

Dynamics of the American Elite

By NATHANIEL WEYL

In a previous article,¹ I outlined a method of analyzing the national-linguistic and class origins of élites by comparing the representation of batches of common surnames in special rosters of eminence and in social security rolls. From this method, the concept of *performance coefficient* was derived. In performance coefficients, 100 means the average. The fact that bearers of Dutch names have a coefficient of 293 and bearers of Spanish names one of 4 in *American Men of Science*, Volume I (the Physical Sciences), means simply that in that region the first group is almost three times as productive as the national average whereas the second group is only 1/25th as productive.

The article in question suggested that the following generalization can be made concerning leadership in the United States c. 1955-60:

1. The differentials between the national-linguistic and class- or occupational-origin groups are greatest in the exacting and creative areas, strongly evident in fields which require outstanding qualities of will, administration and judgment, least marked in such security-oriented occupations as the higher and middle echelons of the American Foreign Service.
2. Jews generally excel Protestants and Protestants Catholics. These differentials are large and statistically significant. Similarly, leadership concentrations in all fields are greatest in Northwestern Europe and there is a gradient of deterioration as one moves toward the Mediterranean.²
3. The American Negroes, the Spanish-speaking element (which is overwhelmingly Puerto Rican and Mexican) and the Italian stock (chiefly of peasant stock from Sicily and Calabria) make minimal contributions to American leadership and creativity. They have been unresponsive to the stimuli provided by the American environment.

¹ "Ethnic and National Characteristics of the U.S. Elite," THE MANKIND QUARTERLY, April 1961.

² The evidence of intelligence tests and census data on the occupational distribution of the foreign born and their progeny suggests that there is also a gradient of deterioration as one moves from German into Slavic areas. The Jews are an exception to this rule..

4. English clerical names constitute a group which is consistently and markedly superior to the English average in all leadership areas studied. This superiority suggests that a process of eugenic mating on the part of the scholarly and clerical element has occurred over the seven or eight centuries during which the surnames were the rule in the English-speaking world. The same marked superiority exists for a Special English Occupations Group, but the cause of this superiority is unknown to me.

45 Years of Who's Who in America

Who's Who in America is probably the most generally accepted and comprehensive compilation of the American élite leadership. It recognizes outstanding individual creative achievement and also automatically includes almost everybody who attains high enough

TABLE I

*Performance Coefficients of Stock from the British Isles
in WHO'S WHO IN AMERICA.¹*

CATEGORY	BOASI (thds) ²	<i>Who's Who in America</i> PERFORMANCE COEFFICIENTS			
		1910-11	1918-19	1930-31	1955-57
Scottish	833	102	109	129	126
Welsh	386	100	105	128	113
English	2532	110	109	117	107
Irish	1189	70	71	58	104
Lothian Scots	208	116	132	152	128

¹To make these P.C.s comparable to those appearing in my previous article in *THE MANKIND QUARTERLY*, I have equated them to a performance coefficient of 94 for the name SMITH. Obviously, the SMITHs are not representative of English performance because a significant minority of them are Negro.

²Representation of these surnames in the U.S. Social Security rolls (Bureau of Old Age and Survivors Insurance) in 1956.

status in the professions, politics, business and the military. Among its defects are the disproportionate weight it gives to the clergy³ and the fact that it eliminates controversial, immoral or criminal individuals who nevertheless do belong to the élite.⁴ This com-

³According to the dean of an American divinity college, who made a study of the matter and who, I am sure, would not wish to be identified.

⁴For example, neither Whittaker Chambers nor Alger Hiss are included in the 1955-57 edition of *Who's Who in America*.

pilation has been in continuous existence since 1899 and is therefore invaluable for inter-temporal comparisons.

While the Irish performance coefficients are consistently lower than those of other groups from the British Isles, the gap has been almost closed. In 1930-31, the Irish P.C. was about half the English; by 1955-57, it was only 2 points below the English. Between 1910 and 1930, the Scots and Welsh rapidly advanced their position in the American élite, whereas the English remained stagnant.

An analysis of the P.C.s of the Spanish-language and Italian element for the entire period seemed both difficult and superfluous: difficult because of the allowance that would have to be made for heavy immigration, both legal and surreptitious, and the conjectures that would have been necessary concerning differential fertility and mortality; superfluous because it is evident that neither group has ever made more than a minimal contribution to American leadership. Uncorrected for population changes, the Spanish-language P.C. was 4 in 1918-19 and 11 in 1955-57, an apparent progress which is almost certainly illusory when the immigration

TABLE II

*Performance Coefficients of Stock from Non-British Areas in WHO'S WHO IN AMERICA (SMITH equals 94).*¹

CATEGORY	BOASI (thds)	<i>Who's Who in America</i> PERFORMANCE COEFFICIENTS			
		1910-11	1918-19	1930-31	1955-57
Dutch	73	144	115	182	172
Jews	1282	48	47	74	123
German	557	52	42	73	86
Scandinavians	348	18	24	38	84
French	261	73	71	71	80

¹ Not corrected for population changes.

factor is taken into account, whereas the Italian P.C. was 9 in the first period and 10 in the second.

When we consider the five other major components in the America stock considered in the previous article,⁵ the following generalizations emerge: (1) Scandinavians and Jews have made

⁵ Other immigration strains have had to be ignored either because they are quantitatively too insignificant for meaningful statistical analysis by this method (the Chinese and Japanese are cases in point) or because their surname distribution is too diversified (Slavs, Greeks and Magyars).

extraordinarily rapid progress, rising from a very low level in each case; (2) the Germans and Dutch have made moderate advances; (3) the French have remained approximately stagnant.

Several tentative explanations for these trends can be offered. In the French case, the stability of the P.C.s may mask two conflicting tendencies: increasingly substantial contributions to the American élite by that part of the French group which came directly from France, and increasing immigration of French Canadians, whose social and cultural level is, as a rule, considerably lower than the French average.

The initial low performance of the Scandinavians is largely due to the fact that their immigration concentrated in preponderantly rural areas in Minnesota and adjoining states. With succeeding generations, this population became increasingly diffused, entering areas of greater leadership opportunity. The hypothesis that the slow start and disappointing performance of the Scandinavians is due primarily to a geographical handicap, rather than to any genetic inferiority, seems validated by the fact that they are today a definite leadership group in American science. The same generalization applies to the Germans, whose P.C. in *American Men of Science* is almost double that of the French.

The low performance coefficients of Jews in the 1910-19 period and their below-average P.C. in 1930-31 may be due to a variety of factors. The heavy Russian Jewish immigration of the 1910's brought in an impoverished element, which was ignorant of the English language and concentrated in sweatshop occupations. The great majority of this group could not expect to participate in the American élite. The low Jewish coefficient of 74 for the second-generation of the Russian emigration (the German and Iberian Jewries had immigrated much earlier), however, suggests that prejudice was a substantial causal factor.⁶ The fact that in the late 1950's, Jewish P.C.s were much higher in business leadership, scholarship and in science also suggests either prejudice⁷ by

⁶ The 1930 group had been almost totally emancipated, or alienated, from its traditional, rabbinical or ghetto world; it was not ingrown toward the ghetto world, but aggressively, perhaps over-aggressively, striving for leadership in the national arena.

⁷ The word "prejudice" is not necessarily condemnatory. The élite in a nation consists both of those who earn their place by superior achievement and those who do so by superior acceptance. Obviously, in the latter category, members of the dominant majority are at an advantage. The fact that the United States will probably never elect a President of Armenian origin denotes neither bigotry nor dislike of Armenians. Nor is it discriminatory in the pejorative sense for the Harvard Club to refuse to admit Yale men to membership or for the Ancient Order of Hibernians to exclude Italians, Negroes, Jews and Englishmen.

the gentile majority or else that Jewish leadership ability was not particularly marked in such areas as military command, politics or the bureaucracy.

All this is about what would have been expected on *a priori* grounds. The national-linguistic character of the American élite has become more diversified. Whereas the leadership element was overwhelmingly Nordic, it is today mainly Nordic and Jewish. Irish, Germans and Scandinavians are rising into the élite. The Negroes, Italians and Spanish-language groups play virtually no role in command and creativity.⁸

In my previous article, I stressed the outstanding performance in all leadership areas of two special groups: English Clerical Names and Special English Occupations.⁹ This superiority has been continuous over the entire 45-year period considered. In the successive periods 1910-11, 1918-19, 1930-31 and 1955-57, the P.C.s for the clerical names were 175, 177, 190 and 162. The P.C.s for the Special English Occupations were 325, 202, 278 and 244. In the case of the Special English Occupations, there seems evidence of a levelling process concomitant with the spread of egalitarian doctrine in the United States. Presumably, consciousness of intellectual superiority on the part of the bearers of these special occupational surnames has become somewhat blurred or blunted and, in consequence, their mating may be becoming less selective and the progeny as a result less distinguished than their fathers. In the case of the English Clerical Names, the series suggests that a similar process may be at work, but this is neither marked nor certain.

There are other indications of persevering class differentiation. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (13th Edition) lists 23 names of Irish kings which are common enough to be on the BOASI list of the 1514 commonest names in the United States.¹⁰ If we consider the performance coefficient of the original Irish sample

⁸ Excluding special situations. In athletics, the Negroes are outstanding; in popular music, they are prominent; in politics, they are being pushed into the limelight as part of a U.S. foreign policy which seems designed to make this country more Africa-oriented than Europe-oriented.

⁹ The three clerical names are CLARK, CLARKE, and PALMER with an aggregate representation in BOASI of 386,000 persons. The Special English Occupations are the four non-clerical occupational surnames with the highest performance coefficients in *Who's Who in America* 1955-57, namely: COOKE, DRAPER, MINER and POTTER.

¹⁰ Using the six-letter coding system of BOASI, the names are: BRYAN, BRYANT, O'BRIEN, COLEMAN, CONNER, CONNOR, DONOVA, DONNEL, EGAN, FINLEY, KENNED, McCONN, McCORM, McDONA, McKENN, McLAUGH, McNEIL, O'CONN, O'CONNO, O'DONNE, O'NEIL, O'NEILL and O'ROURK.

as 100, then the P.C. of the sample of Irish names of royal origin—which names were borne by 909,000 people on BOASI rolls in the mid-1950's—was 124 in *Who's Who in America* for 1910-11 and 122 in the same volume for 1955-57. These differences are statistically significant. They are unexpectedly large when one considers that some of these Irish kings ruled domains not much larger than that of Odysseus.

The performance coefficients of rabbinical names show consistent superiority in science over Jewry as a whole, but inferiority in respect of *Who's Who in America* as the following table shows:

TABLE III

Comparative Performance Coefficients of Rabbinical Names and of Jews in general.

	BOASI (thds)	PERFORMANCE COEFFICIENTS IN: ¹		
		WWA 55-57	AMS-I	AMS-III
All Jews	1282	123	237	338
Rabbinical names	107	100	287	720

¹ WWA 55-57 means the 1955-57 edition of *Who's Who in America*. AMS-I and AMS-III are volumes I (Physical Sciences) and III (Social and Behavioral Sciences) of *American Men of Science*.

The Jewish clerical element is as markedly superior in science as is the English clerical element. The probable reason for the under-representation of these names in *Who's Who in America* 1955-57 is simply that they are more characteristically Jewish than the average names in the larger Jewish sample. Specifically, the rabbinical names are COHEN (indicating descent from Aaron, the high priest), KAPLAN (descendant of the high priest) and KATZ (“an abbreviation of *kohen tzedek*, priest of righteousness, therefore a priest”).¹¹

The Social Elite

We have suggested that there are marked differences in the composition of the American intellectual, executive and status élites and that discrepancies between the P.C.s of *American Men of Science* and *Who's Who in America* partially reflects this state of affairs, since the latter compilation is a conglomerate of the various élite groups. These discrepancies are revealed more clearly by an examination of the social élite as indicated by name

¹¹ Elsdon C. Smith, *Dictionary of American Family Names*, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1956, p. 109.

frequency analysis of the *National Social Directory*, 1961 edition. This directory, as its title suggests, stresses family rather than money as its primary criterion.¹²

The performance coefficients for the *National Social Directory* are as follows:

CATEGORY	PERFORMANCE COEFFICIENTS IN THE NATIONAL SOCIAL DIRECTORY 1961
<i>English-speaking:</i>	
Lothian Scots	137
Welsh	128
Scots	125
English	114
Irish	90
<i>Non-English-speaking:</i>	
Dutch	148
French	118
Germans	79
Scandinavians	57
Jews	24
Italians	15
Spanish-speaking	7
<i>Special Groups:</i>	
Special English Occupational	501
English Clerical Names	167
Smith	94

We have no explanation for the extraordinarily high performance coefficient of the Special English Occupational surnames. The Jewish case deserves special mention because it is the group with maximum variation in élite status. Accordingly, efforts by leaders of Jewish organizations to identify the problems of their ethnic group with those of the Negroes reveal blindness to the realities of the structure of American society. Groups with an élite status which is homogeneous have few problems. Groups with a homogeneously non-élite status may suffer from misfortunes, but not from ambiguities.¹³ The hetero-

¹² Neither President Kennedy nor his parents are listed, but his mother-in-law, Mrs Hugh D. Auchincloss, is.

¹³ The consistently null-élite groups may suffer from problems of status ambiguity if the true élite insistently informs them that they are down-trodden and denied their rightful heritage. The American Negro of today is a case in point.

geneously élite and non-élite is unique in its uncertainty of its relationship to society and in the reciprocation of that uncertainty by society.

From what has been said about the persistent superiority of groups of clerical origin, it might be assumed that similar relationships would persist among groups of varying original occupational status, wealth and poverty, high and low degree. In another article, I shall go into this problem and show that, in general, these correlations are infrequent, uncertain and seldom statistically significant.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



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