

were launched in 2004.

Under the plans, consumers must buy relatively inexpensive health insurance with a very high deductible while placing up to \$5,450 (for a family of four) into tax-advantaged savings accounts to cover some of the potential costs before insurance kicks in. Among other things, the president wants to increase the amount people can save.

Bush's proposal has received the usual criticism from liberals and applause from conservatives, all of it delivered almost ritualistically. Whatever the fate of his ideas, both camps know that the larger debate will go on for years.

## SOCIETY

## The Busy Class

**THE SOURCE:** "Busyness as the Badge of Honor for the New Superordinate Working Class" by Jonathan Gershuny, in *Social Research*, Summer 2005.

"KEEPING BUSY?" ONE VICTORIAN gentleman would ask of another. The answer often had little to do with what modern folk might think of as work. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the pursuits that occupied the time of the moneyed classes—"sports, politics, the armed services, academics, and the arts"—fell into a category that economist Thorstein Veblen described as "leisure." Precisely because such leisure pursuits were separated from the necessary but grubby business of making money, they identified participants as members of the class of privilege.

How things have changed! Today, according to Jonathan Gershuny, a sociologist at the University of Essex, England, "long hours of paid work are

The most privileged now work more than the less privileged, a British sociologist concludes.

associated with advantaged social positions." The best-off are "increasingly employed in paid jobs that are intrinsically as well as financially rewarding," such as corporate management, and the legal and medical professions. Stranger still, this phenomenon has occurred despite an overall decline in the number of hours people are working. The inescapable conclusion: "The most privileged now work more than the less privileged."

In Gershuny's view, several factors account for this evolution. Longer life spans have reduced the flow of inherited wealth, forcing the children of the wealthy—mainly through higher education—to develop and use professional skills in order to maintain the same economic status enjoyed by their parents. At the same time, "innovations in the technology of production have led to enormous increases in the volume of professional and technical work." Such jobs guarantee high wages, and Gershuny cites a number of studies showing that "those with higher levels of earning power will choose longer hours of paid work time."

Gershuny believes that "busyness" at work has succeeded leisure as "the signifier of high social status." He bases this on time-budget diaries that indicate that even lower-earning workers and the unemployed seem as busy as high-wage earners. Why is this? Partly it is because of the range

of activities—errands and family responsibilities as well as traditional leisure pursuits—crammed into their nonwork hours. The steady rise of women in the workplace has also led to the sharing of a greater proportion of home responsibilities. But Gershuny suspects that at least part of this "I'm-so-busy" attitude pervading modern life is the perception that busyness—or at least its appearance—has now become a mark of social prestige.

## SOCIETY

## Education Takes a Baby Step

**THE SOURCE:** "A Decade of Effort" by Lynn Olson, "A Second Front" by Ronald A. Wolk, and "National Standards" by Diane Ravitch, in *Education Week's Quality Counts 2006*, Jan. 5, 2006.

THE STATES' EFFORTS SINCE THE early 1990s to hold public schools to explicit standards of academic achievement seem to have had a fairly positive impact. The improvement in students' test scores in mathematics and reading is "heartening," though certainly far from sufficient, says Lynn Olson, executive editor of the 10th edition of an annual report card issued by *Education Week*, a leading trade publication of the education industry.

Between 1992 and 2005, scores in fourth-grade math increased by almost 19 points on a 500-point scale used by the federal government, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). That's the equivalent of nearly two grade levels. The increases were even greater for black (28 points) and Hispanic (24 points) fourth graders. Had white students'