

On the Search for Relief

Lamar, the mailroom attendant, always has something clever to say. Sometimes, he talks to me like a spirit or an oracle, literally advising me to be grateful for my life at times. Once he randomly said to me, “You’re a man, Vincent! You need to get back in that gym and lift weights.” Crude but true, I thought.

As Lamar was sifting through his ledger, trying to find the location of my package, I noticed a deliveryman park his bicycle near the corner of the lobby. I instantly felt bad for him, especially on that hot day. He walked through the revolving doors with a bag of food in his hands and made his way towards the counter where I was standing. He was there to deliver a meal to Lamar — Chinese takeout.

When Lamar extended his arms to take hold of his food, I noticed a familiar expression on his face. It showed a feeling of humble pride and relief, as if he was thinking to himself, “My job sucks, but at least I’m not delivering food on a bicycle.”

It reminded me of my own experience as a jaded accountant who once painfully noticed an old, humpbacked janitor pushing around his cart of cleaning supplies as he made his way to clean every restroom in a large four-story office building.

Later that night, as I thought about those interactions, I recalled a childhood memory:

As we drove past the gate, my aunt softly said, “We’re not supposed to be here, but we’ll just take a peek.” I curiously looked to my right and then to my left, but I only saw trees. Then, as I brought my gaze forward again, my eyes slowly began to trace the outline of the most surreal structure I had ever seen. What was it? Some type of business building? No — it couldn’t be. Its edges were too sharp, its curves too steep. Where did it begin — and where did it end? It seemed to be glowing and sparkling as if it had crystals reflecting rays of sunlight. Was it actually a burnt orange color, or was my mind just playing tricks on me? Finally, its identity became clear to me as I focused my eyes on a huge circular window — big as a car — and a door positioned to the right of it. I looked at my aunt, awestruck, and found her observing me. She sternly said to me, “If you want a house like that, you need to be a doctor or a lawyer.” “Okay!” I said excitedly.

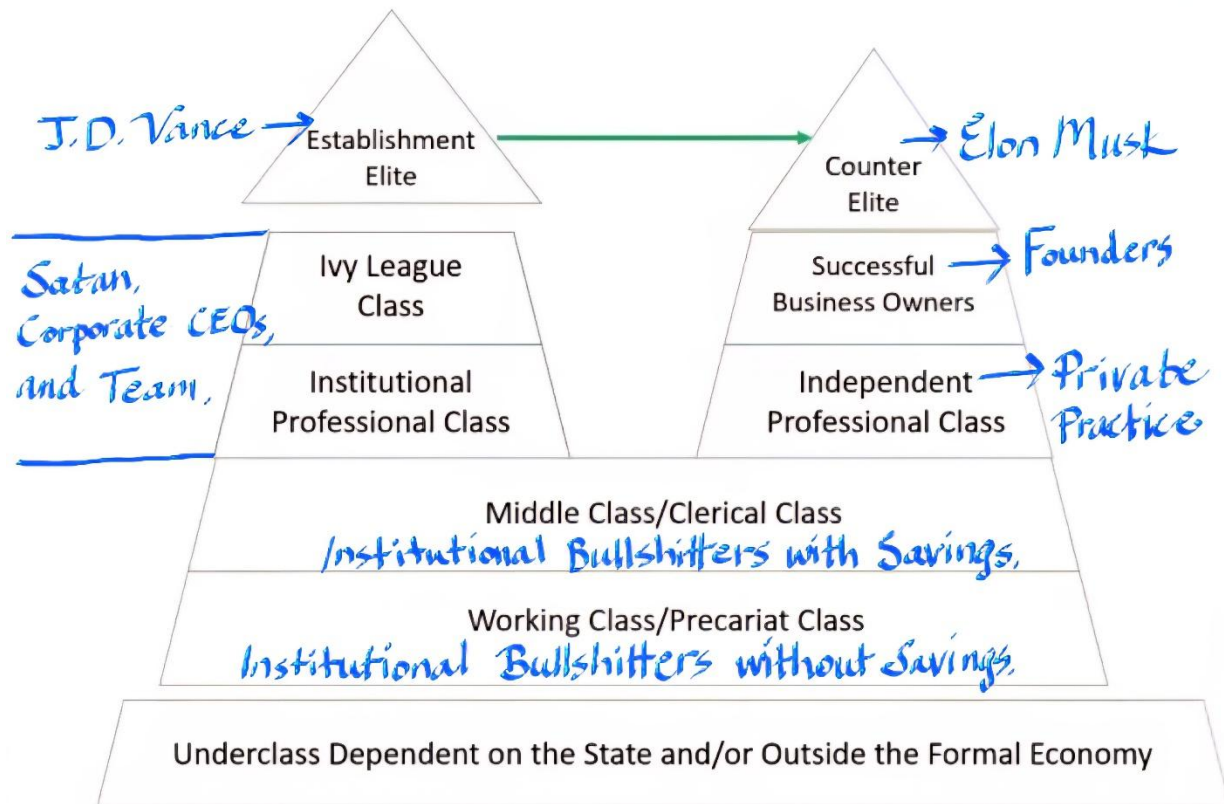
Then, I thought to my 30-year-old self, “Yeah, right, more like: be the owner of a chain of nail salons.”

Anyway, I’m sure even the doctors and lawyers know that false sense of pride and relief that comes from seeing the lower classes in their realities.

Perhaps the societal class structure we know today was designed to be both a motivator and a coping mechanism. Maybe that's why new age economics separates "the middle class" into so many different segments:

This illustration excludes people who protect and save lives,

The American Class Hierarchy



But the reality of the matter, according to a certain Economics textbook from 1923, is that there are only two classes: Capitalists and Laborers.

The Capitalist minds his own business (he uses his mind to create a business of his own).

The Laborer minds someone else's business (he uses his mind to help build or maintain a business).

In that context, there really is no difference between the accountant and the janitor or the mailroom attendant and the deliveryman. Perhaps, instead of telling our children to be doctors and lawyers and engineers and such, we should tell them to focus on what they do with their time instead of focusing on what they do for a living. Maybe then they could find a real sense of pride and relief.

With Love,

Vincent A. V-S.

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