lem, Fatima, Lourdes, or Salt Lake City. It's notable that the most civilized places—London, Paris, Antibes, and even New York—pass safely through this test, although by the strictest application of the rule, Rome is a little doubtful. Still, classier than Jerusalem.

One signal of desirability is the quality of a city's best newspaper. The class inferiority of Washington, despite all its pretensions to high status, with its embassies and all, can be sensed the minute you open the Washington Post, which on Sunday provides its readers (high profile?) with not just a horoscope but lengthy plot summaries of the TV soaps, together with the advice of Ann Landers. In the same way, you can infer that Indianapolis carries little class clout by noticing that the Indianapolis Star offers its readers all these features, plus "Today's Prayer" on the front page. Both Florida (except perhaps for Palm Beach) and Southern California (except perhaps for Pasadena) have been considered socially disastrous for decades. As if the facts were well known, the vilest nightclubs abroad, especially in gotten-up new places like West Germany, are likely to be named Florida. One reason no civilized person could think of living near Tampa is that during the 1970s this sign was visible there, advertising nearby Apollo Beach: "Guy Lombardo Wants You as a Neighbor." In the same way, retired persons are solicited to share some of the magic of their musical hero by buying into the Lawrence Welk Country Club Mobile Estates in Escondido, California. In the classified section of a recent issue of the prole National Enquirer there were four ads offering fraudulent university degrees: all four listed California addresses. And some events seem class perfect: how right that the derelict Queen Mary should end as a piece of junk in precisely so witness a place as Long Beach, California, or that St. Petersburg, Florida, should find itself the site of the Dali Museum, or that Fort Lauderdale should be the headquarters of the STP Corporation.

In the face of this, the question arises, "Where then may a member of the ten classes live in this country?" New York first of all, of course Chicago. San Francisco. Philadelphia. Baltimore. Boston. Perhaps Cleveland. And deep in the countryside of Connecticut, New York State, Virginia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. That's about it. It's not considered good form to live in New Jersey, except in Bernardsville and perhaps Princeton, but any place in New Jersey beats Sun-

nyvale, Cypress, and Compton, California; Canton, Ohio; Reno, Nevada; Cheyenne, Wyoming; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Columbus, Georgia, and similar Army towns; and Parma, Ohio, a city of 100,000 without a daily newspaper, bus system, hotel, or map of itself. Impossible also are Evergreen, Colorado, because John Hinckley came from there, and Dallas, because—among many other good reasons—Lee Harvey Oswald lived there. It is said that experts on the subject regard Las Vegas as "the world capital of tacky," and I suppose you could get some idea of the height of your social class by your lack of familiarity with it. And Acapulco as well?

Back, now, to the classes. The middle class is distinguishable more by its earnestness and psychic insecurity than by its middle income. I have known some very rich people who remain stubbornly middle-class, which is to say they remain terrified at what others think of them, and to avoid criticism are obsessed with doing everything right. The middle class is the place where table manners assume an awful importance and where net curtains flourish to conceal activities like hiding the salam' (a phrase no middle-class person would indulge in, surely: the fatuous making love is the middle-class equivalent). The middle class, always anxious about offending, is the main market for "mouthwashes," and if it disappeared the whole "deodorant" business would fall to the ground. If physicians tend to be upper-middle-class, dentists are gloomily aware that they're middle, and are said to experience frightful status anxieties when introduced socially to "physicians"—as dentists like to call them. (Physicians call themselves doctors, and enjoy doing this in front of dentists, as well as college professors, chiropractors, and divines.)

"Status panic": that's the affliction of the middle class, according to C. Wright Mills, author of White Collar (1951) and The Power Elite (1956). Hence the middles' need to accumulate credit cards and take in The New Yorker, which it imagines registers upper-middle taste. Its devotion to that magazine, or its ads, is a good example of Mills's description of the middle class as the one that tends "to borrow status from higher elements." New Yorker advertisers have always known this about their audience, and some of their pseudo-upper-middle gestures in front of the middles are hilarious, like one recently flogging expensive stationery, here, a printed invitation card. The pretentious Anglophile spelling of the second word strikes the right opening note:
In honour of
Dr and Mrs Leonard Adam Westman,
Dr and Mrs Jeffrey Logan Brandon
request the pleasure of your company for
[at this point the higher classes might say cocktails, or, if
to thoroughly secure, drinks. But here, “Dr.” and Mrs. Bran-
don are inviting you to consume specifically—]
Champagne and Caviar
on Friday, etc., etc.
Valley Hunt Club,
Stamford, Conn., etc.

The only thing missing is the brand names of the refreshments.
If the audience for that sort of thing used to seem the most
deply rooted in time and place, today it seems the class that’s the
most rootless. Members of the middle class are not only the sort
of people who buy their own heirlooms, silver, etc. They’re also
the people who do most of the moving long-distance (generally
to very un stylish places), commanded every few years to pull up
stakes by the corporations they’re in bondage to. They are the
geologist employed by the oil company, the computer program-
ner, the aeronautical engineer, the salesman assigned a new ter-
ritory, and the “marketing” (formerly sales) manager deputed to
keep an eye on him. These people and their families occupy the
suburbs and developments. Their “Army and Navy,” as William
H. Whyte, Jr., says, is their corporate employer. IBM and Du-
Pont hire these people from second-rate colleges and teach them
that they are nothing if not members of the team. Virtually no
latitude is permitted to individuality or the milder forms of eccen-
tricity, and these employees soon learn to avoid all ideological
statements, notably, as we’ll see, in the furnishing of their living
rooms. Terrified of losing their jobs, these people grow passive,
their humanity diminished as they perceive themselves mere parts
of an infinitely larger structure. And interchangeable parts, too.
“The training makes our men interchangeable,” an IBM execu-
tive was once heard to say.
It’s little wonder that, treated like slaves most of the time, the
middle class lusts for the illusion of weight and consequence. One
sign is their quest for heraldic validation (“This beautiful em-
bossed certificate will show your family tree”). Another is their
custom of issuing annual family newsletters announcing the most
recent triumphs in the race to become “professional”:

John, who is now 22, is in his first year at the Dental School
of Wayne State University.
Caroline has a fine position as an executive secretary for a
prestigious firm in Boise, Idaho.

Sometimes these letters really wring the heart, with their proud
lists of new “affiliations” achieved during the past year: “This
year Bob became a member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce,
the Beer Can Collectors League of North America, the Alumni
Council of the University of Evansville, and the Young Re-
publicans of Vanderburgh County.” (Cf. Veblen: “Since conserva-
tivism is a characteristic of the wealthier and therefore more
reputable portion of the community, it has acquired a certain
honorable or decorative value.”) Nervous lest she be considered
nobody, the middle-class wife is careful to dress way up when
she goes shopping. She knows by instinct what one middle-class
woman told an inquiring sociologist: “You know there’s class
when you’re in a department store and a well-dressed lady gets
treated better.”

“One who makes birth or wealth the sole criterion of worth”:
that’s a conventional dictionary definition of a snob, and the place
to look for the snob is in the middle class. Worried a lot about
their own taste and about whether it’s working for or against
them, members of the middle class try to arrest their natural
tendency to sink downward by associating themselves, if ever so
tenuously, with the imagined possessors of money, power, and
taste. “Correctness” and doing the right thing become obses-
sions, prompting middle-class people to write thank-you notes
after the most ordinary dinner parties, give excessively expensive
or correct presents, and never allude to any place—Fort Smith,
Arkansas, for example—that lacks known class. It will not sur-
prise readers who have traveled extensively to hear that Neil
Mackwood, a British authority on snobbery, finds the greatest
snobs worldwide emanating from Belgium, which can also be
considered world headquarters of the middle class.
The desire to belong, and to belong by some mechanical act
like purchasing something, is another sign of the middle class.
Words like club and guild (as in Book-of-the-Month Club and
Literary Guild) extend a powerful invitation. The middle class is
thus the natural target for developers’ ads like this:
"The street behind us is nowhere near as friendly. They knock on doors over there."

If the women treasure "friendliness," the men treasure having a genteel occupation (usually more important than money), with emphasis on the word (if seldom the thing) executive. (As a matter of fact, an important class divide falls between those who feel veneration before the term executive and those who feel they want to throw up.) Having a telephone-answering machine at home is an easy way of simulating (at relatively low cost) high professional desirability, but here you wouldn't think of a facetious or eccentric text (delivered in French, for example, or in the voice of Donald Duck or Richard Nixon) asking the caller to speak his bit after the beeping sound. For the middle-class man is scared. As C. Wright Mills notes, "He is always somebody's man, the corporation's, the government's, the army's..." One can't be too careful. One "management adviser" told Studs Terkel: "Your wife, your children have to behave properly. You've got to fit in the mold. You've got to be on guard." In Coming Up for Air (1939) George Orwell, speaking for his middle-class hero, gets it right:

There's a lot of rot talked about the sufferings of the working class. I'm not so sorry for the proles myself... The prole suffers physically, but he's a free man when he isn't working. But in every one of those little stucco boxes there's some poor bastard who's never free except when he's fast asleep.

Because he is essentially a salesman, the middle-class man develops a salesman's style. Hence his optimism and his belief in the likelihood of self-improvement if you'll just hurl yourself into it. One reason musicals like Annie and Man of La Mancha make so much money is that they offer him and his wife songs, like "Tomorrow" and "The Impossible Dream," that seem to promise that all sorts of good things are on their way. A final stigma of the middle class, an emanation of its social insecurity, is its habit of laughing at its own jests. Not entirely certain what social effect he's transmitting, and yet obliged, by his role as "salesman," to promote goodwill and optimism, your middle-class man serves as his own enraptured audience. Sometimes, after uttering some would-be clever formulation in public, he will look all around to gauge the response of the audience. Favorable, he desperately hopes.

Oddity, introversion, and the love of privacy are the big enemies, a total reversal of the values of the secure upper orders. Among the middles there's a convention that erecting a fence or even a tall hedge is an affront. And there's also a convention that you may drop in on neighbors or friends without a telephone inquiry first. Being naturally innocent and well disposed and aboveboard, a member of the middle class finds it hard to believe that all are not. Being timid and conventional, no member of the middle class would expect that anyone is copulating in the afternoon instead of the evening, clearly, for busy and well-behaved corporate personnel, the correct time for it. When William H. Whyte, Jr., was poking around one suburb studying the residents, he was told by one quintessentially middle-class woman:
The young men of the middle class are chips off the old block. If you want to know who reads John T. Molloy’s books, hoping to break into the upper-middle class by formulas and mechanisms, they are your answer. You can see them on airplanes especially, being forwarded from one corporate training program to another. Their shirts are implausibly white, their suits are excessively dark, their neckties resemble those worn by undertakers, and their hair is cut in the style of the 1950s. Their talk is of the bottom line, and for no they are likely to say no way. Often their necks don’t seem long enough, and their eyes tend to be too much in motion, flicking back and forth rather than up and down. They will enter adult life as corporate trainees and, after forty-five faithful years, leave it as corporate personnel, wondering whether this is all.

So much for the great middle class, to which, if you innocently credit people’s descriptions of their own status, almost 80 percent of our population belongs. Proceeding downward, we would normally expect to meet next the lower-middle class. But it doesn’t exist as such any longer, having been pauperized by the inflation of the 1960s and 1970s and transformed into the high-proletarian class. What’s the difference? A further lack of freedom and self-respect. Our former lower-middle class, the new high proles, now head “the masses,” and even if they are positioned at the top of the proletarian classes, still they are identifiable as people things are done to. They are in bondage—to monetary policy, rip-off advertising, crazes and delusions, mass low culture, fast foods, consumer schlock. Back in the 1940s there was still a real lower-middle class in this country, whose solid high-school education and addiction to “saving” and “planning” maintained it in a position—often precarious, to be sure—above the working class. In those days, says C. Wright Mills, there were fewer little men, and in their brief monopoly of high-school education they were in fact protected from many of the sharper edges of the workings of capitalist progress. They were free to entertain deep illusions about their individual abilities and about the collective trustworthiness of the system. As their number has grown, however, they have become increasingly subject to wage-worker conditions.

Their social demotion has been the result. These former low-

white-collar people are now simply working machines, and the wife usually works as well as the husband.

The kind of work performed and the sort of anxiety that besets one as a result of work are ways to divide the working class into its three strata. The high proles are the skilled workers, craftsmen, like printers. The mid-proles are the operators, like Ralph Kramden, the bus driver. The low proles are unskilled labor, like longshoremen. The special anxiety of the high proles is fear about loss or reduction of status: you’re proud to be a master carpenter, and you want the world to understand clearly the difference between you and a laborer. The special anxiety of the mid-proles is fear of losing the job. And of the low proles, the gnawing perception that you’re probably never going to make enough or earn enough freedom to have and do the things you want.

The kind of jobs high-prole people do tempt them to insist that they are really “professionals,” like “sanitation men” in a large city. A mail carrier tells Studs Terkel why he likes his work: “They always say, ‘Here comes the mailman.’ . . . I feel it is one of the most respected professions there is throughout the nation.” Prole women who go into nursing never tire of asserting how professional they are, and the same is true of their daughters who become air stewardesses, a favorite high-prole occupation. Although Army officers, because they are all terrified of the boss, are probably more middle-class than high-prole, they seem the lower the more they insist that they are “professionals,” and since their disgrace in Vietnam, and their subsequent anxiety about their social standing, that insistence has grown more mechanical.

An Army wife says, “Some like to speak of doctors, lawyers, etc., as professionals. All [Army] officers are professionals.” And then, a notable deviation from logic: “Who could be more professional than the man who has dedicated his whole life to the defense of his country?”

One way to ascertain whether a person is middle-class or high-prole is to apply the principle that the wider the difference between one’s working clothes and one’s “best,” the lower the class. Think not just of laborers and blue-collar people in general, but of doormen and bellboys, farmers and railway conductors and trainmen, and firemen. One of these once said: “I wish I was a lawyer. Shit, I wish I was a doctor. But I just didn’t have it. You gotta have the smarts.”

But high proles are quite smart, or at least shrewd. Because