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State Autonomy or Class Dominance?: Case Studies on Policy Making in America (Social Institutions and Social Change)

G. William Domhoff

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In his new book G. William Domhoff provides the most thorough critique to date of state autonomy theory as it has been applied to the American federal government. The view under attack holds that the federal government, rather than the banks and corporations, wields greater power in the United States. Utilizing new arguments and new archival findings, this book challenges every case study that state autonomy theorists have done on the Progressive Era, the New Deal, and World War II. Domhoff then concludes with an analysis of why the theory received so much attention.

In addition to demonstrating the weaknesses of state autonomy theory in the case of the U.S., the book presents a step-by-step statement of the author's non-Marxian class dominance theory, defining each concept clearly and suggesting the kind of evidence necessary to support it. The chapters on the origins of the Social Security Act 1935 and on the role of corporations in the industrial mobilization for World War II lead to general statements on the factors that limit the effectiveness of liberal and labor political forces in America; the chapter on the Progressive Era contains an analysis of why the corporate community has been more powerful in the United States than in Europe.

Although it is part of a continuing debate with other experts, the author has marshaled his argument in a style that is always accessible. As a result, the book is ideal for use in courses in which the instructor wants to compare and contrast original presentations of rival viewpoints by major proponents of the debated theories.

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