

Shorter Notice

Nancy Isenberg. *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America.* New York, U.S.A.: Viking Press. 2016. xvii + 460 pages. USD 15.36 (Hardcover).

With the victory of Donald J. Trump in the US elections, race and class relations have again become a topic of hot discussion. Nancy Isenberg's book from the last year, "White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America", provides a very compelling read in this regard. The rather derogatory term 'white trash' usually refers to the poor white people, especially those living in the southern US but the author uses it in a larger context to write about the entrenched social hierarchy and class relations in the US. In a book organised in three parts, comprising a total of twelve chapters, Isenberg questions the myths about equality and democracy in the country. In the three parts, titled: *To begin the world anew*; *Degeneration of the American breed*; and *The white trash makeover*, Isenberg takes the reader through the evolution of the term white trash, and looks into its genesis and how it is applied to various groups of people throughout the US's history. Giving a list of terms used for the poor, including the 'waste people', 'offals' and 'lazy lubbers', Isenberg busts the myth of America's supposedly class-free society and concludes that it has no bearing with reality. This is a historical narrative, with very thorough citations, providing a comprehensive history of America from the Colonial Period to today's world, seen through the lens of social class. Looking at the class stereotypes, Isenberg traces them to the British who considered America as a wasteland, and a place where to abandon their undesirables. Stemming from this sentiment, the Americans have always looked down on the poor and thought of them to be congenital laggards. The notion of equality and free competition, she believes, with evidence, is nothing but a fantasy. Although the book is about the US but similar myths can be found in many, if not most, of the countries, and there is much to be learned here. For instance, the chapters on civil war as a class warfare, the topography of class, and the demographics of mediocrity can make an interesting study anywhere in the world. [*Durre Nayab*].