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CLASS AND PRESTIGE ORIGINS IN THE AMERICAN ELITE

by

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The relation of economic privilege to political power is a prominent issue in American social science, and one approach to its study has led to the examination of elite recruitment and activity. All studies of this topic have found considerable overrepresentation of men from upper and upper middle class families in top positions in powerful public and private sector institutions (e.g., Matthews, 1960; Keller, 1963; Mintz, 1975; Dye, 1979). Prewitt and Stone (1973: 136) summarize the evidence with the statement:

> The tiny group, consisting primarily of men, that directs the political economy of the United States is overwhelmingly recruited from the wealthier families of society. Few persons reach elite positions in political and economic life unless they are born to wealth, acquire it fairly early in life, or at least have access to it.

Moreover, privileged social origins characterize large proportions of leaders in all groups examined not only in the United States but also in dozens of other countries (see Putnam, 1976 for a review of the literature).

Most research, measuring social origins by father's occupation, has found that those with professional or managerial fathers are disproportionately represented in elite positions (e.g., Keller, 1963). Others attempt to identify a far smaller group (less than 1% of the population), the upper class, and study its occupancy of top positions (Domhoff, 1967, 1971; Dye, 1979). Domhoff, using such facts as attendance at an elite prep school or membership in an exclusive social club as indicators of upper class membership, concludes that the upper class is found in top institutional positions far in excess of its proportions in the population as a whole (1967, 1971). He argues further that its overrepresentation is due to its cohesion and group consciousness. In his view, upper-class cohesion rests on an exclusive nationwide network of informal connections, including attendance at select private schools, membership in exclusive private clubs, vacations at specific resorts and intermarriage (1967, 1971; Baltzell, 1964; Blumberg and Paul, 1975).

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Members of the upper class, sharing both similar origins and experiences and linked indirectly and directly, tend to trust one another more than outsiders. As a result, non-members are handicapped in the achievement of an elite position because they are excluded from the social institutions in which important informal relations are forged.

Despite the overwhelming consistency of the evidence on social origins and elite recruitment, very important questions remain. Thus, while the social homogeneity of American elites in the past is well documented, the current extent of homogeneity is open to question, as some have found heterogeneity to be increasing. For example, reviewing the social class origins of elite members in several institutional sectors through the early 1960's, Keller found some evidence that the representation of those from working class origins was growing (Keller, 1963: 205-7). Nevertheless, she declared that social class factors continue to play a significant role in elite recruitment. Also without a definitive answer is whether the relative importance of social origins for elite entry varies by institutional sector. Putnam, for one, after reviewing numerous studies of elite recruitment, concludes that business elites tend to come from the most privileged origins, followed next by top-level federal officials and then by federal legislators (Putnam, 1976: 22-26).

Little is known about the role of social origins once an elite position has been attained. If Domhoff's argument on the importance of interaction in upper-class social institutions is correct, one would expect upper-class origins to be advantageous even within elite groups. This would result in differentiation _within_ elite groups according to social origins, with key positions and

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network centrality being disproportionately held by those from the upper class. But this expectation is contradicted by the implications of the pluralist view. In general, pluralists contend that the link between class background and policy-making behavior is weak (e.g., Polsby, 1980). Implied is that, although privileged social origins may be an asset in the achievement of an elite position, they are of little consequence to activities or positions within the elite.

A final related issue concerns the kind of origins that matter for the achievement of an elite position. As some recent research has emphasized (e.g., Wright and Perrone, 1977; Wright, 1979; Robinson and Kelley, 1979), the bulk of American stratification research over the last few decades has concerned dimensions of *status*; that is, it is based on a conception of stratification as a continuum of fine distinctions, without sharp breaks or boundaries, and has focused on what might be taken as indicators of generalized prestige, such as occupation and education. In contrast to this tradition, recent research in a neo-Marxist spirit has revived the categorical notion of *class*, which derives from the organization of production. A measure of class position in the social relations of production has been found to be at least as useful as the traditional status variables in predicting income (Wright and Perrone, 1977; Wright, 1979).

With some notable exceptions, such as the work of Domhoff, most research on elite origins derives from the status conception of stratification. But both status and class deserve consideration in an examination of the impact of social origins on elite position. On behalf of a consideration of class, the view of Marxist class analysis can be noted--namely, that ownership of a business and control over the labor of others confer distinct advantages to members of the bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and, in contemporary capitalism, managers.

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These groups are seen as uniquely able to accumulate wealth and political power (Wright, 1979: 224). In addition, growing up in a property-owning rather than a laboring family might offer related cultural and social skills such as experience in giving rather than taking orders and a belief in one's leadership ability.

In this paper, we examine the relationship of class and status origins to elite positions, using a unique sample of interviews with top position holders in powerful public and private sector organizations in 1971-72. We address the following major questions: (1) What is the representation of individuals from different class and status groups in the American elite? (2) To what extent are there differences along these lines within the elite in such matters as routes of entry into it or current standing in it? (3) Are there marked tendencies for interaction within the elite to take place along class or status lines?

DATA

The data we use are taken from the American Leadership Study, conducted by the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University in 1971-72. These data are well suited for examining the above questions since they include extensive social background, current activity and sociometric information for a sample of 545 elite position holders in a variety of institutional sectors that have a broad impact on policymaking and political processes in the United States. Ten sectors were selected for study on the basis that their leaders appear to exert significant influence on electoral politics, governmental actions, the definition of national issues or public opinion. These are: _Fortune_ 500 industrial corporations; _Fortune_ 300 non-industrial corporations; holders of large fortunes (these first three we combine into a single "Business" sector); labor unions; political parties; voluntary organizations; mass media; Congress; political appointees in

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the federal government; and federal civil servants.[1] We refer to the top position holders in these institutions as the elite, although we recognize that others might define the national elite in somewhat different terms.

Within each sector, a random sample of approximately 50 persons was interviewed. The 484 resulting interviews constituted the positional sample. It was supplemented by a snowball sample of 61 other persons named as influential by several of the original respondents. However, the analysis reported here uses data only from the positional interviews. We exclude the snowball interviews because a comparison of the social origins of snowball and positional sample members revealed that the former group had a greater proportion of fathers with high status occupations and a college degree. The completion rate for the positional sample was 73%.

The design in terms of sectors, although a necessity in a broad elite study, causes problems for any analysis. The definition of the sampling universe varies by sector so that, in this sense, the study is composed of ten distinct samples. Moreover, the sectors probably do not have equal influence on national policy, although it is not possible to assign a meaningful weight to the influence of each. To meet these problems, wherever possible we report results by sector or, at least, control for sector in our analysis. Nonetheless, for convenience in summarizing, we at times use figures for the overall sample.

The data include detailed social origins, such as the occupation and education of the respondent and his or her parents, as well as extensive information on his or her attitudes on national issues, current activities and organizational memberships. These two last are of special relevance for an elite study. For example, from the very detailed information about organizational memberships, we are able to identify whether the respondent belongs to any upper-class social clubs (listed by Domhoff, 1971, ch. 1) and whether he or she

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is a member of the major policy-planning organizations (Moore, 1979: 685). Each respondent was also asked to report memberships on boards of trustees, boards of directors, and Federal government advisory committees; testimony before Congressional committees; as well as recent press or television interviews, speeches given, and other indicators of communications output. We use this information to create measures of elite-related activities (for details, see Moore, 1979: 684-689). Finally, the interviews focused in part on the respondent's policy-related activities on a national issue in which he or she recently had been deeply involved. A series of sociometric questions asked for the names of persons with whom he or she discussed

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the issue as well as those the respondent believed to be nationally influential on it. We use these to construct various sociometric measures.

Classifying elite members' social origins

In classifying elite social origins, we use both a neo-Marxist definition of class and the more usual parental occupation and education variables. Because the class variable is less familiar and its categories are subject to dispute (see Robinson and Kelley, 1979; Attewell and Fitzgerald, 1980; Aldrich and Weiss, 1981), we explain in detail our definition and operationalization of it.

According to Wright and Perrone (1979: 33), the traditional Marxist concept of class results in the identification of three major classes in capitalist society: (1) capitalists: those who own the means of production and employ others, (2) the petty bourgeoisie: those who own the means of production but do not employ others, and (3) workers: those who do not own the means of production and work for others. Wright and Perrone argue that in contemporary capitalist society, it is reasonable to distinguish a fourth important group, managers: those who do not own the means of production but who supervise the work of others (Wright and Perrone, 1977: 34).

One difficulty with this scheme is the absence of a clear boundary between the capitalist class and the petit bourgeoisie (Wright and Perrone, 1977; Aldrich and Weiss, 1981: 280-2). It is not clear whether one employee is sufficient to make one a capitalist or whether a distinction should be made between large and small employers. Aldrich and Weiss (1981), in particular, argue that workforce size is a crucial variable which must be considered in analysis of the capitalist class. In order to incorporate a distinction based on workforce size, we have chosen to classify business owners with ten or more employees as capitalists and those with 0-9 employees as petty bourgeoisie. Although somewhat arbitrary, this cutting point has the virtue of allowing a

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comparison to the class composition of the United States as determined by Wright and Perrone.

Hence, we classify individuals on the basis of father's social class according to the following categories:

1. capitalist: owner of business with at least 10 employees
2. petty bourgeois: owner of business with 0-9 employees
3. manager: supervises work of others but not self-employed
4. worker: not self-employed and does not supervise the work of others[2]

Our classification of elite individuals according to father's occupation and parental education follows more conventional lines. In classifying by father's occupation, we distinguish professional, proprietary, and managerial occupations from other white-collar workers; additionally, we retain a broad category for blue-collar occupations and one for farm owners. In terms of parental education, we distinguish college-educated parents from others.[3]

Social origins in the American elite

The first question to be addressed is: what are the class and status origins of the American elite? Related to this is the question of how the social origins of the elite compare to those of the general population. Are those with high status parents overrepresented in the elite, as past studies have found? Do disproportionate numbers of the offspring of the capitalist class occupy elite positions? We answer these questions in this section. In the next, we consider the relationship of social origins to position and activities within the elite.

Table 1 presents the basic data on social origins, including father's class, occupation and education and mother's education. It shows these by institutional sector as well as for the entire elite sample. In order to assess

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over - or underrepresentation, the table also provides comparable parental class, occupation and education data for the American population.

The general population data for father's occupation and parents' educations are calculated from the combined NORC General Social Surveys for 1972-80. Since nearly all members of the elite sample are male (95%) and were over 40 at the time they were interviewed (94%), these two characteristics have been used to define the relevant American population for comparison.[4] There is great difficulty in obtaining population data for father's social class as we have defined it. Ideally, the data would characterize the older male population from which the elite is drawn, referring in historical terms, to the class composition of the population during the 1920's and 1930's, when most of our respondents were growing up. But we could not find this information. We use instead the only data we could locate on class composition of the U.S. population as defined here, taken from the 1969 Survey of Working Conditions, as reported by Wright and Perrone (1977). In comparison to the 1920's and 1930's, these data probably overstate the proportion of managers, while understating those of workers and members of the petty bourgeoisie. Nonetheless, we think that the general pattern of class origins in the elite is clear enough to withstand any ambiguity caused by the absence of an exact standard of comparison.[5]

The most striking result in the table is the strong overrepresentation of those from capitalist families in the elite. Over one in five members of the elite sample come from such origins, but only one in sixty members of the comparable population group is in this category. Also overrepresented in the sample are persons from <u>petit bourgeois</u> origins, with over a fourth of the sample but only 10% of the population in this group. Combining the two categories of ownership shows that nearly one in two sample members had a father who owned his own business. On the other hand, workers' sons and daughters are

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greatly underrepresented in the sample--about 16% versus nearly half of the population. The children of managerial fathers are found in the elite sample in roughly the same proportion as in the population.

Moreover, the children of business owners are not concentrated in just a few sectors, but are overrepresented in all the sectors in the survey. The labor sector has the sparsest representation of this group and by far the highest representation of the sons and daughters of workers. With the additional exceptions of civil servants and the media, at least half of every sector is composed of the children of owners. This proportion rises to two-thirds among party leaders and those in Congress. Indeed, nearly a third of Congress is composed of the children of capitalist fathers; this group also comprises over a quarter of business leaders.

The elite sample is also unrepresentative of the general population in terms of father's occupation. Nearly three out of five fathers of elite sample members were in high status white-collar positions (professional, proprietor,[6] manager) compared to about one in six in the comparison group.

Most sectors roughly approximate the occupational distribution of the sample as a whole, with about 50-60% having high-status white-collar fathers. As was true of father's social class, the major sectoral exception from the general pattern is found among labor leaders: three-fourths are the children of blue-collar or service workers, a far higher proportion than in the sample as a whole (or the population, for that matter), and only 19% have high-status white-collar fathers. An exception in the other direction is the media, where three-quarters have high-status fathers, including 40% who are the children of professionals. Business leaders also have a high percentage (71%) of high-status fathers. Congress is unusual for its higher proportion of farm-owner fathers, probably reflecting the rural origins of many members of that sector.

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The overrepresentation of the children of high-status fathers in most elite sectors suggests that elites' parents had more education than most others of their generations. This is indeed the case, as the last two columns of Table 1 show. One third of fathers and one fifth of mothers of elite sample members graduated from college, at times when tiny proportions of the population had as much education. In specific sectors, namely Congress and labor, fewer mothers and fathers of elite members had college educations, but only for the mothers of labor leaders does the proportion in an elite sector come close to that of the population. Again, the media are an exception in the other direction; a very high proportion of their fathers, but not of their mothers, had a college education. In other sectors, the percentage of parents who are college graduates is close to that in the overall sample.

The combination of class and status dimensions sheds an interesting light on Putnam's (1976: 22-26) well-known generalization that business leaders are from more privileged origins than political administrators, who in turn have higher origins than legislative elites. The differences in status origins among sectors generally are in accord with Putnam's statement. Thus, in comparison to political appointees and members of Congress, a very high percentage of the fathers of business leaders fall into the three high-status occupational categories. And of the three sectors, Congress has the lowest percentage of fathers in the top occupational categories and also the lowest percentage of parents with college educations. But in terms of the class dimension, the members of Congress move from the bottom to the top. They have the highest percentage of fathers who were owners and also the highest percentage of capitalist fathers. The discrepancy is a result of the high percentage of fathers of members of Congress who were farm owners, a group which falls into the owner class but is placed low in terms of occupational prestige. Accordingly, the

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class dimension imparts a different perception of elite social origins than do the status dimensions.

Overall, the class and status origins of the elite sample are far different from those of the comparison groups in the U.S. population. Elites are far more likely to come from occupationally and educationally privileged families than are non-elite persons. This is not, of course, a surprising finding, but what is striking among the differences in social origins of elite and non-elite persons is the large percentage of elites from capitalist families. Origins in the capitalist class appear to be a significant advantage in achieving a top level position in a powerful public or private institution.

Differentiation by socioeconomic origins within the elite

Two broad questions concerning differences by class and status origins within the elite remain. First, are elite members from different class and status backgrounds similar with respect to other background factors, such as types of education? It may be, for example, that whatever their origins elite members tend to have attended the most prestigious colleges, that these schools serve as entry portals, even for those from the least favored backgrounds. Second, do social origins coincide with differences in elite position, as indicated by current activities or influence? Much of the literature suggests that common origins and common culture form the cement for powerful informal networks within the elite. If so, then those entering the elite from less favored backgrounds may remain on the periphery of influence, while those from the most favored backgrounds may be at its center.

Both of these questions are addressed by the results reported in Table 2. The table shows the results of regression analyses of five social background characteristics, seven current activity measures, and three sociometric variables.[7] Because we are interested in whether these variables are related to

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class and status background, they are the dependent variables in the regressions. The class and status background variables, which are represented by sets of dummy variables,[8] are independent variables in regressions run separately for each of them. For each, the first column reports the increment to the R^2 produced when the variable is added to an equation already containing sector.[9] The remaining columns for the variable report the coefficients of its dummy variables. These coefficients have been calculated in such a way that they represent differences, in standard deviation units of the dependent variable, and with sector controlled, between each category represented by a dummy variable and the so-called omitted category. The significance tests for the coefficients are, then, tests of those differences; the overall effect of each class or status variable is tested by its increment to the R^2.

An example may help to clarify this set-up. The R^2 increment of father's social class to the equation for the COLLEGE variable shows that class background is significantly related to the quality of the college attended by an elite sample member, even with sector controlled. The coefficient of _petit bourgeois_ origins shows that those from such origins were less likely, by .50 standard deviation units, to attend high-prestige colleges than were those from capitalist origins, who form the omitted category. This difference is with sector controlled.

To begin with, class and status background is related, and sometimes strongly so, to the other aspects of social background that we have analyzed here. The relation of father's class to the background variables generally demonstrates the advantages of those with capitalist origins (the omitted category). These are visible in the overall pattern of differences in the education variables, and especially in the differences in attendance at an elite private high school (PREPSCHL). Contrary to what might be expected, however, the children of

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small entrepreneurs are not the next most advantaged group. Indeed, in educational terms, they seem the least advantaged of the four groups. There is little difference between the children of managers and those of workers, although it deserves note that the former come from the oldest American families (GENRES).

Regarding father's occupation, advantages in background adhere to those with professional fathers (the omitted category) or managerial ones, with the children of proprietors and other white-collar workers generally not far behind. Specifically, the children of professional and managerial fathers are the most likely to have attended elite private schools and high-quality colleges. Falling at the bottom in both these respects are the children of blue-collar and farm origins. These two groups are clearly the least advantaged in general background, as they also have less education (OWNED) than those in the four white-collar categories. In addition, the children of blue-collar fathers come from the most recently arrived families.

Finally, in terms of parental education, the children of college-educated parents are generally the most advantaged in overall social background. Although the differences made by mother's education are not that large, as is indicated by the relatively small R^2 figures, the differences associated with father's education are defined fairly sharply. The children of fathers who earned at least a baccalaureate have attended more prestigious educational institutions, and the children of fathers with the very highest educational credentials, a post-baccalaureate degree (the omitted category), have themselves the highest educational attainment. Father's education is also associated with generations of residence in the United States.

By and large, the differences we have just described form a set of related differences in background that, broadly speaking, constitute what most would

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expect to find. It is worth noting, nonetheless, that the parallels do not hold in every detail. There are not, for example, neatly graduated differences for each step in father's social class, as we have already called to attention in the extreme differences within the sample between the children of capitalists and those of the petty bourgeoisie.

We are now at the point of asking what these differences in class and status origins imply about current position within the elite. The answer, first of all, is: less than one might think. For most of the indicators of current position and influence in the elite, class and status origins make little or no difference when their effects are assessed by a difference-of-R^2 test. Among the sociometric indicators, for instance, there is only one significant relation by this test. Among the indicators of current activities and visibility, there are no significant differences for the number of federal advisory boards (FEDADV) or corporate boards (CORPDIR) on which an individual sits, the number of times he or she has testified before Congress (TESTCONG), or the level of that person's communications output (COMMOUT). Although there are occasionally significant regression coefficients for some of these variables (e.g., for the children of workers on level of communications output), their presence does not change the general pattern of little or no relation.

On the whole, those indicators of current activities for which class and status origins make the most difference are the ones often thought to reflect the influence of an "upper class," expressed in large part through informal connections. These indicators include membership in exclusive social clubs (ELCLUBS), on the boards of trustees of non-profit organizations (NONPROF), and in influential policy-planning organizations (ELITEORG). By and large, the

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differences on these indicators correspond with the differences in general social background we have identified above.

Judging again by a difference-of-R^2 test, membership in exclusive social clubs is associated with father's class and education. In terms of class origins, the children of capitalists are the most likely to belong to such clubs, followed by the children of managers. In terms of father's education, the children of college graduates or those with post-graduate educations are the most likely to belong, while the children of fathers who did not graduate from high school are the least likely. Membership on the boards of trustees of nonprofit organizations is associated with father's class, occupation, and education. The differences according to father's class and education parallel those for club membership. In terms of father's occupation, those of blue-collar and farm origins are less likely to be non-profit board members than are the children of white-collar fathers.

The biggest differences by background are for membership in elite policy-planning organizations, such as the Business Council and the Council on Foreign Relations, that are thought to be a key channel for upper-class influence on national policy (e.g., Domhoff, 1979; Dye, 1979). But father's class is not related to this sort of membership; rather, father's occupation and education are. The differences associated with father's education are somewhat unanticipated, as the children of fathers with post-baccalaureate degrees are among the least likely to be members. The differences associated with father's occupation are more expected and also large in magnitude. The children of professionals, followed by the children of managers, are most likely to belong; the children of lower white-collar workers and of farm owners are least likely.

These differences in elite activities are worthy of attention because of the significance that is often attributed to them.

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But it must be noted that the differences associated with background are, on the whole, not large, as is indicated by the size of the R^2 increases reported in the table and the magnitudes of the regression coefficients. Only in one instance does a background variable add more than 3% to the variance explained by sector membership. And only a few of the differences among categories of a background variable are larger than .4 standard deviation units. That these are indeed signs of relations of only modest strength is brought out by a comparison to the regression results for the other social background variables, such as attendance at a select prep school.

In terms of a larger picture, the results of this section are quite fundamental. We have already noted that class and status background has an important bearing on entry into the elite. This is especially true, of course, for father's social class. Further, according to the results presented early in this section, class and status origins correspond with other background differences that might be expected to affect position and influence within the elite. They affect not only the amount of education received but the prestige and quality of the educational institutions an elite person has attended. And they correspond with differences in generations of family residence in the United States. But class and status origins are surprisingly weak in predicting indicators of current elite position and influence. These origins are consistently related to only a few indicators, such as membership in exclusive social clubs. These few indicators do have an important theoretical status, but they are only weakly associated with class and status background.

Homophily in elite interaction

The proposition that informal relations tend to occur on the basis of

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common origins and culture is often viewed as central to the presumed hegemony of elite individuals of upper-class origins. This proposition is an instance of the homophily principle, which holds that persons tend to interact with others like themselves (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954). We have already tested it indirectly through the relation of class and status origins to sociometric indicators such as the number of interaction nominations an individual receives from others in the elite sample. These tests are indirect because the indicators were constructed by aggregation; hence, the equality of individuals of different socioeconomic origins could mask a tendency for interaction at the individual level to run along lines determined by origins.

To test the homophily principle directly, we use part of the data that provided the basis for the sociometric measures of the last section -- specifically, the nominations respondents provided when asked to name those with whom they were in personal contact concerning their issue of activity.[10] In this section, we report briefly an analysis of who named whom, focusing specifically on the extent to which respondents named others with the same class and status origins as themselves. Our analysis is based on who-to-whom tables, in which characteristics of respondents are tabulated by the same characteristics of the persons they named.

In constructing such a table, we can only use nominations to other sample members, since only for these do we know the socioeconomic backgrounds of both the respondents and the persons they named. A total of 645 nominations were to sample members; they were made by 279 sample members. However, because of missing data, not all of these nominations can be tabulated in each who-to-whom table. As a result, the tables are based on relatively small portions of the data, and it is impossible to control for sector, as we have done elsewhere in the paper. Obviously, our conclusions must be tentative.

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We have constructed a who-to-whom table for each class and status variable, and we have run each table in two different ways, one with the nomination as the unit that is counted (hence, respondents contribute unequally to the table) and one with the respondent as that unit (weighting his or her nominations in inverse proportion to their number). Space constraints prevent a full presentation of these tables, but some representative results, for father's social class, are presented as Table 3. The results are quite consistent for all the tables: There is no trace of a systematic pattern. None of the X^2 values is significant; none, in fact, even borders on significance. Inspection of the percentages reveals variations that are too weak and inconsistent to support even a qualified conclusion on behalf of homophily, as Table 3 illustrates.

In sum, there is no evidence here of homophily along lines determined by social origins. The fact that this conclusion is based on tables constructed from only parts of the data is partly redeemed by the consistency of the results. Although they are far from definitive, our results suggest that elite interaction patterns may be constrained by instrumental interests. Many writings about elites which presume a cohesion within ethnic- or class-derived groups assume that elite interactions are based to some degree on "elective affinity." But our results imply to us that instrumental interests may counteract the "taste" for others like oneself, and consequently cohesion based on social origins may be only of minor magnitude _within the elite_.

Conclusion

The relation of political power to the other axes of stratification is one of the classic issues in sociology and political science, dating back at least as far as the famous dictum in _The Communist Manifesto_ that, "political power, properly so-called, is merely the organized power of one class for

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oppressing another." The perspective inherent in this remark has influenced many descriptions of the American elite. It is visible in such well-known works as C. Wright Mills' The Power Elite and those of G. William Domhoff, and in many related pieces of empirical research (e.g., Domhoff, 1975). The point of view these represent is a familiar one, but not the only one. We start with it because it offers a useful background to the empirical findings we have presented here.

To begin with, this point of view is generally taken to imply a link between social origins and elite recruitment. Its adherents tend to identify the elite as extremely selective in terms of the social origins of its personnel, with social class of origin an especially important criterion of entry. Dye's work emphasizes this fundamental point as he finds that at least 25% of elites in major sectors come from upper class origins (1979: 169-70). This perspective also identifies a mechanism through which such narrow recruitment occurs. Namely, selection is accomplished through special socialization agencies, such as select private schools, which provide individuals with the social and cultural wherewithal to qualify as potential elite members. These institutions are, by and large, open chiefly to those of privileged origins.

Our research on the class and status origins of the American elite has produced results that agree in part with but also differ in part from this familiar portrayal. Agreement seems strongest on the selectivity of the elite. As others have noted, the children of professionals, proprietors, and managers are overrepresented in the elite, as are individuals with highly educated parents. But none of these concentrations of individuals with favored status origins seems sharp enough to impart a dominant character to the elite.

Such a character does appear in our findings on father's social class, and here too we are in broad agreement with the familiar portrayal. Truly

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striking is the proportion of individuals whose fathers were owners of businesses. Such persons make up about half the elite sample, and although we are unable to determine precise U.S. population figures to compare against the sample, it is obvious that the children of owners are highly overrepresented. This seems especially true for the sons and daughters of those we have labeled "capitalists," employers of 10 or more persons. This concentration along lines determined by class of origin becomes even more sharply defined when we include the children of managers into our reckoning. Thus, the children of men who controlled either property or the work of others make up an astounding 85% of the elite sample.

But we differ from the familiar portrait on the precise nature of class advantages. Domhoff and others describe elite selectivity in terms of a very small group of extremely privileged families, the upper class, whose members are highly overrepresented in the elite although they are not a majority of it. We have found a broader stream of recruitment, from the families of business owners. This produces a considerable overrepresentation of individuals who do not have upper-class origins--for example, the children of farm owners or of the *petit bourgeoisie*. It also leads to a stronger representation of a class group within the elite than is true of the upper class, as the children of business owners form a majority or a near majority of nearly all elite sectors.

Our findings are also at variance with the familiar portrait on the impact of social origins on current position and influence *within* the elite. We are unable to find much impact, despite the abundant evidence that class and status origins affect elite recruitment. We have examined the relation of social origins to activities and organizational memberships that might either reflect or magnify an elite individual's influence. Examples of the indicators we have

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considered are the number of times a person has testified before Congress and memberships in exclusive social clubs. But the background variables are only occasionally related to these indicators and even these few relations are modest in magnitude. The same basic pattern is found in our analysis of interaction within the elite, both in the analysis of aggregated sociometric indicators and in our homophily analysis. In short, we find little or no evidence that the influence of those with privileged origins is consolidated further by informal patterns of elite interaction or the solidarity cultivated in exclusive institutions.

Finally, although this is not clear from the empirical findings we have presented, we differ from the familiar portrait on the mechanisms giving rise to elite selectivity. This is an important difference because the selective character of the elite with respect to class origins is a phenomenon that demands some explanation. As we noted before, Domhoff and others explain the class selectivity of the elite in large part by pointing to the role of specific instit tions in channeling individuals into the elite. These institutions, it is argued, provide individuals with a cultural patina shared by elite members and with a set of connections, ultimately including some to potential sponsors within the elite, that assist in elite entry. Chief among these institutions are schools, and this explanation takes on added plausibility since very specific educational credentials seem prerequisites for elite positions in some other societies like France and England (Bottomore, 1964). But the evidence on behalf of this explanation is not very compelling as far as the U.S. is concerned. Only a small proportion (10%) of our sample has attended an exclusive private school, and even the proportion who attended a high-quality college (37%) is not large. As we indicated earlier, class and status origins are related to the prestige and quality of the educational

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institutions an elite individual has attended. We suspect that having attended a prestigious school is a definite advantage for entry into the elite. Nonetheless, the representation of individuals with this sort of education does not seem large enough to account for class advantage.

Two other categories of explanation, involving culture and wealth, seem plausible to us, although we can only advocate them in a speculative way. The influence of cultural values on social position is an important theme in sociology, and has been discussed often in relation to ethnic differences in mobility (cf. Steinberg, 1974). In that context, a critical distinction has been made between groups with entrepreneurial experiences in their countries of origin, eastern European Jews being perhaps the preeminent example, and those without those experiences, such as Southern Italians (Schooler, 1976). A classic argument traces the broad mobility differences between these groups to the cultural values engendered by these different backgrounds. We see the possibility of a similar argument in relation to entry into the elite, although we are not certain as to the exact details. In its essence, such an argument would depend on an outlook specific to the controllers of property (and perhaps also controllers of persons). Involved would be such factors as attraction to risk, commitment to the notion of a "career" that is independent of a specific organizational context, and a high value placed on control over the lives of others and over one's own work.

Wealth, of course, is useful in many concrete ways, such as the attainment of an elite education. Further, wealth and other material resources may interact with or even make possible the outlook that predisposes some toward an elite career. We have no direct data on inherited wealth in our sample, and in all probability the bulk of the sample members with owner fathers did not inherit great wealth (a majority of these fathers were in the "petty bourgeois" category).

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But is is likely that most of the children of owners inherited some wealth. In our view, wealth is significant in that it enables individuals to weather the vicissitudes of an elite career, especially in its early stages, when the improbability of success may drive men and women of lower social origins into a more stable career path.

To sum up, we believe that the major value of our research on the class and status origins of the American elite is in documenting the significant advantages enjoyed by the children of business owners, rather than merely the scions of the upper class, in attaining a national elite position in the United States. However, additional research is required to delineate the precise mechanisms through which such origins facilitate an elite career. It is also essential to examine further the consequences of this class selection for policy-influencing and policy-making behavior.

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<u>Footnotes</u>

1. Detailed descriptions of the universe for all sectors are given by Barton (1974); capsule descriptions are presented by Moore (1979: Table 1). The descriptions of a few sectors here may help to give the flavor of the study design. The universe for the political appointees sector, for example, included Secretaries, Under- and Assistant Secretaries, and General Counsels of Cabinet departments as well as heads and deputy heads of independent agencies. The civil servants sector included individuals in the two highest civil service grades (GS 17 and 18) from all Cabinet departments and independent agencies. In industrial corporations, the chief executive officers of the 500 largest corporations comprised the universe.

2. In classifying respondents, we use information they provided on a vita form pertaining to the work of their fathers when the respondents were 16 years old. Specifically, they were asked about their fathers: Was he self-employed? Did he employ others? Number he employed? Did he supervise others? The information gathered by these questions was sufficient to classify the class origins of nearly 80% of the positional sample members.

3. The parental education and occupation variables are constructed from the considerable information about family background that respondents provided on the vita form. The information about parental education is straightforward, but some of the information about father's occupation (when the respondent was 16 years old) is coded according to somewhat unconventional categories. We report these unconventional categories below, followed immediately in each case by the occupational categories in which we have placed them: "subprofessional (nurse, surveyor, personnel)," professional; "armed services, policemen, firemen, other protective services," blue collar; "unemployed, disabled," blue collar; "politics," professional; "business man, no further information," managerial. It should be noted that the number of respondents classified in these unconventional categories is very small (N=20).

   For each of the background variables, the percentage of missing data is as follows: father's occupation, 10.3%; father's education, 15.5%' mother's education, 16.9%.

4. In terms of age, the American population selected for comparison is that part over 40 at the time of the elite interviews. These are men born before 1932.

   Some of the occupational categories in the elite sample and the NORC surveys are not precisely comparable. The farm owner category in the elite sample includes only owners of farms, while in the NORC surveys this category includes farm tenants as well. Also, the NORC survey does not have a separate category for proprietors, but combines these with managers.

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5. The standard is less than fully exact for two reasons not mentioned in the text. The study used by Wright and Perrone includes women and excludes persons out of the labor force. The inclusion of women undoubtedly depresses the class distribution by comparison with that which holds for men only, while the exclusion of those out of the labor force probably works in the other direction, as individuals primarily in the lowest class category are dropped from the sample. We are uncertain as to the overall effect of these two features of the study.

6. Some readers may find it puzzling that the two occupational categories of ownership (proprietors and farm owners) contain a smaller percentage of the sample than do the categories of ownership for the class variable. The discrepancy is explained by the fact that many respondents whose fathers were self-employed described the kind of work their fathers did (e.g., lawyer, butcher) in answering the occupational question. In short, the discrepancy results from a meaningful distinction between the class and status dimensions. The same point holds for differences between the managerial categories.

7. The variables are: GENRES, generations of residence in the U.S. (range 1-4 with 1 = foreign born, 4 = 4 or more generations), PREPSCHL (1 = attended elite prep school, 0 = did not attend one), COLLEGE, quality of college attended (1 = attended high prestige college, 0 = did not attend one), OWNED, years of education, AGE (in years), ELITEORG, number of memberships in 17 elite policy-planning organizations, FEDADV, the number of memberships on federal advisory committees, TESTCONG, number of Congressional testimonies given (1-3, 1 = 0, 2 = 1, 3 = 2+), COMMOUT, level of communications output (1-7 with 1 = low), CORPDIR, number of corporate directorships held, NONPROF, number of nonprofit directorships held, ELCLUBS, elite club membership (0 = no, 1 = yes), INTVOTES, number of interaction nominations received from other sample members (0-5 with 0 = 0, 1 = 1...5 = 5+), REPVOTES, number of reputation nominations received from other sample members (0-5 as in INTVOTES), CENTRAL C, central circle membership (0 = no, 1 = yes). The central circle, a key feature of the elite network, is described in detail by Moore (1979). The lists of elite prep schools and clubs are taken from Domhoff 1971, chapter 1.

8. In our regression results for mother's and father's education, we have provided finer breakdowns of these variables than we report in Table 1.

9. Because the elite sample is actually composed of separate sector samples, sector is controlled throughout the analyses reported in this section.

10. Respondents were not constrained in making these nominations. They were, for example, allowed to make as many nominations as they liked and were not provided with predefined lists of names from which to choose.

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Table 1

Class and Status Origins in the Elite Sample
(all figures are percentages)

Sector	Father's Class					Father's Occupation							Father's Education		Mother's Education	
	Capi-talist	Petty Bourgeois	Manager	Worker	(N)	Profess-ional	Propri-etor	Mana-ger	Other White Collar	Blue Collar	Farm Owner	(N)	College Gradu-ate	(N)	College Gradu-ate	(N)
Overall Elite	21.3	27.3	35.4	16.0	(381)	21.9	21.0	15.9	6.7	25.6	9.0	(434)	32.0	(409)	20.1	(402)
Business	27.0	23.0	36.0	14.0	(100)	19.7	24.8	26.5	6.0	15.4	7.7	(117)	34.5	(113)	28.2	(110)
Labor	7.1	14.3	38.1	40.5	(42)	9.5	7.1	2.4	0.0	76.2	4.8	(42)	14.7	(34)	3.1	(32)
Party	21.1	44.7	23.7	10.5	(38)	27.3	25.0	13.6	6.8	22.7	4.5	(44)	31.8	(44)	26.2	(42)
Voluntary Org.	21.6	35.1	29.7	13.5	(37)	13.3	24.4	15.6	6.7	24.4	15.6	(45)	33.3	(39)	28.6	(42)
Media	18.2	25.0	45.5	11.4	(44)	40.8	24.5	12.2	10.2	10.2	2.0	(49)	44.9	(49)	16.3	(49)
Congress	32.3	35.5	22.6	9.7	(31)	19.0	23.8	4.8	7.1	23.8	21.4	(42)	17.6	(34)	8.8	(34)
Political Appt.	21.4	28.6	40.5	9.5	(42)	17.8	17.8	20.0	8.9	22.2	13.3	(45)	37.8	(45)	15.9	(44)
Civil Service	17.0	23.4	40.4	19.1	(47)	28.0	14.0	14.0	8.0	30.0	6.0	(50)	29.4	(51)	16.3	(49)
U.S. Population[a]	1.6	10.1	37.4	49.2	(1502)	4.7	12.2		5.3	47.8	30.0	(2295)	5.1	(1756)	2.8	(1919)

[a] Population figures for social class are calculated from Wright and Perrone 1977: 36-37 (Table 3 and Note 7); for occupation and education these figures are calculated from the combined NORC Social Surveys, 1972-80 for men born before 1932.

Table 2

Regression of social background, current activities, and sociometric measures[a] on class and status background, net of sector

	Father's social class[d]				Father's occupation[e]					
		semi-standardized coefficients[c]				semi-standardized coefficients[c]				
	R^2 net of sector[b]	petty bourgeois	manager	worker	R^2 net of sector[b]	proprietor	manager	other white collar	blue collar	farm owner
Social background										
GENRES	.026*	.04	.29*	-.16	.076**	-.55**	-.05	-.33	-.67**	-.05
AGE	.014	.15	-.11	.16	.024*	-.08	-.19	-.26	-.24	.31
PREPSCHL	.061**	-.71**	-.44**	-.52**	.061**	-.37*	-.18	-.59**	-.66**	-.64**
COLLEGE	.031*	-.50**	-.21	-.16	.028*	-.22	-.05	-.22	-.44**	-.46*
OWNED	.011	-.29*	-.10	-.13	.019*	-.04	-.04	-.07	-.34**	-.35*
Sociometric measures										
CENTRAL C	.004	-.05	.09	-.02	.017	-.24	.00	-.03	-.31*	-.22
INTVOTES	.001	-.05	.01	-.01	.002	-.01	.10	-.06	.08	.08
REPVOTES	.001	.03	.08	-.00	.004	-.16	-.12	-.18	-.15	-.07
Current activities										
ELITEORG	.005	-.18	-.04	-.13	.033**	-.39**	-.23	-.55**	-.37*	-.57**
FEDADV	.009	-.19	.05	-.08	.012	-.23	-.26	-.33	-.24	-.06
TESTCONG	.001	-.04	.00	-.09	.009	.06	-.01	-.02	-.20	-.19
COMMOUT	.012	-.20	-.13	-.36*	.023	.23	-.17	.12	-.05	-.25
NONPROF	.019*	-.38**	-.23	-.34*	.022*	-.06	.04	-.14	-.33*	-.38*
CORPDIR	.004	-.14	-.04	-.18	.014	-.25*	-.02	-.21	-.20	.09
ELCLUBS	.021*	-.40**	-.22	-.35*	.015	-.15	-.05	-.18	-.34*	-.30

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Table 2 (cont.)

	Father's education[f]					Mother's education[g]			
		semi-standardized coefficients[c]					semi-standardized coefficients[c]		
	R^2 net of sector[b]	college graduate	some college	high school graduate	not a high school graduate	R^2 net of sector[b]	some college	high school graduate	not a high school graduate
Social background									
GENRES	.066**	.25	.14	-.15	-.42*	.051**	-.06	-.30*	-.63**
AGE	.011	.21	.29	.25	.36*	.003	.00	.03	.14
PREPSCHL	.083**	.03	-.56*	-.54**	-.66**	.029*	-.27	.03	-.37*
COLLEGE	.037**	.03	-.05	-.48*	-.26	.005	.00	-.05	-.19
OWNED	.039**	-.33*	-.50**	-.21	-.61**	.003	-.09	-.05	-.17
Sociometric measures									
CENTRAL C	.022	.17	-.08	-.05	-.24	.014	.25	.02	-.15
INTVOTES	.008	.20	-.08	.07	-.01	.003	.11	.01	.12
REPVOTES	.023*	.31	.07	-.01	-.10	.001	-.11	-.09	-.09
Current activities									
ELITEORG	.025*	.36	.08	.00	-.07	.008	-.21	-.14	-.28
FEDADV	.013	.06	.32	.14	-.05	.011	-.35*	-.21	-.23
TESTCONG	.002	.05	.02	.13	.05	.006	.02	-.16	-.04
COMMOUT	.012	.05	.25	.01	-.12	.001	-.05	-.04	-.10
NONPROF	.025**	.02	-.17	-.21	-.39*	.004	-.07	-.04	-.18
CORPDIR	.012	.12	-.22	.03	-.12	.003	.16	.09	.03
ELCLUBS	.026*	-.02	-.19	-.13	-.41*	.005	-.06	.03	-.15

[a] Descriptions of the variables in this table are in footnote 7.

[b] These columns report the increment to the R^2 produced by adding a particular class or status variable, expressed as a set of dummy variables, to an equation already containing sector.

[c] The semi-standardized coefficients report the differences, in standard deviation units of the dependent variable, between the categories heading the columns and the omitted category.

[d] The omitted category contains those with capitalist fathers.

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Table 2 (cont.)

[e] The omitted category contains those with professional fathers.

[f] The omitted category contains those whose fathers had post-graduate educations.

[g] The omitted category contains those whose mothers earned at least the baccalatureate degree.

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Table 3

The who-to-whom tables for father's social class

a. nominations counted

		nominee's class background				
		capitalist	petty bourgeois	managerial	worker	
nominator's class background	capitalist	30.9%	23.5	35.3	10.3	(68)
	petty bourgeois	30.3	31.6	31.6	6.6	(76)
	managerial	23.4	29.7	34.2	12.6	(111)
	worker	30.6	30.6	30.6	8.2	(49)

$X^2 = 4.36$ with 9 d.f. ($p > .8$)

b. respondents counted

		nominee's class background				
		capitalist	petty bourgeois	managerial	worker	
nominator's class background	capitalist	33.3%	17.1	38.5	11.0	(37)
	petty bourgeois	32.4	27.4	33.9	6.3	(45)
	managerial	20.4	28.7	36.6	14.3	(60)
	worker	27.8	37.7	30.7	3.8	(27)

$X^2 = 7.63$ with 9 d.f. ($p > .5$)

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