and Malibu, Kerry didn't get even a majority in the other wealthy Los Angeles areas for which votes can be broken out. Moving farther south into the wealthy towns of Orange County, Kerry won Laguna Beach but nowhere else, getting a meager

combined 35 percent of the vote in Newport Beach, Aliso Viejo, Tustin, and Yorba Linda.

On the East Coast, the towns of the new upper class in the Super-Zips surrounding New York City were not particularly blue. Kerry got huge margins in a few of the New Jersey suburbs—Montclair and South Orange gave Kerry larger margins than even the most liberal San Francisco suburbs. But thirty-three of the forty-six wealthy New Jersey towns for which votes could be broken out went for Bush, with Kerry getting just a combined 39 percent of the vote. In the wealthy Connecticut suburbs outside New York City, Kerry won only ten of the eighteen towns for which votes could be broken out. The combined vote across all eighteen was 49 percent for Kerry, barely more than his national percentage.

Moving away from the coasts, it becomes impossible to think of the new upper class as being predominantly liberal. For the most part, wealthy neighborhoods in the cities of the Midwest, South, and Southeast are about as conservative as the states in which they are located, and sometimes more so. The entire state of Kansas gave Bush 62 percent of the vote. The wealthy towns of Leawood, Lenexa, Shawnee, and Overland Park each gave more than 70 percent of their vote to Bush.

Austin, Texas, provides an object lesson in the perils of confusing the conspicuous exceptions with the underlying profile. Austin's liberal neighborhoods are so visible in the life of the city that Austin is known elsewhere in Texas as "the People's Republic of Austin." Judging from its description by journalist Bill Bishop (and he lives there), the most liberal zip code (78704) in Austin, Travis Heights, is almost a caricature of the doctrinaire, politically correct progressive neighborhood.[31] Travis Heights gave Kerry 82 percent of the vote in 2004. Its neighbor to the north, just west of the University of Texas campus, went for Kerry with 63 percent of the vote. But the zip code adjoining it to the west, with a higher median income and a higher percentage of college degrees than either of the two liberal zip codes I just mentioned, went for Bush with 61 percent of the vote. The wealthiest zip code in Austin, also with one of the top percentages of the college-educated, went for Bush with 62 percent of the vote. So

it is true that the areas immediately to the south, west, and north of the campus and the Texas state capitol are bastions of intellectual liberalism, just as Austin's image has it. But that doesn't mean that all or perhaps even most members of the Austin new upper class are liberal.

Who Represents the SuperZips in Congress?

Presidential votes can be broken out for only some towns and urban neighborhoods. Elections to the House of Representatives offer a more systematic way to characterize the political orientation of the new upper class nationwide.

As the measure of the political orientation of a zip code I used the liberal quotient of its congressional representative. *Liberal quotient* is the term used by the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) for the number it calculates for each congressperson in each congressional session. The liberal quotient represents the number of correct votes, in the ADA's view, on key legislation divided by the total number of votes cast by that representative. One hundred is therefore the perfect liberal score and 0 is the perfect conservative score. I averaged the liberal quotients for all representatives for the 108th through 111th Congresses (those elected in 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008), which, serendipitously, consisted of two each with Republican and Democratic majorities.[32]

In the pie charts that follow, "doctrinaire liberal" means an average liberal quotient of 90 or more, "liberal" means 75–89, "mixed" means 25–74, "conservative" means 10–24, and "doctrinaire conservative" means 0–9.

First, consider the nation as a whole. From 2002 to 2008, the members of the House of Representatives had a mean liberal quotient of 51.5, just slightly to the left of center, but that may imply more centrism than actually existed. Fifty-seven percent of the representatives had liberal quotients at the doctrinaire extremes, either liberal or conservative, and a mere 21 percent had liberal quotients in the great middle range of scores from 25 to 74. Taking all the zip codes in the country, figure 3.7 shows how the balance looked when the ADA

scores of the representatives are weighted by the adult population in the zip codes they represented.

FIGURE 3.7.   ADA VOTING RECORDS OF PEOPLE REPRESENTING ZIP CODES THAT ARE NOT SUPERZIPS
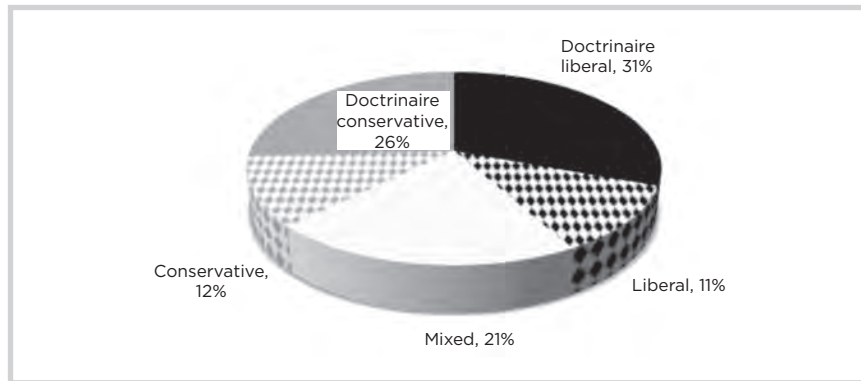
Source: Annual ADA reports and the zip code data base. Percentages are weighted by zip code population.

Outside the SuperZips, the nation was almost evenly split, with only a small edge for doctrinaire liberals.

The same balance between liberals and conservatives applies to most of the SuperZips. Figure 3.8 shows the representation for people who live in SuperZips—with one little caveat: It includes all the SuperZips except the ones surrounding the Big Four—New York, Washington, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

FIGURE 3.8.   ADA VOTING RECORDS OF PEOPLE REPRESENTING THE SUPERZIPS THAT ARE NOT NEAR THE BIG FOUR
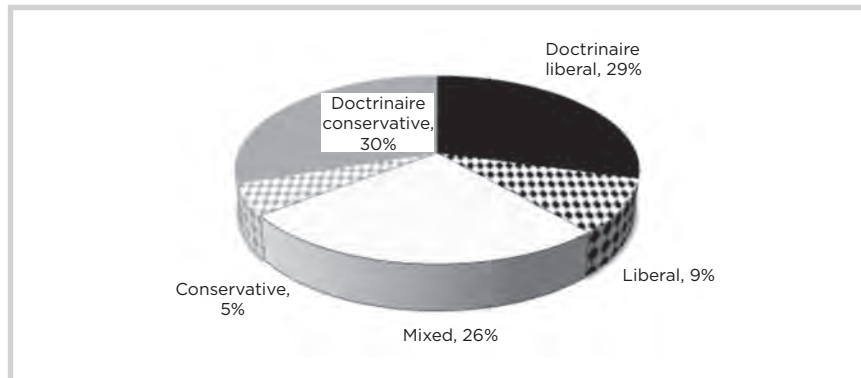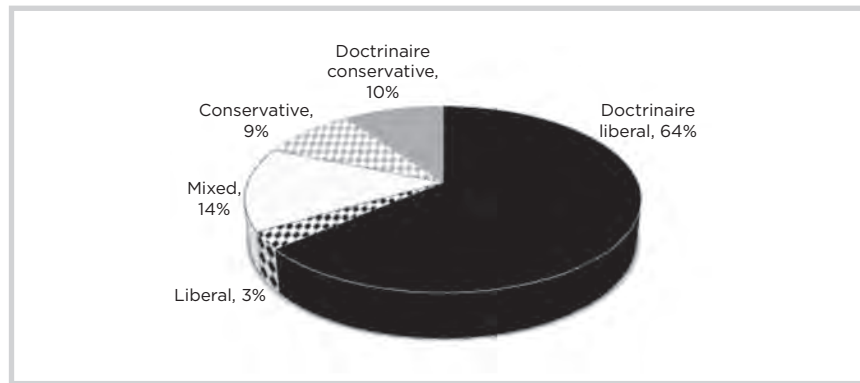

Sources: Annual ADA reports. Percentages refer to the aggregate population of the SuperZips.

The representatives of the SuperZips outside the Big Four are slightly more polarized than the entire House of Representatives, with 60 percent of the inhabitants being represented by doctrinaire liberals or conservatives. But the doctrinaire representation is equally balanced.

In figure 3.9 we look at who represents the people in the SuperZips surrounding the Big Four.

FIGURE 3.9. ADA VOTING RECORDS OF PEOPLE REPRESENTING THE SUPERZIPS SURROUNDING THE BIG FOUR

Sources: Annual ADA reports. Percentages refer to the aggregate population of the SuperZips.

Sixty-four percent of the people living in the SuperZips surrounding the Big Four are represented by doctrinaire liberals, compared to 19 percent who are represented by a conservative of any stripe. The reason figure 3.9 is significant is, of course, that the SuperZips surrounding New York, Washington, Los Angeles, and San Francisco are the home of almost all of the narrow elite whose decisions directly affect the economy, politics, and culture of the nation. These are also the SuperZips that are aggregated into the largest and most heavily buffered SuperZip clusters in the nation. The representatives they elect reflect a component of the new upper class that is just as liberal as its reputation.

How Thick Is Your Bubble?

A new upper class that makes decisions affecting the lives of everyone else but increasingly doesn't know much about how everybody else lives is vulnerable to making mistakes. How vulnerable are you?

N O VICE OF the human heart is so acceptable to [a despot] as egotism," wrote Alexis de Tocqueville. "A despot easily forgives his subjects for not loving him, provided they do not love each other." That couldn't happen in the United States, Tocqueville argued, because of the genius of the founders in devolving power:

> Local freedom . . . perpetually brings men together, and forces them to help one another, in spite of the propensities which sever them. In the United States, the more opulent citizens take great care not to stand aloof from the people. On the contrary, they constantly keep on easy terms with the lower classes: they listen to them, they speak to them every day.[1]

That's not true anymore. As the new upper class increasingly consists of people who were born into upper-middle-class families and have never lived outside the upper-middle-class bubble, the danger increases that the people who have so much influence on the course of the nation have little direct experience with the lives of ordinary

Americans, and make their judgments about what's good for other people based on their own highly atypical lives.

In one sense, there is no such thing as an "ordinary American." The United States comprises a patchwork of many subcultures, and the members of any one of them is ignorant about and isolated from the others to some degree. The white fifth-grade teacher from South Boston doesn't understand many things about the life of the black insurance agent in Los Angeles, who in turn doesn't understand many things about the life of the Latino truck driver in Oklahoma City. But there are a variety of things that all three *do* understand about the commonalities in their lives—simple things that you have no choice but to understand if you have to send your kids to the local public school, you live in a part of town where people make their living in a hundred different ways instead of a dozen, and you always eat out at places where you and your companion won't spend more than $50 tops, including tip.

Those specifications embrace an extremely large part of the American population. Tack on a few other specifications—that you watch at least twenty-four hours of commercial television a week (still well below the national average of thirty-five hours) and that you see most of the most popular new movies, either in theaters or on DVDs—and you have guaranteed a substantial degree of common familiarity about the culture as well. So while there is no such thing as an ordinary American, it is not the case that most Americans are balkanized into enclaves where they know little of what life is like for most other Americans. "The American mainstream" may be hard to specify in detail, but it exists.

Many of the members of the new upper class *are* balkanized. Furthermore, their ignorance about other Americans is more problematic than the ignorance of other Americans about them. It is not a problem if truck drivers cannot empathize with the priorities of Yale professors. It is a problem if Yale professors, or producers of network news programs, or CEOs of great corporations, or presidential advisers cannot empathize with the priorities of truck drivers. It is inevitable that people have large areas of ignorance about how others live, but that makes it all the more important that the members of the new upper class be aware of the breadth and depth of their ignorance.

To my knowledge, sociologists haven't gotten around to asking upper-middle-class Americans how much they know about their fellow citizens, so once again I must ask you to serve as a source of evidence by comparing your own experience to my generalizations. This time, I have a twenty-five-question quiz for you to take.[2] I hope it will serve two purposes: first, to calibrate the extent of your own ignorance (if any); second, to give you a framework for thinking about the ignorance that may be common in your professional or personal circles, even if it doesn't apply to you.

The questions you should take most seriously are the opening ones that ask about the places you have lived and the variation in conditions of life that you have experienced. The ignorance they imply is certain. If you have never lived or worked in a small town, you *must* be ignorant about day-to-day life in a small town, no matter how many movies set in rural Georgia you've seen. If you have never held a job that caused a body part to hurt by the end of the day, you don't know what that's like—period.

When I move to informational questions about sports, popular culture, and some American institutions, you are free to complain that some of them aren't fair. Some questions have a gender bias (though I've tried to balance those). Some are sneaky and several poke fun. In no case does an inability to answer reflect on your intelligence, character, or all-around goodness of heart.

Some of the questions are ones that whites will get right more often than minorities, and that people who do not live in metropolises will get right more often than people who do. That's because I am writing about the problems of the new upper class, the new upper class is overwhelmingly white and urban, and the readers of this book are overwhelmingly white and urban. Note, however, that had I included questions that would be more easily answered by minorities in working-class urban neighborhoods, your score would probably be even worse.

Unless I specify an age range, the questions apply to experiences that occurred at any point in your life.

Please take out your no. 2 pencil and begin.

The Questions

Life History

1. Have you ever lived for at least a year in an American neighborhood in which the majority of your fifty nearest neighbors probably did not have college degrees?

2. Did you grow up in a family in which the chief breadwinner was *not* in a managerial job or a high-prestige profession (defined as attorney, physician, dentist, architect, engineer, scientist, or college professor)?

3. Have you ever lived for at least a year in an American community under 50,000 population that is not part of a metropolitan area and is not where you went to college?

4. Have you ever lived for at least a year in the United States at a family income that was close to or below the poverty line? You may answer "yes" if your family income then was below $30,000 in 2010 dollars. Graduate school doesn't count. Living unemployed with your family after college doesn't count.

   Take your best guess. For estimating your family's past income, you should multiply what you or your parents used to make by the inflator appropriate to that time. For example, if your dad made $7,000 a year when you were growing up in 1970, you should multiply that by 5.61. He made about $39,270 in 2010 dollars. You may estimate the inflator for any particular year from these: 1940, 15.66; 1950, 9.12; 1960, 7.41; 1970, 5.61; 1980, 2.64; 1990, 1.67; 2000, 1.26.

5. Have you ever walked on a factory floor?

6. Have you ever held a job that caused something to hurt at the end of the day?

People Who Have Been Part of Your Life

7. Have you ever had a close friend who was an evangelical Christian?

8. Do you now have a close friend with whom you have strong and wide-ranging political disagreements?

9. Have you ever had a close friend who could seldom get better than Cs in high school even if he or she tried hard?

10. During the last month, have you voluntarily hung out with people who were smoking cigarettes?

11. What military ranks do these five insignia represent?

Sports, Pastimes, and Consumer Preferences

12. Choose one. Who is Jimmie Johnson? Or: Have you ever purchased Avon products?

13. Have you or your spouse ever bought a pickup truck?

14. During the last year, have you ever purchased domestic mass-market beer to stock your own fridge?

15. During the last five years, have you or your spouse gone fishing?

16. How many times in the last year have you eaten at one of the following restaurant chains? Applebee's, Waffle House, Denny's, IHOP, Chili's, Outback Steakhouse, Ruby Tuesday, T.G.I. Friday's, Ponderosa Steakhouse

Some American Institutions

17. In secondary school, did you letter in anything?

18. Have you ever attended a meeting of a Kiwanis Club or Rotary Club, or a meeting at a union local?

19. Have you ever participated in a parade not involving global warming, a war protest, or gay rights?

20. Since leaving school, have you ever worn a uniform?

21. Have you ever ridden on a long-distance bus (e.g., Greyhound, Trailways) or hitchhiked for a trip of fifty miles or more?

Media and Popular Culture

22. Which of the following movies have you seen (at a theater or on a DVD)? *Iron Man 2, Inception, Despicable Me, Tron Legacy, True Grit, Clash of the Titans, Grown Ups, Little Fockers, The King's Speech, Shutter Island*

23. During the 2009–10 television season, how many of the following series did you watch regularly? *American Idol, Undercover Boss, The Big Bang Theory, Grey's Anatomy, Lost, House, Desperate Housewives, Two and a Half Men, The Office, Survivor*

24. Have you ever watched an *Oprah, Dr. Phil*, or *Judge Judy* show all the way through?

25. What does the word *Branson* mean to you?

Scoring Your Access to the Rest of America

1. *Have you ever lived for at least a year in an American neighborhood in which the majority of your fifty nearest neighbors did not have college degrees?* Seven points maximum. Score 4 points if you answered "yes" plus a bonus point for every five years you have lived in such a place up to fifteen years.

    In the 2000 census, 92 percent of Americans lived in zip codes in which the majority of adults ages 25 and older did not have college degrees. Seventy-seven percent lived in zip codes where fewer than a third of those adults had degrees. You should make your judgment with regard to your neighborhood, not your zip code. Zero points if you are thinking of a gentrifying neighborhood in which you were one of the gentrifiers.

2. *Did you grow up in a family in which the chief breadwinner was* not *in a managerial job or a high-prestige profession (defined as attorney, physician, dentist, architect, engineer, scientist, or college professor)?* Seven points maximum. Score 4 points if you answered "yes" and 3 bonus points if the chief breadwinner for most or all of your childhood was in what you consider to be a blue-collar job.

    The percentages of households in which the chief breadwinner

was not in a managerial job or a high-prestige profession ranged from 85 percent in 1960 to 75 percent in 2010.[3]

3. *Have you ever lived for at least a year in an American community under 50,000 population that is not part of a metropolitan area and is not where you went to college?* Seven points maximum. Score 5 points if you answered "yes," 6 points if the place was under 25,000, and 7 points if you lived in a town of fewer than 10,000 people or in a rural area.

   The percentage of Americans fitting the description in the question was 58 percent in the 1960 census and 48 percent in the 2000 census. You may find it surprising, as I did, that 21 percent of Americans still lived in rural areas as of the 2000 census and another 10 percent lived in towns of fewer than 10,000 people—in total, almost a third of the population. That figure is not completely cleansed of bedroom communities, but it's close.

4. *Have you ever lived for at least a year in the United States at a family income that was close to or below the poverty line? You may answer "yes" if your family income then was below $30,000 in 2010 dollars. Graduate school doesn't count. Living unemployed with your family after college doesn't count.* Seven points maximum. Score 5 points if you answered "yes" and two bonus points if you experienced poverty both as a child and as an adult.

   A majority of Americans in their forties have been below the poverty line for a year at least once since their teens—56 percent for the 1979 cohort of the NLSY.[4]

5. *Have you ever walked on a factory floor?* Six points maximum. Score 2 points for "yes," 4 points if you have ever had a job that entailed routine visits to factory floors, and 6 points if you have worked on a factory floor.

   I was prompted to use this question because of a personal experience. In the mid-1980s, my sponsor for a speech at a local college in Wichita was the owner of a factory that made cardboard boxes, and my host took me to see it. It was fascinating—the ingenious machines, the noise, the speed, the organization. Then it struck me that every product I used was made in such a place—in the aggregate, thousands of them, constituting the

world that made my life possible—and until then I had never seen even a glimpse of it except as a small child on a single visit to Maytag Company's assembly line. My visit to the box factory was a quarter of a century ago, and I haven't been on another factory floor since.

6. *Have you ever held a job that caused something to hurt at the end of the day?* Six points maximum. Score 3 points if you answered "yes," add 2 bonus points if the job lasted longer than a summer, and a bonus point if you're talking about a job that made you ache all over.

   The question applies to any part of the body that hurts because of physical labor using the large muscles. Headaches don't count, and neither does carpal tunnel syndrome. Sore feet from having to stand up for long periods of time does count.

   If you answered "no" to this one, your bubble is thick indeed. John Kenneth Galbraith, who grew up on a farm, once said that after you've worked on a farm, nothing else you ever do is work. One might also say that if you've never had a job where something hurts at the end of the day, you don't know what work is. You certainly don't know what work is like for the large proportion of the American population who do hold jobs that cause something to hurt at the end of the day.

7. *Have you ever had a close friend who was an evangelical Christian?* Four points maximum. Score 2 points if you answered "yes," and 4 points if you are an evangelical Christian yourself.

   The distinguishing characteristics of evangelical Christians are belief in the historical accuracy of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, including especially the divinity and resurrection of Christ, and belief in the necessity of personal conversion— being "born again"—as a condition for salvation. In the Pew Forum's survey of the U.S. religious landscape in 2004, with a sample of more than 35,000, 26.3 percent of the respondents said they were affiliated with evangelical Protestant churches, the single largest category. Catholics came in second at 23.9 percent, mainline Protestant churches third at 18.1 percent, and "unaffiliated" fourth at 16.1 percent.[5]

8. *Do you now have a close friend with whom you have strong and wide-ranging political disagreements?* Four points maximum. Score 2 points if you have one such close friend, 4 points if you have more than one, but *not* if they are disagreements within the same side of the political spectrum (no points if you are a liberal who has an ultraliberal friend or a conservative with an ultraconservative friend).

The reason for this question is obvious from the discussion of red and blue SuperZips in chapter 3. See Bill Bishop's *The Big Sort* for a comprehensive analysis of this issue.[6]

9. *Have you ever had a close friend who could seldom get better than Cs in high school even if he or she tried hard?* Score 4 points for "yes."

I use this question as a way of getting at the question I would like to ask, "Have you ever had a close friend who would have scored below the national average on an IQ test?" I can't ask that question, because readers who grew up in an upper-middle-class neighborhood or went to school with the children of the upper-middle class have no way of knowing what *average* means. The empirical case for that statement is given in detail elsewhere, but it may be summarized quickly.[7] The typical mean IQ for students in schools that the children of the upper-middle class attend is around 115, compared to the national mean of 100. In such a school, almost all of the below-average students, the ones you thought of as the school's dummies, actually were above the national average. Even if the students were arranged in a normal distribution around a mean of 115, only 11 percent of the students could be expected to have IQs under 100.[8] But they probably weren't normally distributed, especially at a private school that uses a floor of academic ability in its admission decisions. So if you went to upper-middle-class schools and think you had a good friend who was below the national IQ mean, and are right, it had to have been one of the students who was at the absolute bottom of academic ability.

If you answered "yes" to this question as stated, you need to ask yourself if you fudged about the definition of "close friend." We hate to think we're such snobs that we have consorted only

with people as smart as we are, and the temptation is strong to define as a "close friend" a classmate in K–12 who didn't seem very smart but with whom we exchanged friendly greetings in the lunchroom.

10. *During the last month have you voluntarily hung out with people who were smoking cigarettes?* Score 3 points for "yes."

In the Centers for Disease Control's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System for 2009, 35 percent of the respondents said that they smoked some days or every day.[9] Rates of smoking have a strong socioeconomic gradient, but the wording of the question is designed to get at something else. Open smoking in the world of the new upper class has become so rare that it is nearly invisible. Cigars and pipes appear occasionally, but it is possible to go for weeks in the new-upper-class milieu without smelling a whiff of cigarette smoke anywhere except on a public street. Elsewhere in America, there are still lots of homes, bars, and work sites where smoking goes on openly, and nonsmokers in those settings accept it as a fact of life. The question asks to what extent you have any voluntary participation in that part of America.

11. *What military ranks are denoted by these five insignia?* From left to right, the five stand for colonel (or navy captain), major general (or navy rear admiral, upper half), corporal, master sergeant, and captain (or navy lieutenant). Five points maximum. Score 1 point if you got at least one correct, 3 points if you identified all of them, and 5 points if you ever served in the armed forces.

In 2007, 1.4 million Americans were on active duty in the armed forces, another 1.3 million were in the reserve, and 805,000 civilians worked directly for the Department of Defense. People who live in counties where a large military base is located account for another 8.4 million.[10] In the 2000 census, 26.4 million Americans were veterans of the armed forces. In mainstream America, just about every neighborhood is peppered with numerous veterans, and the local chapter of the VFW or American Legion is still a significant civic force in much of America.

12. *Option 1: Who is Jimmie Johnson?* Three points maximum. Score 3 points if you identified Jimmie Johnson as the NASCAR driver.

Score 1 point (consolation prize) if you identified him as the former coach of the Dallas Cowboys (the coach spells it *Jimmy*, not *Jimmie*).

For tens of millions of Americans, Jimmie Johnson is the most important figure in sports. He was the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series champion for five consecutive years from 2006 to 2010, a feat as unlikely as pulling off the Grand Slam in golf or tennis. NASCAR itself rivals the NFL, NBA, and Major League Baseball by several measures of attendance, economic clout, and size of fan base.

Option 2: Have you ever purchased Avon products? Score 3 points for "yes."

Avon is one of the largest companies selling cosmetics and perfume door-to-door, with sales of $9.9 billion in 2007.

13. *Have you or your spouse ever bought a pickup truck?* Score 2 points for "yes."

    In 2010, Americans bought about 1.6 million new pickup trucks.[11] Occasionally members of the new upper class buy one for fun or because they need one at their summer place in Montana. But it remains true that people who have a need for the things that a pickup truck can do are usually engaged in activities that people in the new upper class often don't do at all, or things that the new upper class hires other people to do for them.

14. *During the last year, have you ever purchased domestic mass-market beer to stock your own fridge?* Score 2 points for "yes."

    The leading qualifying beers are Budweiser, Coors, Miller, or Busch, light or regular. The disdain of the new upper class for domestic mass-market beer is nearly as intense as its disdain for people who smoke cigarettes.

15. *During the last five years, have you or your spouse gone fishing?* Two points maximum. Score 1 point for "yes" and 2 points if you or your spouse go fishing more than once a year.

    Fishing is a regular pastime for about 40 million Americans, and at the center of the annual vacation for millions more who don't fish regularly.[12] It is so popular that it supports not just one but two professional bass-fishing tournament circuits, the Bass-

master Tournament Trail and the Walmart FLW Tour, plus several regional tours. Top prize for the Bassmaster Classic is $500,000. Win the Forrest Wood Cup, and you get $1 million. Both major tours are nationally televised.

16. *How many times in the last year have you eaten at one of the following restaurant chains? Applebee's, Waffle House, Denny's, IHOP, Chili's, Outback Steakhouse, Ruby Tuesday, T.G.I. Friday's, Ponderosa Steakhouse.* Four points maximum. Score a point for each time you ate at one of them up to 4.

    However much they disapprove of fast food in theory and restrict their visits, almost all members of the new upper class at least know what the inside of a McDonald's looks like. But how about the chains of sit-down restaurants that form such an integral part of life in most of America? The nine I listed are the ones with the most outlets in the United States.[13] I could not get statistics on meals served by them, but given that these nine chains had revenues of more than $12 billion in 2009 (probably much more), and all of that comes from dinner checks that ran around $5 to $25 per person, the aggregate number of meals served by just the top nine chains has to be in the high hundreds of millions, at least.[14] Why a list of nine chains instead of the more natural top ten? Because one of the top ten is Chipotle Mexican Grill, which is to the casual-dining genre of restaurants as Whole Foods is to grocery stores.

17. *In secondary school, did you letter in anything?* Two points maximum. Score 2 points if you got any high school varsity letter *except* for the debating team or chess club. Score 2 points if you were a cheerleader or in the marching band.

    The stereotype of the overeducated elitest snob as a teenager is someone who either went to a private school where team sports were not a big deal or went to a public school where he held himself aloof from the team sports and collateral activities that are such an important part of the culture of public high schools. Does the stereotype fit you?

18. *Have you ever attended a meeting of a Kiwanis Club or Rotary Club, or a meeting at a union local?* Score 2 points for "yes."

Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs have for several decades been a primary networking organization for local businessmen. They are more influential in small cities than in large ones, but their reach extends everywhere. They are a significant source of secular social capital as well, playing an active role in a variety of civic activities. Unions usually do not play a large role in generating social capital for the community at large, but they are often centrally important to the work life of members of the union.

19. *Have you ever participated in a parade not involving global warming, a war protest, or gay rights?* Score 2 points for "yes."

    Celebratory parades, as opposed to parades on behalf of causes, occur everywhere in America, from small towns to ethnic neighborhoods in the largest cities, but not so often in the enclaves of the new upper class. This question asks if you have ever been part of one. Helping to decorate a float counts even if you didn't get to ride on it.

20. *Since leaving school, have you ever worn a uniform?* Three points maximum. Score 1 for "yes," a bonus point if you did so as part of your job, and a third point if it was while you served in the armed forces.

    A uniform can consist of as little as a shirt with your employer's logo that you are required to wear on the job. It gives you a chance to score a point or two if you are a member of a social club that occasionally has rituals involving uniforms, if you are a Civil War reenactor, or if you participate in an adult athletic league. Wearing a uniform in a dramatic production or on Halloween does not count.

21. *Have you ever ridden on a long-distance bus (e.g., Greyhound, Trailways) or hitchhiked for a trip of fifty miles or more?* Two points maximum. Score 1 point for having used each form of transportation.

    About 25 million people rode on a Greyhound Bus in 2008 alone. There are no statistics on hitchhiking.

22. *Which of the following movies have you seen (at a theater or on a DVD)? Iron Man 2, Inception, Despicable Me, Tron Legacy, True*

Grit, Clash of the Titans, Grown Ups, Little Fockers, The King's Speech, Shutter Island. Four points maximum. Score a point for each movie seen up to 4.

These represent the ten top-grossing films of 2010 that were not principally directed at children or teens.[15]

23. *During the 2009–10 television season, how many of the following series did you watch regularly? American Idol, Undercover Boss, The Big Bang Theory, Grey's Anatomy, Lost, House, Desperate House-wives, Two and a Half Men, The Office, Survivor.* Four points maximum. Score a point for each series up to 4.

These were the ten television series (omitting a sports series, NBC *Sunday Night Football*) with the highest Nielsen ratings for the 2009–10 television season. Number 1, *American Idol*, had a rating of 9.1 and an audience share of 24 percent. Number 10, *Survivor* (the "Heroes and Villains" sequence), had a rating of 4.5 and an audience share of 13 percent.[16]

24. *Have you ever watched an* Oprah, Dr. Phil, *or* Judge Judy *show all the way through?* Four points maximum. Score 1 point for each of the three for which you have watched an entire episode and a bonus point if you watch any of them regularly.

The Oprah Winfrey Show is, of course, the highest-rated talk show in American history, in its twenty-fifth and last year as I write. *Dr. Phil* is in its ninth year, and is rated second only to *Oprah*. *Judge Judy* is now in its fifteenth year and is said to be watched by about 10 million people on a typical day. References to them have become a common part of the popular culture.

25. *What does the word* Branson *mean to you?* Four points maximum. Score 2 points if you knew that Branson is a big entertainment center in the Midwest, and 4 points if you've gone to Branson yourself. No points for thinking of Richard Branson.

Branson, Missouri, is one of the leading tourist destinations in America. With a permanent population of only 6,050 in the 2000 census, it has more than fifty different theaters offering daily live performances, almost all of them devoted to country music and its derivatives. In 2009, during the worst year of the recession, it still attracted more than 7 million visitors.[17]

Interpreting Your Score

Here are the scores that you could expect to get if you fit the following descriptions.

- *A lifelong resident of a working-class neighborhood with average television and moviegoing habits.* Range: 48–99. Typical: 77.
- *A first-generation middle-class person with working-class parents and average television and moviegoing habits.* Range: 42–100. Typical: 66.
- *A first-generation upper-middle-class person with middle-class parents.* Range: 11–80. Typical: 33.
- *A second-generation (or more) upper-middle-class person who has made a point of getting out a lot.* Range: 0–43. Typical: 9.
- *A second-generation (or more) upper-middle-class person with the television and moviegoing habits of the upper-middle class.* Range: 0–20. Typical: 2.

The scoring of the archetypes reflects a few realities about socioeconomic background and the bubble.

If you grew up in a working-class neighborhood, you are going to have a high score even if you are now an investment banker living on Park Avenue. Your present life may be completely encased in the bubble, but you brought a lot of experience into the bubble that will always be part of your understanding of America.

Growing up in a middle-class neighborhood also scores points for you on several questions, and this, too, is reflected in the real-world experiences that people bring to their adult lives in the new upper class. But *middle class* covers a wide variety of environments, and the degree to which people who grew up in the middle class seal themselves off from that world after they reach the new upper class also varies widely, which is reflected in the wide range of possible scores.

Having grown up in an upper-middle-class neighborhood inevitably means some restriction to your exposure to average American life. If you grew up in an exclusive part of town such as Chicago's North Shore or Northwest Washington, you or your parents had to

take proactive steps to force you out of the bubble. That sort of thing happens, but even then it is often artificial—your parents made you help out in a soup kitchen during high school and you volunteered for Habitat for Humanity during college, so you have had brief exposure to some of the most downtrodden people and disorganized neighborhoods. The truth is, such experiences still leave people with little idea of what life in an ordinary working-class or middle-class neighborhood is like.