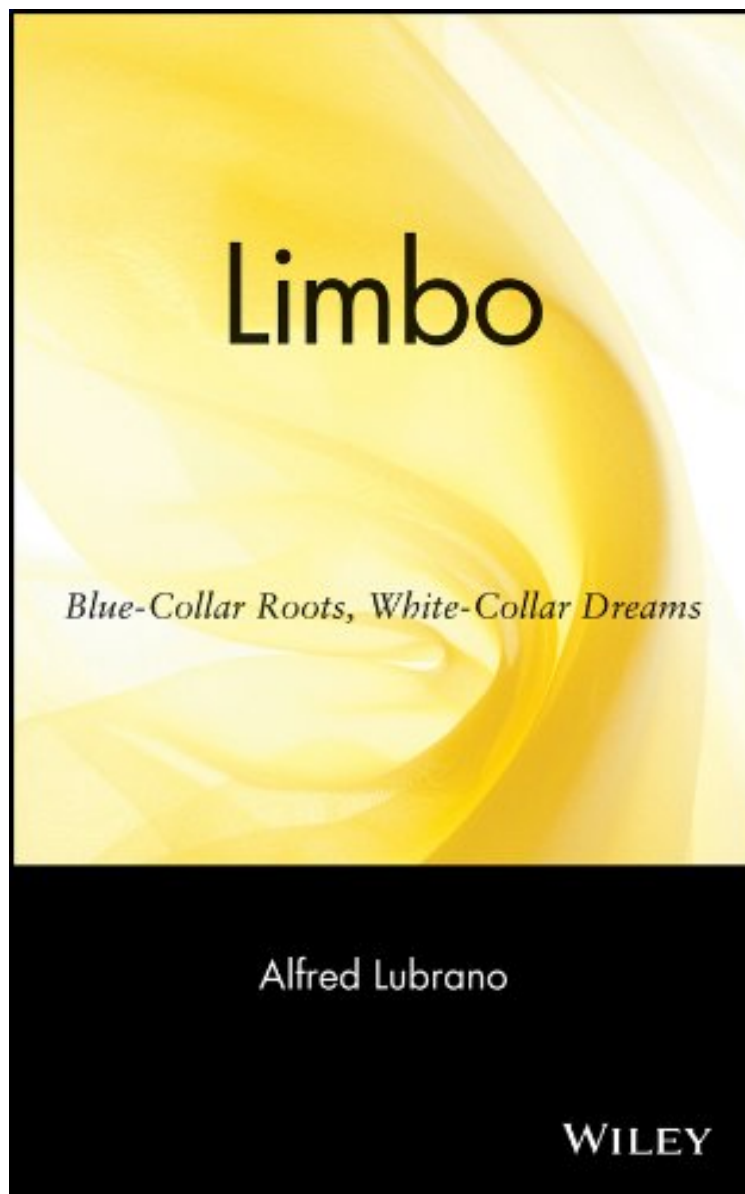


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## Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams

*Alfred Lubrano*

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**Alfred Lubrano : Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A must read for first-generation college students By Legal Princess I have read many articles online about Alfred Lubrano's book. I am a first generation college graduate who happens to find out what this book is really about. I have graduated from the University of Maryland 27 years ago with a

Bachelor's degree in Government Politics . My family was not very understanding and emotionally supportive of my college education. I had a hard time with my grades but I barely graduated. I felt at times I was fish out-of water in an University environment. Many professors had given me subtle signs of elitism that a blue collar first generation American should not have been there in the first place. However I was lucky that I had some who who helped me along the way. In 2003 I returned to the university and gotten another Bachelor's in legal studies and my grades were a lot better. Even when I went back to school , my father thought it was a waste of my time and money especially for a person over thirty at the time. I wish this book was in print back in the late 1980's. I think in today's generation colleges and universities are more understanding of these students. Today I am an Administrator of a government agency and to this very day my family doesn't understand what my job is about. It is a huge deal for me. Sometimes in my current job feel like a fish out of water because of my blue collar sensibilities. Each universities should have this book available for all of its first generation students.11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. If only I had this book when I was in high school

By Dr Stuart Jeanne Bramhall  
Lubrano's book is based on the premise that class differences have not disappeared in the US, as much of the mainstream media would have you believe. Non-college educated Americans who work with their hands - and usually work much harder for much less money - have their own distinct culture and values in the US. They usually live in working class neighborhoods, speak their own distinct language and have very distinct attitudes towards family, child rearing, loyalty and personal integrity. My cluelessness in this regard made my high school, pre-med and medical school years extremely miserable. I had absolutely nothing in common with the upper middle class kids who were my peers - and they were constantly finding fault with the way I dressed, walked, talked and did my hair. No matter what I did, I could never fit in. I was 32 before a friend from Appalachia explained that the main reason behind the inane thoughtlessness of my upper middle class friends was the direct result of their class background and the sense of privilege that goes with it. Another friend introduced me to *Worlds of Pain* by Lillian Breslow Rubin. Suddenly my life was more bearable because it made sense. *Limbo* differs from *Worlds of Pain* in being more descriptive and less scientific (Rubin is a sociologist and *Worlds of pain* is based on scientific research). I prefer *Limbo*, which is based on both Lubrano's personal experience and 50 interviews with "straddlers," because it makes a deliberate effort to define the value system that characterizes working class culture. Lubrano lists some of the more important working class values at the beginning of his book: a powerful work ethic (not found in the middle class); a strong unambivalent respect for parents; a need for close contact with extended family; a forthrightness devoid of hidden agendas; intense loyalty; a belief in firm limit setting for children; reliance on common sense as opposed to book learning; and a willingness to openly display emotion. Lubrano coins a new word - "straddler" - in *Limbo*. It describes a professional of working class origin who is never totally comfortable with either his/her working class family or his/her professional colleagues and friends.

By Dr Stuart Jeanne Bramhall, author of *THE MOST REVOLUTIONARY ACT: MEMOIR OF AN AMERICAN REFUGEE*  
3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Excellent book: A must read for any first generation professional or manager

By Social Media Convert  
This was an excellent read. It clearly outlines how the first generation professional struggles with fitting into a corporate environment that's filled with generations of white collar professionals. If you're the first generation in your family to graduate college and enter the professional workforce, you should read this book as it will save you tons of time, anguish, frustration and embarrassment that many others have had to learn the hard way. Managers should also read this book as it gives insight into managing this distinct demographic in the workforce. Yet don't write them off as they're likely to be your most industrious, loyal and honest team players.

In *Limbo*, award-winning journalist Alfred Lubrano identifies and describes an overlooked cultural phenomenon: the internal conflict within individuals raised in blue-collar homes, now living white-collar lives. These people often find that the values of the working class are not sufficient guidance to navigate the white-collar world, where unspoken rules reflect primarily upper-class values. Torn between the world they were raised in and the life they aspire too, they hover between worlds, not quite accepted in either. Himself the son of a Brooklyn bricklayer, Lubrano informs his account with personal experience and interviews with other professionals living in limbo. For millions of Americans, these stories will serve as familiar reminders of the struggles of achieving the American Dream.

From Publishers Weekly  
Lubrano's view of the challenges that upwardly mobile children of blue-collar families (he calls them Straddlers) face in establishing themselves in white-collar enclaves could spark lively debates among Straddlers themselves, not to mention those Lubrano views as having a head start based on birth into a white-collar family. In this combination of memoir and survey, the Philadelphia Inquirer staff reporter recalls his freshman year at Columbia; he'd expected classmates to regard him as sophisticated because he was a New Yorker. However, this son of a Brooklyn bricklayer found himself on the outside of elite cliques populated by men he characterizes as "pasty, slight fellas-all of them seemed 5-foot-7 and sandy-haired." This was only the beginning for Lubrano, who came to see entry into a select educational institution as a harsh cultural dividing line between his blue-collar upbringing and his white-collar future. Becoming a journalist cost him emotionally when he felt torn between abandoning cherished values from his youth and accommodating his new profession's demands. Lubrano's interviews with other Straddlers

have convinced him that ambition puts many of them in positions fraught with similar ambivalence and unexpected culture shock. With quotes from Richard Rodriguez and bell hooks, Lubrano illustrates his thesis: "Limbo folk remain aware of their 'otherness' throughout their lives [and remain] perpetual outsiders." Yet he's quick to recognize individual Straddlers who've persevered in the face of those outsider feelings (though, regrettably, he doesn't share self-reflection). Straddlers' ultimate challenge, Lubrano opines, is to be as steadfast and self-possessed in reconciling their white-collar present with their blue-collar heritage as they have been in achieving their professional goals. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist This country always celebrates the idea that there is enormous opportunity here to move up from one's station in life, to achieve greatness from the most humble of roots. But for those who are the first from a traditionally blue-collar family to enter college and move into the white-collar workplace, there is a darker side to success when they find themselves alienated from both their own family and their strange new middle-class world. Lubrano, himself an Italian American son of a bricklayer who transcended his roots to become an award-winning journalist, wrote this book in an attempt to reconcile this dichotomy and explore the unique challenges of this transitional social class. Interspersed with his own story are the stories of more than 100 others whom he calls "Straddlers" because they straddle two worlds, "many of them not feeling at home in either, living in a kind of American limbo." This is an emotionally charged study of class values, a subject even touchier than race or gender. David Siegfried Copyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved Lubrano's view of the challenges that upwardly mobile children of blue-collar families (he calls them Straddlers) face in establishing themselves in white-collar enclaves could spark lively debates among Straddlers themselves, not to mention those Lubrano views as having a head start based on birth into a white-collar family. In this combination of memoir and survey, the Philadelphia Inquirer staff reporter recalls his freshman year at Columbia; he'd expected classmates to regard him as sophisticated because he was a New Yorker. However, this son of a Brooklyn bricklayer found himself on the outside of elite cliques populated by men he characterizes as "pasty, slight fellas-all of them seemed 5-foot-7 and sandy-haired." This was only the beginning for Lubrano, who came to see entry into a select educational institution as a harsh cultural dividing line between his blue-collar upbringing and his white-collar future. 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Forecast: A national advertising and publicity campaign and co-promotions with the Philadelphia Inquirer and NPR should attract readers who've experienced the duality Lubrano describes. (Publishers Weekly, July 28, 2003) An award-winning reporter with the Philadelphia Inquirer and commentator for National Public Radio, he owns 11 backyard-bred horses on a farm in South Jersey: "I hold our chestnut yearling Beau Soleil as a friend French braids his blond mane in preparation for his Devon debut," he reports. Life is good-but that's the problem: Lubrano cannot reconcile his father's being a construction worker with his becoming an affluent professional. The result is Limbo, a stringing together of Lubrano's and others' thoughts on the pain of straddling two different worlds. Lubrano's journalism background apparently precludes any sociological methodology: the narrative is full of broad generalizations with little substantiation. One may wonder what country Lubrano was born in: aren't most Americans of a "hybrid class"? Don't most parents aspire to have their children exceed their own station in life? And what about the current glut of unemployed graduates? Now there's a problem. My advice: Lubrano should stop kvetching, and librarians should save their money for Sherry B. Ortner's New Jersey Dreaming: Capital, Culture, and the Class of '58, which explores the forces that influenced the author's classmates' lives after graduation. Many of them went from blue-collar families to the middle class, but Ortner analyzes the phenomenon with scholarly expertise rather than bemoaning it. — Ellen D. Gilbert, Princeton, NJ (Library Journal, October 1, 2003) One of the lies we tell ourselves, as a nation, is that there are no real class boundaries here - or, at least, none that can't be overcome by determination and hard work. Anyone can be president, right? That's why we've had so many working-class presidents over the years, so many vice presidents from the ghetto, so many cabinet secretaries from the barrio and the hollow, so many Supreme Court justices whose fathers were plumbers. With another presidential election clicking into gear, the issue of class is sure to be raised, but it will be quickly doused by one millionaire candidate or another saying something like: "Now, now, no one wants a class war in America." True, no one wants a class war. In fact, we want so badly to avoid a class war that we're afraid even to initiate the kinds of national discussions we've managed to have about race, gender and sexuality. Part of this comes from the fact that the poor and working classes have no voice in the American media elite. Part of it is more subtle: Though the law offers equal opportunity to members of the lower classes, there are enormous psychological barriers to upward mobility, and, often, an enormous price to be paid by those who overcome them. In Limbo, his brilliant examination of people who have climbed from the poor or working

classes into the middle and upper classes, Alfred Lubrano knocks down one of the walls that keep the class issue out of sight and earshot, and floods the subject with light. Born to a tough, kind Brooklyn bricklayer and a knowledge-hungry housewife, Lubrano now lives on a horse farm, is a reporter for *The Inquirer*, and does commentary for National Public Radio, so he knows the joys and perils of this climb, and writes about them with an authority unavailable to someone merely making an academic study. *Limbo* is a pitch-perfect interweaving of his own story - as neighborhood kid, Columbia scholarship student, newspaper reporter - with the stories of others who have made a similar journey. Some of the others, such as writers Richard Rodriguez and Dana Gioia, are well known. All are successful - surgeons, professors, executives, lawyers, teachers. And, beneath the business suits and degrees, all of them carry histories that reach back to the mean streets, the factories and farms, the dinner tables and bars at which their unschooled parents and less talented, less ambitious, or simply more frightened peers talked to them about the snobbery of the well-educated and well-off. "This book," Lubrano writes, "is a step toward understanding what people gain and what they leave behind as they move from the working class to the middle class." We already have an idea what they gain - nicer homes, cars and vacations, safer schools for their kids, safer jobs for themselves. But Lubrano wisely gives equal time to what they leave behind - the directness and authenticity of their hardworking relatives; the rough, honest humor of their peers; a humility and a courage born of daily discomfort. "Much about working-class life is admirable and fine," Lubrano writes. "The trick is to avoid glorifying it without painting life in it too darkly." So he gives us the racism, sexism and small-mindedness, too, the crippling envy and pettiness, all the things that pushed his aptly named "Straddlers" out of the old neighborhood in the first place. After the Straddlers have earned their degrees, moved away from the familiar streets, and embarked on the types of careers their parents once spoke about with envy or disdain, they face challenges parallel to those faced by immigrants to the land of plenty. Lubrano details those challenges in chapters on the workplace, dating, marriage and child-rearing. His research is extensive, and the stories he elicits from interviewees are touching and raw. There is the woman who loses on purpose while playing Scrabble with her less-well-educated mother; a young man who spends months carefully talking his closed-minded father into letting him go to college. Lubrano presents their stories sympathetically, linked to them as he is by his own uncomfortable adjustment to the bright new world of American success: "I often feel inhabited by two people who don't speak to each other." That duality will be intimately familiar to readers who have moved from humble backgrounds well up into the middle class, from Campbell's soup to sushi, from stifling apartments to summer homes, from a sweaty tribal comfort to an anxious open-mindedness. But this book is too good and too important to be limited to a narrow audience. In *Limbo*, Alfred Lubrano has said something fresh and true about our simplistic myth of upward mobility, and in doing so he has illuminated the panoply of fear, hope, envy, courage and sacrifice that lies at the very heart of the American dream. (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 2, 2003) "Hopefully, this superbly written book will give voice to the millions who have to make this transition...." (*San Francisco Chronicle*, November 2, 2003)