

# [William deresiewicz essay](https://assignbuster.com/william-deresiewicz-essay/)

This paper attempts to answer the questions based on the reading of The Dispossessed by William Deresiewicz. He wrote about the inconspicuous disappearance of the American working class from the mainstream and the reasons behind it. The all popular middle class has been justly criticized for their self conceit and attempts to portray itself as the champion of the cause of the working classes when they are themselves responsible for their marginalisation. How does Deresiewicz define working class? Deresiewicz defines working class as the community whose members are wage earners on an hourly basis.

But then, as he puts it this definition even has exceptions in the form of an airline pilot and a secretary working in an organisation. The definition clearly excludes the innumerable professionals who receive a fixed stipulated amount at the end of the month. Even some economists in the country consider a cop, fireman or a factory worker belonging to a Union as being from middle class strata of the society just because they drive big cars or live in houses that are bigger than the houses considered as typical working class residences.

According to Deresiewicz, the middle class is highly prejudiced in the country, to the extent that they have been culturally withheld from finding mention as the ‘ working class’ in the mainstream media and other portrayals. Nobody talks about the working class people; the American Diaspora has gone as far as to obliterate any reference to their style of life. The only people who seem to be interested or happen to be interested in learning of their lives and their ways are the middle class journalists and that too because the latter is trying to masquerade as the former (Deresiewicz, 2006).

This despite the fact that a vast majority of the American population still falls under the working class! They are referred to as everything but as members of working class. In racial terms, it is taken for granted that the blacks constitute the working class of the country when the truth is that there is substantial number of Whites as well working for hourly wages. Their realm of family structure is defined as having children at an early age, children outside of marriages, raising children as a single parent mostly with the help of an older relative and the community at large being cool with the arrangement.

The media and other mainstream domains of the American culture have come to identify these characteristics as being entirely black and thus class is replaced by race. Who portrays its members in mainstream American culture, and what does he think these representations lack? In the mainstream American culture, the working class are portrayed by “ the people, who serve our food, ring up our purchases, fix our cars, and change our bedpans” (Deresiewicz, 2006). The people just turn a blind eye to them, they are not ignoring their existence, just overlooking them.

Another interesting portrayal of them, as hyped by media-consisting of journalists and columnist born and bought up in the middle class American families- is as the rural, Southern, conservative, nationalist, and fundamentalist-in other words, redneck. It was said during the election campaign that the majority of the votes for Bush came from the common Americans, the Southerners but the term working class was not used even then. The middle class prides itself on its academic achievements when there are many working class members who are rich enough to live as middle class American families.

The true character of the American middle class remains conspicuously hidden, so much so that New York Times had started a special series on class, when the class system is an integral part of American culture. This general manifestation and portrayal of working class doesn’t represent their true character. The working class are not only the Southerners. If the situation of a doctor working hard to mobilize funds for his son’s education at Harvard and a cashier striving to pay for medicine bills were not collated, then the juxtaposition of the former against the latter would have been stark and the distinction clear.

But this led to marginalisation and almost disappearance of the working class. It can be seen that the distinctions have become broader and do not just depend on the nature of job or the mode of remuneration of the various people employed in various jobs. On the basis of their political orientation, they are divided in regions. The republicans are from the red states and the democrats are from the blue states. On the basis of region, their culture is divided in that the red state dwellers drink beer and blue state dwellers drink wine.

Now, there in that lies the subtle class distinction, as obviously wine drinkers are more affluent than the beer drinkers. But this portrayal almost leads to disappearance of the working class which represents almost 80% of the American population. Such a substantial part of the American workforce is going without notice. Which virtues and vices are specific to the working class, and how do these differ from those of the middle class? Characteristics of a particular class or community can be safely categorised into virtues and vices typical to it.

Where working class is concerned, the common characteristics are that they are poor, perform manual labour, play saxophone, born and raised into a single parent household and are mostly seen striving to make both ends meet or in dire financial needs. Where their virtues are concerned, they are surely more in touch with the basic human nature than the members of the middle class. Loyalty, community, stoicism, humility, and tolerance (Deresiewicz, 2006) are some of their higher virtues.

Tolerance is also included here because they truly believe in the policy of ‘ live and let live’. They are not jealous of the elite middle class or the rich affluent class; they do not go to the extent of limiting the scope and boundary of existence of the classes lower to theirs. They believe in the providence of God and care more for their families and places and their native land than for the pursuit of higher career goals. Their Vices manifest themselves in their being less temperate, less prudent, and less thrifty than their middle class counterparts.

Some people consider them to be less industrious when in reality the working class people perform most of the manual jobs, far beyond the 9-5 schedule of the middle class. The virtues of middle class are the negatives of the vices of the working class. They are definitely known for their prudence, thrift, and temperate disposition-a trait acquired through practised emotional labour at job- and industriousness. But their vices far surpass their virtues in intensity. The vices of narrowness, meanness, prudery, timidity to higher authorities, hypocrisy and self conceit are under no circumstances leveraged by the handful of virtues.

As Deresiewicz puts out, the middle class people are instilled with the thought that they are meant for the best things in life and there is nothing that should stand between them and their ultimate goals in life. In the face of failure, they often resort to whining and self pity. They are more prejudiced than the working class and the tolerance it preaches, it hardly ever puts in practise. Towards the end, the author goes as much to say that the American society can fair much better by inheriting and inculcating Proletariat (working class) values than Bourgeoisie (middle class) values (Deresiewicz, 2006).

What reasons does he offer for insisting that we distinguish among working class, working poor, and working families? The reason because of which the writer emphasises on the need to differentiate amongst working class, working poor and working families is that in essence the three terms mean three different things and it is the callousness of the middle class that has blurred the defining boundaries. The working class is defined as consisting of people who work in lieu of hourly wages. They can be truck drivers or people working at gas and petrol stations, factory workers, restaurant workers or in any other job that provides hourly wages.

Before they shifted on the margins of American existence, they were considered as a very important part of the American Demography, taking immense pride in their ability to work and the work they did. Working poor are those members of the working class which are provided very low wages in return for the work done by them. So confusing working poor with working class only highlights the portrayal of the latter as poor, which is untrue and unfair. Only some working class people are poor and a vast majority are not, “ they just aren’t well-off enough to be middle class” (Deresiewicz, 2006)

Same can be said with respect to working class and working families. Previously it used to be a trend amongst the working classes that the entire family worked but it is not a compulsion and hence using working families to pass off as working classes is a misnomer. Conclusion The article by William Deresiewicz served as an eye opener to the attempts of the American Bourgeoisie to marginalise the working class as a whole. Even the portrayal of the working class members in the mainstream sitcoms, soaps and movies is only half hearted, restricted to their jobs and portraying nothing about their life and living conditions.