The Higher Circles

The powers of ordinary men are circumscribed by the everyday worlds in which they live, yet even in these rounds of job, family, and neighborhood they often seem driven by forces they can neither understand nor govern. 'Great changes' are beyond their control, but affect their conduct and outlook none the less. The very framework of modern society confines them to projects not their own, but from every side, such changes now press upon the men and women of the mass society, who accordingly feel that they are without purpose in an epoch in which they are without power.

But not all men are in this sense ordinary. As the means of information and of power are centralized, some men come to occupy positions in American society from which they can look down upon, so to speak, and by their decisions mightily affect, the everyday worlds of ordinary men and women. They are not made by their jobs; they set up and break down jobs for thousands of others; they are not confined by simple family responsibilities; they can escape. They may live in many hotels and houses, but they are bound by no one community. They need not merely 'meet the demands of the day and hour'; in some part, they create these demands, and cause others to meet them. Whether or not they profess their power, their technical and political experience of it far transcends that of the underlying population. What Jacob Burckhardt said of 'great men,' most Americans might well say of their elite: 'They are all that we are not.'

The power elite is composed of men whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major consequences. Whether they do or do not make such decisions is less important than the fact that they do occupy such pivotal positions: their failure to act, their failure to make decisions, is itself an act that is often of greater consequence than the decisions they do make. For they are in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society. They rule the big corporations. They run the machinery of the state and claim its prerogatives. They direct the military establishment. They occupy the strategic command posts of the social structure, in which are now centered the effective means of the power and the wealth and the celebrity which they enjoy.

The power elite are not solitary rulers. Advisers and consultants, spokesmen and opinion-makers are often the captains of their higher thought and decision. Immediately below the elite are the professional politicians of the middle levels of power, in the Congress and in the pressure groups, as well as among the new and old upper classes of town and city and region. Mingling with them, in curious ways which we shall explore, are those professional celebrities who live by being continually displayed but are never, so long as they remain celebrities, displayed enough If such celebrities are not at the head of any dominating hierarchy, they do often have the power to distract the attention of the public or afford sensations to the masses, or, more directly, to gain the ear of those who do occupy positions of direct power. More or less unattached, as critics of morality and technicians of power, as spokesmen of God and creators of mass sensibility, such celebrities and consultants are part of the immediate scene in which the drama of the elite is enacted. But that drama itself is centered in the command posts of the major institutional hierarchies.

The truth about the nature and the power of the elite is not some secret which men of affairs know but will not tell. Such men hold quite various theories about their own roles in the sequence of event and decision. Often they are uncertain about their roles, and even more often they allow their fears and their hopes to affect their assessment of their own power. No matter how great their actual power, they tend to be less acutely aware of it than of the resistances of others to its use. Moreover, most American men of affairs have learned well the rhetoric of public relations, in some cases even to the point of using it when they are alone, and thus coming to believe it. The personal awareness of the actors is only one of the several sources one must examine in order to understand the higher circles. Yet many who believe that there is no elite, or at any rate none of any consequence, rest their argument upon what men of affairs believe about themselves, or at least assert in public.

There is, however, another view: those who feel, even if vaguely, that a compact and powerful elite of great importance does now prevail in America often base that feeling upon the historical trend of our time. They have felt, for example, the domination of the military event, and from this they infer that generals and admirals, as well as other men of decision influenced by them, must be enormously powerful. They hear that the Congress has again abdicated to a handful of men decisions clearly related
to the issue of war or peace. They know that the bomb was dropped over Japan in the name of the United States of America, although they were at no time consulted about the matter. They feel that they live in a time of big decisions; they know that they are not making any. Accordingly, as they consider the present as history, they infer that at its center, making decisions or failing to make them, there must be an elite of power.

On the one hand, those who share this feeling about big historical events assume that there is an elite and that its power is great. On the other hand, those who listen carefully to the reports of men apparently involved in the great decisions often do not believe that there is an elite whose powers are of decisive consequence.

Both views must be taken into account, but neither is adequate. The way to understand the power of the American elite lies neither solely in recognizing the historic scale of events nor in accepting the personal awareness reported by men of apparent decision. Behind such men and behind the events of history, linking the two, are the major institutions of modern society. These hierarchies of state and corporation and army constitute the means of power; as such they are now of a consequence not before equaled in human history—and at their summits, there are now those command posts of modern society which offer us the sociological key to an understanding of the role of the higher circles in America.

Within American society, major national power now resides in the economic, the political, and the military domains. Other institutions seem off to the side of modern history, and, on occasion, duly subordinated to these. No family is as directly powerful in national affairs as any major corporation; no church is as directly powerful in the external biographies of young men in America today as the military establishment; no college is as powerful in the shaping of momentous events as the National Security Council. Religious, educational, and family institutions are not autonomous centers of national power; on the contrary, these decentralized areas are increasingly shaped by the big three, in which developments of decisive and immediate consequence now occur.

Families and churches and schools adapt to modern life; governments and armies and corporations shape it; and, as they do so, they turn these lesser institutions into means for their ends. Religious institutions provide chaplains to the armed forces where they are used as a means of increasing the effectiveness of its morale to kill. Schools select and train men for their jobs in corporations and their specialized tasks in the armed forces. The extended family has, of course, long been broken up by the industrial revolution, and now the son and the father are removed from the family, by compulsion if need be, whenever the army of the state sends out the call. And the symbols of all these lesser institutions are used to legitimate the power and the decisions of the big three.

The life-fate of the modern individual depends not only upon the family into which he was born or which he enters by marriage, but increasingly upon the corporation in which he spends the most alert hours of his best years; not only upon the school where he is educated as a child and adolescent, but also upon the state which touches him throughout his life; not only upon the church in which on occasion he hears the word of God, but also upon the army in which he is disciplined.

If the centralized state could not rely upon the inculcation of nationalist loyalties in public and private schools, its leaders would promptly seek to modify the decentralized educational system. If the bankruptcy rate among the top five hundred corporations were as high as the general divorce rate among the thirty-seven million married couples, there would be economic catastrophe on an international scale. If members of armies gave to them no more of their lives than do believers to the churches to which they belong, there would be a military crisis.

Within each of the big three, the typical institutional unit has become enlarged, has become administrative, and, in the power of its decisions, has become centralized. Behind these developments there is a fabulous technology, for as institutions, they have incorporated this technology and guide it, even as it shapes and paces their developments.

The economy—once a great scatter of small productive units in autonomous balance—has become dominated by two or three hundred giant corporations, administratively and politically interrelated, which together hold the keys to economic decisions.

The political order, once a decentralized set of several dozen states with a weak spinal cord, has become a centralized, executive establishment which has taken up into itself many powers previously scattered, and now enters into each and every cranny of the social structure.

The military order, once a slim establishment in a context of distrust fed by state militia, has become the largest and most expensive feature of government, and, although well versed in smiling public relations, now has all the grim and clumsy efficiency of a sprawling bureaucratic domain.

In each of these institutional areas, the means of power at the disposal of decision makers have increased enormously; their central executive powers have been enhanced; within each of them modern administrative routines have been elaborated and tightened up.
As each of these domains becomes enlarged and centralized, the consequences of its activities become greater, and its traffic with the others increases. The decisions of a handful of corporations bear upon military and political as well as upon economic developments around the world. The decisions of the military establishment rest upon and grievously affect political life as well as the very level of economic activity. The decisions made within the political domain determine economic activities and military programs. There is no longer, on the one hand, an economy, and, on the other hand, a political order containing a military establishment unimportant to politics and to money-making. There is a political economy linked, in a thousand ways, with military institutions and decisions. On each side of the world-split running through central Europe and around the Asiatic rimlands, there is an ever-increasing interlocking of economic, military, and political structures. If there is government intervention in the corporate economy, so is there corporate intervention in the governmental process. In the structural sense, this triangle of power is the source of the interlocking directorate that is most important for the historical structure of the present.

The fact of the interlocking is clearly revealed at each of the points of crisis of modern capitalist society—slump, war, and boom. In each, men of decision are led to an awareness of the interdependence of the major institutional orders. In the nineteenth century, when the scale of all institutions was smaller, their liberal integration was achieved in the automatic economy, by an autonomous play of market forces, and in the automatic political domain, by the bargain and the vote. It was then assumed that out of the imbalance and friction that followed the limited decisions then possible a new equilibrium would in due course emerge. That can no longer be assumed, and it is not assumed by the men at the top of each of the three dominant hierarchies.

For given the scope of their consequences, decisions-and indecisions—any one of these ramify into the others, and hence top decisions tend either to become coordinated or to lead to a commanding indecision. It has not always been like this. When numerous small entrepreneurs made up the economy, for example, many of them could fail and the consequences still remain local; political and military authorities did not intervene. But now, given political expectations and military commitments, can they afford to allow key units of the private corporate economy to break down in slump? Increasingly, they do intervene in economic affairs, and as they do so, the controlling decisions in each order are inspected by agents of the other two, and economic, military, and political structures are interlocked.

At the pinnacle of each of the three enlarged and centralized domains, there have arisen those higher circles which make up the economic, the political, and the military elites. At the top of the economy, among the corporate rich, there are the chief executives; at the top of the political order, the members of the political directorate; at the top of the military establishment, the elite of soldier-statesmen clustered in and around the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the upper echelon. As each of these domains has coincided with the others, as decisions tend to become total in their consequence, the leading men in each of the three domains of power—the warlords, the corporation chieftains, the political directorate—tend to come together, to form the power elite of America.

The Chief Executives

The corporations are the organized centers of the private property system: the chief executives are the organizers of that system. As economic men, they are at once creatures and creators of the corporate revolution, which, in brief, has transformed property from a tool of the workman into an elaborate instrument by which his work is controlled and a profit extracted from it. The small entrepreneur is no longer the key to the economic life of America; and in many economic sectors where small producers and distributors do still exist they strive mightily—as indeed they must if they are not to be extirpated—to have trade associations or governments act for them as corporations act for big industry and finance. Americans like to think of themselves as the most individualistic people in the world, but among them the impersonal corporation has proceeded the farthest and now reaches into every area and detail of daily life. Less than two-tenths of 1 per cent of all the manufacturing and mining companies in the United States now employ half of all the people working in these basic industries. The story of the American economy since the Civil War is thus the story of the creation and consolidation of this corporate world of centralized property.

1. In the development of each major industrial line, competition between many small firms tends to be most frequent at the industry's beginning. There is then a jockeying and maneuvering which, in due course, results in consolidation and merger. Out of the youthful competition, there emerges the Big Five, or the Big Three, as the case may be: a small set of firms which shares what there is to share of the industry's profits, and which dominates the decisions made by and for the industry. 'The power exercised by a few
large firms,' John K. Galbraith has remarked, 'is different only in degree and precision of its exercise from that of the single-firm monopoly.' If they compete with one another they do so less in terms of price than in terms of 'product development,' advertising, and packaging. No single firm among them decides, but neither is the decision made impersonally by a competitive, autonomous market. There is simply too much at stake for that sort of slipshod method to be the going rule. Decisions become, explicitly or implicitly, the decisions of committees; the Big Three or Four, one way or another, are in on the major decisions that are rendered. In this there need be no explicit conspiracy, and certainly none that is provable. What is important is that each big producer makes his decisions on the basis of his impression of the reactions of the other big producers.

2. In the process of corporate consolidation many owning entrepreneurs and even salaried managers become too narrow; they cannot detach themselves from their own particular company. Managers with less personal feelings for any one firm come gradually to displace such men narrowed by their own experience and interests. On the higher levels, those in command of great corporations must be able to broaden their views in order to become industrial spokesmen rather than merely heads of one or the other of the great firms in the industry. In short, they must be able to move from one company's policy and interests to those of the industry. There is one more step which some of them take: They move from the industrial point of interest and outlook to the interests and outlook of the class of all big corporate property as a whole.

The transitions from company to industry and from industry to class are aided by the fact that corporate ownership is, in a limited way, scattered. The very fact of the spread of ownership among the very rich and the chief executives of the great corporations makes for a unity of the property class, since the control of many corporations by means of various legal devices has excluded the smaller but not the larger proprietyed interests. The 'scatter' of sizable property is within a quite small circle; the executives and owners who are in and of and for this propertied class cannot merely push the narrow interests of each property; their interests become engaged by the whole corporate class.

3. The six and a half million people who owned stock in publicly held corporations in 1952 made up less than 7 per cent of all adults in the population. But that is not the whole story; in fact, by itself, it is misleading. What is important is, first, what types of people own any stock? And second, how concentrated is the value of the stock they own?

First of all: 45 per cent of the executives, 26 per cent of all professional persons, and 19 per cent of all supervisory officials hold stock. But only 0.2 per cent of the unskilled workers, 1.4 per cent of the semi-skilled workers, and 4.4 per cent of foremen and skilled workers hold stock. Some 98.6 per cent of all workers in manufacturing own no stock whatsoever.

Second, in 1952, only 1.6 million (25 per cent) of the 6.5 million people who held any stock received as much as $10,000 per year from any and all sources. We do not know how much of that $10,000 came from dividends, but there is reason to believe that the average proportion was not great. In 1949, some 165,000- about one-tenth of 1 per cent of all U.S. adults- received 42 per cent of all the corporate dividends going to individuals. The minimum income of these people for that year was $30,000. The idea of a really wide distribution of economic ownership is a cultivated illusion: at the very most, 0.2 or 0.3 per cent of the adult population own the bulk, the pay-off shares, of the corporate world.

4. The top corporations are not a set of splendidly isolated giants. They have been knit together by explicit associations, within their respective industries and regions and in supra-associations such as the NAM. These associations organize a unity among the managerial elite and other members of the corporate rich. They translate narrow economic powers into industry-wide and class-wide powers; and they use these powers, first, on the economic front, for example with reference to labor and its organizations; and, second,' on the political front, for example in their large role in the political sphere. And they infuse into the ranks of smaller businessmen the views of big business.

When such associations appear to be unwieldy, containing conflicting lines of argument, cliques have emerged within them which have attempted to steer their programs and lend direction to their policies. In the higher circles of business and its associations, there has long been a tension, for example, between the 'old guard' of practical conservatives and the 'business liberals,' or sophisticated conservatives. What the old guard represents is the outlook, if not always the intelligent interests, of the more narrow economic concerns. What the business liberals represent is the outlook and the interests of the newer proprietyed class as a whole. They are 'sophisticated' because they are more flexible in adjusting to such political facts of life as the New Deal and big labor, because they have taken over and
used the dominant liberal rhetoric for their own purposes, and because they have, in general, attempted to get on top of, or even slightly ahead of, the trend of these developments, rather than to fight it as practical conservatives are wont to do.

5. The growth and interconnections of the corporations, in short, have meant the rise of a more sophisticated executive elite which now possesses a certain autonomy from any specific property interest. Its power is the power of property, but that property is not always or even usually of one coherent and narrow type. It is, in operating fact, class-wide property.

Would it not, after all, be quite strange if, in a country so devoted to private property and where so much of it is now piled up, and in an atmosphere which in the last fifty years has often been quite hostile, where men of economic means also possess, we are continually told, the greatest administrative and managerial ability in the world—would it not be strange if they did not consolidate themselves, but merely drifted along, doing the best they could, merely responding to day-to-day attacks upon them?

6. Such consolidation of the corporate world is underlined by the fact that within it there is an elaborate network of interlocking directorships. 'Interlocking Directorate' is no mere phrase: it points to a solid feature of the facts of business life, and to a sociological anchor of the community of interest, the unification of outlook and policy, that prevails among the property class. Any detailed analysis of any major piece of business comes upon this fact, especially when the business involves politics. As a minimum inference, it must be said that such arrangements permit an interchange of views in a convenient and more or less formal way among those who share the interests of the corporate rich. In fact, if there were not such overlapping directorships, we should suspect the existence of less formal, although quite adequate, channels of contact. For the statistics of interlocking directorates do not form a clean index to the unity of the corporate world or the co-ordination of its policy: there can be and there is co-ordinated policy without interlocking directors, as well as interlocking directors without co-ordinated policy.

7. Most of the thirty-odd billion dollar corporations of today began in the nineteenth century. Their growth was made possible not only by machine technology but by the now primitive office instruments of typewriters, calculators, telephones, and rapid printing, and, of course, the transportation grid. Now the technique of electronic communication and control of information is becoming such that further centralization is entirely possible. Closed-circuit television and the electronic calculator put control of an enormous array of production units—no matter now decentralized such technical units may be—under the control of the man in the front office. The intricately specialized apparatus of the corporation will inevitably be more easily held together and controlled.

The trend within the corporate world is toward larger financial units tied into intricate management networks far more centralized than is the case today. Productivity has and will increase fabulously, especially when automation makes it possible to interlock several machines in such a way as to eliminate the need for much of the human control at the point of production that is now required. That means that the corporate executives will not need to manage huge organizations of people; rather, in Business Week words, they will be 'operating great mechanical organizations using fewer and fewer people.'

All this has not been and is not now inevitable; certainly the enormous size of the modern corporation cannot be explained as due to increased efficiency; many specialists regard the size now typical of the giants as already in excess of the requirements of efficiency. In truth, the relationship of corporate size to efficiency is quite unknown; moreover, the scale of the modern corporation is usually due more to financial and managerial amalgamations than to technical efficiency. But inevitable or not, the fact is that today the great American corporations seem more like states within states than simply private businesses. The economy of America has been largely incorporated, and within their incorporation the corporate chiefs have captured the technological innovation, accumulated the existing great fortunes as well as much lesser, scattered wealth, and capitalized the future. Within the financial and political boundaries of the corporation, the industrial revolution itself has been concentrated. Corporations command raw materials, and the patents on inventions with which to turn them into finished products. They command the most expensive, and therefore what must be the finest, legal minds in the world, to invent and to refine their defenses and their strategies. They employ man as producer and they make that which he buys as consumer. They clothe him and feed him and invest his money. They make that with which he fights the wars and they finance the ballyhoo of advertisement and the obscurantist bunk of public relations that surround him during the wars and between them.

Their private decisions, responsibly made in the interests of the feudal-like world of private property and income, determine the size and shape of the national economy, the level of employment, the purchasing
power of the consumer, the prices that are advertised, the investments that are channeled. Not 'Wall Street financiers' or bankers, but large owners and executives in their self-financing corporations hold the keys of economic power. Not the politicians of the visible government, but the chief executives who sit in the political directorate ... hold the power and the means of defending the privileges of their corporate world. If they do not reign, they do govern at many of the vital points of everyday life in America, and no powers effectively and consistently countervail against them, nor have they as corporate-made men developed any effectively restraining conscience.

The Warlords

During the eighteenth century, observers of the historic scene began to notice a remarkable trend in the division of power at the top of modern society: Civilians, coming into authority, were able to control men of military violence, whose power, being hedged in and neutralized, declined. At various times and places, of course, military men had been the servants of civilian decision, but this trend—which reached its climax in the nineteenth century and lasted until World War I—seemed then, and still seems, remarkable simply because it had never before happened on such a scale or never before seemed so firmly grounded.

In the twentieth century, among the industrialized nations of the world, the great, brief, precarious fact of civilian dominance began to falter and now—after the long peace from the Napoleonic era to World War I—the old march of world history once more asserts itself. All over the world, the world is returning. All over the world, reality is defined in his terms. And in America, too, into the political vacuum the warlords have marched. Alongside the corporate executives and the politicians, the generals and admirals—those uneasy cousins within the American elite—have gained and have been given increased power to make and to influence decisions of the gravest consequence.

The military world selects and forms those who become a professional part of it. The harsh initiation at The Point or The Academy—and on lower levels of the military service, in basic training—reveals the attempt to break up early civilian values and sensibilities in order the more easily to implant a character structure as totally new as possible.

It is this attempt to break up the earlier acquired sensibilities that lies back of the 'breaking' of the recruit and the assignment to him of very low status in the military world. He must be made to lose much of his old identity in order that he can then become aware of his very self in the terms of his military role. He must be isolated from his old civilian life in order that he will come eagerly to place the highest value on successful conformity with military reality, on deep acceptance of the military outlook, and on proud realization of success within its hierarchy and in its terms. His very self-esteem becomes quite thoroughly dependent upon the appraisals he receives from his peers and his superiors in the chain of command. His military role, and the world of which it is a part, is presented to him as one of the higher circles of the nation. There is a strong emphasis upon the whole range of social etiquette, and, in various formal and informal ways, he is encouraged to date girls of higher rather than of lower status. He is made to feel that he is entering upon an important sector of the higher circles of the nation, and, accordingly, his conception of himself as a self-confident man becomes based upon his conception of himself as a loyal member of an ascendant organization. The only 'educational' routine in America that compares with the military is that of the metropolitan 400's private schools, and they do not altogether measure up to the military way.

West Point and Annapolis are the beginning points of the warlords, and, although many other sources of recruitment and ways of training have had to be used in the emergencies of expansion, they are still the training grounds of the elite of the armed forces. Most of the top generals and all of the admirals of today are of West Point or of The Academy, and they definitely feel it. In fact, if no such caste feeling existed among them, these character-selecting and character-forming institutions would have to be called failures.

The caste feeling of the military is an essential feature of the truly professional officer corps which, since the Spanish-American War, has replaced the old decentralized, and somewhat locally political, militia system. 'The objective is the fleet,' naval Captain L. M. Nulton has written, 'the doctrine is responsibility, and the problem is the formation of military character.' Of the period when most present-day admirals were at Annapolis, it was asserted by Commander Earle: 'The discipline of the Naval Academy well illustrates the principle that in every community discipline means simply organized living. It is the condition of living right because without right living, civilization cannot exist. Persons who will not live right must be compelled to do so, and upon such misguided individuals there must be placed restraints. To these alone is discipline ever harsh or a form of punishment. Surely this is just as it should be. The world would be better if such individuals were made to feel the tyrannical, unyielding, and
hard-nailed fist in order to drive them from an organization to which they have not right to belong.'

The military world bears decisively upon its inhabitants because it selects its recruits carefully and breaks up their previously acquired values; it isolates them from civilian society and it standardizes their career and deportment throughout their lives. Within this career, a rotation of assignment makes for similarity of skills and sensibilities. And, within the military world, a higher position is not merely a job or even the climax of a career; it is clearly a total way of life which is developed under an all-encompassing system of discipline. Absorbed by the bureaucratic hierarchies in which he lives, and from which he derives his very character and image of self, the military man is often submerged in it, or as a possible civilian, even sunk by it. As a social creature, he has until quite recently been generally isolated from other areas of American life; and as an intellectual product of a closed educational system, with his experience itself controlled by a code and a sequence of jobs, he has been shaped into a highly uniform type.

More than any other creatures of the higher circles, modern warlords, on or above the two-star rank, resemble one another, internally and externally. Externally, as John P. Marquand has observed, their uniforms often seem to include their facial mask, and certainly its typical expressions. There is the resolute mouth and usually the steady eye, and always the tendency to expressionlessness; there is the erect posture, the square shoulders, and the regulated cadence of the walk. They do not amble; they stride. Internally, to the extent that the whole system of life-training has been successful, they are also reliably similar in reaction and in outlook. They have, it is said, 'the military mind,' which is no idle phrase: it points to the product of a specialized bureaucratic training; it points to the results of a system of formal selection and common experiences and friendships and activities -all enclosed within similar routines. It also points to the fact of discipline-which means instant and stereotyped obedience within the chain of command. The military mind also indicates the sharing of a common outlook the basis of which is the metaphysical definition of reality as essentially military reality. Even within the military realm, this mind distrusts 'theorists,' if only because they tend to be different: bureaucratic thinking is orderly and concrete thinking.

The fact that they have succeeded in climbing the military hierarchy, which they honor more than any other, lends self-assurance to the successful warlords. The protections that surround their top positions make them even more assured and confident. If they should lose confidence in themselves what else would there be for them to lose? Within a limited area of life, they are often quite competent, but to them, in their disciplined loyalty, this area is often the only area of life that is truly worthwhile. They are inside an apparatus of prerogative and graded privilege in which they have been economically secure and unworried. Although not usually rich, they have never faced the perils of earning a living in the same way that lower and middle-class persons have. The orderly ranks of their chain of command, as we have seen, are carried over into their social life: such striving for status as they have known has been within an unambiguous and well-organized hierarchy of status, in which each knows his place and remains within it.

In this military world, debate is no more at a premium than persuasion: one obeys and one commands, and matters, even unimportant matters, are not to be decided by voting. Life in the military world accordingly influences the military mind's outlook on other institutions as well as on its own. The warlord often sees economic institutions as means for military production and the huge corporation as a sort of ill-run military establishment. In his world, wages are fixed, unions impossible to conceive. He sees political institutions as often corrupt and usually inefficient obstacles, full of undisciplined and cantankerous creatures. And is he very unhappy to hear of civilians and politicians making fools of themselves? It is men with minds and outlooks formed by such conditions who in postwar America have come to occupy positions of great decision. It cannot be said that they have necessarily sought these new positions; much of their increased stature has come to them by virtue of a default on the part of civilian political men. But perhaps it can be said, as C. S. Forester has remarked in a similar connection, that men without lively imagination are needed to execute policies without imagination devised by an elite without imagination.

The Military Ascendancy

Since Pearl Harbor those who command the enlarged means of American violence have come to possess considerable autonomy, as well as great influence among their political and economic colleagues. Some professional soldiers have stepped out of their military roles into other high realms of American life. Others, while remaining soldiers, have influenced by advice, information, and judgment the decisions of men powerful in economic and political matters, as well as in educational and scientific endeavors. In and out of uniform, generals and admirals have attempted to
sway the opinions of the underlying population, lending the weight of their authority, openly as well as behind closed doors, to controversial policies.

In many of these controversies, the warlords have gotten their way; in others, they have blocked actions and decisions which they did not favor. In some decisions, they have shared heavily in others they have joined issue and lost. But they are now more powerful than they have ever been in the history of the American elite; they have now more means of exercising power (in many areas of American life which were previously civilian domains) they now have more connections; and they are now operating in a nation whose elite and whose underlying population have accepted what can only be called a military definition of reality...

No area of decision has been more influenced by the warlords and by their military metaphysics than that of foreign policy and Once war was considered the business of soldiers, international relations the concern of diplomats. But now that war has become seemingly total and seemingly permanent, the free sport of kings has become the forced and internecine business of people, and diplomatic codes of honor between nations have collapsed. Peace is no longer serious; only war is serious. Every man and every nation is either friend or foe, and the idea of enmity becomes mechanical, massive, and without genuine passion. When virtually all negotiation aimed at peaceful agreement is likely to be seen as 'appeasement,' if not treason, the active role of the diplomat becomes meaningless; for diplomacy becomes merely a prelude to war or an interlude between wars, and in such a context the diplomat is replaced by the warlord.

Within the span of one generation, America has become the leading industrial society of the world, and at the same time one of the leading military states. The younger military are of course growing up in the atmosphere of the economic-military alliance, but more than that they are being intensively and explicitly educated to carry it on. 'The Industrial College of the Armed Forces,' concerned with the interdependence of economy and warfare, is at the top level of the military educational system.

To the optimistic liberal of the nineteenth century all this would appear a most paradoxical fact. Most representatives of liberalism at that time assumed that the growth of industrialism would quickly relegate militarism to a very minor role in modern affairs. Under the amiable canons of the industrial society, the heroic violence of the military state would simply disappear. Did not the rise of industrialism and the long era of nineteenth-century peace reveal as much? But the classic liberal expectation of men like Herbert Spencer has proved quite mistaken. What the main drift of the twentieth century has revealed is that as the economy has become concentrated and incorporated into great hierarchies, the military has become enlarged and decisive to the shape of the entire economic structure; and, moreover, the economic and the military have become structurally and deeply interrelated, as the economy has become a seemingly permanent war economy and military men and policies have increasingly penetrated the corporate economy.

'What officials fear more than dateless war in Korea,' Arthur Krock reported in April of 1953, 'is peace ... The vision of peace which could lure the free world into letting down its guard, and demolishing the slow and costly process of building collective security in western Europe while the Soviets maintained and increased their military power, is enough to make men in office indecisive. And the stock market selling that followed the sudden conciliatory overtures from the Kremlin supports the thesis that immediate prosperity in this country is linked to a war economy and suggests desperate economic problems that may arise on the home front.'

Scientific and technological development has increasingly become part of the military order, which is now the largest single supporter and director of scientific research in fact, as large, dollar-wise, as all other American research put together. Since World War II, the general direction of pure scientific research has been set by military considerations, its major finances are from military funds, and very few of those engaged in basic scientific research are not working under military direction. The United States has never been a leader in basic research, which it has imported from Europe. Just before World War II, some $40 million—the bulk of it from industry—was spent for basic scientific research; but $227 million was spent on applied research and 'product development and engineering.' With the Second World War pure scientists were busy, but not in basic research. The atom program, by the time it became governmental, was for the most part an engineering problem. But such technological developments made it clear that the nations of the world were entering a scientific, as well as an armaments, race. In the lack of any political policies for science, the military, first the navy, then the army, began to move into the field of scientific direction and support, both pure and applied. Their encroachment was invited or _allowed by corporate officials who preferred military rather than civilian control of governmental endeavors in science, out of fear of 'ideological' views of civilians concerning such things as patents.

By 1954, the government was spending about $2 billion on research (twenty times the prewar rate); and 85 per cent of it war for 'national security.' In private industry and in the larger universities, the support of pure science is now dominantly a military support. Some universities, in
fact, are financial branches of the military establishment, receiving three or four times as much money from military as from all other sources combined.

... Since World War II, the warlords have caused a large-scale and intensive public-relations program to be carried out. They have spent millions of dollars and they have employed thousands of skilled publicists, in and out of uniform, in order to sell their ideas and themselves to the public and to the Congress.

The content of this great effort reveals its fundamental purpose: to define the reality of international relations in a military way, to portray the armed forces in a manner attractive to civilians, and thus to emphasize the need for the expansion of military facilities. The aim is to build the prestige of the military establishment and to create respect for its personnel, and thus to prepare the public for military-approved policies, and to make Congress ready and willing to pay for them. There is also, of course, the intention of readying the public for the advent of war.

It is a delicate problem which the military publicists confront, but there is one great fact that works entirely for their success: in all of pluralist America, there is no interest - there is no possible - combination of interests - that has anywhere near the time, the money, the manpower, to present a point of view on the issues involved that can effectively compete with the views presented day in and day out by the warlords and by those whom they employ.

This means, for one thing, that there is no free and wide debate of military policy or of policies of military relevance. But that, of course, is in line with the professional soldier's training for command and obedience, and with his ethos, which is certainly not that of a debating society in which decisions are put to a vote. It is also in line with the tendency in a mass society for manipulation to replace explicitly debated authority, as well as with the fact of total war in which the distinction between soldier and civilian is obliterated. The military manipulation of civilian opinion and the military invasion of the civilian mind are now important ways in which the power of the warlords is steadily exerted.

The extent of the military publicity, and the absence of opposition to it, also means that it is not merely this proposal or that point of view that is being pushed. In the absence of contrasting views, the very highest form of propaganda warfare can be fought: the propaganda for a definition of reality within which only certain limited viewpoints are possible. What is being promulgated and reinforced is the military metaphysics - the cast of mind that defines international reality as basically military. The publicists of the military ascendancy need not really work to indoctrinate with this metaphysics those who count: they have already accepted it.

In contrast with the existence of military men, conceived simply as experts in organizing and using violence, 'militarism' has been defined as 'a case of the dominance of means over ends' for the purpose of heightening the prestige and increasing the power of the military. This is, of course, a conception from the standpoint of the civilian who would consider the military as strictly a means for civilian political ends. As a definition, it points to the tendency of military men not to remain means, but to pursue ends of their own, and to turn other institutional areas into means for accomplishing them.

Without an industrial economy, the modern army, as in America, could not exist; it is an army of machines. Professional economists usually consider military institutions as parasitic upon the means of production. Now, however, such institutions have come to shape much of the economic life of the United States. Religion, virtually without fail, provides the army at war with its blessings, and recruits from among its officials the chaplain, who in military costume counsels and consoles and stiffens the morale of men at war. By constitutional definition, the military is subordinated to political authority, and is generally considered, and has generally been, a servant as well as an adviser of civilian politicians; but the warlord is moving into these circles, and by his definitions of reality, influencing their decisions. The family provides the army and navy with the best men and boys that it possesses. And, as we have seen, education and science too are becoming means to the ends sought by the military.
The military pursuit of status, in itself, is no threat of military dominance. In fact, well enclosed in the standing army, such status is a sort of pay-off for the military relinquishment of adventures in political power. So long as this pursuit of status is confined to the military hierarchy itself, it is an important feature of military discipline, and no doubt a major source of much military gratification. It becomes a threat, and it is an indication of the growing power of the military elite today, when it is claimed outside the military hierarchy and when it tends to become a basis of military policy.

The key to an understanding of status is power. The military cannot successfully claim status among civilians if they do not have, or are not thought to have power. Now power, as well as images of it, are always relative: one man's powers are another man's weaknesses. And the powers that have weakened the status of the military in America have been the powers of money and of money-makers, and the powers of the civilian politicians over the military establishment.

American 'militarism,' accordingly, involves the attempt of military men to increase their powers, and hence their status, in comparison with businessmen and politicians. To gain such powers they must not be considered a mere means to be used by politicians and money-makers. They must not be considered parasites on the economy and under the supervision of those who are often called in military circles 'the dirty politicians.' On the contrary their ends must be identified with the ends as well as the honor of the nation; the economy must be their servant; politics an instrument by which, in the name of the state, the family, and God, they manage the nation in modern war. 'What does it mean to go to war?' Woodrow Wilson was asked in 1917. 'It means,' he replied, 'an attempt to reconstruct a peacetime civilization with war standards, and at the end of the war there will be no bystanders with sufficient peace standards left to work with. There will be only war standards ...' American militarism, in fully developed form, would mean the triumph in all areas of life of the military metaphysic, and hence the subordination to it of all other ways of life.

There can be little doubt but that, over the last decade, the warlords of Washington, with their friends in the political directorate and the corporate elite, have definitely revealed militaristic tendencies. Is there, then, in the higher circles of America 'a military clique'? Those who argue about such a notion-as Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas and General of the Army Omar Bradley have recently done - are usually arguing only about the increased influence of the professional military. That is why their arguments, in so far as they bear upon the structure of the elite, are not very definitive and are usually at cross-purposes. For when it is fully understood, the idea of a military clique involves more than the military ascendancy. It involves a coincidence of interests and a co-ordination of aims among economic and political as well as military actors.

Our answer to the question, 'Is there now a military clique?' is: Yes, there is a military clique, but it is more accurately termed the power elite, for it is composed of economic, political, as well as military, men whose interests have increasingly coincided.

The Mass Society

In the standard image of power and decision, no force is held to be as important as The Great American Public. More than merely another check and balance, this public is thought to be the seat of all legitimate power. In official life as in popular folklore, it is held to be the very balance wheel of democratic power. In the end, all liberal theorists rest their notions of the power system upon the political role of this public; all official decisions, as well as private decisions of consequence, are justified as in the public's welfare; all formal proclamations are in its name.

Let us therefore consider the classic public of democratic theory in the generous spirit in which Rousseau once cried, 'Opinion, Queen of the World, is not subject to the power of kings; they are themselves its first slaves.'

The most important feature of the public of opinion, which the rise of the democratic middle class initiates, is the free ebb and flow of discussion. The possibilities of answering back, of organizing autonomous organs of public opinion, of realizing opinion in action, are held to be established by democratic institutions. The opinion that results from public discussion is understood to be a resolution that is then carried out by public action; it is, in one version, the 'general will' of the people, which the legislative organ enacts into law, thus lending to it legal force. Congress, or Parliament, as an institution, crowns all the scattered publics; it is the archetype for each of the little circles of face-to-face citizens discussing their public business.

This eighteenth-century idea of the public of public opinion parallels the economic idea of the market of the free economy. Here is the market composed of freely competing entrepreneurs; there is the public composed of discussion circles of opinion peers. As price is the result of anonymous, equally weighted, bargaining individuals, so public opinion is the result of each man's having thought things out for himself and contributing his voice to the great chorus. To be sure, some might have more
influence on the state of opinion than others, but no one group monopolizes the discussion, or by itself determines the opinions that prevail. Innumerable discussion circles are knit together by mobile people who carry opinions from one to another, and struggle for the power of larger command. The public is thus organized into associations and parties, each representing a set of viewpoints, each trying to acquire a place in the Congress, where the discussion continues. Out of the little circles of people talking with one another, the larger forces of social movements and political parties develop; and the discussion of opinion is the important phase in a total act by which public affairs are conducted.

The autonomy of these discussions is an important element in the idea of public opinion as a democratic legitimation. The opinions formed are actively realized within the prevailing institutions of power; all authoritative agents are made or broken by the prevailing opinions of these publics. And, in so far as the public is frustrated in realizing its demands, its members may go beyond criticism of specific policies; they may question the very legitimations of legal authority. That is one meaning of Jefferson's comment on the need for an occasional 'revolution.'

The public, so conceived, is the loom of classic, eighteenth-century democracy; discussion is at once the threads and the shuttle, tying the discussion circles together. It lies at the root of the conception of authority by discussion, and it is based upon the hope that truth and justice will somehow come out of society as a great apparatus of free discussion. The people are presented with problems. They discuss them. They decide on them. They formulate viewpoints. These viewpoints are organized, and they compete. One viewpoint 'wins out.' Then the people act out this view, or their representatives are instructed to act it out, and this they promptly do.

Such are the images of the public of classic democracy which are still used as the working justifications of power in American society. But now we must recognize this description as a set of images out of a fairy tale: they are not adequate even as an approximate model of how the American system of power works. The issues that now shape man's fate are neither raised nor decided by the public at large. The idea of the community of publics is not a description of fact, but an assertion of an ideal, an assertion of a legitimation masquerading-as legitimations are now apt to do-as fact. For now the public of public opinion is recognized by all those who have considered it carefully as something less than it once was.

These doubts are asserted positively in the statement that the classic community of publics is being transformed into a society of masses. This transformation, in fact, is one of the keys to the social and psychological meaning of modern life in America.

I. In the democratic society of publics it was assumed, with John Locke, that the individual conscience was the ultimate seat of judgment and hence the final court of appeal. But this principle was challenged-as E. H. Carr has put it-when Rousseau 'for the first time thought in terms of the sovereignty of the whole people, and faced the issue of mass democracy.'

II. In the democratic society of publics it was assumed that among the individuals who composed it there was a natural and peaceful harmony of interests. But this essentially conservative doctrine gave way to the Utilitarian doctrine that such a harmony of interests had first to be created by reform before it could work, and later to the Marxian doctrine of class struggle, which surely was then, and certainly is now, closer to reality than any assumed harmony of interests.

III. In the democratic society of publics it was assumed that before public action would be taken, there would be rational discussion between individuals which would determine the action and that, accordingly, the public opinion that resulted would be the infallible voice of reason. But this has been challenged not only (1) by the assumed need for experts to decide delicate and intricate issues, but (2) by the discovery-as by Freud-of the irrationality of the man in the street, and (3) by the discovery-as by Marx-of the socially conditioned nature of what was once assumed to be autonomous reason.

IV. In the democratic society of publics it was assumed that after determining what is true and right and just, the public would act accordingly or see that its representatives did so. In the long run, public opinion will not only be right, but public opinion will prevail. This assumption has been upset by the great gap now existing between the underlying population and those who make decisions in its name, decisions of enormous consequence which the public often does not even know are being made until well after the fact.

Public opinion exists when people who are not in the government of a country claim the right to express political opinions freely and publicly, and the right that these opinions should influence or determine the policies, personnel, and actions of their government. In this formal sense there has
been and there is a definite public opinion in the United States. And yet, with modern developments this formal right-when it does still exist as a right-does not mean what it once did. The older world of voluntary organization was as different from the world of the mass organization, as was Tom Paine's world of pamphleteering from the world of the mass media.

Since the French Revolution, conservative thinkers have Viewed With Alarm the rise of the public, which they called the masses, or something to that effect. 'The populace is sovereign, and the tide of barbarism mounts,' wrote Gustave Le Bon. 'The divine right of the masses is about to replace the divine right of kings,' and already 'the destinies of nations are elaborated at present in the heart of the masses, and no longer in the councils of princes.' During the twentieth century, liberal and even socialist thinkers have followed suit, with more explicit reference to what we have called the society of masses. From Le Bon to Emil Lederer and Ortega y Gasset, they have held that the influence of the mass in unfortunately increasing. But surely those who have supposed the masses to be all powerful, or at least well on their way to triumph, are wrong. In our time, as Chakhofin knew, the influence of autonomous collectivities within political life is in fact diminishing. Furthermore, such influence as they do have is guided; they must now be seen not as publics acting autonomously, but as masses manipulated at focal points into crowds of demonstrators. For as publics become masses, masses sometimes become crowds; and, in crowds, the psychical rape by the mass media is supplemented up-close by the harsh and sudden harangue. Then the people in the crowd disperse again-as atomized and submissive masses.

In all modern societies, the autonomous associations standing between the various classes and the state tend to lose their effect as vehicles of reasoned opinion and instruments for the rational exertion of political will. Such associations can be deliberately broken up and thus turned into passive instruments of rule, or they can be more slowly wither away from lack of use in the face of centralized means of power. But whether they are destroyed in a week or wither in a generation, such associations are replaced in virtually every sphere of life by centralized organizations, and it is such organizations with all their new means of power that take charge of the terrorized or-as the case may be-merely intimidated, society of masses.

The institutional trends that make for a society of masses are to a considerable extent a matter of impersonal drift, but the remnants of the public are also exposed to more 'personal' and intentional forces. With the broadening of the base of politics within the context of a folklore of democratic decision-making, and with the increased means of mass persuasion that are available, the public of public opinion has become the object of intensive efforts to control, manage, manipulate, and increasingly intimidate.

In political, military, economic realms, power becomes, in varying degrees, uneasy before the suspected opinions of masses, and, accordingly, opinion-making becomes an accepted technique of power-holding and power-getting. The minority electorate of the propertied and the educated is replaced by the total suffrage-and intensive campaigns for the vote. The small eighteenth-century professional army is replaced by the mass army of conscripts-and by the problems of nationalist morale. The small shop is replaced by the mass-production industry-and the national advertisement.

As the scale of institutions has become larger and more centralized, so has the range and intensity of the opinion-makers' efforts. The means of opinion-making, in fact, have paralleled in range and efficiency the other institutions of greater scale that cradle the modern society of masses. Accordingly, in addition to their enlarged and centralized means of administration, exploitation, and violence, the modern elite have had placed within their grasp historically unique instruments of psychic management and manipulation, which include universal compulsory education as well as the media of mass communication.

Early observers believed that the increase in the range and volume of the formal means of communication would enlarge and animate the primary public. In such optimistic views-written before radio and television and movies-the formal media are understood as simply multiplying the scope and pace of personal discussion. Modern conditions, Charles Cooley wrote, 'enlarge indefinitely the competition of ideas, and whatever has owed its persistence merely to lack of comparison is likely to go, for that which is really congenial to the choosing mind will be all the more cherished and increased.' Still excited by the break-up of the conventional consensus of the local community, he saw the new means of communication as furthering the conversational dynamic of classic democracy, and with it the growth of rational and free individuality.

No one really knows all the functions of the mass media, for in their entirety these functions are probably so pervasive and so subtle that they cannot be caught by the means of social research now available. But we do now have reason to believe that these media have helped less to enlarge and animate the discussions of primary publics than to transform them into a set of media markets in mass-like society.
In their attempts to neutralize or to turn to their own use the articulate public, the opinion-makers try to make it a relay network for their views. If the opinion-makers have so much power that they can act directly and openly upon the primary publics, they may become authoritative; but, if they do not have such power and hence have to operate indirectly and without visibility, they will assume the stance of manipulators.

Authority is power that is explicit and more or less 'voluntarily' obeyed; manipulation is the 'secret' exercise of power, unknown to those who are influenced. In the model of the classic democratic society, manipulation is not a problem, because formal authority resides in the public itself and in its representatives who are made or broken by the public. In the completely authoritarian society, manipulation is not a problem, because authority is openly identified with the ruling institutions and their agents, who may use authority explicitly and nakedly. They do not, in the extreme case, have to gain or retain power by hiding its exercise. Manipulation becomes a problem wherever men have power that is concentrated and willful but do not have authority, or when, for any reason, they do not wish to use their power openly. Then the powerful seek to rule without showing their powerfulness. They want to rule, as it were, secretly, without publicized legitimation. It is in this mixed case-as in the intermediate reality of the American today-that manipulation is a prime way of exercising power. Small circles of men are making decisions which they need to have at least authorized by indifferent or recalcitrant people over whom they do not exercise explicit authority. So the small circle tries to manipulate these people into willing acceptance or cheerful support of their decisions or opinions-or at least to the rejection of possible counter-opinions. Authority formally resides 'in the people,' but power is in fact held by small circles of men. That is why the standard strategy of manipulation is to make it appear that the people, or at least a large group of them, 'really made the decision.' That is why even when the authority is available, men with access to it may still prefer the secret, quieter ways of manipulation.

But are not the people now more educated? Why not emphasize the spread of education rather than the increased effects of the mass media? The answer, in brief, is that mass education, in many respects, has become another mass medium.

The prime task of public education, as it came widely to be understood in this country, was political: to make the citizen more knowledgeable and thus better able to think and to judge of public affairs. In time, the function of education shifted from the political to the economic: to train people for better-paying jobs and thus to get ahead. This is especially true of the high-school movement, which has met the business demands for white-collar skills at the public's expense. In large part education has become merely vocational; in so far as its political task is concerned, in many schools, that has been reduced to a routine training of nationalist loyalties.

The training of skills that are of more or less direct use in the vocational life is an important task to perform, but ought not to be mistaken for liberal education: job advancement, no matter on what levels, is not the same as self-development, although the two are now systematically confused. Among 'skills,' some are more and some are less relevant to the aims of liberal-that is to say, liberating-education. Skills and values cannot be so easily separated as the academic search for supposedly neutral skills causes us to assume. And especially not when we speak seriously of liberal education. Of course, there is a scale, with skills at one end and values at the other, but it is the middle range of this scale, which one might call sensibilities, that are of most relevance to the classic public.

To train someone to operate a lathe or to read and write is pretty much education of skill; to evoke from people an understanding of what they really want out of their lives or to debate with them stoic, Christian and humanist ways of living, is pretty much a clear-cut education of values. But to assist in the birth among a group of people of those cultural and political and technical sensibilities which would make them genuine members of a genuinely liberal public, this is at once a training in skills and an education of values. It includes a sort of therapy in the ancient sense of clarifying one's knowledge of one's self; it includes the imparting of all those skills of controversy with one's self, which we call thinking; and with others, which we call debate. And the end product of such liberal education of sensibilities is simply the self-educating, self-cultivating man or woman.

The knowledgeable man in the genuine public is able to turn his personal troubles into social issues, to see their relevance for his community and his community's relevance for them. He understands that what he thinks and feels as personal troubles are very often not only that but problems shared by others and indeed not subject to solution by any one individual but only by modifications of the structure of the groups in which he lives and sometimes the structure of the entire society.

Men in masses are gripped by personal troubles, but they are not aware of their true meaning and source. Men in public confront issues, and they are aware of their terms. It is the task of the liberal institution, as of the liberally educated man, continually to translate troubles into issues and issues into the terms of their human meaning for the individual. In the
absence of deep and wide political debate, schools for adults and adolescents could perhaps become hospitable frameworks for just such debate. In a community of publics the task of liberal education would be: to keep the public from being overwhelmed; to help produce the disciplined and informed mind that cannot be overwhelmed; to help develop the bold and sensible individual that cannot be sunk by the burdens of mass life. But educational practice has not made knowledge directly relevant to the human need of the troubled person of the twentieth century or to the social practices of the citizen. This citizen cannot now see the roots of his own biases and frustrations, nor think clearly about himself, nor for that matter about anything else. He does not see the frustration of idea, of intellect, by the present organization of society, and he is not able to meet the tasks now confronting 'the intelligent citizen.'

Educational institutions have not done these things and, except in rare instances, they are not doing them. They have become mere elevators of occupational and social ascent, and, on all levels, they have become politically timid. Moreover, in the hands of 'professional educators,' many schools have come to operate on an ideology of life adjustment' that encourages happy acceptance of mass ways of life rather than the struggle for individual and public transcendence.

There is not much doubt that modern regressive educators have adapted their notions of educational content and practice to the idea of the mass. They do not effectively proclaim standards of cultural level and intellectual rigor; rather they often deal in the trivia of vocational tricks and 'adjustment to life'-meaning the slack life of masses. 'Democratic schools' often mean the furtherance of intellectual mediocrity, vocational training, nationalistic loyalties, and little else.

The Higher Immorality

The higher immorality can neither be narrowed to the political sphere nor understood as primarily a matter of corrupt men in fundamentally sound institutions. Political corruption is one aspect of a more general immorality; the level of moral sensibility that now prevails is not merely a matter of corrupt men. The higher immorality is a systematic feature of the American elite; its general acceptance is an essential feature of the mass society.

'Of course, there may be corrupt men in sound institutions, but when institutions are corrupting, many of the men who live and work in them are necessarily corrupted. In the corporate era, economic relations become impersonal-and the executive feels less personal responsibility. Within the corporate worlds of business, war-making and politics, the private conscience is attenuated-and the higher immorality is institutionalized. It is not merely a question of a corrupt administration in corporation, army, or state; it is a feature of the corporate rich, as a capitalist stratum, deeply intertwined with the politics of the military state.

There is still one old American value that has not markedly declined: the value of money and of the things money can buy-these, even in inflated times, seem as solid and enduring as stainless steel. 'I've been rich and I've been poor,' Sophie Tucker has said, 'and believe me, rich is best.' As many other values are weakened, the question for Americans becomes not Is there anything that money, used with intelligence, will not buy?' but, 'How many of the things that money will not buy are valued and desired more than what money will buy?' Money is the one unambiguous criterion of success, and such success is still the sovereign American value.

Whenever the standards of the moneyed life prevail, the man with money, no matter how he got it, will eventually be respected. A million dollars, it is said, covers a multitude of sins. It is not only that men want money; it is that their very standards are pecuniary. In a society in which the money-maker has had no serious rival for repute and honor, the word 'practical' comes to mean useful for private gain, and 'common sense,' the sense to get ahead financially. The pursuit of the moneyed life is the commanding value, in relation to which the influence of other values has declined, so men easily become morally ruthless in the pursuit of easy money and fast estate-building.

A great deal of corruption is simply a part of the old effort to get rich and then to become richer. But today the context in which the old drive must operate has changed. When both economic and political institutions were small and scattered-as in the simpler models of classical economics and Jeffersonian democracy-no man had it in his power to bestow or to receive great favors. But when political institutions and economic opportunities are at once concentrated and linked, then public office can be used for private gain.

Governmental agencies contain no more of the higher immorality than do business corporations. Political men can grant financial favors only when there are economic men ready and willing to take them. And economic men can seek political favors only when there are political agents who can bestow such favors. The publicity spotlight, of course, shines brighter upon the transactions of the men in government, for which there is good reason.
Expectations being higher, publics are more easily disappointed by public officials. Businessmen are supposed to be out for themselves, and if they successfully skate on legally thin ice, Americans generally honor them for having gotten away with it. But in a civilization so thoroughly business-penetrated as America, the rules of business are carried over into government—especially when so many businessmen have gone into government. How many executives would really fight for a law requiring a careful and public accounting of all executive contracts and ‘expense accounts’? High income taxes have resulted in a network of collusion between big firm and higher employee. There are many ingenious ways to cheat the spirit of the tax laws, as we have seen, and the standards of consumption of many high-priced men are determined more by complicated expense accounts than by simple take-home pay. Like prohibition, the laws of income taxes and the regulations of wartime exist without the support of firm business convention. It is merely illegal to cheat them, but it is smart to get away with it. Laws without supporting moral conventions invite crime, but much more importantly, they spur the growth of an expedient, amoral attitude.

A society that is in its higher circles and on its middle levels widely believed to be a network of smart rackets does not produce men with an inner moral sense; a society that is merely expedient does not produce men of conscience. A society that narrows the meaning of ‘success’ to the big money and in its terms condemns failure as the chief vice, raising money to the plane of absolute value, will produce the sharp operator and the shady deal. Blessed are the cynical, for only they have what it takes to succeed.

It is the proud claim of the higher circles in America that their members are entirely self-made. That is their self-image and their well-publicized myth. Popular proof of this is based on anecdotes its scholarly proof is supposed to rest upon statistical rituals whereby it is shown that varying proportions of the men at the top are sons of men of lower rank. We have already seen the proportions of given elite circles composed of the men who have risen. But what is more important than the proportions of the sons of wage workers among these higher circles is the criteria of admission to them, and the question of who applies these criteria. We cannot from upward mobility infer higher merit. Even if the rough figures that now generally hold were reversed, and 90 per cent of the elite were sons of wage workers—but the criteria of co-optation by the elite remained what they now are—we could not from that mobility necessarily infer merit. Only if the criteria of the top positions were meritorious, and only if they were self-applied, as in a purely entrepreneurial manner, could we smuggle merit into such statistics—from any statistics—of mobility. The idea that the self-made man is somehow ‘good’ and that the family-made man is not good makes moral sense only when the career is independent, when one is on one’s own as an entrepreneur. It would also make sense in a strict bureaucracy where examinations control advancement. It makes little sense in the system of corporate co-optation.

There is, in psychological fact, no such thing as a self-made man. No man makes himself, least of all the members of the American elite. In a world of corporate hierarchies, men are selected by those above them in the hierarchy in accordance with whatever criteria they use. In connection with the corporations of America, we have seen the current criteria. Men shape themselves to fit them, and are thus made by the criteria, the social premiums that prevail. If there is no such thing as a self-made man, there is such a thing as a self-used man, and there are many such men among the American elite.

Under such conditions of success, there is no virtue in starting out poor and becoming rich. Only where the ways of becoming rich are such as to require virtue or to lead to virtue does personal enrichment imply virtue. In a system of co-optation from above, whether you began rich or poor seems less relevant in revealing what kind of man you are when you have arrived than in revealing the principles of those in charge of selecting the ones who succeed.

All this is sensed by enough people below the higher circles to lead to cynical views of the lack of connection between merit and mobility, between virtue and success. It is a sense of the immorality of accomplishment, and it is revealed in the prevalence of such views as: ‘it's all just another racket,' and 'it's not what you know but who you know.' Considerable numbers of people now accept the immorality of accomplishment as a going fact.

Moral distrust of the American elite—as well as the fact of organized irresponsibility—rests upon the higher immorality, but also upon vague feelings about the higher ignorance. Once upon a time in the United States, men of affairs were also men of sensibility: to a considerable extent the elite of power and the elite of culture coincided, and where they did not coincide they often overlapped as circles. Within the compass of a knowledgeable and effective public, knowledge and power were in effective touch; and more than that, this public decided much that was decided.

‘Nothing is more revealing,’ James Reston has written, ‘than to read the debate in the House of Representatives in the Eighteen Thirties on
Greece's fight with Turkey for independence and the Greek-Turkish debate in the Congress in 1947. The first is dignified and eloquent, the argument marching from principle through illustration to conclusion; the second is a dreary garble of debating points, full of irrelevancies and bad history. George Washington in 1783 relaxed with Voltaire's 'letters' and Locke's 'On Human Understanding'; Eisenhower read cowboy tales and detective stories. For such men as now typically arrive in the higher political, economic and military circles, the briefing and the memorandum seem to have pretty well replaced not only the serious book, but the newspaper as well. Given the immorality of accomplishment, this is perhaps as it must be, but what is somewhat disconcerting about it is that they are below the level on which they might feel a little bit ashamed of the uncultivated style of their relaxation and of their mental fare, and that no self-cultivated public is in a position by its reactions to educate them to such uneasiness.

By the middle of the twentieth century, the American elite have become an entirely different breed of men from those who could on any reasonable grounds be considered a cultural elite, or even for that matter cultivated men of sensibility. Knowledge and power are not truly united inside the ruling circles; and when men of knowledge do come in contact with the circles of powerful men, they come not as peers but as hired men. The elite of power, wealth, and celebrity do not have even a passing acquaintance with the elite of culture, knowledge and sensibility; they are not in touch with them—although the ostentatious fringes of the two worlds sometimes overlap in the world of the celebrity.

Most men are encouraged to assume that, in general, the most powerful and the wealthiest are also the most knowledgeable or, as they might say, 'the smartest.' Such ideas are propped up by many little slogans about those who 'teach because they can't do,' and about 'if you're so smart, why aren't you rich?' But all that such wisecracks mean is that those who use them assume that power and wealth are sovereign values for all men and especially for men 'who are smart.' They assume also that knowledge always pays off in such ways, or surely ought to, and that the test of genuine knowledge is just such pay-offs. The powerful and the wealthy must be the men of most knowledge, otherwise how could they be where they are? But to say that those who succeed to power must be 'smart,' is to say that power is knowledge. To say that those who succeed to wealth must be smart, is to say that wealth is knowledge.

The prevalence of such assumptions does reveal something that is true: that ordinary men, even today, are prone to explain and to justify power and wealth in terms of knowledge or ability. Such assumptions also reveal something of what has happened to the kind of experience that knowledge has come to be. Knowledge is no longer widely felt as an ideal; it is seen as an instrument. In a society of power and wealth, knowledge is valued as an instrument of power and wealth, and also, of course, as an ornament in conversation.

The American elite is not composed of representative men whose conduct and character constitute models for American imitation and aspiration. There is no set of men with whom members of the mass public can rightfully and gladly identify. In this fundamental sense, America is indeed without leaders. Yet such is the nature of the mass public's morally cynical and politically unspecified distrust that it is readily drained off without real political effect. That this is so, after the men and events of the last thirty years, is further proof of the extreme difficulty of finding and of using in America today the political means of sanity for morally sane objectives.

America - a conservative country without any conservative ideology-appears now before the world a naked and arbitrary power, as, in the name of realism, its men of decision enforce their often crackpot definitions upon world reality. The second-rate mind is in command of the ponderously spoken platitude. In the liberal rhetoric, vagueness, and in the conservative mood, irrationality, are raised to principle. Public relations and the official secret, the trivializing campaign and the terrible fact clumsily accomplished, are replacing the reasoned debate of political ideas in the privately incorporated economy, the military ascendancy, and the political vacuum of modern America.

The men of the higher circles are not representative men; their high position is not a result of moral virtue; their fabulous success is not firmly connected with meritorious ability. Those who sit in the seats of the high and the mighty are selected and formed by the means of power, the sources of wealth, the mechanics of celebrity, which prevail in their society. They are not men selected and formed by a civil service that is linked with the world of knowledge and sensibility. They are not men shaped by nationally responsible parties that debate openly and clearly the issues this nation now so unintelligently confronts. They are not men held in responsible check by a plurality of voluntary associations which connect debating publics with the pinnacles of decision. Commanders of power unequaled in human history, they have succeeded within the American system of organized irresponsibility.