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# Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There

David Brooks

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One of the best places to see the new upper class in all its glory is the *New York Times* wedding page. On any given Sunday, the paper lists the weddings it thinks are important. You can't just send your stuff in and get listed; you have to apply and be accepted. I asked what the criteria are, but they won't tell. It's like cracking the CIA code.

Go back to the *New York Times* wedding page of the 1950s and you can

see that the elite back then was the Protestant establishment. The *Philadelphia Story* with Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant and Jimmy Stewart is the world evoked by that page. It didn't just describe the couple and their jobs, it also listed their social connections. For the grooms, it was prep schools, colleges, the clubs—was it the Metropolitan Club or the Union League Club? For the women, it was debutante history, what cotillion ball they came out at.

Try to imagine this item from the wedding page in 1958 in a newspaper today: “She is descended from Richard Warren, who came to Brookhaven in 1664. Her husband, a descendant of Dr. Benjamin Treadwell, who settled in Old Westbury in 1767, is an alumnus of Gunnery School and a senior at Colgate University.”

We no longer talk that way. Today’s New York Times wedding page is a great clash of résumés. Its devotees call it the mergers and acquisitions page: Harvard marries Yale, Fulbright marries Rhodes, Salomon Brothers marries Skadden Arps, magna cum laude marries magna cum laude. You never see a magna cum laude marrying a summa cum laude: the tensions in such a marriage would be too great.

In the Vows column, they describe one wedding in great detail. The message of this column is always the same: these people may work eighty hours a week and pull in \$2 million a year, but they are not consumed by ambition. They’re free spirits upon whom success just happened to fall.

The wacky wrinkle of each wedding ceremony is described in loving detail. A couple may have hired the rock band Devo to play the Jeopardy! theme song as they walked up the aisle. A bride may have taken her bridesmaids to get drunk at a Russian bathhouse. A groom may come up with a snowboard with his favorite Schiller quotation on it.

The column will describe the history of the relationship of the two résumé gods. They always seem to have met while recovering from marathons or on

a dig for the bones of Pleistocene man. They fall in love on educational vacations in Myanmar or Minsk. But then there is always a troubled moment when they broke up and one of them went off to arrange the largest merger in Wall Street history and the other settled for a career in neurosurgery after dropping out of sommelier school. When they get back together, it’s in a summer house in a place like Martha’s Vineyard, surrounded by people with cheekbones similar to their own, and they decide ultimately to share an apartment.

The Times doesn’t yet have a fornication page, so we don’t know what their sex life is like, but you can imagine what it would be: Jane Doe, Princeton ’89, Harvard M.B.A. ’93, is now sleeping with John Smith, Stanford ’87, Berkeley ’92.

What you see on this page is what the new elite looks like: vineyard-touring doctors, novel-writing lawyers, tenured gardening buffs, and the unusually literary real estate agents who are upscale America. I spent a few years with these people—going to Aspen; to Bozeman, Montana; to Marin County, California; to East Hampton, New York—because that’s the kind of reporter I am: I don’t care how long I have to spend in Aspen, I’m going to get the story.

## The Bourgeois Risorgimento

One of the most striking characteristics of the new elite is that they’ve smashed the old categories. Through most of the past 150 years, you could

tell the bourgeoisie from the bohemians. The bourgeoisie were the square, practical ones. They worked in corporations, lived in suburbs, went to church, and had a distinctively bourgeois, Ben Franklin ethos: self-discipline, frugality, order, punctuality, moderation, industry, temperance, fidelity, faith. Not grand and heroic, but good for making money, for succeeding in the world.

The bourgeoisie, the shopkeepers, were opposed almost immediately by the bohemians, who established themselves in Paris in the 1830s with novelists like Flaubert and Stendhal, artist intellectuals. The intellectuals found repulsive the merchants and shopkeepers who had replaced the aristocracy as the most important leaders of society. Flaubert looked at what he called the stupid grocers and their ilk; he found them “plodding and avaricious.” Stendhal said hatred of the bourgeoisie was “the beginning of all virtue.” They made him “want to weep and vomit at the same time.” Flaubert actually signed his letters “Bourgeoisophobus” to show how much he hated these people.

Shocking the bourgeoisie became what bohemians did. They wore long hair, had free sex, liked altered consciousness, wore ridiculous clothing, and liked pranks. A poet in the 1830s walked a lobster on a leash—exactly the hippie sense of humor I saw when I was growing up in Greenwich Village in the 1960s.

For the next 150 years, there was a culture war. The bourgeois was materialistic, so the bohemian was antimate-

rialistic. The bourgeois liked politeness; the bohemian liked incivility. The bourgeois was career-oriented, so the bohemian was experience-oriented. The bourgeois pretended to be chaste, and the bohemian pretended, at least, to be promiscuous.

A hundred years ago, if you read Horatio Alger stories, you were probably bourgeois, making money. If you hung around Greenwich Village talking revolution, you were probably bohemian. In the 1950s, if you liked Ike you were probably bourgeois. If you liked the beatniks and Allen Ginsberg, you were probably bohemian.

Bohemianism turned into a mass movement in the 1960s with the hippies and Woodstock and the counterculture. Theodore Roszak described the hippie assault on the bourgeoisie: “The bourgeoisie is obsessed by greed; its sex life is insipid and prudish, its family patterns are debased; its slavish conformities of dress and grooming are degrading; its mercenary routinization of life is intolerable.”

It wasn’t just a quibble. They really had a lot of arguments with it.

Then something odd happened: conservatives and the bourgeoisie started fighting back. Until the counterculture became so strong in the 1960s, they had just followed the advice on their throw pillows—Living well is the best revenge—and ignored all those carping artists. They fought back, in the 1970s and 1980s, both through religious conservatism, defending traditional family values, and also in an intellectual sphere. People like Irving

Kristol made a case for the bourgeoisie; Kristol wrote that bourgeois society is the most prosaic of all possible societies, but it is organized for the comfort of common men and women.

Bourgeois society is not grand and heroic, but it's a pretty good context for capitalism. It offers foundations like family and home and church—a good, decent life. Bourgeois institutions like the family keep society together. The bohemians who talk about freedom and emancipating themselves sometimes just go off into narcissism. The neoconservatives pointed out that in spite of the changes of the nineteenth century, families stayed together. Crime stayed down. Society was pretty healthy when the bourgeois virtues dominated.

And then in the 1980s, there was a bourgeois risorgimento. The yuppies—the young urban professionals—suddenly were flourishing, wearing their yellow ties, ridiculous suspenders, and moussed-back hair. They had a tremendous work ethos: if you don't come in to work on Saturday, don't bother coming in on Sunday, because you're not going to have a job.

This culture war made its way into the political realm. In 1988, when George Bush the elder was running against Michael Dukakis, he visited a flag factory sixteen days in a row. The Pledge of Allegiance became a big issue. Bush was saying that Dukakis was a northeastern liberal—they're not patriotic, they don't love America, they have countercultural values—and you don't want to vote for him. It worked extraordinarily well. A guy

named Arthur Finkelstein ran a series of ads: so-and-so is dangerously liberal, scarily liberal; these guys are weird hippies, so don't vote for them. For a time in the 1980s it worked extremely well.

## The Birth of the Bobos

Today, especially in the upscale culture of the New York Times résumé gods, it is very hard to discern the bourgeois from the bohemian. Bankers have those teeny-tiny steel-framed glasses—the kind that give you the peripheral vision of a worm, but suddenly it's cooler for bankers to look like Franz Kafka than like Johnny Carson.

In Wayne, Pennsylvania, where I went to high school and where *The Philadelphia Story* was set—it's a very Republican, conservative town, eighth in the country in the number of social register families—suddenly there are coffee shops all around. On the takeout cups at Cafe Procopio, it says that the café is named after a seventeenth-century Parisian café where artists, rebels, and intellectuals gathered. Now, in Republican Wayne, there still aren't a lot of artists, rebels, and intellectuals, but there are a lot of people who want to drink coffee as if they were, and that's not insignificant. In right-wing towns like Wayne and Orange County, California, and in formerly left-wing towns like Berkeley and Burlington, Vermont, you see the same culture: coffee shops, gourmet bread stores where they sell you a spinach feta loaf for \$4.75. The first time I walked into one, I disgraced myself by asking to have it sliced.

And then there are distressed-furniture stores. The yuppies and the bourgeoisie liked polished, new-looking furniture, or very refined antique furniture. Now it's all chipped and nicked—distressed. I often wonder what the Asian factory workers who make it think. They make this nice new furniture, then it goes another step down the assembly line, where another set of workers are banging it and distressing it. What must they think of us?

And the organic grocery stores: they've got basmati rice, vegetarian dog biscuits, all-natural hair coloring—because if you're going to artificially color your hair, you want it to be all-natural. They've gotten rid of all the things from the 1960s, from Berkeley, that were of interest to teenagers, like free love and nudity, and kept the things that were of interest to middle-aged hypochondriacs, like whole grains. It's hippiedom brought to the suburbs.

People who used to tell you that consumerism is a soul-destroying sham have kitchens the size of 747 hangars. You expect to see a "You are here" sign. The refrigerator is over here, the stove is over there, and there's a big island that seats sixteen in the middle. And there are Agas, Viking ranges, Sub-Zero refrigerators. I was at the Sub-Zero factory in Madison, Wisconsin—holy ground—where they make these big refrigerators; you could fit an in-law suite in one side.

If you go deeper into religious life and intellectual life, pleasure and work, as I did in researching my book, you find that these people have bourgeois

and bohemian attitudes all mixed up. Marx taught that cultures always clash, that classes conflict, but sometimes they just blur together. That's what has happened to these two formerly opposing cultures. Is this, I asked myself, a cultural consequence of the information age? In this age, ideas and creativity are as important to making money as financial capital and natural resources.

Information age technologies have replaced, or at least been added to, extraction industries. The people who are thriving can turn emotions and ideas into products. They have one foot in the world of emotions and ideas and creativity—the bohemian world—and another foot in the bourgeois world of the marketplace. That is what has brought these two things together.

This new elite is doing what elites always do. They have replaced the old Protestant elite and set up new social codes, new rules about manners and morals, a new pecking order, new attitudes about what we should do, how we should be, how we should treat our kids, and how we should spend money.

Bourgeois bohemians—Bobos—are very keen on spending money in ways that show they don't care about money and material things, that they've risen above all that. There's a section in my book titled "The Code of Financial Correctness" on how to spend money to show you don't care about the vulgar things in life. There's an Aristotelian distinction between needs and wants.

It's vulgar to spend money on a luxury; that's what rich people do. But it's cool to spend money on a need, some-

thing that's practical. A \$15,000 media center with a big-screen TV is vulgar, but a \$15,000 slate shower stall is a sign that you're at one with the Zenlike rhythms of nature.

Caviar is vulgar because you don't really need it, but you can spend lots of money on those northern Italian cognoscenti lettuces that taste so bad on sandwiches, because lettuce is an earthy thing.

A Corvette is vulgar because it's impractical, but with a \$65,000 Range Rover you can actually carry stuff and go off road. I thought of writing a screenplay called "Rebel Without a Camry" about an English professor who buys a Cadillac and loses all his friends because he violates the code.

Another rule is that you can never have too much texture. The yuppies and the old WASPs liked everything smooth. Now we have distressed furniture, beaten floors, sisal rugs, wildflowers. Everything you drink, like microbrews and thick coffee, should leave a little sediment.

Back in my hometown, I saw people with Colombian and Peruvian fabrics all over, and I thought to myself, I wonder if they know where I can get some fresh fava beans.

A final rule is that you should spend a lot of money on things that look like they were formerly owned by someone much poorer than yourself. Whereas the old WASPs mimicked Versailles and the palace crowd in Europe, now we admire those peasants of Tuscany and Provence who seem to know so much about mushrooms. On the dining room tables at Crate and Barrel, there

always seems to be something once used for slaughtering pigs. The richer you get, the more you should look like a Shaker.

## Bobos in Business

Bohemian symbols have swept through commercialism—shopping and buying—which once was the essence of bourgeois life. On a deeper level, the Bobos have transformed our business world. Businessmen used to project an image of calm sobriety: white shirts, dark paneling. Now businessmen are photographed for the business magazines with their wacky accoutrements. Jeffrey Katzenberg has a Super Soaker water cannon or a bungee cord. The number two at Microsoft appeared on the cover of *Fortune* in a beanie propeller hat. Imagine John D. Rockefeller posing that way.

The culture of business has been transformed by the culture of the 1960s, first of all in advertising. Apple Computer uses slogans like *The Crazy Ones*, *The Misfits*, *The Rebels*. Lucent Technology: *Born to Be Wild*. Burger King, though it doesn't seem like an Age of Aquarius organization: *Sometimes You Gotta Break the Rules*.

And it's not only in the advertising and the way people talk, but in the way they actually organize their companies. The 1960s critique of business and of American life was about bureaucracy and technocracy. Now that critique is the essence of conventional management wisdom. Management consultant Tom Peters says that destruction is cool; think revolution, not evolution. He sounds like a Woodstock guy,

except that he's getting paid \$65,000 a speech. Companies have de-bureaucratized themselves and made themselves much more creative and much more flexible than they were fifty years ago.

Sociologist Daniel Bell, in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, which he wrote in the early 1970s, said we had a productive, Puritan culture in America that was about hard work and making money, and a hedonistic, hippie culture that was about instant gratification.

Bell thought the hippie culture would undermine the hardworking culture, but the exact opposite has taken place. Now we have workers who consider themselves artists but work incredibly hard and very creatively, and we have the economy we now enjoy. It looks like the bohemians have swept over American life and won the culture war.

A lot of conservatives really do think that. Irving Kristol is one who thinks the cultural war is over and the bohemian counterculturalists won. George Gilder, another prominent conservative writer, made a similar case. Gilder wrote in *Commentary* magazine in 1995:

Bohemian values have come to prevail over bourgeois virtue in sexual morals and family roles, arts and letters, bureaucracies and universities, popular culture and public life. As a result, culture and family life are widely in chaos, cities seethe with venereal plagues, schools and colleges fall to obscurantism and propaganda, the courts are a carnival of pettifoggery.

The argument that bourgeois conservatives are losing and 1960s people have taken over America was echoed by Robert Bork in *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*.

I find exactly the opposite to be true.

## Bobo Ballast

On the surface, a lot of manners are bohemian. People dress casually when they go to work. But basically, the core bohemian complaint was about capitalism, about commerce. The bohemians thought that making money was soul-destroying. Now, the people who seem bohemian think capitalism is great, as long as you can wear a black T-shirt to work. They've embraced capitalism. Business has never been as prestigious as it is now in America. It has never had so few mortal enemies. Ben and Jerry—very left-wing, up at Burlington, Vermont—have accepted capitalism and the virtues of the marketplace.

High-tech business magazines like *Wired* and *Fast Company* and *Red Herring* look like *Jefferson Starship*, they look sixties. But ultimately they're business magazines, and they accept the virtues of the business world. Once you accept the business world, all sorts of other bourgeois attitudes come to life.

Bohemians were always talking about emancipation from conformity. They wanted people to throw off the fetters of custom and tradition. Now social critics talk about community, civil society, reestablishing order, preservation.

Bowling Alone, a book by Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam, laments the demise of bowling leagues as a sign of loss of community. No 1950s or 1960s intellectual would lament the loss of bowling leagues. They would have thought bowling leagues were reactionary. Now we think bowling leagues are healthy, because we are ultimately bourgeois. We like community. We like civil society. We like people getting together and observing customs.

This translated throughout our political life. Universities are much stricter than when I went to college in asserting in loco parentis authority on drinking, hazing, smoking, sexual conduct. They take a much stricter role now.

Legislators seem to pass, or entertain passing, any bill with the word control in it: besides guns, they want to control Internet pornography, tobacco, violent television, campaign spending. It's an effort to clamp down and make things a little more stable.

Summerhill, a book by A. S. Neill about a school in Britain where there were no rules except those set by the students themselves, sold 2 million copies in America in the 1970s. Now nothing is as out of fashion as that idea. Now we have parents asserting tremendous authority, not letting kids out of their sight. Bicycle sales are suffering as a result. Kids are doing all sorts of parentally directed activities.

Towns like Burlington and Berkeley that used to be for emancipation are now all for preservation. Every third bumper sticker says save something:

the bay, the theater, something else. People are more inclined to look backward to the past at something they had forgotten than to look to an emancipated utopian future. These places are now conservative in the old-fashioned sense: they distrust change.

Edmund Burke said that the owners of great property are the "ballast in the vessel of the commonwealth." The Bobos are the ballast in the vessel of the commonwealth. They don't want great change; they want to preserve, and they look back. They buy books called Simple Abundance, looking back to some simple, yet still wealthy, past.

In political life, the Bobos also are conservative in the old-fashioned sense. They distrust change on the left (like Hillary Clinton's health care plan) and they distrust change on the right (like Newt Gingrich's attempt to scale back government). They don't like conflict, and they don't like vehemence; they just want to keep things rolling along as they are.

That is a fundamental change from where we were in the 1980s, when we had a cultural war, a polarization, between Ronald Reagan and Michael Dukakis or Walter Mondale. Now we have the third way. We have Bill Clinton, who is liberal on some things, like condoms in schools, and conservative on some things, like school uniforms. He takes a little bit from both, mashes it all together, and forms this third way. We see in both Bill Clinton and Tony Blair a reconciliation of left and right, and it creates a mushy, anti-ideological style of politics.

## Bobo Materialists, Conservative Ideologists

Conservatives are beginning to be fed up with the bourgeoisie. You would think that if the bourgeoisie really won, Republicans and conservatives would benefit, since they are defenders of the traditional values of the bourgeoisie, and if any party was in favor of the counterculture, it was the Democrats.

But a funny thing has happened. It is clear that conservatives and Republicans are not ultimately the party of the bourgeoisie because conservatives tend to have ideals. If they are libertarians, they have ideals about freedom. If they're religious conservatives, about the divine order. If they're patriotic conservatives, about what America should stand for. And conservatives tend to want some radical changes.

During the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, conservatives were outraged by Clinton's behavior because it was a violation of certain moral rules that conservatives held. But the country wasn't outraged. The country said, The stock market's going great, so why rock the boat? That's a classic bourgeois response: materially, things are fine. Now we're beginning to see on the right what we used to see on the left: diatribes against the bourgeoisie. Bill Bennett wrote a book called *The Death of Outrage*, in which he asked why people aren't getting angry. That's what the leftists used to say.

Now we're beginning to see friction between the right and their former allies in the middle class, or, as we now call them, the soccer moms. One of the

paradoxes of the past ten years is that the Democratic Party has actually done a better job, until recently, of becoming the party of the bourgeoisie via this third way, the Clinton triangulation style of politics.

My friends at *The Weekly Standard* who wrote State of the Union speeches for Presidents Bush and Reagan were stunned at the first Clinton State of the Union address because it was totally different from the ones they had written. They had a theme, a few policies that exemplified the theme, a coherent argument, and a big, ideological windup. In Clinton's State of the Union speeches, there is no pretense at having a theme. It's just a laundry list of very modest proposals—this for this group, that for that group—put together without any ideology at all. That's the style of politics the bourgeoisie likes: it is modest, not grand, not confrontational. And so those speeches are tremendous successes every year.

Newt Gingrich never really adapted. He was too vehement, too ideological.

George W. Bush's semi-oxymoronic slogan, compassionate conservatism, is very Bobo in that it mixes two things that formerly haven't been brought together. Bush is creating a political campaign style that is a little of this, a little of that. Social Security privatization, pretty conservative. On the other hand, he has spending programs for all sorts of federal activism in other spheres, which puts him more to the center of the road.

The consumer life of the bourgeoisie and the Bobos is great. We've got these fancy bread stores and really

big refrigerators. Business life, too, is excellent. Countercultural values have made American corporations more flexible and more creative. But other aspects of our lives, like intellectual life, religious life, and political life, are a little flat and a little too moderate and stifling for me. I spent four and half years in Belgium, and I came back warning of the menace of Belgian cultural hegemony, in which everything lively is made boring. That's ultimately what's happening now. There are worse things in the world than a boring society or a boring political life in Washington, but there is a waning of national energy. That is something I worry about.

## Death of a Bobo

As I was writing my book, I thought about how Bobos die.

At the Vatican, there's a big painting of the Last Judgment: some people get sent to heaven and some to hell. That seemed so confrontational for the Bobos. Maybe just a last discussion, and the recyclers go to a slightly better place.

So what does a Bobo death look like? How would a University of San Francisco law professor with a house in Montana die?

It's dusk in August, and she's up on her hillside in Montana, looking over the valley with her neighbors. There are bed and breakfasts all over the landscape. Some former lawyers are making chutney over here, and some former cardiologists are making pesto over there. She pulls her fox fiber shirt

around herself because it's getting a little cool. Her dogs, Dylan and Joplin, are sitting by her side.

She decides to go down to the farmhouse and have a cup of coffee because night is coming on. She walks carefully around the trees she has planted and the wild grasses she has imported from New England, and she goes up to her porch, where she's put her wood piles. It's not wood she actually burns, but she has become a devotee of the wood-pile aesthetic, which is simple and virtuous and helps her get in touch with her inner self. In the house, the soundtrack to the movie *The Horse Whisperer* is playing on the sound system. Her partner is in the study reading memoirs by South Asian feminists or working on his ladle collection.

She walks into her kitchen, and the Angel of Death is sitting there at the island. It's the special Bobo Angel of Death, so he's wearing a North Face parka instead of a black robe. And instead of a scythe, he has a Smith & Hawken trowel, ergonomically designed. Apparently he's been there a while, because he has found one of the ceramic mugs she got at the crafts fair in Santa Fe the year before. He asks her about the kitchen renovation, which he's really interested in. He's impressed by the way she has managed to quadruple the size of the kitchen while keeping its original character intact. He likes the warehouse doors she installed as her cabinet doors, and how they squeak intentionally for authenticity.

Then he says to her, "By the way, you're dead. But there's going to be no

heaven for you, and no hell. You'll just get to stay in this oversized kitchen you've built for yourself, with your California casual chairs, and every radio will be tuned to National Public Radio. You can live here forever."

That's it. She looks out the window and sees him taking her Range Rover with him off into eternity. That's the end for the Bobos.

Following his talk, David Brooks took questions from the audience.

Mitch Pearlstein: What does this mean politically and ideologically? And what do you take to be some of the more substantial arguments against your thesis?

David Brooks: So far, there haven't been any substantial arguments. Politically, if you had asked me a year ago who the final two contenders for the Republican nomination would be, I would have said there would be one conservative and one moderate. In the moderate camp, I would have put Dole, McCain, Bush, and maybe Alexander. In the conservative camp, Quayle, Forbes, Buchanan, and Bauer. And it seemed to me that one conservative would emerge. I think that would have been a conventional view, at least in Washington, among my crowd. But it turned out that no conservatives emerged as viable candidates. There were two moderate conservatives, McCain and Bush. That was surprising to me, but it's an example of the fact that conservatism is weak in an age of Bobo centrism.

Similarly, the Democratic Party hasn't run a true, self-declared liberal for president for quite a long time. People thought Paul Wellstone would run, but he decided not to. Clinton and Gore may be liberal—many of us think they're quite liberal—but they're not self-declared liberals. They talk about centrism, they talk about free trade.

The past eight years have been terrible for the left. Left-wing arguments really haven't been heard in the national debate. Right-wing arguments have been heard because conservatives are more aggressive in promoting them, but it hasn't been great since Newt Gingrich fell. This age of prosperity and Bobo reconciliation is not good for the conservative movement. I'm barely on speaking terms with people in Washington who used to be my close friends because we don't agree. But a sense of a coherent, conservative political movement is not something one feels the way one did in the Reagan years, or even in the Bush elder years. That is the product of the age we're in, which really has ended the culture war.

Conservatives depended on the culture war. If you weren't hating the commies, you were hating the sixties. Some people—Robert Bork, George Gilder, Gertrude Himmelfarb—still do, and still think the sixties are dangerous. My argument is that the sixties have been co-opted. They aren't that dangerous anymore; they're just a fact that happened.

One other political point is this: Who is an anti-Bobo? One main group is those who are against globalization, like the people I saw getting arrested

outside my office at The Weekly Standard during the IMF/World Bank hearings. A lot of the kids didn't get arrested during the protest and didn't want to go home without having gotten arrested, so they negotiated with the police. The police brought school buses to the corner of 17th and M and arrested the line of kids there. I was hoping they would keep them in jail for two weeks to teach them a lesson, but they didn't.

I had just come back from a company called Sonic Foundry in Madison, Wisconsin, where they make Web pages. The twenty-two-year-old millionaires there have red hair, pierced noses, ripped clothes. They looked exactly like the people at the IMF meeting.

I came away from those two experiences thinking that the IMF left-wing anarchists are going to get jobs at Sonic Foundry and find a satisfying life, that the left-wing attack on the World Trade Organization and the IMF would fritter away. But the right-wing attack on the Bobos and globalization, the Pat Buchanan attack, is not going to fritter away. That's the real opposition.

David Sturrock: You described how one set of values arose in reaction to another, opposed it for a long time, and finally, as you say, was co-opted by it. What might come along in the future to challenge, rival, maybe undermine, replace, or synthesize with this existing order?

David Brooks: When I first started my book, the last chapter was going to be about the coming revolt against the

Bobos. I thought it would be people who were poor and had less education, because this is a university-based structure. The old elite was based on blood and country clubs; this is an elite based on university and education.

I expected to see social resentment against these people. If you can't afford the furniture at Restoration Hardware, and especially if you don't get all the cultural references and the ironic jibes, I thought you would feel alienated. At a Restoration Hardware in Palo Alto, I saw a lady following other ladies around the store and attacking them: You rich bitch. I thought I'd found real social rebellion. They actually arrested her. Some cops came and sat her down on a nice Mission sofa, and she sat there quietly until they took her away.

Generally, though, I found very little populist resentment. Instead, I found that the manners and mores that have been adopted by this class are going down to the rest of society. I was at a truck stop in Montana where there's a cappuccino stand six feet off the ground so the truckers don't have to get out of their cabs.

You do see among young people a reaction against Bobos having it so easy. A book by Jedediah Purdy called *For Common Things* says you can't be a good person and buy all this stuff; it corrupts you. So, he says, he's not going to buy this stuff; he's going to lead an aesthetic lifestyle. He's on the left. On the right is a young woman named Wendy Shalit who says you can't be a good person if you sleep around and show off your body. She has a book called *A Return to Modesty*. It seems

reasonable to think that these young people would say Bobos think they can have everything. You can have this great life and still be great spiritual beings, but life ain't that easy and we're going to make the hard choices and live an aesthetic lifestyle. That seems to be a natural response to the tremendous spending we see around us.

Mitch Pearlstein: Draw a distinction, if you would, between the truly rich folks—those who spend \$15,000 for a shower—and others who are doing well, but are not at that level you talk about. Is there tension between those two groups? When you talk about this new upper class, it's not just the folks making a couple of million; it's folks who are making real nice salaries but are having a hard time paying their bills.

David Brooks: The cultural gap between these two groups is no longer that great. The Bill Gateses of the world dress in worn chinos and don't want you to think they're rich; they want you to think they're just graduate students. But then there's the problem for those of us who are confronted by their wealth, those of us—this hit me, especially, when I was at the Wall Street Journal — with high-status, low-income jobs.

I call it status-income disequilibrium. You're off at lunch palling around with millionaire Wall Street brokers, and after lunch one of them says, "I've got my car. Can I give you a lift home? I'm going up to Park Avenue." You don't live on Park Avenue; you live over in some crappy little apartment. They lead one sort of life, and I take the subway to my other sort of life. So you're a

god during the day, and at night you're scrubbing the toilet and he's got a squad of nannies for every kid.

And then we talk about Paris. He's got an apartment in the Marais district. I stay in a one-star hotel out in the suburbs. Nobody feels very sorry for sufferers of this malady, but it's an effect of the information age. Intellectuals, journalists, media types, professors, and congressmen feel this acutely. They're big guys, but they can't afford anything because they have to have two homes on their incomes. Suddenly, they're thrown in with bankers whom they never would have met in years past because there was a sharp distinction between the world of finance and money and the world of arts and ideas. But in the new economy, all these things are thrown together.

Jim Van Houten: You indicated that you thought there was a lot of prestige for people who are successful in business. But there also seems to be a great willingness, even among the middle class, for lawsuits brought against businesses and basic attacks on business by very diverse groups. How can you reconcile that?

David Brooks: There is distrust of some businesses. If you're in the tobacco industry, and soon the gun industry, you're in the target. But it's not accompanied by the real hatred of all business that one used to see, on television and in books. In *Babbitt* and *Death of a Salesman*, businesses were horrible. That was the mainstream; that was every novel and every TV show. But now, people don't detest even Bill

Gates, who is thought to be rapacious. There aren't a lot of people who say capitalism is a monstrous system. In that sense, the cold war really has changed things.

There is still a lot of distrust, and there are still lawsuits, but the lawsuits are supermillionaire lawyers suing supermillionaire businessmen. It's not a class conflict, like workers striking against the rich; it's extremely rich guys suing one another. The homes on the north shore of Chicago that were built in the 1920s look like fortresses; they've got thick walls. You get the sense that the people who built them feared riots and union activity. You don't feel that in the culture now. I don't think working-class people or middle-class people feel hostile toward the people who own AOL or the people at Ford Motor Company, although they're quite willing to sue them if they can make a buck out of them.

Mike Wigley: We have creeping socialism here in Minnesota. How does your analysis of Bobos play into that, and what do you suggest to conservatives to counteract it?

David Brooks: There are two opposing impulses. One is the individualistic impulse, but that's on the wane. Creeping socialism, which comes not so much as socialism anymore but as protection for this and that, is still going to be a dominant force, for two reasons. One thing that the 1960s and the 1980s had in common was individualism and unleashing individual freedom. The sixties were about personal and social freedom,

casting off old traditions. The eighties were about economic freedom.

Now there is a counterreaction. The Bobo mission is in many ways to restore community authority, to put little brakes on freedom to make life more civil and more orderly. One way to do that is by imposing health and safety regulations, environmental regulations, nanny-state regulations on what kids can own, what people can own, on guns and things like that.

This socialism takes the form not of control of the workplace, not control of the means of production, the way the old socialists were in opposition, but control of zoning. Anti-sprawl legislation. The new regulations in many ways preserve the order that affluent people enjoy. I have mixed emotions about sprawl, but I don't see a great deal of counterforce against it. So far, people who might be bothered by sprawl legislation don't seem to rise up against it. People who are bothered by the Million Mom March for gun control—I myself am ambivalent, being a Bobo—don't seem to rise up against it. In part, that's because of the cultural power of the Bobos. The people who want sprawl legislation and gun control legislation are sitting atop society. They control the media, and that's an incredibly dominant force. And so, it seems to me, that sort of regulation is going to continue to spread.

Doug Cody: How do the Internet and Internet shopping fit into the Bobo philosophy?

David Brooks: It's incredibly individualistic shopping. One of the things

we're seeing in Internet shopping is prices breaking down. Now we have auction sites and Priceline.com, where the prices come down. Someday there won't be any set prices; we'll have a bot, a little computer gizmo, that will go around the Web negotiating prices. There are now sites where buying TVs and radios and Palm Pilots is the same as buying a stock on Wall Street: the prices continually fluctuate. That is going to further increase the prestige of capitalism. People are used to fluctuating prices, and they are going to be calculating whether to buy a Palm Pilot at 10:00 a.m. or at 2:00 p.m. You go to the mall with a thing like this, and it will tell you that Diet Coke prices at McDonald's are down two cents, so you run over. That style of shopping is going to transform the way people think and make people even more comfortable with capitalism.

The consensus among venture capitalists at a dinner party thrown for me in Los Angeles was that a tremendous shakeout in e-commerce is coming, and after that a few sites will dominate.

Bill Bockelman: As you look at the future, do you see any kind of contribution that the church can make in affecting values?

David Brooks: Many people, especially in the boomer generation, in the 1960s and 1970s, went into a New Age-style religion of crystals and profound experiences on mountaintops. It was throwing off the old organized religion and experiencing something on their own, of their own making. But

sociologists have noticed that many of those people are returning to organized faith.

An endless series of experiences on a mountaintop doesn't add up to a lot, and it's very hard to pass down to your kids. Religions are good at passing things down to kids. A return to organized religion is a good thing for a reason described in a New York Times headline: "Religion Makes a Comeback, Belief to Follow." I do think belief may actually follow.

But there's still a weird mixture of New Agey stuff in organized religion. A rabbi in Montana, asked to describe what style of Judaism he practices—Orthodox, Reform, Conservative—said *flexidoxy*, which seemed to me a perfect word. Flexibility and freedom on one hand, orthodoxy and ritual on the other. That's one of the things I observed over and over again: a return to religion, but not deference to God. I don't think it works to say I'll believe in God in this, this, and this, but I'll overrule God on this, this, and this. Religious organizations are getting much stronger, and I hope they will play a much greater role in society, but it won't be the same as the Catholic Church was in the 1950s.

Mitch Pearlstein: We have proof that this is, indeed, a new world simply by the fact that you found a rabbi in Montana.

David Brooks: He's a circuit rabbi.

Bob Prentiss: We have a governor who flies in the face of everything you've been saying. Is this the new

wave of the future—the confrontational professional wrestler who is certainly not a Bobo—or is this just a flash in the pan?

David Brooks: If you're surrounded by a society where everybody is at Starbucks having discussions over latte and being very civil to one another, you may feel that it's like a conspiracy, that you want somebody who's not very civil, who's erratic and unpredictable and refreshing and will say things that fly in the face of organized religion. I understand that the student population

was important support for [Governor Jesse] Ventura. It's a rebellion against politeness and civility and niceness, and Minnesota has always been known for those things. But Bobos probably make it so treacly polite that it makes you sick and you want this guy. That's one of Pat Buchanan's great appeals, too: he insults people. There's something refreshing about that. n