
The need for the lower Nobility in the 21st Century

Dr. Otto F. von Feigenblatt, Northwood University

Abstract: *The popularity of Royalty in the world seems to be increasing or at least remains constant however there are few news about the lower nobility and esquires. This exploratory essay explains the importance of an intermediate layer between the Royalty and the masses from a Sociological perspective. People need role models close to their homes who embody the best values of civilization.*

Keywords: *Social Stratification, High Culture, Deviance, Conflict, Nobility, Aristocracy, Enculturation, the Media.*

1. Introduction

With the wedding of Prince William to Kate Middleton in the United Kingdom and the earlier wedding of Prince Felipe of Asturias (now King Phillip VI of Spain) to Letizia Ortiz, both commoners, Royalty has seen a sharp increase in popularity in terms of media attention. Souvenirs for both weddings sold very well and the masses followed both events with interest. While this renewed interest in Royalty is a welcomed development for those who are concerned about the contemporary deterioration in the quality of role models and public figures, they are so far detached from the common man and woman that their actual influence over their behavior will most likely be minimal.

The purpose of role models is to provide useful guides for the behavior of other people. Role models are supposed to embody the best qualities and values of a society. Both Prince William (now Duke of Cambridge) and King Phillip VI are great role models for their particular societies. They both have impeccable manners, advanced degrees, and stable marriages. Nevertheless their life styles are too far removed from those of their subjects in order for them to truly influence the actual behavior of the common people. Following Royalty has become a pastime for a large portion

of the population but it is voyeuristic rather than truly a learning experience. Magazines publish what the Royals are wearing and other details but fail to explain the values behind all those superficial trappings.

This paper explores how the role of the lower nobility and of the country squire cannot be fulfilled by Royalty and how their relative eclipse represents an important loss for society at large and in particular in terms of connecting the common people to high culture.

2. The Traditional Role of the Nobility

While many contemporary Americans misunderstand the meaning of Nobility to be a privileged class with unfair advantages over the rest of the population this is very far from the original meaning of the word. Nobility is a concept that precedes modernity and can be traced back even beyond the time of the Roman Empire (Roberts, 1997). This social status was awarded to those who provided considerable services to the community or whose qualities made them notable in one or more ways (Salcedo, 2008; Thomas Innes of Learney, 1956). Eventually this new social class developed its own norms and values. While there were always unscrupulous members of this and every other class, the Nobility started to define itself as the embodiment of the ideals of the societies they represented (Salcedo, 2008). This can be seen in ancient Greece in the writings of Philosophers such as Plato and Socrates. An aristocracy was differentiated from an oligarchy in that the aristocrats were the best and the brightest with the duty to rule for the good of all while an oligarchy simply implied power over resources and ruling for their own good. The key difference is the requirements for membership in the class as well as the purpose or role of the particular class.

Gradually, the Nobility developed its own honor codes, depending on the region of the World, as well as provided the impetus and support for the development of High Culture (Llosa, 2012). Refined Japanese gardens and poetry, the Russian ballet, the British country house, and many others were created by this social class (Morton & Olenik, 2005). Of particular interest is the nexus between the middle class

composed of merchants and professionals with the nobility. This link was the key to the functioning of society and to the perpetuation of High Culture and the civilizations its represents.

Other than in very few cases such as England, the nobility was composed of a range of families that included gentlemen, squires, knights, titled nobles, and ecclesiastic authorities (Thomas Innes of Learney, 1956). One example of a social system that approximates a Weberial ideal type is that of Spain. Even the poorest descendant of a knight was considered to be noble and thus deserved to be treated with respect (Salcedo, 2008). Therefore the family of a hereditary knight (known in Spain as *hildagos*) was considered to be part of this important class and enjoyed all the privileges and duties.

As extensively discussed in the literature on social stratification, social mobility leads to greater socio-political stability (Notar, 2008; Pruitt & Kim, 2004). The nexus between the lower nobility and the middle classes provided that bridge between the upper and lower classes. Thus, the middle classes were in constant contact with the lower nobility and could emulate their behavior, lifestyle, and most importantly values. This contact could result in many cases for a middle class person to move up the ranks through marriage or merit to the lower nobility, further strengthening the ties between the two classes.

Thus the wealthy merchant could try to marry his daughter off to a squire or knight and could try to learn the manners and values of his or her betters. After a few years the merchant would have proceeded through several stages of socialization and for all purposes would have internalized the norms and values of the nobility. In terms of the public good, this would have resulted in a more refined, cultured, and informed middle class. Moreover, the funds collected by the merchant would be channeled to the promotion of high culture through a voluntary process rather than coercion. An example would be the house of the merchant, who would have hired an architect or at least emulated the seats of the local nobles, resulting in an aesthetically pleasing abode. Another example would be the issue of free time. The

merchant would have a wide array of options on how to spend his free time and money. Everything from sponsoring the local brothel to sponsoring the local guild of artists and musicians would be included in the menu of possibilities. Nevertheless due to the constant contact between himself and the lower nobility he would become aware of the importance of promoting and supporting the arts. This does not mean that the merchant will find the paintings or the opera inherently pleasing at the beginning but rather that due to emulation he would take the first step in at least exploring the visual and auditory pleasures of those options. As previously mentioned, eventually the norms and values will be internalized, and the merchant and his children will find those forms of art, intrinsically pleasing.

The effect of the upper middle class emulating the upper class can then be multiplied through the effect of the middle class interacting directly with the lower classes. Thus the lifestyle of the wealthy merchant or the successful professional would be emulated by the lower classes that come into direct contact with them. This multiplier effect spreads the values and ideals of the upper classes all the way down to the lower strata of society. It should be noted that the values, norms and ideals that are spread are not limited to superficial aesthetic taste but rather to deeper values such as loyalty, honor, duty, and respect.

Social position is multidimensional rather than being based on a single indicator. Thus two equally wealthy merchants may belong to different social classes depending on their education, values, upbringing, and lifestyles. The same is true of two professionals since technical knowledge does not automatically lead to good manners and taste. Constant interaction between the different social strata, and in particular between the lower classes and the lower nobility, reinforces the values considered to be ideals for a civilization or society.

Therefore the lower nobility has historically represented the purest ideals of the upper classes. Without the fortunes and power of the upper nobility, they focus on becoming the embodiment of the core ideals of their civilizations. Many serve in the armed forces, the government, and academia.

Others run small family businesses and farms by applying the morals and ethics of their forefathers rather than succumbing to economic expediency.

3. Social Ailments and some possible solutions

Most Western societies and many non-Western ones as well, are undergoing rapid changes (Fukuyama, 1992; Huntington, 2003; Oke, 2009; Tan, 2010). Many of those changes are perceived to be beneficial, such as the green revolution that took place in the mid twentieth century, as well as improved sanitation. Nevertheless the sheer speed of change and the seemingly random nature of this process is destroying the fabric of entire societies (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2009; Andriessse & Westen, 2008; Battersby & Siracusa, 2009; Feigenblatt, 2010, 2011; HSIN-HUANG, HSIAO, & WAN, 2007; Pieterse, 2008, 2009). Instead of building from what society has developed over millennia, the free reign of the markets has replaced our values and norms with the impersonal imperatives of the laws of supply and demand (Hook, Gilson, Hughes, & Dobson, 2005; Keong, 2006; Kim, Fidler, & Ganguly, 2009; Llosa, 2012). Although it is impossible to reject the free market system in its entirety, it should be remembered that it is an economic system and not a social system (Lemert, 2004; Ritzer, 2008). Economics aims to explain the allocation of scarce good and resources not social norms and values (Abu-Nimer, 1996). Nevertheless, as Karl Marx predicted the changed nature of the economy eventually started to undermine other important social institutions (Lemert, 2004; Ritzer, 2008). Music was no longer produced for its quality but simply based on its sales potential. Art was also commoditized and aesthetics were relegated to a secondary position (Llosa, 2012). Eventually, market mechanisms were mistaken for social principles.

The result of the reign of the free markets was an initial rise in the power and influence of the middle classes (Roberts, 1997). This was not a problem as long as they had constant interaction with the upper classes and were socialized into the norms and values at the core of their civilizations. Thus, a wealthy merchant could sponsor an opera house or a painter. The true challenge to high culture

and thus to civilization came about with the separation of the means and the ends in term of success. Wealth creation is not supposed to be a goal in and of itself. Money has no intrinsic value it rather a form of “frozen” value that can be used as a tool for trade. As the noted American sociologist Dr. Robert Merton aptly explained in his Social Strain Theory, one important cause of deviance is the rejection of the means of attaining socially desirable goals by a large part of the population (Feigenblatt, 2009; Lemert, 2004).

The commodification of social reality has resulted in a fundamental shift from a world in which relationships based on *gemeinschaft* were predominant to one mostly based on *gesellschaft* (Lemert, 2004; Ritzer, 2008). Not only are relationships supposed to be means to an ends but the consensus on the means to attain the ends is breaking down. In other words the lower classes are giving up on the attainment of part of the socially acceptable goals such as the attainment of the lifestyle of the upper classes and most importantly they are rejecting the legitimate means of attaining it. Two simple examples depict the two situations. A hard working construction worker who saves money and becomes a wealthy contractor decides to give up on emulating the lifestyle of the upper classes and instead decides to build an aesthetically insulting structure to hold his gaming console collection. In this case the individual in question has rejected the goal while accepting the means. His money was earned legitimately but the success that he achieved is not the authentic socially accepted goal. A second case is a highly intelligent boy living in the inner city who finds it difficult to find a legitimate job. After a few months of trying to find a job he decides to go into the counterfeit goods business. He is very successful and after a few years he takes his savings, moves to another city and builds a single family home for his new wife. This individual becomes a sponsor of the local school and library. Merton was more concerned about the second individual than with the first one (Ritzer, 2008). The reason for this was that at the time the immediate challenge was the rising crime rates in the United States. Nevertheless, in the long term the first individual is a much more serious challenge to high culture and to our civilization than the second.

Rejecting the means while accepting the goal increases the crime rate in the short term, but allows for the possibility of reintegration of the individual into society. Well known examples of this include the Kennedys who made their fortune in the bootlegging business and later on become one of the most prominent American families (Thelin, 2011). On the other hand rejecting the goals is a direct challenge to the most important values and norms in society. It is understandable that a dock worker does not have the time to eat with proper table manners. It is also expected that a farm-hand eat his or her lunch standing up or walking between breaks. Nevertheless it is also understood that if the former dock worker improves his or her station in life he or she will learn table manners and will sit while having lunch. Although the previous example may seem frivolous there are other more serious social consequences to the rejection of core social values and norms. For example, the contractor of our story earned enough money to build a beautiful home but instead he chose to commission the construction of a dwelling that satisfies his most basic desires. He liked red as a teenager so he painted half the house red. After work he used to go to the bar to have a beer so he decided to build a private bar in his living room with an arcade and slot machines next to the vestibule. By this point, the reader is probably thinking about Adam Smith and John Locke and the right to do as one pleases with private property however this is not a philosophical treatise but rather an exploration of the social consequences of unleashing the not very creative destruction of the lower classes (Ashley & Orenstein, 2005). Thus, one must consider the negative externalities of the giant red bar built by the contractor. Resources are limited and thus the money that was used to build the hideous structure could have been used to build a beautiful home that would someday become a national monument or at least a harmonious addition to the neighborhood. The resources that are used on a daily basis to buy beer and to hire the occasional heavy metal band to play in the backyard could be used to support the local philharmonic or at least the local school band. Nevertheless the negative externalities do not end with this. The children of the contractor will be proud of their taste for heavy metal music and for the family tradition of burping before, during, and after meals.

Eventually, the children of the wealthy contractor will make the serious mistake of equating money with social status and reject the traditional values of the upper classes permanently. This extreme form of liberalism leads to a complete breakdown of social norms and to a high degree of relativism in terms of values.

Part of the reason why this occurs is due to the role of the media in modern societies (Llosa, 2012). The media is ruled less by ethical codes and more by ratings and financial imperatives. Prominent Nobel Prize winner Vargas Llosa aptly explains this phenomenon in his first book after winning the Nobel Prize in literature (2012). Llosa explains how the media promotes superficial enjoyment at the expense of more serious intellectual pursuits. Moreover, the media substitutes popular ratings for the erudite evaluations of professional critics. The result of this is that Mozart's Requiem is lowered to the same level as a song by the popular heavy metal band Slayer. While Llosa focuses mostly on the realms of literature and the arts the same can be said in terms of moral values and lifestyles. Proper etiquette is considered to be equally appropriate as the considerably more relaxed feeding rituals of the lower classes.

Returning to the role of the lower nobility in terms of dealing with some of the social maladies discussed above, it should be noted that the media has propelled to public notoriety individuals who clearly reject the mores and norms of the traditional upper classes. In addition to the widespread evidence of this in magazines and television there is also considerable anecdotic evidence. College students ask their professors about the existence of the so-called "Illuminati", a secret society believed to be very influential in the world according to popular culture. Members of this so-called elite circle of statesmen and stateswomen include Beyonce, Jay-Z, Lindsay Lohan, and several other hip hop singers. Although this is clearly ridiculous for anyone with a basic college education or at least few courses in World History and Sociology, the majority of the American population can only read at an 8th grade level (Professor-X, 2011). Therefore they are not going to consult the journals of the Royal Societies to evaluate the information they receive from the media. In addition to that,

the circulation of the Enquire or any of the famous celebrity magazines is hundreds of thousands larger than that of the most successful journals and trade magazines in the world. Even educated students are shocked to hear that the real Illuminati were based in Germany and that their organization declined with the rise of nationalism and eventually the organization disappeared. In order to be historically accurate, students must be told the truth that the real illuminati may have considered hiring Jay-Z or Lindsay Lohan for entertainment or cleaning service but not much more. Even in today's liberal society, it is clear that Lindsay Lohan is not the best person to be setting the global agenda in the 21st century. The challenge is not that those people are running the world, because they are clearly not, staying away from alcohol is already enough of a challenge and memorizing their choreographies takes up much of their short term and long term memories, but rather that the common people are starting to believe those stories.

Do we truly want to replace Baron de Montesquieu with Lindsay Lohan, or even the Marquise de Sade for Jay-Z? Does it make sense for Philharmonic Orchestras to be scrambling for sponsors while singers like Lil Wayne are making millions recording songs with the vocabulary of a first grader? Those are external manifestations of the lack of a strong lower nobility. Local notables who are close to the people have the ability to provide guidance and to serve as role models. The present day emphasis on extreme egalitarianism at the lower levels and idol worship at the national level is clearly dysfunctional and destructive. It reduces role models to two-dimensional figures with carefully crafted images controlled and created by the media. The majority of current day "idols" do not even choose what to wear but serve as the few models for society to emulate.

One possible solution to our present conundrum is for the upper middle classes in the Republics to become more assertive in terms of values and to forgo political correctness in favor of defending their culture and prestige. Although it is impractical and unrealistic to re-establish a formal lower nobility in many parts of the world, there is already a squirearchy in existence. Rather than succumb to the current trend of extreme cultural relativism of the educated

classes, whose members at times justify wearing pants in a way that shows the underwear as due to the need for cultural expression, it is imperative to call things by their name and to label those types of behavior as deviant. It should be noted that what is being labeled as deviant is the behavior and not the person, this allows the person to correct his or her behavior.

Therefore, the lower upper classes, best known as the upper middle class in the Republics and as the lower nobility in the monarchies, have the duty to protect their heritage and to defend civilization by defending their right to critique deviant behavior. After all, if extreme liberalism protects the absolute freedom of speech and though, then conservatives should also be proud of expressing their support for the protection of the norms and values of our civilization.

References:

- Abrahamsen, R., & Williams, M. C. (2009). Security Beyond the State: Global Security Assemblages in International Politics. *International Political Sociology*, 3(1), 1-17.
- Abu-Nimer, M. (1996). Conflict Resolution Approaches: Western and Middle Eastern Lessons and Possibilities. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 55(1), 35-52.
- Andriessse, E., & Westen, G. v. (2008). Varieties of embedded mercantilism and regional development in the Thailand-Malaysia Borderlands. *Journal of Development Alternatives and Area Studies*, 27(3/4), 165-187.
- Ashley, D., & Orenstein, A. M. (2005). *Sociological Theory: Classical Statements* (Sixth ed.). New York: Pearson.
- Battersby, P., & Siracusa, J. M. (2009). *Globalization & Human Security* (Hardcover ed.). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Feigenblatt, O. F. v. (2009). Anomie, Racial Wage, and Critical Aesthetics: Understanding the Negative Externalities of Japanese and Thai Social Practices. *Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, 1(1), 69-75.
- Feigenblatt, O. F. v. (2010). A Brief Analysis of Popular Aesthetics in Thailand: Subjective Culture vs. Objective Culture. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 22(1), 61-63.
- Feigenblatt, O. F. v. (2011). International Law: Normative Contestation in the Transnational Realm. *Ritsumeikan Center for Asia Pacific Studies Working Paper*, No. 10-6(March), 1-11.
- Fukuyama, F. (1992). *THE END OF HISTORY AND THE LAST MAN*. New York: The Free Press.
- Hook, G., Gilson, J., Hughes, C. W., & Dobson, H. (2005). *Japan's International Relations: Politics, economics and security* (2nd Edition ed.). London: Routledge.

- HSIN-HUANG, HSIAO, M., & WAN, P.-S. (2007). The Experiences of Cultural Globalizations in Asia-Pacific. *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 8(3), 361-376.
- Huntington, S. P. (2003). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Paperback Edition 2003 ed.). New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.
- Keong, C. Y. (2006). Behind Malaysia's "Miracle": A Veblenian Perspective on Mahathir's Era of Economic Modernization. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 40(4), 861-875.
- Kim, S. W., Fidler, D. P., & Ganguly, S. (2009). Eastphalia Rising? Asian Influence and the Fate of Human Security. *World Policy Journal*, 26(2), 53-64.
- Lemert, C. (2004). *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Llosa, M. V. (2012). *La civilización del espectáculo* (First ed.). México, D.F: Alfaguara/Santillana.
- Morton, W. S., & Olenik, J. K. (2005). *Japan: Its History and Culture* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Notar, B. E. (2008). Producing Cosmopolitanism at the Borderlands: Lonely Planeteers and "Local" Cosmopolitans in Southwest China. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 81(3), 615-650.
- Oke, N. (2009). Globalizing Time and Space: Temporal and Spatial Considerations in Discourses of Globalization. *International Political Sociology*, 3(3), 310-326.
- Pieterse, J. N. (2008). Global Multiculture, Flexible Acculturation. In K. Archer, M. M. Bosman, M. M. Amen & E. Schmidt (Eds.), *Cultures of globalization : coherence, hybridity, contestation* (pp. 65-79). London: Routledge.
- Pieterse, J. N. (2009). *Globalization & Culture: Global Melange* (Second ed.). Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Professor-X. (2011). *In the Basement of the Ivory Tower: Confessions of an Accidental Academic*. New York: Viking.
- Pruitt, D., & Kim, S. H. (2004). *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate and Settlement* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Ritzer, G. (2008). *Sociological Theory*. New York: McGraw Hill Higher Education.
- Roberts, J. M. (1997). *The Penguin History of Europe* (Paperback ed.). London: Penguin Books.
- Salcedo, J. M. S. (2008). *Nobleza española: grandeza inmemorial, 1520*. Madrid: Vision Libros.
- Tan, J. (2010). Social Relationships in the Modern Age: Never-married Women in Bangkok, Jakarta and Manila. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 41(5), 749-765.
- Thelin, J. R. (2011). *A History of American Higher Education* (2nd ed.). Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Thomas Innes of Learney, S. (1956). *Scots heraldry; a practical handbook on the historical principles and modern application of the art and science*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd.