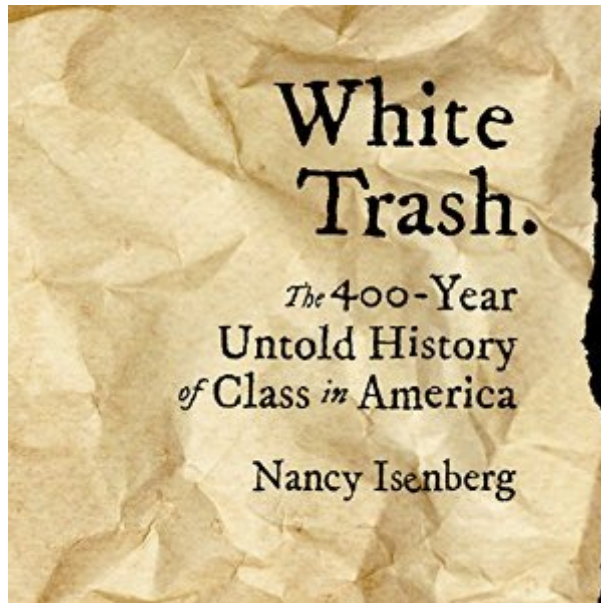


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# White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History Of Class In America



## Synopsis

The wretched and landless poor have existed from the time of the earliest British colonial settlement. They were alternately known as "waste people", "offals", "rubbish", "lazy lubbers", and "crackers". By the 1850s the downtrodden included so-called "clay eaters" and "sandhillers", known for prematurely aged children distinguished by their yellowish skin, ragged clothing, and listless minds. In *White Trash*, Nancy Isenberg upends assumptions about America's supposedly class-free society. Poor whites were central to the rise of the Republican Party in the early 19th century, and the Civil War itself was fought over class issues nearly as much as it was fought over slavery. Reconstruction pitted poor white trash against newly freed slaves, which factored in the rise of eugenics. These poor were at the heart of New Deal reforms and LBJ's Great Society; they haunt us in reality TV shows like *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* and *Duck Dynasty*. We acknowledge racial injustice as an ugly stain on our nation's history. With Isenberg's landmark book, we will have to face the truth about the enduring, malevolent nature of class as well.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was super excited about the release of this book; I've been a fan of the PBS "People Like Us" movie for a very long time. A lot of the narrative in the U.S. tends to focus on race, overlooking elements of class that exist and have some pretty strong historical roots. This is a good read, it's a great read if you're someone who is faintly familiar with ideas in sociology or in general about class struggle. It's a sociology/history book, so may not be as mainstream as people would like. What's

nice is that this particular author actually articulates the ideas some have come across in sociology/history regarding class and puts those often underlying murmurs of class struggle into historical context, along with supporting ideas and accounts. It ties in some of the ideas of the Founding Fathers, especially as it pertains to Thomas Paine and variations and distinctions between the land-holding and non, as property is often tied to wealth. The author starts out in discussing the elements of Protestant Work Ethic and the reverberations of that in the U.S. The author does a great job of going through the different evolutions of the idea of "white trash" especially as it pertains to the name and variations of the name. There is also the element of how the imagery of white trash changes over the years; such as mountain folk or those in Kentucky, or those who grow corn. It's relatively an always evolving term as explained by the author. The author takes the reader through the present day, and links it back to the civil war and to the revolutionary war. All and all, a great book and a quick read that I enjoyed. This is a history narrative, meaning I don't really know where some of the reviews dog it for being "political."

This book explains the unsavory fine points of our national identity by probing and then exposing the not so well hidden loose ends that tie the bottom half of America's social hierarchy to the top half. It reveals that there is much much more to race and class than what we see at eye level. We learn here that the colonists who came to the Americas were very much a mixed bag. Initially, the upper classes were investor friends of the British Crown, given concessions to search for gold and to find a non-existent water passage across North America to India. Later, they were made up of political and religious enemies of the beheaded King Charles I. Jamestown was one of the many failures at finding gold or the non-existent passage to the East. And thus, only as an afterthought did the leaders decide to salvage their costly expeditions by killing two birds with one stone: England's horrendous social problems of crime, poverty and street violence would be solved by shipping the poor off to America. Then tracts of Indian lands would be sold off to entice the many lost souls hoping to make a life in the New World. These lost souls thus mostly were tricked onto ships in large numbers under a number of unsavory land contract schemes, the most prominent of which was called the "head right system," in which those who did the tricking were paid in 50-acre land parcels, and in which the contractees thought they would all end up as rich English gentlemen, with free land, slaves and tools, living a life of leisure. Of course, it was all a lie. Most of the founding fathers became rich by acquiring large parcels of land through land scams of the head right variation.

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