The Role of the Upper Middle Class in Trump’s Rise to Power

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Accompanying materials.

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Social Class Invisible

**THE 1%, .01%, .001%:**

**Upper class/Rich and Powerful Class**

Social Class Visible

The 99%, 99.99%, 99.999%:

Upper middle class

Lower middle class/working class

Lower class
In the United States the term middle class and its subdivisions are extremely vague concepts as neither economists nor sociologists have precisely defined the terms. There are several perceptions of the upper middle class and what the term means. In academic models the term applies to highly-educated, salaried professionals whose work is largely self-directed. Many have graduate degrees with educational attainment serving as the main distinguishing feature of this class. Household incomes commonly may exceed $100,000, with some smaller one-income earners earning incomes in the high 5-figure range. Typical professions for this class include lawyers, physicians, psychologists, certified public accountants, pharmacists, optometrists, stockbrokers, editors, dentists, engineers, professors, architects, school principals, urban planners, civil service executives and civilian contractors.

"The upper middle class has grown ... and its composition has changed. Increasingly salaried managers and professionals have replaced individual business owners and independent professionals. The key to the success of the upper middle class is the growing importance of educational certification ... its lifestyles and opinions are becoming increasingly normative for the whole society. It is in fact a porous class, open to people ... who earn the right credentials." -Dennis Gilbert, The American Class Structure, 1998.

In addition to having autonomy in their work, above-average incomes, and advanced educations, the upper middle class also tends to be influential, setting trends and largely shaping public opinion. Overall, members of this class are also secure from economic down-turns and, unlike their counterparts in the statistical middle class, do not need to fear downsizing, corporate cost-cutting, or outsourcing—an economic benefit largely attributable to their graduate degrees and comfortable incomes, likely in the top income quintile or top third.
While many Americans cite income as the prime determinant of class, occupational status, educational attainment, and value systems are equally important variables.

Sociologists Dennis Gilbert, William Thompson and Joseph Hickey estimate the upper middle class to constitute roughly 15% of the population. Using the 15% figure one may conclude that the American upper middle class consists, strictly in an income sense, of professionals with personal incomes in excess of $62,500, who commonly reside in households with six figure incomes.[1][5][8][11] The difference between personal and household income can be explained by considering that 76% of households with incomes exceeding $90,000 (the top 20%) had two or more income earners.[8]

The upper middle class is often the dominant group to shape society and bring social movements to the forefront. Movements such as the Peace Movement, The Anti-Nuclear Movement, Environmentalism, the Anti-smoking movement, and even in the past with blue laws and the temperance movement have been in large part (although not solely), products of the upper middle class. Some claim this is because this is the largest class (and the lowest class) with any true political power for positive change, while others claim some of the more restrictive social movements (such as with smoking and drinking) are based upon "saving people from themselves."[3]
Some U.S. social movements of the last 70 years

50s and 60s: Civil rights movement
2010s to present: Black Lives Matter

60a and 70s: Anti Vietnam War movement

60s to present: Women’s movement

80s to present: LGBTQ movement

80s to present: Climate change movement