

between British and American elites is the importance in Britain of the traditional aristocratic gentry and its institutions. British institutional elites continue to be drawn from this segment of society, although the significance of this is not agreed upon by the authors. Giddens contends that aristocratic institutions are a means by which a ruling sector maintains its power in successive generations, while Rex suggests that perhaps these anachronistic trappings, especially as displayed by symbol-manipulating institutions such as university and church, serve the function of making liberal reforms, in contrast to old-line conservatism, look good to the working class. However, comparison with the United States makes one skeptical of the necessity of such institutions to elite operation. While there are aristocratic institutions such as Domhoff's Bohemian Grove or Baltzell's metropolitan men's clubs, external aristocratic trappings do not surround them. And while there are Groton and Harvard, these hardly monopolize ascendancy to elite status as Eaton and Oxbridge do in Britain. In short, membership in American upper-status organizations is as much a reward of elite incumbency as a route to it.

It is unfortunate that the data and the theory do not fit together better. The theory presented argues for an institutional approach to the study of elites, but the data are primarily personal. Recruitment to elite positions is discussed theoretically as one of many structural mechanisms to ensure continuity of aristocratic domination. However, it is presented empirically as documentation of elite hegemony. Likewise, we are exhorted to differentiate between moral and structural integration and to search for the conditions under which they coincide and diverge. But there are no data on moral integration nor even an indication of how we would recognize it if we found it.

Despite methodological shortcomings, the book should be read. For those with a particular interest in British society, the data presented here are invaluable. Those with a theoretical interest in elites, stratification, power, and related issues will find the book a highly significant contribution that not only stands on its own but should generate further work as well.

*The Bohemian Grove and Other Retreats: A Study in Ruling Class Cohesiveness.* By G. William Domhoff. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975. Pp. 116. \$2.45.

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Recently social scientists have come to understand more and more the influence on scientific theory and research of what Thomas S. Kuhn calls paradigmatic assumptions. Alvin Gouldner is basically correct: a sociological theory is often accepted or rejected by a social scientist because it is compatible or incompatible with his own "background assumptions." G. William Domhoff's latest work will probably experience the same fate as did his other important works (most notably *Who Rules America?* and

*The Higher Circles*). Sociologists of a less crusading nature will pass over this work as representing “sloppy” research, while sociologists of a critical nature will accept it as a significant contribution.

Perhaps more than any other area of sociological research, the “power elite debate” has been clouded by what can only be described as politically significant background or paradigmatic assumptions. Much of this is due to the extremely difficult nature of the research required in this area; C. Wright Mills was only the first of many to point out the problems involved in obtaining valid data on the upper class. It seems that when adequate research is hard to achieve, background assumptions can have great influence on theory construction and validation (especially when the questions are extremely sensitive to political values).

But beyond the background assumptions involved, we must understand the point from which Domhoff begins. His study of the Bohemian Grove represents only a piece of the puzzle that was laid down in his earlier works. His basic thesis, taken partly from C. Wright Mills and partly from ruling-class theorists, is essentially that there is a unified upper class which through various means has developed into a governing class in contemporary America. Domhoff’s earlier works were guided by what he termed a “sociology of leadership method.” His primary task was to demonstrate first that there was a somewhat unified upper class and then to show that this upper class was a governing class as a consequence of its overrepresentation in key leadership positions in our society. One of the most persistent criticisms of the governing-class thesis made by pluralists has been directed to the alleged cohesiveness, consensus, or unity within the upper class. In his study of the Bohemian Grove and other upper-class retreats, Domhoff attempts to provide more data on this question of upper-class unity.

The book has three parts: the first and most important looks in detail at the upper-class summer retreat operated by San Francisco’s exclusive Bohemian Club; the second deals with two other “upper-class” summer retreats (the Rancheros Visitadores in southern California and Roundup Riders of the Rockies in Colorado); and the third part is a summary of the significant theoretical issues related to the above-mentioned upper-class-unity argument. I state that the first part is the most important because the third is basically a summary of much of Domhoff’s previous work and the second concerns two retreats which are, by his own admission, not of the Bohemian Grove’s status.

The importance of the 94-year-old Bohemian Grove to the question of upper-class unity is indicated by some of the following membership characteristics provided by Domhoff: 27% of its 928 resident members are listed in the San Francisco Social Register, 45% of its 411 nonresident members are listed in other social registers in the country, and, in 1968, 40 of the top 50 corporations and 20 of the top 25 banks had representation. These facts are significant for Domhoff’s overall thesis, because it is partly at retreats and clubs like the Bohemian Grove that members of the upper class come together, get to know one another and each other’s views, and work out some consensus regarding the major issues facing the country

(and big business) at any given time. Though the Bohemian Grove was established as a retreat from its members' worldly problems of running corporate America, Domhoff's researchers and inside informants describe how, in fact, these issues are often of primary concern. An example of this is the daily political and intellectual seminars at the retreat featuring prominent professors and such speakers as Henry Kissinger, Melvin Laird, William P. Rogers, and Richard Nixon (a longtime member in good standing).

Turning to the overall significance of the study, the pluralist's response will no doubt be, So what? Domhoff has shown that some wealthy members of the economic and political elite spend time together socializing and discussing mutual problems. But does he show that a consensus or united front is thus established to deal with their common problems? We must conclude that Domhoff does not. And further, even if Domhoff were correct in the above assertion, would this help show that this "governing class" can make national decisions which favor the exclusive interests of the corporate rich? Again, we must conclude that it does not. Domhoff has problems in his other works with answering the question of how much overrepresentation by the upper class in key positions in the society is enough to say it is a governing class (and in specifying further the consequences of this overrepresentation for upper-class interests); similarly, he has problems here with showing the outcome of these clubs and retreats with respect to upper-class unity. All Domhoff is able to do at this point is to introduce evidence from a number of studies in psychology on the process of opinion formation in small groups.

Domhoff's most critical problem, however, is that he overstates the significance of his data. Contrary to his belief, the book does not provide "significant evidence for the existence of a cohesive American upper class." But what the book does provide is no less important. Along with studies like those of E. Digby Baltzell, it does provide another small bit of research indicating that the governing-class argument is at least plausible. At present, we know much more about the poor in our society than about the rich. But with more work along the lines of that presented in this book, we can at least be optimistic about the chances for the elimination of this gap in our knowledge. And it is only when more research is done in this area that we will be able to reduce the influence of politically relevant background assumptions.

In short, Domhoff's book represents only a modest study. But even with its limitations it is at least a beginning and deserves attention by everyone interested in the question of political and economic power in a postindustrial society.