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William Domhoff

The Rich in America: Power, Control, Wealth and the Elite Upper Class

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Film Analysis

This was a thought provoking film by William Domhoff discussing the rich in America, how the elite upper class control the majority of America's wealth. He further states that politics in America is dominated by these rich elites. His main focus is the upper class, those with old or new money, those with political power and the capitalist. His arguments are centered on the idea that wealth and power belong to a few upper class elites.

According to Domhoff, social class is defined as those with similar incomes, education power and prestige in society. He states that in America there is the upper class or ruling class, the upper middle class, those who hold PhD's from Ivy League schools for example; middle class which is the average Joe, these people seldom attend Ivy League schools but instead hold degrees from public universities; example nurses and teachers. Then there is the lower middle class or working class, those who do manual labor, the electrician or the plumber. Finally the lower class, the working poor, those who work hourly jobs with no benefits, who rent instead of own their own home and who most likely live in bad neighborhoods with terrible school districts. But, he continues, there is a blending of classes, for example a low income student who gets the opportunity to attend an Ivy League school may blend in with the upper class and may no longer relate to the hood.

Watching it for the first time I found it difficult to understand Domhoff's viewpoint; but it soon became clear that he favored the Democratic viewpoint and his liberal stance was quite evident. He spoke of the rich with disdain which I do not agree with. I think that in pursuing the American dream we should be careful how we perceive the rich. Instead of demonizing them or treating them like they are from another world and resenting them for their nice houses, I would rather say, "what a lovely house, one day I would love to have one like that." Although it is true that there is a gap between rich and poor in America, I found that Domhoff was too focused on statistics, intent on proving that rich people use their wealth and power to control the middle class. I was reminded of what we covered in class, instead of resenting the rich we should focus on improving ourselves because an educated mind cannot be controlled or enslaved. He describes the rich like you would a secret society. They stick together, they hire each other and they make money only to benefit themselves.

The producer made the assumption that rich people are only interested in hoarding their money but that is not always the case. Many rich people in America donate millions to charities, offer grants to students and most importantly create jobs for many. He is correct when he says only a small percentage of America owns the majority of America's wealth, what I do not agree with is that the opportunity does not exist for everyone. We can all seek wealth.

Domhoff also insists that the rich control the political process, which in part may be true but how many of us vote? How many of us actively take part in the democratic process to affect change? I did enjoy watching the film and admit that although it was made many years ago, it is still relevant to contemporary United States political-economic situation. But I would say to anyone who watches it, do not be too quick to side with Domhoff and his agenda. Rich Americans own businesses, businesses create jobs that help the economy for everyone to enjoy.

