

Studying the Power Elite

Fifty Years of *Who Rules America?*

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Who Rules America? Through Seven Editions and Fifty Years: Still More Accurate Than Alternative Power Theories

1

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Introduction

This chapter presents a substantive account of my writing and updating of *Who Rules America?* over the past five decades. It is the story of an ongoing eclectic search for an understanding of power by a researcher with a strong empirical bent and a preference for “middle-range” theories over Grand Theory. The chapter includes a focused argument that looks backwards and thinks forward as the story of the American power structure continues to evolve. It amends and extends a book that first appeared in 1967 and concludes with the somewhat bold claim that the seventh version, published in 2014, still provides the best starting point for those who want to understand the ongoing changes in the constant battle for power and dominance in the United States.

The original *Who Rules America?* was drafted in the summer of 1965 after two years of detailed research, some of it carried out with the help of students energized by the early civil rights movement and the free speech movement. The manuscript was revised in style and content in the summer of

1966. It was published in the late summer of 1967 after being downsized to fit the compact format of Prentice-Hall's Spectrum Books series. The first sentence signaled the book's use of concepts and methods borrowed from four different theoretical perspectives by saying it was "inspired by the ideas" of four "very different" social scientists.

Those four social scientists are, in the order they appeared in that first sentence: sociologist E. Digby Baltzell, himself a member of the social upper class, who said he favored "an open-class" business system over a "classless socialism"; the iconoclastic Weberian leftist sociologist C. Wright Mills, whom I characterized as throwing "consternation into the ranks of orthodox radicalism" by "talking in terms of 'elites' and 'institutions' rather than 'classes,' and by rejecting the revolutionary role claimed for the working class as a "labor metaphysic"; economist Paul M. Sweezy, who had written one of the best books on Marxism by an American up to that time, as well as a chapter on "The American Ruling Class," in which he was raised; and political scientist Robert A. Dahl, who published an article criticizing Mills for not using the proper methodology for studying power, and then wrote a celebrated book on the dispersion of power in New Haven, which he saw as America writ small because it "offered analogies with national politics that few other cities could provide" because of its "highly competitive two-party system" (Baltzell 1958; Dahl 1958; Dahl 1961, pp. v-vi; Domhoff 1967, pp. 1-3; Mills 1962, pp. 127-129; Sweezy 1942; Sweezy 1953).

In mentioning Baltzell and Sweezy's similar upper-class backgrounds, but opposing political views, I hoped to further signal that the book had an independent and apolitical orientation. The opening chapter then attempted to reinforce this point by stating the book is " beholden to no theory about the dynamics of history or the structure of society or the future of man" (Domhoff 1967, p. 3). I then borrowed Mills' (1956) phrase "the power elite" and redefined it as the leadership group of the "governing class," which is the more neutral term for the dominant class that I used at the time. More specifically, I said I agreed with Mills in "defining the power elite as those who have a superior amount of power due to the institutional hierarchies they command," but differed from him by "restricting the term to persons who are in command positions in institutional hierarchies controlled by members of the upper class, or, in the case of members of the federal government, to persons who came to the government from the upper class or from high positions in institutions controlled by members of the upper class" (Domhoff 1967, p. 8).

I knew that definition would be a big mouthful of words to digest all at once, but it gave me an opening to anticipate the likely objection that many American leaders are not from the upper class and that some members of the upper

class are not involved in governing. I had been alerted to that and many other likely criticisms by reading all the critics of Baltzell, Mills, and Sweezy, including their criticisms of one another as well as the pluralist critics of all of them.

I chose to use the phrase “the power elite” to convey my belief that it is possible to create a theory based on both organizational and class-based concepts, and wrote that my definition of the power elite was similar to Baltzell’s (1964, p. 8) concept of “an establishment.” But redefining a very famous phrase proved to be problematic. Using concepts from both organizational and class theoretical perspectives created resistance among those social scientists who insisted that the two perspectives were antithetical, including many class-oriented theorists. It also led to the assumption that I must be a “Millian,” even though I was critical of Mills on several different points, such as his overly large separation between the upper-class owners and corporate leaders, and his failure to include the political parties and policy-discussion groups in his analysis (Domhoff 1967; Domhoff 1968; Domhoff 1970b, Chapter 3).

As part of a final chapter that anticipated and answered likely objections to the methodology and the interpretation of the empirical findings, the book concluded with the following three sentences, which were meant to remind readers of its independence from past theories:

For ourselves, we conclude that the income, wealth, and institutional leadership of what Baltzell calls the “American business aristocracy” are more than sufficient to earn it the designation “governing class.” As Sweezy would say, this “ruling class” is based upon the national corporation economy and the institutions that economy nourishes. It manifests itself through what the late C. Wright Mills called the power elite.
(Domhoff 1967, p. 156)

What Did *Who Rules America?* Have to Say?

The empirical analysis began in Chapter 1 with evidence that there is a close-knit and cohesive social upper class. The fact that this social upper class is also a Weberian “status group” was dealt with in a footnote by using a quote in a social stratification textbook of that era, which tersely said that, “Here, obviously, we depart from the terminology of Weber in favor of ordinary English” (Domhoff 1967, p. 158, footnote 12; Kahl 1957, p. 12). The chapter was based on an analysis of the overlap of people on a variety of membership lists—in-group telephone books (the *Social Register* and other “blue books”), private-school alumni lists, and membership lists from private clubs,

private resorts, and vacation retreats. The analysis was enlivened by “a great many illustrations that appeared in the mass media” in an effort “to dispel any notion that the ‘real’ rulers of America are somehow behind the scenes rather than before the public each and every day,” but readers were reminded that the validity of the argument “is based upon the systematic data that are presented throughout each chapter” (Domhoff 1967, p. 3).

These many analyses demonstrated to my mind that there is a nationwide social upper class; that is, overlapping social circles of intermarrying people who see each other as equals, live in the same expensive neighborhoods, and belong to their own exclusive set of private institutions. I saw all this as an extension of original research by Baltzell (1958), who had studied the history of the Philadelphia upper crust in detail and then used the interactions of its members with people at New England prep schools, university alumni gatherings, and summer retreats as evidence for the nationwide nature of this social class.

I started with the social upper class for several reasons, partly based on the information that was available, and partly as a matter of presentation strategy. First, there was far better information on the social institutions of the social upper class at that time than there was on the ownership and control of corporations. Not only was there less information on corporations, which had to be pieced together from several sources, but there was also a mainstream (“pluralist”) consensus on the idea that the corporate “managers” were separate from the corporate “owners.” This separation supposedly reduced the possibility that there could be a dominant class because the upper class and the corporate leaders seemingly had somewhat different interests. (The idea of a separate managerial class, which almost totally disappeared by the 1980s at the latest, was incarnated in political sociology by Daniel Bell [1960], but there were many others who supported this cornerstone of pluralism, including the leading theorist in American sociology in the 1950s, Talcott Parsons [1960], as best seen in his critique of *The Power Elite*.) My thought was that I could deal with this claim much better if I was ready to show that these allegedly independent managers, with their supposedly more public-regarding concerns for the good of everyone, were in fact being assimilated into the social upper class with the help of their high salaries, lucrative stock options, and invitations to upper-class social and charitable events.

I also figured it would be easier for readers to consider an analysis they might not want to hear if it started with something relatively visible and mundane, such as schools and clubs. I hoped that approach might reduce any tendency to label claims of concentrated power as a “conspiracy theory,” which I knew before I started was one of the ways that pluralists dealt with

any implication that there is more hierarchy than they thought possible in a liberal democracy (because of the existence of voluntary associations, the importance of public opinion, and the right to vote).

Although I thought the case for a social upper class was a strong one, I continually updated and strengthened it later with more finely grained studies of upper-class organizations and institutions. I wanted to be sure, to start with, as to which organizations could serve as “social indicators” of upper class standing for future studies of corporate directors and the trustees of nonprofit organizations. I did so by looking at the issue both quantitatively and through surveys of knowledgeable observers in several different cities (Domhoff 1970b, Chapter 1). Among other things, I used these social indicators to demonstrate that the world of celebrity had more overlap with the upper class than Mills (1956, Chapter 4) had concluded (Domhoff 1970b, Chapters 1, 3).

I then approached the issue from another angle by studying the social institutions of “the feminine half of the upper class,” pointing out that these women had several important roles in a time of much greater male dominance, including during the Progressive Era, when women of the upper class worked with and put pressure on their male counterparts to improve wages and hours for women workers and workplace safety for all workers (Domhoff 1970b, Chapter 2). It was gratifying that other sociologists later extended and amended the study of women of the upper class, even while coming to very similar conclusions (Daniels 1988; Kendall 2002; Kendall 2008; Ostrander 1980; Ostrander 1984).

I also did an in-depth study of one of the ubiquitous men-only social clubs with a nationwide membership, the Bohemian Club of San Francisco, which is unique among such clubs in that it also includes many middle-class “performing members.” These members provide musical and theatrical entertainment during the club’s two-week retreat in the second half of July in cabins and lodges in a pristine redwood forest seventy-five miles north of San Francisco. I was therefore able to demonstrate more fully a point that had been made by social psychologists in small-group experiments: social cohesion facilitates policy cohesion (Domhoff 1974b; Domhoff 2005a). Later I added flourishes that allude to various esoteric issues, such as rites of passage that temporarily remove the men from the profane world of business, as well as ceremonies of affirmation and renewal, all of which touch on the realm of collective effervescence, dramaturgy, and symbolic interactionism (Domhoff 2014, pp. 52–57; Durkheim 1912/1965; Vaughn 2006).

The names and social institutions used in the chapter on the social upper class were one part of a larger database stored on five by eight cards, which also included corporate directors, trustees of foundations, think tanks, and

policy-discussion groups, and appointees to important positions in the executive branch of the federal government. I said all this was based on the “sociology of leadership method” (Domhoff 1967, pp. 6, 143–146), a phrase I borrowed from Baltzell (1964, p. 203). In essence, it means a study of “the social composition of leadership groups in order to determine whether or not the leaders come from any given socioeconomic class, ethnic group, or religious group,” which I claimed was similar to two of the three methods Dahl (1961) used in his study of New Haven (Domhoff 1967, p. 6).

Within a few years, following a trail created by many others, I was putting this kind of database on computers and employing the techniques of network analysis to analyze them (e.g., Alba 1973; Bonacich 1972; Bonacich and Domhoff 1981; Domhoff 1975; Kadushin 1968; Salzman and Domhoff 1983; Sonquist and Koenig 1975). Thanks to sociologist Ronald Breiger’s (1974) seminal paper, which used the term “membership network analysis” to conceptualize a “two-level” network that included both people and institutions, we had a way to deal with the old claim that we were merely muckraking investigative journalists who allegedly only looked at the individual level of society.

By the 1990s, and shortly thereafter with the full flowering of the Internet, there was more information on the corporate world than on the social upper class. Moreover, there was less information available on members of the upper class because younger generations were less likely to bother with the *Social Register*, which shrank in size. Then, too, the most prominent and visible members were less inclined to list their private schools and club memberships in various types of “who’s who” sources, at least partly in reaction to the public use of this information by advocacy groups looking for corporate leaders to single out because their prep schools and clubs did not admit Jews, people of color, or women. The third (and later) versions of *Who Rules America?* acknowledged this change in information availability by beginning with a chapter on “the corporate community,” as defined by all those corporations that shared directors (interlocks) with one another.

The corporate-community chapter in the later versions was then followed by a chapter on “The Corporate Community and the Upper Class,” which turned out to be a better order in which to deal with the issue of the assimilation of new corporate managers as well as the assimilation of those who were newly rich through the founding of new businesses. It also provided a better way to bring in the key point that social cohesion contributes to policy cohesion; that is, social cohesion now could be seen as an add-on to the fact that the existence of a corporate community generated by at least some common economic interests, despite the considerable competition that exists among rival businesses. At this point I also stressed that the competing

corporations shared many common enemies, including organized labor, liberals, and environmentalists. This also allowed me to draw implicitly on the adage from social psychology that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” which is another powerful incentive for working together. In any case, the chapter on the corporate community and the upper class concludes that the corporate community and the upper class are two sides of the same coin, a melding of Weber’s (1998) separate concepts of an “economic class” and a “status group,” a theoretical point I originally brought into the picture through Mills’ obvious debt to Weber (Domhoff 1967, p. 4).

For all the new detailed empirical evidence and examples in the original chapter on the upper class, it did begin with a major historical conclusion on what made the American power structure distinctive and unusually powerful. It said that the American upper class was unique because:

. . . it alone grew up within a middle-class framework of representative government and egalitarian ideology, unhampered by feudal lords, kings, priests, or mercenary armies. Only the American upper class is made up exclusively of the descendants of successful businessmen and corporation lawyers—whatever their pretensions, few families are “old” enough or rich enough to forget this overriding fact.

(Domhoff 1967, p. 12)

Although I didn’t hammer on this point by elaborating or repeating, and stayed at the middle levels of theory for the next two decades, it helps explain, along with my skepticism about Marxist theory, why I was so receptive to Michael Mann’s (1986) four-network theory of power when it appeared. The idea that all power structures are based on four independent but intertwining organizational networks (the Ideological, Economic, Military, and Political networks, known as the IEMP model) was “music to the ears of those who analyze American power structures as networks of people and institutions,” and I added that it “is invigorating to have such a congenial theoretical home after all those years spent wandering in the empirical wilderness, surrounded on every side by pluralists, structural Marxists, and utility maximizers” (Domhoff 1990, pp. xviii–xix, 2).

Theoretical flights of fancy aside for now, the original *Who Rules America?* next turned to the “control” of corporations, with “control” meant to imply “dominance,” which was defined as “the exercise of power,” and contrasted with “influence,” characterized as a weaker term “implying that a person can sometimes sway, persuade, or otherwise have an effect upon those who control from a position of authority” (Domhoff 1967, p. 11). In the case

of corporations, control was first and foremost asserted on the basis of a “power indicator” that I call “overrepresentation,” which is simply the degree to which members of a social class hold many more positions of authority in an organization than would be expected by chance if members of all social classes had an equal opportunity to attain such positions. Thus, if the upper class includes at most about 0.5 percent of the total population, then the fact that 53 percent of the 884 people who served on the boards of directors of the fifteen largest banks, fifteen largest insurance companies, and twenty largest industrial corporations in 1963 were from the upper class is an overrepresentation by a factor of 106 (Domhoff 1967, pp. 51). Moreover, I assumed other social scientists knew that the “statistical significance” of any seeming deviation from chance is determined by the formula for the significance of differences between two proportions.

The implicit statistical rigor of this indicator notwithstanding, it is also the kind of indicator that makes perfect intuitive sense to social scientists when it is used as an indicator of a *lack of power*, such as in the case of women, who are half the population and only a small fraction of the people in positions of power (e.g., Zweigenhaft 1975; Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 2006). It also makes intuitive sense in the case of African Americans, who are 12 to 14 percent of the population, but usually held less than 1 percent of the power positions until relatively recently; even now, African Americans are underrepresented by half or more in most power venues in the United States (Zweigenhaft 2016; Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 2003; Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 2014).

However, pluralists rejected this kind of indicator when it came to the powerful, arguing that people in high positions may be just figureheads who don’t really “exercise” any power, or maybe they are just good competent folks who are in the positions they are in because they earned them (e.g. Dahl 1958; Matthews 1960; Matthews 1967; Polsby 1980). As far as pluralists are concerned, the only way to study power in a rigorous way is to figure out who initiated and who vetoed new ideas that were or were not included in a series of legislative decisions (a “decision-making” indicator of power).

In issuing this edict, they overlooked the many problems with this method, including the fact that “it is often difficult to determine what factors are involved in the making of any given decisions, and “the participants themselves may not be able to assess correctly the roles of the various members of the group,” or may forget many of the details shortly after the decision is made (Bauer 1966, for an excellent discussion of the problems with the decision-making method; Domhoff 1967, pp. 144–145 for similar arguments and the quotation in this paragraph).

The chapter on corporate control also made use of the distributions of stock ownership, wealth, and income as power indicators, based on the same statistical rationale concerning proportions/percentages on which the overrepresentation indicator is based. These distributions are helpful because there was good information on them over a period of many years (Domhoff 1967, pp. 40–47). True, the data on wealth and income were not as detailed as is found in the innovative work that has been done since the turn of the twenty-first century, nor did it extend backwards as far in the twentieth century as it does now (e.g., Kopczuk and Saez 2004; Kopczuk, Saez, and Song 2010; Piketty and Saez 2003; Saez 2012; Wolff 2010). But a study of stock portfolios in the late 1940s did show that “the 0.1 percent of families who had incomes over \$45,000 in 1949 held 35 percent of all outstanding stock held by individuals, that the 0.5 percent who made over \$25,000 had 50 percent of the stock, and that the 1 percent who made over \$15,000 had 65 percent of the stock,” which are disproportionate by factors ranging from 350 to 100 to 65 times (Butters, Thompson, and Bollinger 1953, for the full study; Domhoff 1967, pp. 163–164). A study of the estates of deceased wealthy individuals using the estates-tax multiplier method revealed that the top 0.5 percent of the population held 25 percent of all privately held wealth in 1953 and 26.0 percent in 1956, which is again a large overrepresentation (Domhoff 1967, pp. 43–44, Tables 1 and 2, for a summary of information for 1922 to 1956; Lampman 1962, for the full study). By 1974 we knew through a new study using the estates-tax multiplier method that the top 0.2 percent held 33 percent of the stock and that the top 1 percent had 51 percent of it in 1969 (Smith and Franklin 1974).

But, of course, the pluralists disputed the concentration of stock ownership and wealth as power indicators. They did so on the basis of the general claim that “who benefits?” indicators may be misleading because some benefits may fall to people by accident. Dahl (1982, p. 17) later used the example of how “American wheat farmers can benefit from a decision by Soviet leaders to buy American grain.” Dahl’s former student, Nelson Polsby, who did most of the heavy lifting when it came to criticizing the alternatives to pluralism, listed four reasons why value distributions can be misleading, which included the fact that “largely powerless Black Panthers, who oppose gun control, are beneficiaries of the fact that there are no gun control laws,” and that the powerful sometimes are “intentionally conferring benefits on the non-powerful (e.g., in at least some welfare systems)” (Polsby 1980, p. 207). None of this had anything to do with the information collected over decades by various government agencies, so it really had nothing to do with the matter.

Meanwhile, as the debate over power indicators droned on without any concessions by any pluralists, even income inequality was gradually becoming

more concentrated after 1970, which tracked perfectly with the decline of unions and the rising power of the “corporate rich” (Mills’ term for the reorganized class of corporate owners and managers) (Domhoff 2013). For example, the income of the top 0.5 percent rose by 140 percent between 1980 and 2010, and the income of the top 1 percent rose by 110 percent, but the income of the top 40 percent rose by only 40 percent, and the income of the bottom 60 percent stayed the same or fell backwards (Domhoff 2014, p. 64, Table 3.1).

After the evidence was marshaled that the major corporations were controlled by wealthy members of the social upper class, with the help of upwardly mobile executives in the process of being assimilated into that class, the original *Who Rules America?* turned in Chapter 3 to “the shaping of the American polity,” with “polity” defined as “the framework within which American opinion reaches its decisions” (Domhoff 1967, p. 63). This definition seems too vague in retrospect, but it pointed to the involvement of non-profit organizations, political parties, and the mass media in bringing issues into the political arena for eventual decision-making by the executive and legislative branches of the federal government. In terms of “shaping” efforts by members of the upper class and corporate leaders, they were said to be carried out by several foundations, think tanks, and policy-discussion groups, which were linked to the upper class and the corporations through the over-representation of members of the upper class and corporate executives on their boards of trustees.

Put another way, these nonprofit organizations were linked to the social organizations of the upper class and to corporate boards by their interlocks with the parts of the database that were constructed in the process of studying the upper class and the corporations in Chapters 1 and 2. In addition, the finding that the majority of the funding for an organization came from corporations and/or corporate-dominated foundations was brought in as further evidence of control, which also means in today’s terminology that financial flows were serving as another type of network link. The chapter also included examples of how these organizations operated, but it did not provide a systematic enough analysis of how this upper-class/corporate/nonprofit network interacted with and influenced government.

I would judge the chapter as okay as far as it went, but it did not go far enough or have enough information on process as was needed—and subsequently developed. Moreover, I should note that many of the findings in the chapter originally came as a surprise to me. It was only through reading through the biographical information that corporate leaders provided to *Who’s Who In America* and other reference sources that I slowly came to realize how frequently the same few foundations and other nonprofit

organizations were mentioned by business leaders. In that sense, the density of the corporate/nonprofit network (and the full range of the organizations in it) only emerged gradually in my thinking. Then it was demonstrated through systematic studies.

In the case of the chapter on the federal government, I reverted to the term “control” to indicate that I thought the upper-class/corporate/nonprofit network dominated the executive branch. The evidence I presented for this strong conclusion began with campaign donations by members of the upper class and corporate leaders to political candidates in both parties. Following the lead of political scientist Alexander Heard (1960), who did excellent work on campaign finance in the 1950s, I emphasized that what makes money important “is the problem of gaining the nomination for a major political office in the first place” (Domhoff 1967, p. 85).

Although members of the upper class and corporate leaders were the primary donors to both parties, I stressed that there were “intra-class differences” between the wealthy donors in the two parties. The Republicans received a large portion of their support from the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants in banking and manufacturing in the North, whereas the Democrats were supported by “very new and very old elements within the upper class, including Southern aristocrats and the ethnic rich” (Domhoff 1967, p. 86). I also took the occasion to show that most wealthy Republicans in the North supported the ultra-conservative Barry Goldwater presidential campaign in 1964. I rejected the claim that the new rich in the Southwest had taken over the party, which was floating around long before the poetical, non-academic theory of a Yankee-Cowboy division led many researchers astray and wasted a good deal of time and energy (Domhoff 1967, pp. 88–90). The later Yankee-Cowboy story aside, I think the conclusions about money and politics in this chapter were a good start, but they needed greater detail and historical depth, which was later added (Domhoff 1972b; Domhoff 1990 Chapter 9; Domhoff 2014, 140–141, 197–200, and 151–154 for the Obama donor network).

The other main source of evidence for the upper-class/corporate/nonprofit network’s control of the federal government in the first version of *Who Rules America?* consisted of detailed studies of the presidents’ cabinets, the presidents’ inner circles of advisors, the diplomatic corps, and appointments to the federal judiciary between 1932 and 1965 (Domhoff 1967, pp. 97–107, 109–111). This effort showed that the cabinet members and the inner circles of advisors came in large part from the upper-class/corporate/nonprofit network, along with the corporate law firms that worked closely with the corporations.

The chapter contained a cursory glance at the social backgrounds of members of Congress, and noted the best of the case studies on how corporate

lobbyists strongly influence regulatory agencies and Congress (Domhoff 1967, pp. 107–108, 111–114). Once again, as with the chapter on the shaping of the polity, I would have to say the chapter was decent as far as it went. However, following Mills (1956, Chapter 11) too closely, I did underestimate the importance of Congress, a problem I began to address soon thereafter, and of which more is discussed shortly. (For those who think that the power elite's dislike of government is fairly recent, or that their hostility toward government contradicts the thesis that they dominate it, the last chapter of *Who Rules America?* contains a lengthy discussion of this issue entitled "But Businessmen Hate Government" (Domhoff 1967, pp. 152–156).

The original *Who Rules America?* also had a highly detailed chapter on the control of the military, the FBI, and the CIA, which paid by far the most attention to the military. It used some of the same sources as did Mills (1956, Chapters 8–9) to conclude that he was wrong to give any independent role to the military on the basis of its rise in importance during World War II and the subsequent Cold War (Domhoff 1967, pp 115–127). I also documented that several of the key military decision-makers mentioned by Mills were from the upper class, had relatives with major corporate roles, or themselves became corporate directors and Wall Street financiers after they retired from the military. Other sources came to the same conclusion (Coffin 1964; Janowitz 1960). I continued to update this argument as new information became available (Domhoff 1968; Domhoff 1970b, pp. 137–139; Domhoff 1996, Chapter 6). Because virtually all scholars came to agree by the 1970s that the military was subordinate to the corporate executives and policy-planning experts appointed to lead the Department of Defense, this chapter was eliminated from future versions of *Who Rules America?*. Instead, the issue was dealt with as part of a subsection rejecting the idea that there is a "military-industrial complex" separate from the rest of the corporate community.

The evidence for the upper-class/corporate/nonprofit network's control of the CIA was equally strong, and the FBI's links to corporate executives through its longstanding director at the time, J. Edgar Hoover, were noted, although the latter is an admittedly weak plank to stand on (Domhoff 1967, pp. 127–131). The analysis of the CIA was strengthened by future research, which was made possible by major revelations about the CIA that were leaked during the Vietnam War (Domhoff 1970b, Chapter 7, for a summary of the subsequent information). However, the CIA and the FBI were dropped from later versions because they are secondary issues.

Perhaps as a result of my attempt to forge a new middle-range theory focused only on power in the United States between 1932 and 1964, which used respectable positivist definitions and methods, and presented new

empirical information, the first version of *Who Rules America?* ranked No. 12 in Herbert Gans's (1997) study of the top fifty-three non-textbook best sellers in American sociology from the 1950s to the early 1990s.

New Discoveries, New Concepts, New Syntheses

Despite the generally positive reception of the first version of *Who Rules America?* as a contribution to the study of the American power structure, it was not without its critics. First and foremost, some researchers were not convinced that any of the think tanks or policy-discussion groups had any impact on what were widely interpreted as liberal-labor legislative successes, such as the Social Security Act and the National Labor Relations Act, which were passed at the height of the New Deal. This challenge sent me on what turned out to be an on-and-off quest that lasted for several decades. It finally culminated in new archival findings that showed the critics were wrong on the Social Security Act, but in good part right to say that the National Labor Relations Act was a defeat for the major corporations, although not fully for the reasons they suggested (Domhoff 1970b, pp. 207–249; Domhoff 1990, Chapters 2–3; Domhoff and Webber 2011, Chapters 3–5). They also doubted that the Democratic Party was beholden to wealthy fat cats, whatever their region, religion, or ethnicity, and they rightly noted that I did not do enough on the legislative process and the important role of Congress. The result was further research on these issues, which did not come to full fruition until the seventh version of *Who Rules America?*, so it has been a long and slow journey (Domhoff 2014).

My new round of research began with detailed studies of several major policy-discussion groups concerned with foreign policy and domestic policy, with a stronger historical dimension as well (Domhoff 1970b, Chapters 5–6). Shortly thereafter, I began to think in terms of a “policy-planning network,” complete with a network diagram that showed the flow of people and money into think tanks and policy-discussion groups from large corporations and foundations, and the flow of ideas and people from the think tanks and policy-discussion groups into the federal government (Domhoff 1970a; Domhoff 1974a). More generally, sociologist Michael Useem (1979; 1980) discovered that people who served on two or more corporate boards of directors, and also were members of one of the policy-planning groups, had higher odds of being appointed to an advisory position in the federal government. His subsequent interviews with top corporate executives revealed that they saw involvement in policy-discussion groups as an important step in preparing corporate leaders for government positions (Useem 1984).

At about the same time, detailed studies of campaign finance in the 1968 and 1984 presidential elections convinced me that I was on the right track in understanding the financial support for the Democratic Party (Alexander 1971; Domhoff 1972a, Chapters 1–2; Domhoff 1990, Chapter 9). Other sources come to similar conclusions on the role of ethnicity (and religion) in the financial support for the Democrats (e.g., Allen 1991; Burriss and Salt 1990; Isaacs 1974; Lipset and Raab 1984; Webber 2000). By 1990 I had come to define the Democratic Party as the party of the “out-groups” in the United States, in terms of both its financing and its voter base, from its founding in the 1790s to the present (Domhoff 1990, Chapter 9; Domhoff 2014, pp. 140–141). The idea of the Democratic Party as a coalition of out-groups fit well for the powerful Southern slaveholders, who dominated the party from the 1790s to 1860, because they were on the defensive in a land of free labor, and they were always well aware of that fact. My conclusions about the differences between the two major parties also prepared me to readily agree with the importance of “social identity” in terms of voting behavior, as persuasively demonstrated in *Democracy for Realists* (Achen and Bartels 2016, Chapters 8–9).

Every subsequent version of *Who Rules America?* updated the information on the network connections of the most recent presidential cabinets, and each one revealed the same pattern as the earlier accounts. The analysis of the Clinton Administration was especially detailed because it was the first Democratic administration since 1977–1980. If anything, the Clinton Administration was even more laden with financiers and corporate lawyers affiliated with various policy-planning groups than previous Democratic administrations (Domhoff 1983, pp. 137–143; Domhoff 1998, pp. 247–256; Domhoff 2002, pp. 150–157; Domhoff 2006, pp. 165–171; Domhoff 2010, pp. 183–195; Domhoff 2014, pp. 175–177).

Taken together, the sections on the cabinet in the various versions of *Who Rules America?* present a striking portrait of how the executive branch of the federal government was dominated by corporate interests between 1932 and 2014. This portrait is further supported by a three-volume effort that pulled together information from a wide variety of sources on the individuals who served in presidents’ cabinets from the 1790s to 1980, and on the corporate and legal networks of Supreme Court appointees as well. It revealed that both the cabinet and court appointees seemed to reflect the rise and fall in importance of various business sectors, such as in the case of railroads. The New Deal was a partial exception, but matters reverted to the usual pattern during World War II and thereafter (Burch 1980; Burch 1981a; Burch 1981b). A study of presidential cabinets from 1897 to 1972 presented a very similar picture (Mintz 1975). The network connections of top government appointees since

at least the 1940s onwards shows that the policy-planning network is indeed the key linkage between the corporate community and government. Then, too, the chairs of the president's Council of Economic Advisors often come from the major think tanks and had served as advisors to policy-discussion groups, and sometimes returned to private life as corporate directors (Domhoff 1987).

I also was able to deepen my understanding of Congress through further reading in the political science literature. By 1972 I had grasped that Congress was in good part controlled by the Southern Democrats, thanks to a superb early article on the topic (Irish 1942) and a book on voting patterns in Congress on a range of issues, which showed that the Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans often sided with each other on an important subset of issues (Mayhew 1966). I concluded that the Southern Democrats voted with the Northern Republicans "to gut any legislation supporting labor unions, minimum wages, or social welfare" (Domhoff 1972a, p. 94). I also concluded that the Southern rich stayed Democrats in part because the Republicans would not join them in quid-pro-quo trade-offs on federal subsidies, whereas the non-Southern Democrats were very glad to do so. However, I had not yet arrived at an understanding of the basis of the conservative voting coalition in Congress (defined as a majority of Republicans and Southern Democrats voting against a majority of non-Southern Democrats), nor of its full impact. This understanding was not to come for another several years through further reading and new studies (e.g., Manley 1973; Patterson 1967; Shelley 1983).

The Second Version of Who Rules America?

Most of the new information developed in the 1970s was gathered together in a second version of *Who Rules America?*, this time called *Who Rules America Now?* to make clear that it was in some ways a new book, extending well beyond the first version. It eased into the specifics of the argument with an introductory chapter that began with everyday understandings of "class" and "power," and then supplemented those understandings with the social-science meanings of those terms. (It also used the phrase "ruling class" instead of "governing class" to provide more of a symmetry with the use of "the power elite.") In addition to a more detailed discussion of how new policies were formulated within the policy-planning network, it added more information on the numerous means through which the members of that network connect to government: service on advisory commissions to departments of the executive branch, appointments to blue-ribbon presidential committees, and

testimony before Congress, as well as through the numerous appointments of corporate executives and experts from the policy-planning network to positions in the White House and executive departments.

The book now talked about four general processes, not simply a policy-planning network, that connected the power elite to government. The “special-interest process” included the myriad ways in which the specific needs of particular companies and business sectors are taken care of through lobbying, as buttressed by the thousands of case studies of this activity. The “candidate-selection process,” a concept borrowed from political scientist Walter Dean Burnham (1975), outlined the several ways in which the power elite involved itself in the efforts of the two political parties over and beyond campaign finance.

The “opinion-shaping process” was more clearly separated from the policy-planning process, even though those who attempt to shape opinion (but often fail) use the policy stances developed in the policy-planning network as their main starting point. Several organizations linked to the upper-class/corporate/nonprofit network were used as case studies of how the process operated, but I did not have a good understanding of how the opinion-shaping process could sometimes be successful even though it is difficult, if not impossible, to shape public opinion on most issues. To anticipate a discussion later in the chapter, new work in the 1990s and thereafter by experts on public opinion made it possible to show that everyday people have agency and can form their own opinions (e.g., Gilens 2012; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000; Page 2008; Page and Jacobs 2009; Page and Shapiro 1992). However, the opinion-shaping process, in conjunction with the candidate-selection process, nonetheless plays a role in the power elite’s success in enacting its policy agenda through raising doubts about rival legislation and criticizing the motives and credentials of those who disagree with them (Domhoff 2014, pp. 119, 129–130; Michaels 2008; Potter 2010).

In Weberian terms, I concluded that these four processes constituted the “party” through which the upper-class/corporate/nonprofit network tried to influence communal action in a conscious and planned way (Weber, 1998). At the empirical level, and crucially, this new four-process theory of how the power elite connects to government makes it plausible to attempt the kind of decision-making studies demanded by pluralists. First, the policy statements prepared by corporate leaders and experts in various think tanks and policy-discussion groups can be compared with legislative proposals put forth by the White House and Congressional leaders. Then it can be determined whether the people involved in testifying and lobbying for a particular bill are the same people who discussed and prepared similar proposals

earlier. So, too, the content of privately produced documents can be compared with the provisions in the legislation that is finally enacted. Within this context, interviews with participants and knowledgeable observers, such as journalists, are icing on the cake. I began to say that power structure research involves network analysis and content analysis, and put together several case studies (Domhoff 1979).

The role of Congress (and indirectly, the candidate-selection process) also was brought into the policymaking picture in the second version of *Who Rules America?* in a section on the struggle over policy enactment. It claimed that those Mills (1948, pp. 23–27; 1956, p. 122) called the “sophisticated conservatives” within the power elite, whom I also called “corporate moderates” by the 1970s, were very often the tipping point in legislative conflicts. They stood between their ultra-conservative counterparts (as exemplified by the National Association of Manufacturers, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the American Farm Bureau Federation, and several think tanks) and “the more loose-knit and divided liberal-labor coalition that is rooted in trade unions, middle-income liberal groups, environmental and consumer groups, university communities, and the foundations and advocacy groups financed by a few rich mavericks” (Domhoff 1983, p. 144).

If the corporate moderates, as represented by proposals from the moderate policy-planning groups and think tanks that they finance and lead, were in favor of a compromise with the liberal-labor coalition, then there were often enough votes for moderate legislation to pass. However, if the corporate moderates sided with the ultra-conservatives, as they usually did, then *Who Rules America Now?* claimed that “There have been only a few occasions in the twentieth century when the conservative voting coalition in Congress did not have the means to block liberal initiatives in some way, either in open votes on the floor of the House or Senate, in committees and subcommittees, or through parliamentary maneuvers and filibusters” (Domhoff 1983, p. 145).

Thus, “when push comes to shove, the liberal-labor coalition has to hope that the moderate conservatives will be on their side, as they were on Social Security, Medicare, civil rights legislation, and several other new policies long advocated by liberals and labor” (Domhoff 1983, p. 145). This conclusion was grounded in fair measure on the findings in an excellent book on voting patterns in Congress on a wide range of issues (Clausen 1973). However, the section on how policy emerges, or else is stymied by a united power elite and the conservative voting coalition, closed with the admission that the National Labor Relations Act did not fit this analysis. So I was still a long way from closure on that exceedingly crucial issue for a class-domination theory of power

in America. For the most part, though, the challenges posed by the critics of the first version of *Who Rules America?* had been met successfully as far as I was concerned.

A New Theory of Community Power Structures

Who Rules America Now? also included a greatly revised version of a skimpy chapter in the original *Who Rules America?*, which I did not mention previously for reasons that will now become apparent. The original chapter was focused primarily on city power structures (aka “community power structures”) and was entirely pluralist. It even said that Dahl (1961), believe it or not, was probably right in regard to his picture of dispersed inequalities in New Haven (Domhoff 1967, pp. 132). It noted that corporations could threaten to leave a city if their demands were not met, which is a very significant factor in any decision made by local elected officials (Domhoff 1967, p. 137). But the chapter offered no theory that could incorporate the local level into the national-level system, which made that chapter as incomplete in its own way as were the original chapters on the shaping of the polity and the control of the federal government.

A few years later, though, the path-breaking sociologist Floyd Hunter (1953) told me he had collected some preliminary evidence that New Haven might have a more hierarchal power structure than Dahl believed. (To my chagrin, I did not cite his excellent book on the overlapping pyramids of power in Atlanta in the original *Who Rules America?*, focusing instead on his later fine work on the national level [Hunter 1953; Hunter 1959].) Shortly thereafter, my views about local power began to change drastically based on interviews and archival research I carried out in New Haven in 1974 and 1975, thanks to Hunter’s comment (Domhoff 1978). By that point I also had access to Dahl’s interviews with local business leaders and politicians, due to his generous sharing of his files. He also gave me the memos about the doings at city hall that he had received from his graduate assistant posted there, who published a revealing book on New Haven just as my own research began (Wolfinger 1973).

And while I was mapping out New Haven’s surprisingly strong power structure, centered on two banks, two corporate law firms, and Yale University’s board of trustees and top administrators, sociologist Harvey Molotch (1976; 1979) provided a brand-new theory that made it possible to think about the community power literature in a way that meshes with my views on corporate power at the national level. His empirical work and wide-ranging

theoretical tastes led to the insight that land owners, local banks, mortgage companies, and affiliated real estate interests, not national corporations, are the major movers and shakers in most cities, with the primary goal of increasing real estate values through the intensification of land use. Working as “place entrepreneurs,” coalitions of pro-growth elites try to reach their goals by making their cities attractive locales for outside capital, as well as for new federal government installations and the expansion of local university campuses. When they succeed, they turn a city into a “growth machine,” a term that has the same kind of clear, hard ring to it as “the power elite.” “The power elite and the growth machines” became my new shorthand statement for describing the American power structure (e.g., Domhoff 1986).

In striving for their goals, the local growth machines often find themselves at odds with national corporations, which make their profits through selling services or products, and have little or no allegiance to any given city or region. Local growth coalitions are also in constant competition with one another, so the overall system is a very dynamic and competitive one, which often leads to a race to the bottom on taxes and regulations. To the degree that these pro-growth coalitions face opposition on their home fronts, it comes at its core from neighborhoods that want to protect their amenities against downtown expansion, high rises, shopping malls, convention centers, stadiums, or free-ways. More abstractly, this means there is a built-in conflict at the local level between the exchange and use values of land, which has little or nothing to do with class conflict. In fact, some of the most powerful blue-collar unions, those in the construction industry, serve as political bulldozers for the local growth machines in dealing with any hesitant liberal Democrats or environmentalists who might raise objections to growth at any cost (Logan and Molotch 1987). The conflict between exchange values and use values is resolved or compromised in a variety of ways, some halfway reasonable, some very ugly, as in the case of the urban renewal program that cleared out inner-city neighborhoods so that downtown elites could remake their cities (e.g., Domhoff 1978, Chapter 2; Domhoff 2013, pp. 77–80, 116–121, 129, 135–138; Logan and Molotch 1987; Mollenkopf 1975; Sanders 1987; Sanders 2014; Stone 1976).

Energized by this new theory, *Who Rules America Now?* reexamined the entire community power literature from “Middletown” in the 1930s through the late 1970s, leading to the conclusion that the idea of the city as a “growth machine” fit every one of them. At this point I also added new interview and archival data to my analysis of New Haven as well—a practice I continued by studying Yale archives that became available in the late 1990s (Domhoff 1983, pp. 184–196; Domhoff 2005c). The idea of the city as a growth machine gained further support in studies by urban researchers, such as sociologist J.

Allen Whitt (1982; 1986; 1987a; 1987b) and political scientists John Mollenkopf (1983) and Todd Swanstrom (1985).

The finding that growth coalitions in some cities were forced to make concessions by neighborhood-based coalitions, and were defeated by citywide neighborhood coalitions in a few instances, especially in up-scale suburban cities or cities with large numbers of university-based student voters, further showed that this new theory of the local power structure had strength and flexibility (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom 2004; Gendron and Domhoff 2009; Logan and Molotch 1987; Molotch 1976). It can account for everything from the new mega-cities to the failed growth coalitions called “ghost towns,” which litter the American landscape and are sometimes used as tourist attractions by the nearby growth machines that defeated them in the land wars.

When pluralists (e.g., Peterson 1981), urban Marxists (e.g., Harvey 1985), and regime theorists (e.g., Stone 1989) all ignored the evidence that supports the new growth-coalition theory, and refutes their theories, they were subjected to strong critiques (Domhoff 1986; Gendron and Domhoff 2009, pp. 187–203; Molotch 1984; Molotch 1988; Molotch 1999). But these critiques had little or no impact. In any event, urban sociologists gradually turned their attention to many issues other than power, or else they employ urban Marxist David Harvey’s (1973; 1976) version of neoliberalism to address any concerns they may have with the role of local power actors (Harvey 2005). As a result, the lengthy and detailed chapter on urban power structures in *Who Rules America Now?* was shortened to a few pages in subsequent versions, and instead reappeared as online supplements that were extended and updated (Domhoff 2005b; Domhoff 2014, pp. 36–39).

All in all, I thought *Who Rules America Now?* was a helluva book. At the least, it was better in substance on some issues than the original version, thanks to the considerable amount of research and new theoretical insights that many social scientists developed in the 1970s, including new studies that appeared in a special issue of *The Insurgent Sociologist* in 1975 and in an edited book entitled *Power Structure Research* (Domhoff 1980). This burst of new research included numerous studies of corporate interlocks that cast further doubt on the emphasis on the managerial revolution and narrow business interest groups by pluralists (e.g., Allen 1974; Allen 1978; Mintz and Schwartz 1981; Mizruchi 1982; Sonquist and Koenig 1975). My positive assessment of *Who Rules America Now?* may be supported by the fact that it ranked No. 43 on Gans’s (1997) top fifty-three list. If we also throw in that my two best 1970s follow-up books to the first *Who Rules America?*, which contributed

greatly to the success of the second version, ranked No. 39 (*The Higher Circles*, 1970b) and No. 47 (*The Powers That Be*, 1979) on the Gans list, we can gain a sense of the interest in the American power structure between 1968 and the mid-1980s.

Another New Synthesis: 2014

The third version of *Who Rules America* (1998) was long (335 pages, which is 100 more than *Who Rules America Now?* and 150 more than the original *Who Rules America?*). It was also rather stolid and didactic, with detailed discussions of alternative theories and methodology at the beginning of the first chapter. There were later sections on such heady topics as “Strategic Alliances/ Producer Networks,” the power of pension funds, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, all of which reflected the fact that it had devolved into a textbook. The argument was now framed in terms of a “dominant class” and a “power elite,” who did battle with a “liberal-labor coalition” through their “corporate-conservative coalition,” which reached out to right-wing groups that were concerned with “social issues” related to race, religion, affirmative action, sexual orientation, gun rights, and immigration.

But with students no longer all that interested in theories they had never heard about before, or in the details on the size of the federal government and why that matters in evaluating alternative theories, the third version felt more like a handbook than anything else. The book was streamlined and reorganized in three subsequent versions that reflected the tenor of the moment in which they appeared. For example, there was a speculative final chapter in the sixth edition on whether the Great Recession and the election of Barack Obama as president would lead to challenges to corporate and class dominance, which was out of the question before the manuscript was in print, and even sounds somewhat silly in retrospect (Domhoff 2010, Chapter 9).

However, the seventh version stepped back from the fray and provided a new synthesis that includes recent original theoretical and empirical contributions by others. These new efforts included work on, for example, the origins of the different types of electoral rules in class conflicts in a number of countries (Ahmed 2013), the changing configuration of the policy-planning network (Burris 2008), and the reason why workforces in a few very different business sectors were able to unionize, despite corporate resistance, before the passage of the National Labor Relations Act (Kimeldorf 2013). More generally, it uses historical and comparative work by sociologists who

employ the four-network theory of power to explain why the American power structure is more straightforward and corporate-dominated than is the case in most European countries, which had stronger and more independent national governments than the United States until World War II and thereafter (Domhoff 2014, Chapter 8; Lachmann 2000; Lachmann 2010; Mann 1993; Mann 2012)

The seventh version is therefore a worthy heir to the original *Who Rules America?* and to *Who Rules America Now?* Although it is mostly read by the sociology and political science professors who teach courses in social stratification, political sociology, and political science, along with at least some of the students who take these courses, I think it might warrant consideration by any social scientist interested in understanding local or national power in the United States in the twenty-first century.

Building on a database that starts with the 500 largest companies in the United States, it first reports that 87.5 percent of those corporations had at least one link to one another, and that they had interlocks with many large, privately held corporations and equity funds as well (Domhoff 2014, pp. 23–26). When fifty-two think tanks and policy-discussion groups are added to the mix, “497 of the 552 organizations (90 percent) of the organizations in the combined corporate community and policy-planning network were connected to each other either directly or indirectly,” with several think tanks and policy-discussion groups at the center, and with the Business Roundtable ranked No. 1 (Domhoff 2014, pp. 80, Table 4.1). (For a more extensive analysis of an even larger database that includes 2,563 corporations, thirty-three think tanks, and eighty-two foundations, along with forty-seven major universities and nineteen White House advisory committees, see Domhoff, Staples, and Schneider 2013).

Legislative battles from the 1930s through the 1980s are now understood in terms of two major coalitions, starting with a “spending coalition,” which until the 1990s included a majority of Southern and non-Southern Democrats arrayed against a majority of Republicans. They worked together because they were mutually interested in providing subsidies and other government benefits for their main constituents, namely, planters, ranchers, and growers in the South, Southwest, and California, and urban real estate interests everywhere in the country (Clausen 1973; Domhoff 2014, pp. 142–143; Sinclair 1982). The nature of their bargain was very explicit. Urban Democrats in the North supported agricultural subsidies and price supports that the Southerners and western ranchers needed, and in return Southerners and western ranchers supported government spending programs for roads, urban redevelopment, public housing, and hospital construction. Spending programs

that are thought of as liberal often differentially benefited the urban growth machines that provide campaign donations to the Democrats at both the local and national levels (Brown 1999; Domhoff 2013, pp. 15–17, 28; Domhoff 2014, pp. 142–144).

As for the second coalition, the long-familiar conservative voting coalition, it came together to oppose unions, the expansion of civil rights, tax increases, and business regulation, which are the issues of greatest concern to large-scale property owners in both the North and the South, and on which they rarely lost (Domhoff 2014, pp. 143–145; Shelley 1983). In fact, these are the four issues that defined class conflict for most of the twentieth century, with the civil-rights issue fitting under the rubric for class conflict because opposition to civil rights in the South was essential to the plantation owners' complete control of their major workforce (Domhoff 2014, pp. 143–145; Domhoff and Webber 2011). (Although some political scientists have doubted the existence of the conservative voting coalition as an organized effort, I think new research since the seventh version appeared provides strong support for the earlier sources I cited [Jenkins and Monroe 2014, pp. 1125–1126].)

Since the late 1990s, as everyone knows, the Northern and Southern rich have been united in the Republican Party, which means that the old conservative voting coalition is largely, if not entirely, housed in that party. Indeed, the new Southern Republicans may be even more conservative on many issues, such as social spending, than the old Southern Democrats. However, what many people may not realize is that the gradual movement of the Southern rich and the Southern Democrats into the Republican Party involved two crucial policy concessions on the part of the ultra-conservative Republicans in the North. First, the ultra-conservative Northern Republicans quietly abandoned their opposition to the huge agricultural subsidies (originally proposed by corporate moderates working through the policy-planning network), which have differentially benefited the Southern economy since the Agricultural Adjustment Act was passed with enthusiastic Southern support in 1933 (e.g., Domhoff and Webber 2011, Chapter 2). Second, the holdout ultra-conservative minority among them gradually abandoned their "isolationism" and became rip-snorting supporters of defense spending. This spending also differentially aids the Southern economy because of the insistence on the part of the old Southern Democrats from the start of World War II onward that a great many new defense plants, and later just about the whole missile and space industry, had to be placed in the South (Schulman 1991).

As for the liberal-labor coalition, which has been able to elect a significant number of Democrats to Congress over the decades, and often is essential to the spending coalition's victories on subsidies, it is not often able to win on

its own issues because of the adamant opposition of the conservative voting coalition. By and large, it usually has to settle for extensions of the Social Security Act in relation to old-age benefits and unemployment insurance, or else inflation catch-ups on the minimum wage. On larger issues, it had to hope in the past that the corporate moderates would be somewhat sympathetic to some of its concerns, which they often were until the 1970s.

Within this context, the passage of the National Labor Relations Act finally could be accounted for, with the additional aid of new archival findings and historical accounts concerning the role of the corporate moderates (Domhoff and Webber 2011, Chapters 3, 5; Farhang and Katznelson 2005). The corporate moderates had fashioned a plan in the 1920s and early 1930s to deal with labor unrest through the “company unions” they called Employee Representation Plans, and they were confident that their workers would prefer the company unions to independent unions. They even suggested and served on the original National Labor Board appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 in the face of an upsurge in union organizing. But both their legislative efforts and their company unions failed them. In 1935 it was the nascent liberal-labor coalition that shaped the main provisions of the National Labor Relations Act, against strong opposition by virtually all corporate leaders (Domhoff 2014, pp. 97–98, 172–173; Domhoff and Webber 2011, pp. 132–137).

However, I had missed the full extent of the all-out opposition of the corporate moderates to the new version of the labor act for two reasons, as I finally understood by the late 1980s (Domhoff 1990, pp. 90–91). First, my other case studies had convinced me wrongly that a leading Marxist historian was right in concluding that “few reforms were enacted without the tacit approval if not the guidance of the large corporate interests” (Weinstein 1968, p. ix). Second, I did not know the main historical study that showed otherwise on the National Labor Relations Act, but I should have been aware of it because it had appeared long ago (Auerbach 1966). It revealed that the behind-the-scenes moderate corporate policy group on this issue, the Special Conference Committee, which had been supportive of the original National Labor Board, was completely opposed to the more liberal National Labor Relations Act of 1935 for a variety of reasons. In fact, it immediately instigated a constitutional challenge, and some of its corporate supporters purchased weapons and hired private police forces to do battle with union organizers, if necessary.

That major mistake aside, the defeat suffered by the corporate moderates was not simply a matter of the very large electoral gains won by the liberal-labor coalition in Congress in the 1934 elections. It was also the case that the Southern plantation capitalists acquiesced in the passage of the act

in exchange for the exclusion of their primary workforce (agricultural and domestic labor) from its purview. The liberal-labor coalition offered this bargain because it in fact needed the support of Southern Democrats, who still enjoyed preponderant power in the Democratic Party through their control of key Congressional committees (Farhang and Katznelson 2005; Katznelson 2013; Katznelson, Geiger, and Kryder 1993; Katznelson and Mulroy 2012). They also had close political ties to Roosevelt, who owed them for their political support at the Democratic Convention in 1932, and feared that they would block the rest of his domestic legislative agenda if the National Labor Relations Act somehow passed over their objections. Indeed, he valued other parts of his domestic agenda, including the Social Security Act, more than the National Labor Relations Act.

In effect, then, the corporate rich outside the South lost on this issue of pre-eminent concern to them because they lost the support of their usual Southern allies. This analysis is supported by the fact that the liberal-labor coalition never again won on an issue related to unions after the Southern plantation owners vehemently turned against the labor act in 1937 and 1938 because of attempts by Northern unions to organize integrated unions in the South; they also abhorred the sit-down strikes that were extremely successful until they were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1939 (Domhoff 2014, pp. 97–98, 172–173; Gross 1981, Chapters 1–2). At this point the Democrats also lost enough seats in the House in 1938 to make a coordinated conservative voting coalition stronger (and long-lasting, it turned out) (Manley 1973; Patterson 1967; Shelley 1983). This reversal of fortunes for the pro-labor Democrats in 1938 was almost surely due to a big dip in the economy and the steep rise in unemployment caused by budget-balancing attempts by President Roosevelt, along with other short-sighted traditional government policies that also weakened consumer demand (e.g., Achen and Bartels 2016, Chapter 7). Union density declined over the next two or three years, but a big surge in union membership during World War II saved the day; this surge was followed by several years of postwar decline in union density, which was temporarily halted by a brief resurgence during the Korean War (Domhoff 2013, p. 81). As a result of these two war-based revivals, during which the federal government restrained corporations in their anti-union efforts, defeat for the union movement in the North after World War II came only gradually as corporations developed new anti-union strategies and moved as many of their factories as possible to union-free regions in the South. During the postwar years, unions therefore had a significant influence on some domestic policies, including on the passage of Medicare (e.g., Dark 2001; Quadagno 2005, Chapters 3–4; Roof 2011).

Studies based on the private archives and policy papers of a major policy-discussion group, the Committee for Economic Development, made it possible to demonstrate that a new round of corporate conflict with unions in the late 1960s was a major factor in the “right turn” that the corporate moderates took at that time. Although they had chipped away at union strength through a variety of means after the Korean War ended in 1953, they had been unable to make much progress toward eliminating private-sector unions. Unfortunately, the rest of that story is too complex to be told here, but it is recounted in excruciating detail elsewhere (Domhoff 2013, Chapters 8–10; Domhoff 2014, pp. 98–101, 197–201; Domhoff 2015; Linder 1999; Matusow 1998).

When the Nixon Administration, with the full backing of the one-time corporate moderates, resorted to price controls to “zap labor” to deal with inflation in 1971, and at the same time announced that it would no longer exchange American dollars for gold, it freed the American power elite to continue to expand corporate exports abroad and at the same time take a harsh stance toward organized labor (Domhoff 2013, Chapter 9). Contrary to those social scientists who once thought that the country was in decline in the 1970s, the corporate community and the White House had reasserted their post-World War II international dominance, which was still in place as of the year 2000. (And when the dust settles, it might be that the United States is and will remain the dominant power in the world for many years to come, but such long-term trends cannot be discerned on the basis of a few recent years, as the many past failed predictions of imminent American decline demonstrate.)

As American ascendancy continued throughout the last quarter of the twentieth century, union density declined rapidly in the private sector and income inequality increased at an accelerating pace (Domhoff 2013, Chapters 12–13; Jacobs and Dixon 2010; Volscho and Kelly 2012; Western and Rosenfeld 2011). The passage of NAFTA in 1994 and trade normalization with China in 2000, both of which were in good part deals to export jobs to low-wage countries while at the same time protecting copyrights and other corporate properties marketed in foreign countries, further accelerated the decline in private-sector unionism (Dreiling 2001; Dreiling and Darves-Bornoz 2016).

As was the case with the policy-planning network, recent findings relating to the opinion-shaping network made a new synthesis possible in the 2014 version of *Who Rules America?*. Americans usually formulate their own general opinions despite the massive efforts to shape those opinions by a large flotilla of public relations firms, nonprofit organizations, public affairs departments in corporations, and corporate-controlled foundations, the latter of which are now major donors to every plausible cause. (Corporate foundations are a

relatively new supplement to the family foundations.) Most Americans agree with the corporate community that private enterprise is a good way to run an economic system, and they share the opinion that government can grow too large and bureaucratic. But they also want the government to develop more job-creation programs and they support expanded social insurance programs relating to health issues and old age, all of which even the former corporate moderates among the corporate rich have strongly opposed since the late 1970s; the general public also advocates a more cooperative foreign policy with other nations, as well as less militarism, than do the foreign policy discussion groups in the policy-planning network (Moore 2007; Page 2008; Page and Jacobs 2009).

Although everyday citizens formulate their own general opinions, they pay little attention to politics and do not develop specific positions on impending legislation or inquire about the stances adopted on legislative proposals by elected officials (e.g., Zaller 2006, Chapter 6). They instead focus on the compelling and often enjoyable issues of everyday life, the most salient of which are family, jobs, and various forms of entertainment. In doing so, they are also living out the important American value of liberty (go where you want to go, do what you want to do), which can make the pull of everyday life even stronger (Flacks 1988). As a result, the opinion-shaping network has a fair amount of leeway in working with lobbyists and elected officials in crafting the details of new legislation, or in aiding the conservative voting coalition in blocking liberal and labor initiatives. Consultants employed within the opinion-shaping network also can aid elected officials in finding ways to vote against majority sentiment on some issues in their state or Congressional district, which they are inclined to do for their own reasons (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000).

Moreover, the emphasis that pluralists once put on the importance of public opinion in arguing against class dominance in the United States has been muted by innovative research based on analyses of several hundred opinion surveys carried out primarily between 1981 and 2002. The American government is responsive to the top 10% of citizens at most on issues concerning taxes, economic regulation, and social welfare, so “the preferences of the vast majority of Americans appear to have essentially no impact on which policies the government does or doesn’t adopt” on these issues (Gilens 2012, p. 1). These results are supported by a study of three general social surveys that compared the top 4% of income earners with the remaining 96%, which narrows the range of the affluent who have any influence to within hailing distance of a class-dominance theory (Page and Hennessy 2010). Then a pilot study based on a small sample from the top 1% showed that “they are extremely active politically” and “much more conservative than the American

public as a whole with respect to important policies concerning taxation, economic regulation, and especially, social welfare programs” (Page, Bartels, and Seawright 2013, p. 51). These studies led two prominent researchers on public opinion to suggest that “biased pluralism” (in which “corporations, business associations, and professional groups predominate”) and the theory presented in the seventh version of *Who Rules America?* are the two theories that still seem viable based on the new findings (Gilens and Page 2014, pp. 564–565, 573–574).

Still, there are limits to attempts to ignore public opinion. Unpopular wars affect voting behavior, as seen most recently in the election of a Democratic Congress in 2006 as the widespread dismay over the war in Iraq grew stronger (Mueller 1973; Mueller 2005). Economic disruption also can lead to defeat for an incumbent party, as seen in the presidential and congressional elections in 1932 and 2008. Nor are corporate executives, policy experts, and elected officials always able to control the damage when there are unexpected accidents, scandals, or leaks, which generate lurid and detailed media accounts that alert readers and listeners about corporate wrongdoing and illegal activities by government officials, and sometimes lead to reforms (e.g., Molotch 2004; Molotch and Lester 1974).

The Distortion and Marginalization of *Who Rules America?*

The seven versions of *Who Rules America?* have had their fair share of years in the sun, and they have been one of the starting points for studies of corporate networks, the policy-planning network, specific policy-discussion groups, and campaign finance (e.g., Apeldoorn and de Graaf 2016; Barnes 2017; Bonds 2016; Burris 1992; Dreiling and Darves-Bornoz 2016; Gonzalez 2001; Murray 2016; Murray 2017; Peoples 2009; Peoples 2010; Peschek 1987). However, the power structure research tradition on which this work is based came to be somewhat marginalized during the 1980s. I believe this is first and foremost because the social movements of the 1960s, which unexpectedly opened up new space for young social scientists to study power from new angles, gradually faded away. They did so for a mix of sociologically understandable reasons, starting with their success on their specific issues, which made it possible for more African Americans and women to pursue the compelling day-to-day interests and routines of their everyday lives, and often professional careers (Flacks 1988). But they also lost steam because of their debilitating internal divisions and the federal government’s successful efforts

to disrupt the civil rights and anti-war movements (e.g., Cunningham 2004; Ellis 1998, Chapters 4–6).

Within this context, new generations of sociologists naturally turned to the issues that arose in the 1970s and 1980s, as sociologist Karl Mannheim's theory of generational cohorts shaped by major events during their coming of age may have led us to expect (Mannheim 1923/1952; Pilcher 1994). This was in part due to the large increases in immigration from Latin America and Southeast Asia, a distinctly new phenomenon in a country overwhelmingly populated by the descendants of immigrants from Europe and slaves from Africa.

The marginalization also importantly involved the salience of "identity politics," which to me meant that young activists and everyday people were now putting greater emphasis on issues related to their racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities than on their "class identity." (In other words, I have never seen "class identity" as somehow "stronger" or more "basic" than any other identity, no matter how strongly class conflict shapes the country). I further think that these social identities were made more salient by the racism, sexism, homophobia, and other exclusions suffered by those who became involved in a new kind of identity politics, which was often annoying to those who favor a politics based on class identity (Domhoff 1998, pp. 304–305; Domhoff 2003, pp. 63–67).

Beyond these important societal factors, however, power structure research also became marginalized because rival disciplines and theory groups within the groves of academe competed for the time and energy of the diminishing number of new graduate students with an interest in power issues. Despite all the efforts in the original *Who Rules America?* to emphasize that it was neither Marxist nor Millsian, the 1970s and 1980s generations of new sociologists and political scientists were generally critical of *Who Rules America?*. They tended to see it as supposedly being either watered-down Marxism or, worse, straightforward Millsian "elitist" theory (Domhoff 1990, pp. 40–44, for one account of these arguments). I had heard rumblings of these themes a few years earlier, and tried to head them off with an article entitled "Some Friendly Answers to Radical Critics," but no such luck with friendly answers (Domhoff 1972b).

These critics were by and large successful even though the Reagan and Bush administrations (1981–1992) pursued policies that could not happen according to their theories. As economist James O'Connor, a leading figure in one of these efforts, later stated in relation to his own impactful book: "The fact remains that *Fiscal Crisis [of the State]* failed to anticipate the rise of neoliberalism and globalization and the reestablishment of U.S. political

hegemony after the fall of the Soviet empire” (O’Connor 2002, p. xviii). More generally, as concluded by Erik Olin Wright, one of the most visible sociologists who worked with O’Connor in the mid-1970s, “One of the tacit assumptions in much Marxist work of the early 1970s was the conviction that the statist turn in capitalism could not be dramatically reversed,” which meant that “no one seriously envisioned the wholesale dismantling of the welfare state, the deregulation of markets, the partial reversal of statist capitalism as a way of coping with the crisis tendencies of the period” (Wright 2004, p. 252).

The distortion and marginalization was initiated by a strongly anti-Millsian Marxist (Balbus 1971) and by the “structural Marxists” in a study group in San Francisco. This group was organized by O’Connor, whose *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (1973) was seen as a starting point for a new political economy. In their desire to create a refurbished Marxist theory that would be useful for revolutionaries, which is how some of them defined themselves, the members of these study groups first drew upon an obscure construction in O’Connor’s book:

Monopoly capitalist class interests (as a societal force rather than as an abstraction) are not the aggregate of the particular interest of this class but rather emerge within the state administration “unintentionally.” In this important sense, the capitalist state is not an “instrument,” but a “structure.”

(O’Connor 1973, pp. 68–69)

The study group’s discussions of this statement led to the elevation of “instrumentalism” and “structuralism” to a very important dichotomy within Marxism via its newly founded journal, *Kapitalistate*. The San Francisco study group also decided that I was a Marxist of the “instrumentalist” variety, whose work “rests almost entirely at the very *personal* level of showing the *social* connections between *individuals* who occupy positions of economic power” (Gold, Lo, and Wright 1975, p. 33, my italics). They also lumped me with a small group of 1960s American Marxists, called “corporate liberals,” who were said to give a little too much credit to the moderation of one faction of the capitalist class and slighted the insurgent efforts of the working class, a charge that was laid on my doorstep as well (Esping-Anderson, Friedland, and Wright 1976). This claim was not accurate for most of the corporate-liberal historians, who had been militant Marxist activists (usually Communists) for several years before they saw a need to rethink some things and went to graduate school in history (e.g., Eakins 1966; Eakins 1969; Weinstein 1968; Weinstein and Eakins 1970).

In any case, my work then was contrasted with the brilliant but overly abstract theoretical work being done by the Althusserian Marxists (e.g., Poulantzas 1969; Poulantzas 1973) and the more grounded theoretical work of German theorist Claus Offe (1974), one of the founders of *Kapitalistate*. These two newly defined Marxist extremes (American-style instrumentalism and European-style structuralism) were then synthesized into an allegedly better theory by the Kap-State Marxists. In the process I was caught in the crossfire between warring Marxists, and Mills disappeared entirely as far as any further citations to his work on power.

I disagreed with these characterizations in an article (“I Am Not An Instrumentalist”) in *Kapitalistate* by noting that in my work “classes and institutions are the basic *conceptual* units,” but that “individuals are the basic *elements* for building the networks that make up the classes and that locate the institutions in sociological space” (Domhoff 1976, p. 223, my italics). I also protested about being called a “corporate-liberal” theorist because I had earlier adopted and used Mills’ much more accurate distinction between “practical conservatives” and “sophisticated conservatives” before I had read anything about corporate-liberal theory (Domhoff 1967, pp. 28–29; Domhoff 1990, pp. 29–40, for a discussion of corporate-liberal theory and how it was misinterpreted). However, the very fine archival work by the corporate-liberal historians did add a much-needed historical dimension to my post-1967 understanding of the domestically oriented groups in the policy-planning network (Domhoff 1970b, Chapter 5; Domhoff 1979, Chapter 3). (The way in which two genuinely “corporate-liberal” organizations, the Twentieth Century Fund and the National Planning Association, were pushed aside by the corporate moderates [albeit after assimilating some aspects of the corporate-liberal program] has been masterfully demonstrated through new historical research that was published after the seventh version of *Who Rules America?* appeared [Whitham 2016].)

I replied in more detail to the structural Marxists in *Who Rules America Now?*, starting with a major disagreement with them at the end of the updated chapter on “The Shaping of the American Polity.” In doing so I drew upon findings by organizational sociologists (e.g., DiTomaso 1980, for an excellent account), which showed how the recent work in organizational theory could strengthen power structure research. If corporations dread “uncertainty” in their “inter-organizational environment,” as they most certainly do, then it follows that they could never tolerate the tremendous uncertainty of an autonomous state, even if it was in fact structured to do what is best for capitalism and the capitalist class as a whole in terms of the accumulation of capital and the legitimation of new policies: “Given what is at stake, and contrary

to O'Connor and other structural Marxists, it seems unlikely that any upper class has been content to leave these tasks to state managers acting in terms of the structural imperatives of the capitalist system" (Domhoff 1983, p. 111).

I continued my critique of the structural Marxists in a new final chapter that had been added to *Who Rules America Now?*. This chapter had a more confrontational quality, aimed at several specific theories, than did the final chapter in the first version. It pointed out that Breiger's (1974) insights on membership network analysis, which he also nicely framed as a "duality of persons and groups," refuted the structural Marxists' claim that my work rested on the "personal level." I also claimed that what structural Marxists wrote about "the state" and the "state apparatus" seems very similar to what pluralists say about "the government," using different terminology. For example, pluralists also begin with the idea that government has considerable autonomy (independence), but they then note that it has to deal with strong pressures from "interest groups" and political parties, which has parallels with the Marxists' emphasis on class struggle and working-class demands on the state (Domhoff 1983, pp. 213–215). Pluralists would also agree that governments are "structured," but they would emphasize structuring by constitutions, electoral rules, legislative enactments, and court rulings.

The case against structural Marxism to one side, the new instrumentalist-structuralist distinction inadvertently provided the perfect foil for another 1970s sociologist, Theda Skocpol (1980), who used it to criticize all "neo-Marxist" rival theories in what political sociologist Jeff Manza (2015, p. 449) rightly calls "a landmark essay" in terms of its impact. As part of her critique of neo-Marxists, she saddled my work with all the failings wrongly attributed to it by my Marxist critics. She also persisted in labeling me as a neo-Marxist despite my published statements to the contrary. Skocpol's critique originally was carried out in the name of a non-Marxian "state autonomy" theory that sounded for all the world like Mills' view of the state to me (1956, pp. 170, 277; 1962, p. 119), a view she did not mention. (Indeed, Skocpol did not cite Mills for anything in the 1980s and 1990s, except for his now-canonical critique of early postwar American sociology in *The Sociological Imagination* [1959], even though *The Power Elite* also frequently spoke of three major institutional hierarchies, orders, or domains [e.g., Mills 1956, pp. 4, 8, 15, 19, 77, 278, 292].) Nor did it seem to matter that *Who Rules America?*, following Mills, used the concept of institutions in its definition of the power elite and many other times throughout the book, including in its last closing paragraph.

There was also irony for me in her emphasis on state autonomy, along with the sinking feeling that *Who Rules America?* was no longer being taken seriously enough to refute. In fact, I had confronted and dealt with claims

of “state autonomy” and “relative state autonomy” in the United States in answering pluralists in the original *Who Rules America?*. That discussion began as follows:

The final, and most important, objection that is usually raised against a governing-class model concerns the apparent autonomy of the federal government. Critics point to the New Deal, the Democratic Party, anti-business legislation, and the intense hostility of business to government in support of the idea that the federal government is a relatively autonomous institution that adjudicates disputes among various interest groups.

(Domhoff 1967, p. 152)

The discussion then went on to spell out the several reasons why corporate leaders would complain about the government even though they dominated it, which Parsons (1960, pp. 213–214) deemed “impossible to understand” unless we assume “genuine, and in some sense effective government control of business.” These reasons included the insight from political scientist Grant McConnell (1966, p. 294) that it makes sense to complain about allegedly unfair treatment, in part to keep government officials on the defensive, but most of all to ward off “any tendency toward the development of larger constituencies for the government units.”

This analysis was expanded and sharpened in later editions (Domhoff 1983, pp. 166–149; Domhoff 1998, pp. 282–286). In a nutshell, corporate leaders face a basic power dilemma that is not fully appreciated for the difficulties it creates for them. They know they need government for many reasons, but they also fear it because it is a potentially independent power base that could rein them in to a considerable extent. It is especially dangerous as a potential challenger to complete corporate control of labor markets through its ability to hire unemployed workers, provide better social benefits, and/or support unions (Domhoff 2014, pp. 186–189). The many reasons that the various sectors of the corporate community have for opposing specific government actions and agencies gradually were blended together to create a fervent anti-government ideology that was then integrated with longstanding beliefs based on the American Revolution and the creed of liberal individualism.

Ignoring the evidence that there is little or no significant government independence from the corporate community in the United States, as recounted throughout this essay, Skocpol’s state-autonomy theory enjoyed a very successful decade based on her misguided applications of it to this country. By then primarily identified as a political scientist, she later drew back to a

“polity-centered” view of the American government within the context of a revision of her general theory. In effect, she conceded that the idea of state autonomy, which had empirical reality in many European countries, past and present, was not applicable to the United States. Her revised theory was relabeled as a variant of “historical institutionalism,” a comparative approach to studying the relationship between private organizations and government structures and agencies, which placed her work within the context of the several new schools of institutionalism that developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Robertson 1993; Skocpol 1995). She reported that the alterations in her analysis of power in the United States were due in good part to her reading on the role of women in bringing about new laws during the Progressive Era. These women are called either “remarkable,” “adept,” “amazing,” “apt,” “astute,” or “bold” about two dozen times in the book, announcing her altered view of the United States (Skocpol 1992).

The content she offered in her version of historical institutionalism, which is focused on the United States, is little different from that of pluralism, except for its stronger emphasis on enduring institutions. For instance, she now said the lack of strong government bureaucracies in the United States (which were an essential feature of many European governments) provides ample opportunity for voluntary associations and necessitates the creation of “broad, transpartisan coalitions of groups—and ultimately legislators” that have to be “assembled for each particular issue” (Domhoff 1996, Chapters 8 and 9, for my detailed critique of Skocpol’s claims about the Progressive Era; Skocpol 1992, pp. x, 368, 529, for the phrases that are quoted). There is little or no mention of large-scale business enterprises, which were incorporating, consolidating, working closely together, and burgeoning in power before and during the Progressive Era, in good part as a reaction to the major legal and social-movement pressures that owners of big businesses increasingly experienced in the era after the Civil War (e.g., Bunting 1987; Parker-Gwin and Roy 1996; Roy 1983; Roy 1997; Weinstein 1968). Nor does she discuss the fact that many of the Progressive women were members of the social upper class and never won on legislative issues on which corporate leaders opposed them (e.g., Davis 1967; Domhoff 1970b, Chapter 2; Domhoff 1996, pp. 241–249; Gordon 1993; Gordon 1994, Chapter 4; Mink 1993; Mink 1995).

Although anything I write is now often ignored by those who have followed in Skocpol’s footsteps, I have not hesitated to chastise them for their erroneous accounts of the New Deal, which are factually challenged when it comes to the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Social Security Act, and the National Labor Relations Act (Amenta 1998; Domhoff 1996, Chapters 3–5; Domhoff and Webber 2011, pp. 217–235;

Finegold and Skocpol 1995; Hacker 2002; Hacker and Pierson 2002; Orloff 1993; Skocpol 1988). I also have criticized them for their account of the right turn that picked up speed in the 1970s, which Skocpol (2003; 2007) in part attributes to the decline of middle-level voluntary organizations that supposedly used to provide settings for their millions of members to develop a civic orientation and acquire leadership skills (e.g., the American Legion, Elks Club, General Federation of Women's Clubs, Knights of Columbus, Shriners, and labor unions).

Two of her former political science students supplemented her right-turn argument by claiming that in the 1970s there was a sudden rise in the organizational strength and determination of a previously complacent and disorganized corporate community, which was allegedly still "getting its clock cleaned" during the first Nixon Administration (Hacker and Pierson 2010, p. 116). But mountains of case study and network evidence already had shown that the corporate community was very well organized between 1960 and 1970 (e.g., Domhoff 1970b; Domhoff 1979; Hall 1969; Melone 1977; Salzman and Domhoff 1983).

Even worse, her former students deny the central role of racism in precipitating the white backlash that brought the Republicans to power in 1968 and made possible the right turn that the corporate moderates wanted to take at that point for their own separate reasons, which concerned rising foreign competition, accelerating inflation, and the increasing bargaining power of unions in the context of a very tight labor market. They downplay or ignore the massive transformation of the Democratic Party and American power structure in the 1960s resulting from, and then in reaction to, the civil rights movement. They dismiss what many scholars have concluded about the importance of the civil rights movement and the backlash to it as follows: "This near-universal narrative is colorful, easy to tell, and superficially appealing," and add that it "misses the real story," with the accomplished historian Allen Matusow serving as the designated academic whipping boy for his conclusion that there had been an unraveling of the liberal coalition in the 1960s (Domhoff 2014, pp. 197–201; Hacker and Pierson 2010, pp. 95–96; Matusow 1984). That "real story" is based on the continuing high levels of government activism and social spending from 1964 to 1977: "nothing unraveled" as far as "spending, taxation, regulation, and all the other things that government does . . ." (Hacker and Pierson 2010, p. 96).

However, historians, sociologists, and political scientists have shown otherwise for the importance of white racism in the North as well as the South, which has always had a major impact on union success in both the workplace and the political arena (e.g., Boyle 1995; Boyle 1998; Carter 2000,

p. 215; Converse, Miller, Rusk, and Wolfe 1969; Frymer 2008; Matusow 1984; Quadagno 1994, Chapter 3; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 1991; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003; Sugrue 2001; Sugrue 2008). Crucially, just enough whites switched their allegiance by 1968 to elect Republicans to the White House for twenty-eight of the next forty years, with the two exceptions (Carter and Clinton) being white Democratic governors from the South who could still win some Southern states. The votes for the Republicans by the anti-integration blue-collar and white-collar voters, union and non-union, also strengthened the Northern part of the conservative voting coalition, which helped the Nixon Administration to transform the National Labor Relations Board into a means to undercut unions; in addition, their votes made possible the anti-union initiatives by the Department of Labor and further defeats for any legislation that might help unions (Domhoff 2013, Chapters 8–10; Gross 1995, Chapters 11–12; Linder 1999; Manley 1973; Shelley 1983).

As you might suspect by this point, the seventh version of *Who Rules America?* discusses the assertions about the New Deal and the right turn by Skocpol and her former students in a considerably revised and updated closing chapter, which also states my critiques of pluralists, organizational state theorists, and classical elite theorists as well (e.g., Berry 1999; Burton and Higley 1987; Heinz, Laumann, Nelson, and Salisbury 1993; Higley and Burton 2006; Laumann and Knoke 1987). However, I then turn all open-minded and ecumenical after my criticisms are delivered by inviting all power theorists to find “common ground” within the context of Mann’s (2012; 2013) four-network theory, as he and I have independently applied it to the United States:

The general theoretical framework that informs this book has agreements with each of the four other theories, even though it disagrees with many of their specific claims about the United States. Its emphasis on four major independent bases of power—the economic network, the political network, the military network, and the ideological network—generates a dynamic and open-ended view of the future because these networks interact and come into conflict in constantly changing ways due to newly created organizational forms, newly invented technologies, new methods of communication, military innovations, and new spiritual movements. Thus, there is an emergent and constantly changing quality to social organization that makes the present and future very different from the past, thereby rendering history an unreliable guide for present-day actions.

(Domhoff 2014, p. 218).

The chapter then claims that this theory also explains how and why the economic network (read “social upper class/corporate community”) “has always had ascendancy over the other three” power networks in the United States, which in turn explains “why the federal government was not very large until the 1940s and never very independent of those that dominated and benefited the most from the economic system.” Furthermore, it explains why “the military has never had a large or independent role in important government decisions” as well as why “churches and other places of worship have been too divided and fractious to be the kind of power base that the Catholic Church once provided” in some European countries (Domhoff 2014, p. 219).

Once we grant corporate dominance in this country its due, and make proper allowance for the importance of the conflicting needs of Northern business interests and Southern planters on several major issues until at least the 1960s, then we can understand the conservative voting coalition’s dominance of Congress on legislation having to do with taxes, labor unions, and business regulation; the late arrival of government social insurance programs; and why the union movement is weak compared to what it is in most industrialized democracies (Domhoff 2014, p. 219; Voss 1993, for an excellent comparative-historical study of union strength that has had a strong influence on my views). Even more generally, this type of analysis also helps account for the institutional impediments to majority rule, such as:

. . . the nature of the Constitution, the decentralized structure of the government, the weakness of the federal bureaucracy, and the strongholds of committee power within Congress. The American federal government lacks “capacity,” except as a military establishment that also provides pensions and various kinds of health and disability insurance for its civilian citizens, because the corporate community wants to limit the independence of elected officials and government employees.

(Domhoff 2014, pp. 219–220)

In case that was not conciliatory enough in terms of the more open-ended spirit that was in the sociological air when I started to study power in America, the book closes with the thought that the theory presented in the book “encompasses the key insights of the other theories without incorporating their weaknesses”; however, I have to admit, theory aside, that the rest of the concluding sentence states that “the evidence presented for a high level of class dominance in the United States calls into question many of their empirical claims” (Domhoff 2014, p. 220).

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that it is a combination of insights provided by organizational and class concepts that explains the strength of the corporate rich in America, and makes them a dominant class. The institution of private property and the form it has taken in the United States, the corporation, leads to an ownership class that has great economic resources and the potential for political power. At the same time, this ownership class has to deal with the differences among corporate owners resulting from market competition and the rise of new business sectors. The corporate-based private-enterprise system also generates ongoing conflict over wages, profits, work rules, taxes, environmental degradation, and government regulation. However, the wide range of nonprofit organizations financed and directed by members of the ownership class gives them an institutional basis from which they can deploy their class resources for ultimately political ends, including the development of compromises among themselves on key issues. It is therefore the interaction of organizational imperatives (e.g., the division of labor and top-down control) and class imperatives (e.g., the need for constantly rising profits and control of labor markets) that impact all American organizations and institutions, including government, which leads to class dominance. This dominance is maintained due to the unending efforts to shape the society and its government by an institutionally based leadership group (the power elite), which works its will through the special-interest, policy-planning, opinion-shaping, and candidate-selection networks.

So, as I look back on about fifty-four years of power structure research, I have to conclude that *Who Rules America?* has stood the test of time and criticism, and that its shortcomings and mistakes were corrected in later versions. For those reasons, along with the new insights and findings from many other researchers that were added to the later versions, I think the theory and evidence presented in its several incarnations are more accurate and less wrong than any other theory of the American power structure that has been offered to date. There is still plenty of room for improvement, but the latest version of *Who Rules America?*, along with the many long and detailed supplementary documents on WhoRulesAmerica.net, is the best starting point.

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