



Snobbery: The American Version

By Joseph Epstein

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A national bestseller, *Snobbery* examines the discriminating qualities in all of us. With dishy detail, Joseph Epstein skewers all manner of elitism in contemporary America. He offers his arch observations of the new footholds of snobbery: food, fashion, high-achieving children, schools, politics, being with-it, name-dropping, and much more. Clever, incisive, and immensely entertaining, *Snobbery* explores the shallows and depths of status and taste -- with enviable results.

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Snobbery: The American Version By Joseph Epstein Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Noted essayist and former American Scholar editor Epstein, having enlightened us on ambition (*Ambition: The Secret Passion*), now turns to its companion, snobbery. The topic is ripe with promise, but Epstein's observations are less revelatory than entertaining. Underneath their pretentious exteriors, he writes, snobs are insecure people who have latched onto arbitrary measures of status to prove they're worthier than those around them. It's natural fallout, he says, in a world where complete fairness is nonexistent. The best antidote to snobbery, Epstein suggests, is to treat people the same, regardless of their circumstances, and to value things for their intrinsic worth rather than their cachet. Epstein shares his own snobbish tendencies and biases at the outset. From childhood, he writes, his snob radar was fully operational, and by his senior year in high school he was already "an impressively cunning statistician." Epstein goes on to deal with a range of past and present pretensions relating to class, work, democracy, possessions, parenting, college, clubs and intellectualism. In one delicious instance, he describes an American reaction to visiting royalty. "Princess Diana, not long before she died, visited Northwestern University, where I teach," he writes. "The spectacle of the university president, a smallish man in glasses, following the Princess about the campus, yapping away, reminded one of nothing so much as that of a Chihuahua attempting to mount an Afghan hound." The chapter on name-dropping is particularly sharp, citing a variety of ways people exploit connections to well-known individuals for social profit. Epstein has a wickedly wonderful sense of humor and keen observational skills, both on display in the firsthand anecdotes scattered throughout this essayistic assemblage.

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From Library Journal

This readable but serious work examines the nature and place of snobbery and its various manifestations in America, from the country's founding to the present. Epstein (English & writing, Northwestern Univ.) defines snobbery as the practice of making oneself feel superior at the expense of others and argues that as long as people are seeking self-affirmation, it will long live on. He writes of snobbery in the workplace; of its presence in evaluating education, taste, dress, wealth, and race as factors in determining "class" inclusion; and of the snob factors involved in ranking one's status and prestige in all walks of life and situations. He identifies celebrity-level requirements in today's world, compares his own snobberies with those he discerns in others, and overviews Americans' interactions with the cultures of England and the European continent. While Epstein's argument is quite witty and thoughtful, the scant bibliographic references and conversational tone will limit this book's appeal in academic libraries. It is, however, highly recommended for all general readers and public libraries. Suzanne W. Wood, SUNY Coll. of Technology, Alfred

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From [Booklist](#)

Man-of-letters Epstein does precisely what a reader hopes for with a topic as prickly yet slippery as snobbery: he grasps it firmly, holds it under a bright light, and merrily dissects it. Believing that snobbery didn't come into its own until the advent of democracy and an insecure, in-flux society, Epstein traces the evolution of American snobbery with the help of various novelists, "our keenest sociologists," and entertaining confessions of his own snobbishness. He wittily defines downward- and upward-snobbery, reverse snobbery, "with-it" snobbery, and the fuzzy alignment of taste and social class; analyzes the fall of the WASP aristocracy; and observes the way children have become the favorite game pieces in the perpetual tournament for bragging rights. Epstein also takes on the "snobbery of intellectuals" and political snobbery, coining the word *virtucrats* for those who believe that their views are not only correct but also morally superior. Every bracing page is a mirror in which readers can't help but recognize themselves, and each

offers a quotable quip--"Snobbery, like bacteria, is everywhere"--and much to think about. *Donna Seaman*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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