

# Introduction of people view both leisure and consumption



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## **Introduction**

Over the years, there have been changes in the way different classes of people view both leisure and consumption based on their income as well as their lifestyle. Human beings aspire to be recognized by others and to form part of the most respected groups in society. There is therefore a struggle as people aspire to attain higher status and be among the upper class. This paper is going to look at the differences in the two aspects; leisure and consumption among the upper and middle class Americans during the late 19th century and the last part of the 20th century.

## **Discussion**

There are a number of factors that have made the institution of leisure different among the different classes of people. Key among them is the fact that various forms of employment have been a preserve of the upper class, for instance, they have specifically been excluded from industrial occupations and they take up those occupations within which more honor is attached such as the priestly office.

The church has been used as a way of expressing social status with the clergy being paid well without necessarily having to do much work.

Conspicuous leisure is where people take up leisure activities that show off social status. This has taken different forms with time. An example may be taking long holidays to exotic destinations and getting souvenirs while at it. The aspect of conspicuous leisure was first introduced by an American economist- Thorstein Veblen. During the 19th century, the upper class would

own property such as land but would not take part in manual labor. They spent much of their time on leisure activities.

As industrialization took place, the upper class became more useless in society as they mainly consumed but did not take part in the production of goods and services (Veblen, 23). Conspicuous consumption on the other hand takes place among the upper class where they spend money on goods and services that display their wealth or income. The goods are not consumed for their specific utility but rather as a form of attaining status.

The status was and continues to be viewed not only through the ownership of property but also through the ownership of persons specifically women. The use of slaves was a form of power and any kind of manual labor was a preserve of the poor in society. The upper class affected various aspects of life. For instance, women were used as trophies and this has continued to happen in modern society where women are used to show a man's success. Sports such as football have continued to grow only as a result of conspicuous leisure and consumption of the upper class (Veblen, 44).

Vicarious leisure and consumption on the other hand are the types of leisure and consumption that developed over the 20th century where masters used their servants to show off their wealth. The masters give their servants the time and opportunity to take part in leisure activities as a means of showing off their status. The upper class also portrayed vicarious leisure by having non productive labor performed by servants at a fee.

Personal services are therefore performed by employees instead of a member of the household (Veblen, 49). Old money was the wealth that the

very rich acquired through inheritance. This form of wealth was passed down from generation to generation.

In the 1930's there was a division of the upper class in the United States. There were the upper-upper class, whose families had inherited their wealth and the lower-upper class who had attained their wealth through investments as opposed to inheritance (Aldrich, 31). Old money had one major advantage; it gave the young people who had inherited it a platform on which to develop themselves without having to worry about basic need such as housing and food. They would therefore be able to develop faster than those who did not have any inheritance. Families that were rich would command respect than those which did not which meant that old money was important in society and as a form of acquiring status. The inherited wealth may be in the form of either property such as land, businesses or slaves (Aldrich, 31). The leisure class composed of the elite in society who operated in circles and they spent a lot having other people attend to what they required.

Over the years however, these circles have been broken or at least weakened as more people are able to afford leisure activities that were previously a preserve of the leisure class. In the past, some of the leisure activities included going to the theatre, playing polo and fox hunting. Leisure resources have however increased for instance sports teams and community centers therefore the activities that previously symbolized luxury have become affordable to many.

The upper class is therefore forced to keep looking for new activities that are not taken up by people from lower social classes (Ruskin, 22). During the post war era, the middle class in many states like Florida were able to get into jobs that were well paying. This therefore meant that they had high wages and would in turn be able to take part in leisure activities. They stopped viewing leisure as well as conspicuous consumption as only for the upper class but as something they could as well afford. In an attempt to raise ranks from the middle to the upper class, the middle class emulated the activities and consumption patterns of the upper class. The difference between the upper and the middle class was that while the upper class stayed away from work, the middle class put a lot of effort in their work so that they may be able to afford the leisure activities.

The middle class would wish accumulate wealth by being very producing in their early years and then staying away from such work after the wealth had been attained. Society was of the view that staying away from labor was a way of showing one's level of wealth (Mormino, 223). The definition of high status has continued to change as the world becomes more dominated by celebrities. The upper class now comprises of famous people who define the trends such as fashion. As young people grow they emulate those people who are able to attract media attention. Both consumption and leisure have continued to be affected by celebrities. Companies have even used celebrities in their marketing strategy in an attempt to increase profits. With the help of the media, celebrities have been able to influence the way people think and behave (Veblen, 225).

## **Conclusion**

As all Americans wished to form part of the upper class in America which was signified by both consumption behavior and leisure activities, the definitions of both leisure and consumption changed between the 19th and 20th century. One major difference is that the middle class in the late 20th century were in a position to engage in the activities that were a preserve of the upper class during the 19th century. It is also clear that as the media exposes more and more celebrities, the definition of high status has changed.

Celebrity status has become the way in which status is portrayed in contemporary society.

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