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Reviewed by Anne-Marie Slaughter

**They Rule the World:
A Shadowy Organization Is in Power, and It's Made Up of the Very, Very Rich**

Review of SUPERCLASS: The Global Power Elite and the World They Are Making, By David Rothkopf. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 376 pp. \$26.

Go to www.theyrule.net. A white page appears with a deliberately shadowy image of a boardroom table and chairs. Sentences materialize: "They sit on the boards of the largest companies in America." "Many sit on government committees." "They make decisions that affect our lives." Finally, "They rule." The site allows visitors to trace the connections between individuals who serve on the boards of top corporations, universities, think tanks, foundations and other elite institutions. Created by the presumably pseudonymous Josh On, "They Rule" can be dismissed as classic conspiracy theory. Or it can be viewed, along with David Rothkopf's *Superclass*, as a map of how the world really works.

In *Superclass*, Rothkopf, a former managing director of Kissinger Associates and an international trade official in the Clinton Administration, has identified roughly 6,000 individuals who have "the ability to regularly influence the lives of millions of people in multiple countries worldwide." They are the "superclass" of the 21st century, spreading across borders in an ever thickening web, with a growing allegiance, Rothkopf argues, to each other rather than to any particular nation.

Rothkopf's archetypal member of the superclass is Blackstone Group executive Stephen Schwarzman, who is not only fabulously wealthy, but also chairman of the Kennedy Center, a board member of the New York Public Library, the New York City Ballet, the Film Society of Lincoln Center and the New York City Partnership. These boards, along with the over 100 businesses Blackstone has invested in, the other business councils and advisory boards he sits on, and his Yale and Harvard education, mean that Schwarzman is only one or two affiliations away from any center of power in the world. Rothkopf actually traces the "daisy chain" of Schwarzman's connections through his board memberships -- linking him to Ratan Tata, one of India's richest men, former Mexican president Ernesto Zedillo and many others. It is these links that create access that translates to influence and determines how the levers of power are pulled.

Fame alone doesn't get you into the global power elite: Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes are out while Angelina Jolie and Bono are in. High office is generally enough for politicians and even their spouses, but membership in the superclass can be fleeting -- Mikhail Gorbachev and Cherie Blair are now out, while Henry Kissinger and Bill Clinton are still in. Rothkopf harps on the Pareto of distribution, or the "80/20 rule," whereby 20 percent of the causes of anything are responsible for 80 percent of the consequences. That means 20 percent of the money-makers

make 80 percent of the money and 20 percent of the politicians make 80 percent of the important decisions. That 20 percent belongs to the superclass.

On closer inspection, however, Rothkopf has no actual methodology for determining who is in and who is out. Each chapter identifies individuals who are said to count in a field, conclusions backed up by trendspotting and anecdotes about Rothkopf's encounters at Davos and New York dinner parties that make the reader feel vaguely voyeuristic. When Rothkopf ventures away from his core expertise in politics and finance, and into such subjects as asymmetrical warfare, mega-churches and freemasonry, the pastiche-like quality of his research becomes evident.

Still, *Superclass* is often thought-provoking. For one thing, it is as much about who is not part of the superclass as who is. As I read Rothkopf's chronicles of elite gatherings -- Davos, Bilderberg, the Bohemian Grove (all male), Fathers and Sons (all male) -- I was repeatedly struck by the near absence of women. Fortune magazine's annual Most Powerful Women Summit, the only elite gathering I know of that is restricted to women, didn't even rate a mention. And indeed, when Rothkopf summarizes "how to become a member of the superclass," his first rule is "be born a man." Only 6 percent of the superclass is female.

Superclass is written in part as a consciousness-raising exercise for members of the superclass themselves. Rothkopf worries that "the world they are making" is deeply unequal and ultimately unstable. He hopes that the current global elite will use their power to do more than egg each other on to high-profile philanthropy. Elites in radically unequal countries such as Chile, for instance, might decide to open their cozy circles of power to allow the emergence of a genuine middle class. New York bankers might realize that they can no longer peddle loans to developing countries in good times but then pressure the U.S. Treasury and the International Monetary Fund to bail out those same governments when they suddenly default on their debts (ensuring, of course, that the bankers get paid). The agribusinesses that reap billions from domestic subsidies in developed countries might consider the longer-term value of trade rather than aid for countries at the bottom of the global food chain.

Perhaps. But it's likely to take more than exhortation. In the words of former Navy Secretary John Lehman, "Power corrupts. Absolute power is kind of neat." Why would the superclass want to give it up?

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