

OUTLINE FOR TV SHOW ON "LIMBO"

1. Explain why you wrote the book. Include explanations of what a straddler is and the twoness -- the DuBoisian double consciousness -- that straddlers have.
 - A. As part of this explanation, tell about your own background. I may throw in a bit of my own as well, because so much of what you wrote resonates with it.
2. Discuss the fact that there are few college majors in working class studies, those that exist are at smaller schools like Youngstown State (located in the middle of what was a huge working class, steelmaking area), and class is the c word on campus -- nobody wants to discuss it.
3. In view of the huge movement into the middle class in, say, the last 60 years (since World War II), to what extent are the differing views and modes of action of the working class and the middle and upper classes still a problem? It's true, isn't it, that scores of millions of people, including Latino and Asian immigrants, are still working class? Do these immigrants, as far as you know, have the same values as the ones you've written about?
4. I would like to divide up your points into stages of life, as you yourself have largely (but not exclusively) done. Let's start with the values and ways of acting of childhood and teenage years. Explain the following points:
 - A. In working class ("wkg cl") homes there is comparatively little talk. People agree on things (consensus is required) and there is only one right way, so there is no need for talk. Also, children are expected to be obedient, they learn to keep their mouths shut, and the father is the patriarch who barks orders and is not to be questioned. All of this is fine preparation for factory work, but not for executive work. Whereas in middle class ("mid cl") and upper class ("up cl") homes, there is lots of talk, and children are encouraged to think for themselves and to question.
 - i. In wkg cl homes kids do not learn how to talk to adults. In mid cl and up cl homes they do learn this.
 - ii. In wkg cl homes the emphasis is on getting the job done, not on talking about it.
 - iii. In the wkg cl world, talk is forthright and without pretense.

- B. In wkg cl homes children are taught loyalty to the family and the group, and to value family. These are core values. In mid cl and up cl homes individual achievement is the desideratum.
- C. In wkg cl homes there is either silence or rage. In mid cl and up cl homes, people talk in modulated tones.
- D. The wkg cl is emotional, intuitive, resigned, and relies on luck. The mid cl is logical and strives to overcome obstacles. (There have to be lots of exceptions to this dichotomy, don't there?)
- E. Wkg cl kids are taught modesty and self effacement. Mid cl and up cl kids are taught to think highly of themselves.
- F. To the wkg cl, physical toughness and fighting are *very* big deals, and talk is a sign of weakness. Kids learn and grow up with this emphasis on physical toughness. (Explain how you still wonder whether you could beat up this guy or that one, because this kind of notion gets as imprinted as a genetic code.)
 - (i). Wkg cl racism is more physical than mid cl or up cl racism.
- G(i). The wkg cl believes that the only currency, as you put it, is a hard day's competent work (which, as we will get into, is not the currency of the corporate world). A very strong work ethic is inculcated. (Aren't there lots of exceptions to this?)
 - (ii). Yet, and I think somewhat contradictorily, at least contradictorily in theory, it also believes that it's who you know that counts. It is fatalistic (e.g., the whaddaya gonna do idea.).
 - (iii). The wkg cl also believes that taking care of your family is a huge big deal.
- H(i). The wkg cl scoffs at education, learning and bookishness. They are not seen as valuable. As well, they are seen as a rejection of the group's values.
 - (ii). Also, a kid who reads, who is bookish, is scoffed at and is looked upon as a weakling or effeminate . That kid doesn't fit in, and doesn't *completely* fit in even if he is also a tough-guy jock, as apparently you were.
- I. Tell about your experiences visiting Manhattan when you were a teenager in Brooklyn.

- J. One of the things which seems to have affected most straddlers is a sense that they didn't really fit into this wkg cl world, that they wanted something different in life.
5. Let's turn now to the possibility of and attendance at university. Explain the following matters:
- A(i). Wkg cl parents see no value to higher education. To them the important point is that a kid should get a job, begin earning a living, and contribute economically to the family. Survival is the crucial point, and fruitless dreams are discouraged.
- (ii). Also, wkg cl families, fathers particularly, fear that they will lose control of kids, especially daughters, who obtain higher education. (This is a problem for Latinas, isn't it?) Or the families worry that the kids will surpass or reject them, or will become paperpushers, or bosses, or will be in for disappointment.
- (iii). For these reasons, wkg cl families -- and I admit this is shocking to me given my own background, albeit it was wkg cl in important respects -- often discourage kids from going to college.
- (iv). Yet there are wkg cl parents who, quite to the contrary, want their kids to go to college to escape the toil and drudgery of their own lives, and, sometimes, to get opportunities that they themselves would have loved to have but were denied. The parents thereby live through the children, which puts tremendous pressure on the kids in college and afterwards. Tell how your own mother, who would have wanted to become educated, encouraged you to go to Columbia, and how she sat through a history class one day, measuring herself as it were. (My father did something similar in a class in property in law school.) Tell how your father told you to get an education -- a very painful moment because he was telling you not to be like him.
- i. Describe the two differing experiences of you and your father at Columbia.
- B(i). Explain that what a wkg cl kid learns in college is worlds removed from his family background. He learns abstractions; he learns a different way of speaking -- a different language almost, and starts speaking like professors rather than family; he learns different views of race (he stops using the N word) and of sex; he learns sometimes to value education for its own sake,

whereas his family sees it as valuable only to the extent that it enables him to get a high paying job; he learns that there are a lot of supposedly sophisticated people out there who think, dress, act and talk in ways he previously did not know. (Is this last point still true in these days of all-pervasive tube watching?)

- (ii). A kid learns, too, that he cannot talk at home or to friends in the hood about what he is learning at college. Otherwise family, relatives and friends will think he is getting uppity, is beginning to see himself as too good for them. (My many colleagues from Irish American homes have often told me, and I've also read, that in Irish neighborhoods people of ambition are looked upon as being too full of themselves, of thinking they are better than others.) So kids learn, in Archie Bunker's words, to stifle themselves. And they find it harder and harder to talk to their family, etc. They really start getting caught, big time, between two worlds.
 - (iii). Sadly, kids start becoming embarrassed by their parents, and ashamed of them. (Tell the story of the guy who got honors but didn't want his parents, who said "youse," to meet his professors, etc.)
- C(i). Socially, college can be a real problem for kids from the wkg cl. They aren't accepted in fraternities or as people (no George Bush Skull And Bones for them), they have to work so they don't have as much chance or any chance to participate in bull sessions or in the activities of college life, and they have completely different views of things (tell the stories of the Jane Austin ball gowns and of the rich snobs who would go off on shopping sprees on Fifth Avenue or its like.)
- (ii). The wkg cl kids also lack the kinds of experiences and confidence that mid cl kids and, especially, up cl kids have. The mid cl and up cl kids have traveled all over the world. They have previously read the books that are being assigned. They have the easy confidence in discussion that is bred of experience. (Tell the story of Tom, whom you say is now editor of a magazine, while you are a reporter, and tell the story about Eisner.) They are also sneakier, less forthright.
 - (iii). "Interclass" dating can be a real problem, as previously in high school, because of different backgrounds, values, and experiences with and attitudes towards money.
 - i. Tell about people who will spill food, beer, etc. and leave a mess

because other people -- i.e., wkg cl people -- will clean up.

- ii. Explain how a lot of the rich spoiled brats (who often are big on drugs) subsequently amount to nothing because they have nothing but bad habits and are lazy, whereas the wkg class kids make something of themselves and, indeed, are hired by straddlers in preference to others because the wkg cl kids have lots of drive and understand life.
- D. Wkg cl kids don't know the need for a mentor and don't know how to go about getting a mentor. Mid cl and up cl kids are far more skilled at this.
- E. Discuss the fact that how far people can go in life, regardless of how hard they work, is determined by birth. Not everyone is born on third base and thinks he hit a triple, like the Bushes. Mid cl and up cl kids have been speaking the language of college and business all their lives, have a sense of place and confidence, and have networks. All of which helps them in life. (Tell the Carolyn Kennedy story.) They are confident things will work out for them and are therefore willing to take risks.
6. Now let's turn to the experience that straddlers have in the corporate world and to their relationships with their families when they are in that world. Explain the following matters:
- A. Straddlers don't fit into the corporate world, which is a WASP world of hushed talk, not saying what you think, not saying what you mean, backstabbing, and every man for himself. All of this is foreign to people from the wkg cl, who from childhood have been taught to be direct and blunt in speech, are sometimes loud, and who have been taught loyalty.
 - i. Occasionally a person from the wkg cl will use four letter words or even get physical. This is a disaster.
 - ii. In the corporate world there are endless meetings which go nowhere - - one might say there is an endless torrent of bovine defecation. People from mid cl backgrounds say as little as possible at these meetings, whereas people from the wkg cl speak up readily. Also, mid cl talk in corporations often consists of not saying what you mean or being forthright, but of beating around the bush, prevaricating, etc. Whereas people from the wkg cl are forthright and candid.
 - B. The corporate world is a networking world, where having a mentor or a rabbi

(why are they called rabbis rather than ministers or priests?) can be and often is far more important than working hard and accomplishing things. This is foreign to the belief in a work ethic, and in rewards coming to those who work hard and accomplish, that is inculcated in wkg cl people.

- i. Despite the importance of networking, often people from wkg cl backgrounds are disadvantaged by being shunned by colleagues.
 - ii. Tell the pertinent part of the story of Doug, who now works only 50% of the time, not 105%, and spends 50% of his time networking.
 - iii. One exception to the fact that rewards come from networking, not competence may well be the financial world, where results are mathematically measurable and people want money. (For this reason I think the financial world is also more open to women who run money than other worlds are.)
 - iv. Tell why you think New York City may be a little less class conscious than Philadelphia. Explain that there is a lot of sub rosa racism and antisemitism in the corporate worlds.
- C. In the corporate world you have to be a team player, no matter how incompetent or inept the team may be.
- D. In the wkg cl world, one tells off one's boss in direct terms. In the corporate world you don't argue with or sass your boss because to do so is disastrous. You do what he wants. You put your tail between your legs and swallow your bile.
- i. Tell the story of the fiasco that continued at Procter & Gamble because nobody wanted to gainsay the preposterousness of what some boss wanted.
 - ii. Explain what happened when you argued with a boss because he had promised your wife could get credit on a story and then wanted to break his promise.
 - iii. Tell the story of your "run-in" with the New York Daily News.
 - iv. Tell the (contradictory) story of the guy who told off Chief Justice Burger or one of his people in a meeting.

- E. In the corporate world various forms of sycophancy and sucking up are *de rigueur*, are ways of getting ahead. Golf is big. So is inviting the boss over to dinner. But breaking bread with the boss -- sucking up to him -- seems illegitimate to persons from the wkg cl. In wkg cl homes money is tight, and you only invite close friends and relatives to dinner (or supper, as you say it is called). Also, people have hard lives and so, when they relax, they want to relax with friends, not with their boss.
- F. In the corporate world people boast, brag and hog credit, but do all this subtly (if such things *can* be subtle). But people from the wkg cl are taught to be modest and self effacing.
- G. One knows that, because of the habits, views, speech (no Brooklyn or Boston or southern accents, please) dress, etc. stemming from his wkg cl background, he probably will never be able to make it to the top.
- (i). Mid cl colleagues do not understand straddlers.
 - (ii). Straddlers can be fairly bitter because neither in education nor the workplace is there any affirmative action for people from wkg cl backgrounds.
- H. Somewhat to my shock, even though I am aware it is true, wkg cl backgrounds are not accepted in academia either. Tell the story of the fellow who explained, at an academic party, what his grandfathers did, and felt that was the end for him.
- I(i). It is difficult to maintain your relationships with your family. You now live in a different world than they, a world they do not know and don't approve of, and they may even consider you a traitor. You have little to talk to them about except the old days or family gossip (and some straddlers no longer even speak with their families). Corporate life may force you to move around a lot. The family will not accept the view that economic circumstances dictate the number of children you have. You have to accept that there will be a certain break with the family, and that it may be either you or them.
- (ii). Yet, despite all this, relatives look on you as the guy who got out and who is rich (which one usually isn't), and expect you to take care of them.
 - (iii). To get along with their families, some straddlers simply do what they did

before with them: e.g., the guy who goes duck hunting with his old man.

- J. Explain that some guys from the wkg cl who have gotten very rich make sure that they treat wkg cl people respectfully and would be horrified if wkg cl people thought of them as, for example, Harvard educated snobs. They don't forget their blue collar backgrounds.
7. Now let's turn to marriage.
- A. Explain the difficulties that arise when a straddler marries someone from the mid cl or the up cl: there are questions of money, attitudes towards debt, spoiling the kids by giving them too much, etc.
 - B. Tell of the straddlers who have gotten quite wealthy but who take care to insure that their kids do not get spoiled, who dislike any sense of entitlement, and who see to it that their kids have to work and have a respectful attitude towards people in the wkg cl.
 - C. If I remember correctly, you feel that the best straddler marriages are ones where one straddler marries another: there are similarities of backgrounds, experiences and values. You yourself wanted someone smart, whom you could talk to, if I remember rightly, not just someone who would be very nice and who would cook you great Italian meals and bear your children. (Tell the story about the girl who thought juxtaposition was "just a position," and your reaction to it. (But don't you think your reaction was just a bit harsh since juxtaposition is an uncommon word (albeit "just a position" may not have made a lot of sense in context) and perhaps was driven by something lots of us have experienced: a desire, sometimes overweening when one is young, to escape one's background?))
 - D. Explain that relatives may make biting comments at straddlers' weddings.
- 8(a). Explain why straddlers feel that they don't quite fit in in either of the two worlds they've known, and are deeply conflicted. They don't like what they've become, yet, when they go back for reunions, they quickly begin to feel out of place all over again in a wkg cl environment, just as they initially felt out of place there.
- (b). Explain your view that the straddlers who are most successful as people have integrated into one person the best from both of the worlds they've lived in, the blue collar wkg cl world and the mid cl world. Tell about people like Milt Summerfeld and Jeffrey Orridge.

9. Straddlers are delighted, however, to have escaped the soul deadening drudgery and uncreative routines which ensnared their families and turns fathers into people who watch the tube in an exhausted stupor each evening. On the other hand, because they have known hard times and real work, some straddlers feel they could always say, if necessary, take this job and shove it, and would get along doing something else.

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