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Who Rules America? Power, Politics, And Social Change



Synopsis

Drawing from a power elite perspective and the latest empirical data, Domhoff's classic text is an invaluable tool for teaching students about how power operates in U.S. society. Domhoff argues that the owners and top-level managers in large income-producing properties are far and away the dominant figures in the U.S. Their corporations, banks, and agribusinesses come together as a corporate community that dominates the federal government in Washington and their real estate, construction, and land development companies form growth coalitions that dominate most local governments. By providing empirical evidence for his argument, Domhoff encourages students to think critically about the power structure in American society and its implications for our democracy.

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Customer Reviews

I read the first edition of this book in 1969 in an undergraduate political science course at Penn State. The graduate assistant for the course told us to take it with a grain of salt, but that wasn't really necessary. Everyone I knew who read the book believed every word, but no one got particularly exercised by the fact that the U.S. was governed by a small, interlocking elite with enormous wealth and power. Yes, this was happening in the tumultuous '60's, but Penn State was a conservative campus, loaded with students in engineering, agronomy, and the hard sciences, each one with a slide rule in his shirt pocket. Besides, the experience of the post-WWII era seemed to assure that when we graduated, we would walk straight into good jobs and live upper-middle class lives. In other words, the elites who were demonstrably running the country were doing a pretty job,

at least for us. Little did we know that come the early '70's the self-evident efficacy of the ruling elite would fast fade away, at least for us. Domhoff has periodically up-dated Who Rules America, and what was once a great read has stood the test of time. To his credit as a dispassionate social scientist, he has also worked with Tom Dye, a very different sort of elite theorist, a conservative who thinks that the ruling elite is motivated by an ethic of service and brings to the job the education, connections, and cultural capital needed to do the job as well as it can be done. I remember hearing Domhoff speak about governmental reform, turning the country away from war, and reorganizing the American economy to the benefit of all. His prescription was to take over the Democratic Party and use that as a vehicle for progressive social change.

Who Rules America Now? G. William Domhoff is a professor of psychology and sociology at the University of California. He has written numerous books and articles on the subject of social and political power. Domhoff examined the American power structure and presents evidence that a fixed group of privileged people dominate the American economy and government. Less than one percent of the population occupies key positions in the corporate community and dominate government through special-interest lobbying, policy planning, and candidate selection. Chapter 1 says the purpose of this book is to present evidence that the social upper class is a ruling class by its dominant rule in the economy and government. It has its basis in banks and large corporations, shapes the social and political climate, and dominates the federal government through a variety of methods and organizations. The evidence in this book challenges the conventional wisdom of American social science so this book will proceed step-by-step in providing empirical evidence on how each part of the system works (p.3). A social class is made up of families, not individuals (p.6). One way to measure power is still "who benefits" (p.11). Another is the percentages of leadership in businesses and government (p.12). Given conflicts over issues, "who wins?" is policy decisions is an indicator. The purpose of Chapter 2 is to show the existence of an upper class as a set of interrelated social institutions (schools, clubs, resorts, and social activities) that produce a distinctive life-style. Marriage patterns identify families and social cliques of great wealth (p.18). A separate educational system provides an outlook and life-style (p.24).

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