

The Bohemian Grove club: America's ruling elite at work and play

Richard Tyler
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The *World Socialist Web Site* has noted the political and personal bonds linking members of the US Supreme Court with the incoming Republican administration (see: “Family ties, political bias linked US Supreme Court justices to Bush camp”). It is also worth noting that several of the justices, or their spouses, share another common bond with the Bush camp—participation in the activities of the highly secretive Bohemian Grove club.

Every year since 1879, the club holds its two-week Annual Summer Encampment, dubbed by President Herbert Hoover “the greatest men's party on earth.” The gathering takes place on the exclusive 2,700-acre Bohemian Grove in Monte Rio, about 70 miles north of San Francisco, California.

Club membership, which is open only to males, is estimated at 2,700. Those belonging have included every Republican president since Calvin Coolidge, as well as a smaller number of Democratic presidents. The club mixes top-level politicians with the extremely wealthy, including the CEOs of many Fortune 500 corporations and global financial institutions.

Many of the interests represented in the club membership are subsidized by lucrative government contracts, including the military, oil, banking, the utilities and the media.

A list of members reads like a veritable “Who's Who” of the American ruling elite. It includes former secretaries of state Henry Kissinger and George Shultz; S.D. Bechtel Jr., who heads the family-owned global engineering and construction corporation; Thomas Watson Jr. from IBM; Ralph Bailey of Dupont; former president George Bush; A.W. Clausen of the World Bank; CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite; and William F. Buckley, editor-in-chief of the conservative *National Review* magazine.

The club mixes extended bouts of eating and drinking with “artistic” pursuits—staging plays written and performed by members—along with mock “pagan” rituals. The annual gathering starts with the “Cremation of Care” ritual, the burning of an effigy of the club's mascot as members stand chanting in their red-hooded robes before the base of a 40-foot stone owl altar.

The “Lakeside Talks” held as part of the gathering offer the members an opportunity to hear lectures on a variety of topics, usually including several on contemporary political issues. It is said that the Manhattan Project, responsible for building the nuclear bomb dropped on Hiroshima, was conceived at the Grove in 1942.

A brief listing of the topics discussed in recent years indicates the general tenor of the talks:

In 1997 the president of the American Enterprise Institute, Christopher DeMuth, delivered a lecture entitled, “The Triumph of the Market and the Politics of Affluence.” The same year, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who played an instrumental role in handing George W. Bush the presidency earlier this month, spoke on “Church, State and the Constitution.”

The next year, James A. Baker, former secretary of state under Bush senior and head of George W's legal challenge in Florida, expounded upon “The Imperative of American Leadership”. William Perry, the former secretary of defense under Clinton, outlined a “Preventative Defense and American Security Strategy for the 21st Century.”

The 1999 lecture programme seems somewhat prophetic in light of the successful Republican effort to steal the 2000 presidential election. *Washington Post* political correspondent David Broder spoke about “Direct Democracy—Curse or Blessing.” He shared the lecture programme with General Colin Powell

(“America's Promise—Leading Armies and Leading Kids”) and Walter Hussman, publisher of the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* (“Lying, Cheating, Stealing in the Media”).

Those who attended the 1999 gathering were said to include George Bush senior, together with his sons, George W. and Jeb Bush, the Governor of Florida. Also present were Henry Kissinger, Colin Powell and Newt Gingrich.

This year's Bohemian Grove gathering saw the return of George Bush the father, together with his former secretary of defense and now vice-president-elect, Richard Cheney.

According to the *New York Times*, US Supreme Court Justice Sandra O'Connor's husband has also participated in the activities of the Bohemian Grove.

One does not have to subscribe to an outlandish conspiracy theory to imagine a conversation among the California redwoods beginning, “Now, gentlemen, I want to ask what you can do to help my son become the 43rd President...”



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