

01/1-12  
Researching

the Governing Class

of America

**William Domhoff**

William Domhoff is on the faculty of  
Cowell C. (U of California). He is  
the author of Who Rules America?

published by  
New England Free Press  
791 Tremont St.  
Boston, Mass. 02118

10¢



# RESEARCHING THE GOVERNING CLASS OF AMERICA - A Guide to Sources

The following is a fairly comprehensive summary of sources for generating material on members of the American upper (governing) class. I say 'fairly comprehensive' because we are always finding new ways to develop such information, and this pamphlet should not lull researchers into discontinuing such a search. It is not the final word.

In general, we have relied on a few references for most of our information on the corporate rich who are our upper class, going to other sources if we want to try to find every last person in a given business or law firm, or if we want great detail. No one volume is perfect for all purposes, for certain information is often lacking. The sources, with comments on them and suggestions for using them, are listed under the following headings:

Biographical Sources	Academicians and Scholars
Businessmen and Financiers	Historical Sources
Lawyers	Cities
Political Leaders	References on References
Foundation Trustees	

A final section, References on Subject Matter, lists several guides for finding sources on subject matter concerning upper class institutions and their functioning.

## GENERAL BIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES

The single most valuable source in all types of 'power structure' research is Who's Who in America, which contains a great deal of information on most of the people it lists. Often to be used in close connection with it in order to find people who have recently died, or to check the quarry's parents, are the volumes of Who Was Who in America. (However, Who Was Who gives very cryptic biographies, so the researcher will often have to revert to the last Who's Who which listed the person as alive once date of death has been established.)

Usually less productive, but still to be kept in mind in detailed studies, are various regional, state, and world Who's Who's. Several are listed below, but the references in the References on References section of this pamphlet should be checked if you are making a detailed search of some state or area not on the list:

- Who's Who in the East
- Who's Who in the Midwest
- Who's Who in the South and Southwest
- Who's Who in the West
- Who's Who in California
- Who's Who in Oregon and the Western States
- Who's Who in Colorado
- Men and Women of Hawaii
- International Who's Who (often worthwhile)
- World Biography
- Outstanding Young Men of America (only if desperate; has lots of Jaycees and other middle-level people)

There are also volumes that have considerable detail on the people they list. First, Current Biography, which has long sketches on various types of 'elite' persons from 1942



to the present. We usually turn to it in hopes of further detail, but on occasion it turns up someone not found in Who's Who in America. Consult its cumulative indexes. Second, for detail, there is the Biography Index, which from 1947 to the present lists references to all biographical information on persons that appears in books or a large list of periodicals. It is useful for finding those not found elsewhere and for getting great detail on a person. Third, the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature also lists biographical articles, but since the coverage of the Biography Index is more comprehensive, the Reader's Guide should be used only for people prior to 1947. Fourth, the New York Times Index is a goldmine on names (and on subjects of interest to power structure research). Fifth, when searching for detail, there are two 'historical' sources that are kept somewhat up to date with new volumes -- the Dictionary of American Biography and the National Cyclopedia of American Biography. The National Cyclopedia is 49 volumes with 52,000 entries, and is often more useful than the better-known Dictionary of American Biography.

So much for general biographical volumes that have great detail. Turning to a final general resource, there are various 'social registers' and 'blue books' for several major cities. They often list the schools, clubs, and voluntary association memberships of 'leading families', but never list information on business connections or foundation and university trusteeships. These books are sometimes useful in establishing the social class of the person being studied. Along with certain private schools and gentlemen's clubs, they are important as 'social indicators' of the American upper class.

The most important of these blue books is the Social Register, published by the Social Register Association, 381 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10016, in yearly editions for New York, Washington, Philadelphia-Wilmington, Chicago, Boston, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Cincinnati-Dayton, San Francisco, Baltimore, and Buffalo. The Social Register Association also publishes a Social Register Locator, which contains the name and home city for each person listed in the twelve city editions. The city editions of the Social Register contain name, address, wife's maiden name, college attended, and social clubs.

We were also able to obtain blue books for Los Angeles (Los Angeles Blue Book, Box 1500, Beverly Hills), for Southern California (Southwest Blue Book, 3418 No. Broadway, Los Angeles), for Denver (Denver Social Record, 2880 So. High St.), and for Miami (Social Register of Greater Miami, 1830 W. 24th St., Sunset Island #3, Miami Beach). All are very useful. Such bluebooks also exist for Detroit, Houston, New Orleans, and Seattle, but copies are apparently not for sale -- we had to get ours from libraries and underground newspapers. All contain helpful 'social' information about clubs and schools. One other book with much information, but which is not as accurate an 'indicator' of upper classness, is The California Register (Social Blue Book of California, Inc., 457 So. Robertson Blvd., Beverly Hills).

The sources mentioned to this point are for locating upper-class people in general. They are usually the most valuable sources for all types of power structure research. We now turn to more specialized resources.

### WOMEN

The one best source on women is Who's Who of American Women. There is also a 'middle-class' book, Outstanding Young Women of America, which has not been very helpful. For rich girls there is a Debutante Register, which purports to list the names and addresses of all deb's for the given year, but is probably not worth the expense (\$40). Girls who pay the money to list their picture in the front of the book also include their schools, sororities, and clubs underneath the picture.

### ETHNIC GROUPS

There are also various ethnic Who's Who's. The most important for our work has been Who's Who in World Jewry, which has 1955 and 1965 editions. There is also a Who's Who of American Jews, 1936-38. The other ethnic volumes are

- American Catholic Who's Who (in several editions)
- Who's Who in Colored America
- Scott's Blue Book (Negroes)
- Italian American Who's Who
- Who's Who in Polish America



## CELEBRITIES

The one best book here is Cleveland Amory's Celebrity Register, which often has interesting tidbits on important members of the upper class ('they' are celebrities, too, among other things).

## SUMMARY ON BIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES

As can be seen, there are a great many potential sources. Many more can be found in the reference books to be noted in a separate section, References on References. In general, though, it's Who's Who in America, Who's Who in World Jewry, Who's Who of American Women, Current Biography, and the Biography Index that will be most productive among general sources. However, some of the volumes yet to be discussed under other headings are sometimes even better than several of these.

## **BUSINESSMEN AND FINANCIERS**

Since big businessmen are one of the major concerns of power structure research (they being the heart of the upper class, the providers for the playboys and clotheshorses), references in this section are often as valuable as general sources. There are two or three key volumes, and many, many minor ones.

The most important business source is Poor's Register of Corporations, Directors, and Executives, which lists alphabetically about 27,000 banks and industrials (along with their directors, officers, and a little business information), as well as alphabetically listing in the back most of the directors and executives contained in the earlier section, along with their date of birth, college, and (usually but not always) other directorships. It is very useful when you only want to look at a person business-wise, or as a second-best source when a person is not in a general or business Who's Who. Poor's also puts out a Security Dealers of North America, on stock dealers and investment bankers.

Overlapping Poor's in large measure are the various Moody's manuals, which we have used very little:

Banking and Finance  
Industrials

Utilities  
Transports

Another source we have used very little are the Dun and Bradstreet publications, which are better on business details than the people involved:

Million Dollar Directory (has a section on top management)

Middle Market Directory (lists companies worth 1/2 to 1 million, but has no section on management)

Directory of Shopping Centers (lists owners and developers and leasors)

Finally, under business and finance, there are many specialized Who's Who's, the first two of which we have used with some little success and are highly recommended. The others are worth exploring for specific questions:

Who's Who in Commerce and Industry (often the second or third source we turn to after Who's Who in America)

Who's Who in Banking (very useful)

Rand McNally's International Banker's Register

Who's Who in Insurance

Who's Who in Railroading in North America

Who's Who in Advertising

Who's Who in Public Relations

Who's Who in Publishing

Who's Who in Public Utilities, 1942

Who's Who in Aviation and Astronautics

Who's Who in Engineering, 1922-54

Walker's Directory of Southern California Directors and Corporations

Shipping World Yearbook and Who's Who (1100 biographies of leaders in the marine and allied industries)

Who's Who in Atoms, 1959



## **LAWYERS**

Corporate lawyers are as important as businessmen and financiers in the upper class scheme of things, but they are harder to research because the basic reference volumes on them provide no overall alphabetical listings for the whole country. Instead, lawyers are usually indexed by city or state, which makes general searches quite time-consuming if only the name is known. One exception to this is Who's Who in Law, 1937, which had at its publication only a 50% overlap in its entries with Who's Who in America.

The one best source on lawyers is Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory, which lists lawyers by states, cities, and law firms, and tells the educational background of each lawyer. Sometimes (hardly ever, actually) the person's net worth is estimated, and very often the corporate clients of the big law firms are listed (but New York firms no longer list 'representative clients').

Since most judges are lawyers, the Directory of American Judges may be helpful for some investigations. The Lawyer's Directory and the American Bar Association Directory do not go beyond (or match) Martindale-Hubbell. There is a 1957 volume on Women Lawyers in the U.S. which is pretty good, and older volumes on Eminent Judges and Lawyers of the American Bar (1932, 1951) and Eminent Judges and Lawyers of the Northwest (1843-1955).

In summary, there is no one ideal resource on lawyers. We have had our best success by using Martindale-Hubbell in conjunction with Poor's Register and Who's Who in America. To study one large corporate law firm with these three reference sources is to have an immediate impact on one's perception of the American power structure.

## **POLITICAL LEADERS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS**

The one best starting point here is Who's Who in American Politics, which lists party officials as well as elected and appointed members of the government. Also very useful are the volumes of the Congressional Directory, which gave not-quite-enough information on Congressmen, court officials, foreign diplomats, members of departments and agencies, governors, and members of the press who frequent the House and the Senate. There is an International Yearbook and Statesmen's Who's Who that is not bad, as well as a State Department Biographical Register which lists only birth date, educational background, and career history for people in such agencies as State, Peace Corps, USIA, AID, and the Foreign Service.

For earlier days, there is a Who's Who in the Nation's Capitol, 1921-38, and there is the Directory of American Judges mentioned in the previous section. Needless to say, many political people can be found via sources noted in earlier sections. The important ones tend to be members of the upper class, or high-level, high-salaried employees in businesses, law firms, foundations, and institutes controlled by members of the upper class.

## **FOUNDATION OFFICERS AND TRUSTEES**

The Foundation Directory gives the officers and trustees and donors for most foundations. It lists names alphabetically in the back. No background information, but a very valuable book. For example, it can be checked against social registers or businessmen references such as Poor's Register when nothing can be found in any of the Who's Who's. The study of a big foundation's trustees and officers is almost as revealing as the study of a large law firm.

## **CULTURAL WORKMEN**

The pivotal role of 'experts' and intellectuals as advisers and philosophers for the higher circles has become a research topic of some little interest. The following volumes may be of use in scholarly forays into universities and other outposts of these cultural workmen:



American Men of Science  
Directory of American Scholars  
Leaders in American Science  
Who's Who in American Art  
Who's Who in American Education  
Contemporary Authors (very useful)  
Presidents and Deans of American Colleges and Universities  
Biographical Dictionary of American Architecture  
American Men of Medicine  
Rockefeller Foundation Directory of Fellowship Awards for the Years 1917-1950

## **CITIES**

We have done little on cities per se, so have not gone beyond Robert K. Lamb's excellent How to Research Your Own Hometown (from Human Organization), which was written in 1952 for new businessmen and such like, but has been distributed by several New Left organizations. It tells us, among other things, how to utilize Planning Commission surveys and studies, Chamber of Commerce information, and Polk's City Directory. Another good thing to remember is that the tax assessor's office will have the names of all landowners on file, often listing on one card all the holdings of the biggest owners.

Polk's City Directory, developed for businessmen, is the general name for many, many individual city directories put out by this company. From our point of view, the most important information these directories give is the address, occupation, and business ownership (if any) of every person in the telephone book (which, for example, makes it possible to use a map to quickly pinpoint the professional and executive neighborhoods of the town). Another section tells whether or not the person owns the home in which he lives. These directories are not available in many libraries (too expensive, not enough call for them).

## **HISTORICAL STUDIES**

There are several very good volumes for 'historical' studies -- 'historical' meaning anything pre-World War II. (Our interests usually do not extend past the last quarter of the 19th century, which saw the rise of a national upper class, but it is certainly possible to trace some of the institutions and local branches of this upper class much, much further back into American history.) Before listing these sources, let it be recalled that Who's Who in America, the Social Register, and many of the other references in earlier sections have editions that carry them back many years (the Social Register began in 1888, for example, and used to publish for more than the present 14 cities). Other sources:

**Dictionary of American Biography.** A multi-volumed work periodically brought up to date, containing good sketches of Americans from the 1600s through the 1950s.

**National Cyclopedia of American Biography.** Similar to the first reference, and also kept up to date. Does not necessarily overlap the first as to names in it. Very useful.

**Who Was Who in America.** Very valuable for our purposes. Sometimes have to hunt in older Who's Who's for more information on the person as Who Was Who biographies are often shorter

**Guide to American Biography.** For the years 1607-1938, this tells of books and articles on leading Americans. Has subject index (pp. 503-504) by occupation (e.g. business, government, industry, law) as well as by name (page 507ff). More recent biographies should be searched for under the person's name in the subject index of the library catalogue or in Reader's Guide or Biography Index.

**Louis Kaplan's Bibliography of American Autobiographies.** As complete a listing of autobiographies through 1945 as is ever likely to be compiled. Slightly annotated. Lists persons alphabetically. Also has a subject index where you can find out which autobiographies are about financiers, bankers, industrialists, clergymen (Episcopal), lawyers, and other groups that might relate to studies of the upper class in a given area or era.



For more recent autobiographies, use library catalogues and Biography Index.

New York Times Index. Tells of New York Times profiles and obituaries, along with other reportage in this official Establishment source.

A Woman of the Century. Compiled by Mary Livermore and Francis Willard, this is a large volume of very complete sketches on a great many women of the 19th century.

Who's Who in American Women, 1914-15. I found this very informative in one study.

Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature. The best substitute for the Biography Index prior to 1947.

There are also certain older Who's Who's. Check library catalogues when you do specific studies. For example, there are Who's Who in the Confederacy, and Who's Who's for Railroading (1885-1946), Finance, Banking and Insurance (1911-25), Government (1930), Journalism (1925-28), American Jewry (1936-38), the Clergy (1935), the Nation's Capitol (1921-38), Women of California (1922), Association Executives (1935), and California (1928-29, 1939-40).

We also have looked under notable and under the names of specific cities to find such things as

- Notable Men of Atlanta and Georgia, 1913
- Notable Men of Illinois, 1912
- Notable Men of the West, 1902
- Notable New Yorkers of 1896-98

Some books catalogued under clubs in the library will list club memberships:

- The Clubs of New York, 1873, by Francis Fairfield
- Club Women of New York, 1904, 1906-07, 1910-11
- The Clubs of Boston, 1891
- Club Members of New York, 1940, by Frieda Evertt

## **REFERENCES ON REFERENCES**

There are several books to turn to that have information on where to look for biographical information on specific topics. The best and most recent is Biographical Dictionaries: An International Guide, 1967, Gale Research Co., 1400 Book Tower, Detroit. Costs \$20. Excellent. Others are:

- Guide to American Directories (tells of business directories, among others; useful)
- Guide to Reference Books (has sections on biography and business; useful)
- Encyclopedia of Associations (lists 12,000 associations, giving addresses, chief officers, number and type of members, program and activities)
- Business Information: How to Find It and Use It, 1955 (wish it were updated)

## **REFERENCES ON SUBJECT MATTER**

All previous references focus on people. They are useful for telling us such things as who members of the upper class are, who works for upper-class associations, types of interconnections among the big rich, and the key social, economic, political, and cultural affiliations of the big rich. If you want to research a given company, association, or institute of the upper class, or private schools, or high society social life, then use the following sources as starting points by looking under the topic or institution in question:

Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature (lists articles in major periodicals, going back to 1890)

Social Sciences and Humanities Index (lists articles in scholarly and esoteric journals, from 1907)



New York Times Index (articles in the New York Times since the beginning of time)

Business Periodicals Index (lists articles in business and financial periodicals, going back to 1958)

Public Affairs Information Service (lists, by subject matter of course, articles from a wide variety of sources, including the government, going back to 1915)

Legal Periodicals Index

Foreign Affairs Bibliography (from 1919 to 1962, in four volumes; a public service of the Council on Foreign Relations)

## ***ADDENDUM***

This guide should end as it began, with a disclaimer. This is not the final word on finding out about our leaders and their activities. There are a few more sources we could list, and, I am sure, even more that we don't know about. What we have outlined here are the sources that have been valuable in most of our studies of the .2-.3% who own 22% of all privately-held wealth and 60-70% of all privately-held corporate wealth. On certain questions, there is no substitute for your own fresh search for relevant sources: Women's Wear Daily, privately-published genealogies, fox-hunting guides, or alumni bulletins may be the perfect answer on some given topic.

And let me hear what you learn about the power structure.

Cowell College  
University of California  
Santa Cruz, Cal. 95060  
July 15, 1969

I am grateful to research assistants Allan Hunter and Sonne Lemke for their help in developing this guide.

