

## Ruling America

Gary Gerstle

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**Gary Gerstle : Ruling America** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ruling America:

50 of 54 people found the following review helpful. The Other Side of 'People's History' By S. Sherman This extremely stimulating, highly cohesive collection of essays focuses on a topic underappreciated in American history--the shifts in power from one elite group to another. The idea that small groups of very wealthy men play the major role in shaping the political dynamics of the US is every bit as subversive as the idea that the US has been the site of intense class struggles (the 'people's history' view). After reading it, my sense of the trajectory of American capitalism--from the merchant-slave owner alliance to the rise of industrial capitalism to the managerial revolution of the twentieth century

to the recent shift to the South-Southwest--was renewed. Its one of those books you finish and think--how did I not know this already? It all seems so central, yet so neglected. Although elite history inevitably has a strong economic focus, this book by no means neglects gender, race, culture and other social historical themes. The elites are always seen as historical actors, shaped by and shaping their contexts, rather than mechanically performing class roles. Nor is elite rule presumed to be natural, inevitable, or unchallenged. While the book perhaps could have given more attention to elites at (or engaged with) such institutions as Hollywood, the news media, academia and other spaces for 'manufacturing consent', and perhaps underrates the importance of the consolidation of space for progressives in some of these institutions since the sixties, overall this is a very engaging collection I strongly recommend. 4 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Reads like a running time line. By Lopidious1 Half way through it and it is everything I hoped and more. Reads like a running time line. Advanced vocabulary usage so be sure to be well read before starting. But worth every cent! 1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Good Read. By John E Reimers This is a very well written, informative history on an aspect of American history. I particularly liked the last chapter. Now I know what is driving this country into the ditch.

This book offers a panoramic history of our country's ruling elites from the time of the American Revolution to the present. At its heart is the greatest of American paradoxes: How have tiny minorities of the rich and privileged consistently exercised so much power in a nation built on the notion of rule by the people? In a series of thought-provoking essays, leading scholars of American history examine every epoch in which ruling economic elites have shaped our national experience.

From Publishers Weekly Even in a nation founded on the principles of freedom and equality, small, motivated groups wield inordinate amounts of power. The notion itself is straightforward, but the 11 historians contributing to this volume examine it rigorously, documenting the dominance of American ruling classes like the antebellum South's "slave power," the North's "Merchants and Manufacturers," the "nouveau riche industrialists" of the Gilded Age and the Cold War's "Foreign Policy Establishment." Each essay chronicles the myriad factors that led to the consolidation of power by one such set of aristocrats, and then explains the internal divisions and external changes that led to their downfall and empowered their successors. For example, a small clique of graduates from top New England boarding schools and universities coalesced into the "Establishment," dominating foreign policy with their worldview until "Vietnam raised questions that the foreign policy Establishment was not successfully able to answer." The most recent manifestation of this elite baton-passing, according to a convincing entry by Michael Lind, resulted in the "southernization of American society"-under which the country morphed into "a low-wage society with weak parties, weak unions and a political culture based on demagogic appeals to racial and ethnic anxieties, religious conservatism, and militaristic patriotism." The volume captures the essence of varied eras and their elites, but at times the narrative suffers from dry academic prose and a shortage of illustrative anecdotes. Curiously, the editors conclude that despite 200 years of cyclical history, no current challenge is arising to overthrow the currently prevailing "counterrevolution against the New Deal." In fact, in suggesting that "the democratic urge to rein in the dangerous ambitions of privileged elites has gone frail," they undermine the key lesson of the compilation itself. Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. One of the enduring mysteries of American politics, from the days of the Constitutional convention to the Bush administration, has been how, in a democracy, wealthy elites have managed to exert a powerful influence on public life. In this book, some of our finest historians address this question and in so doing offer a host of new insights into our national past and present. Class is the feature of American life that dares not speak its name, but these essays go a long way toward explaining how it operates in American politics. (Eric Foner, De Witt Clinton Professor of History, Columbia University) This is a powerful set of essays on a sorely neglected subject: the history of the American elite in a world it has come to dominate. U.S. society has become less egalitarian in recent years, and Fraser and Gerstle's polished and provocative anthology helps explain how it got that way. (Michael Kazin, author of *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*) Ruling America is a splendid collection of superbly written essays which probe the nature and importance of inequality in income and power over a 250 year period of American history. It succeeds in reintroducing concepts like "ruling class," "elite" and "establishment" into our political and historical vocabulary. It is an impressive accomplishment. (Nelson Lichtenstein, University of California, Santa Barbara) Undoubtedly, Ruling America provides valuable insight into historical periods that trace the growing power of an elite ruling class, but perhaps its true value lies in the questions the narrative prompts about the balance of power in the world's most powerful nation...A pertinent reference for scholars in the fields of business, economic and political history. For business historians in particular, this book provides a solid foundation to explore the machinations of big business and government inside America's ruling class in the context of a triumphant agenda. (Shakila Yacob Business History 2007-11-01) One of the enduring mysteries of American politics, from the days of the Constitutional convention to the Bush administration, has been how, in a democracy, wealthy elites have managed to exert a powerful influence on public life. In this book, some of our finest historians address this question and in so doing offer a host of new insights into our national past and present. Class is

the feature of American life that dares not speak its name, but these essays go a long way toward explaining how it operates in American politics. (Eric Foner, De Witt Clinton Professor of History, Columbia University)