For over a decade I have been researching and writing a cultural history of New York City’s upper class from the 1750s to the present. The book takes an essay-like approach, exploring a series of related topics and ideas analytically rather than providing encyclopedic coverage or a narrative storyline. Its method is to investigate particular decades as slices or layers of the overall history of New York City. Seven decades are scrutinized: the 1750s/1760s, the 1780s/1790s, the 1820s, the 1860s, the 1890s, the 1940s, and the 1970s.

These seven decades were selected to receive in-depth examination because important changes in the urban political economy happened then that in various ways challenged the upper class. In responding to these challenges, upper-class individuals made choices that reveal their priorities and that reset their compass directions. I begin with the 1750s/1760s because that is when New York City first became internationally important, as a British military headquarters during the Seven Years’ War. Four other periods (the 1780s/1790s, the 1860s, and the 1940s) also coincided with wars (the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and World War II, respectively) that transformed political and economic affairs and altered how elites organized their lives. The Gilded Age was at its height during the 1890s. Two other decades (the 1820s and the 1970s) marked fundamental shifts in the urban economic base that had far-reaching effects on the upper class, with the 1820s representing the beginning of the city’s takeoff as a national metropolis after the construction of the Erie Canal and the 1970s encompassing New York City’s near-bankruptcy during the fiscal crisis along with its transition to a finance- and service-centered economy.

My basic conclusion is that upper-class New Yorkers tried hard to create a separate and exclusive world for themselves, but they kept being assailed by the forces of economic growth and democracy. Their pursuit of privilege is what makes them different, but they were never able to completely control their environments in economically dynamic New York City. An initial colonial upper class that modeled
itself on European norms ran headlong into American capitalism and democracy by the 1790s and then spent the next two centuries trying to figure out how to deal with that whipsaw. In the process the elite became more complex and more plastic, while at the same time working feverishly to preserve its exclusivity, especially from the middle class that began to gain in numbers and prestige from the time it formed in the mid-nineteenth century. The tension between urban economic dynamism and democratic culture, on the one hand, and the enticements of exclusivity and superiority, on the other, is my focal point.

If high-status populations were convinced of anything, it was of their own importance. Fortunately for me, they filled libraries and archives with an abundance of materials documenting themselves — genealogies that are best described as creative; detailed household records; diaries, manuscripts, and letters; memoirs and books; the files of their churches, militia companies, private schools, and other institutions, and more. Along the way, however, I realized that I needed a better empirical knowledge of the people who constituted New York’s economic elites.1 Although I use quantitative evidence throughout the book, much of it comes from the records of institutions like private men’s clubs and elite militias and involves the piecing together of networks. I decided that I required something less impressionistic than my qualitative evidence and more comprehensive and systematic than the rest of my quantitative evidence — a census, in effect. That need was especially acute for my chapter on the 1940s.

The main reason for this felt need involves what I will call “the problem of the Gilded Age.” The preponderance of scholarship on the American (and New York City) upper class concentrates on the so-called Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century. Think of the work of Sven Beckert, Thomas Kessner, Eric Homberger, and David C. Hammack, not to mention the many biographies that have been written about robber barons like John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and J.P. Morgan.2 And of course there’s Susie Pak’s

1 I use two main categories of high status populations: “upper class” and “economic elites.” The upper class is defined as a group of individuals who are tied together by family, friendship, and business bonds, are self-conscious in their possession of goods deemed to be prestigious, and lead a distinctive way of life. Economic elites comprise people who make key economic decisions, those who provide support for the decision-makers, and those who serve as their retainers. Although the binary schema applied here derives from the theoretical work of sociologist E. Digby Baltzell, it modifies his typology in two respects. First, economic elites are not viewed as atomized individuals. Like the upper class, economic elites could establish communities and had their own values, practices, and aspirations. Second, economic elites and the upper class interacted in a variety of ways: sometimes they overlapped, cooperated, and shared, while at other times they separated and clashed. Both modifications take into consideration the intricacies of relationships among the high status New Yorkers. Digby Baltzell, Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class (1958; New Brunswick, N.J., 1992), 6–8; E. Digby Baltzell, The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America (New York, 1964), vii–xv; E. Digby Baltzell, Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia (1979; New Brunswick, N.J., 1996), 19–30.

new and methodologically innovative *Gentlemen Bankers*. Historians are drawn to the Gilded Age because that is when the upper class was at the summit of its wealth and power and was unequivocal about flexing its muscle, with some of its members even conceiving of themselves as a European-style aristocracy.

Most of these individual works are of high quality, but the problem with the myopic concentration of this overall body of scholarship on a single era is that it misses the historical profession’s reason for being, the study of change over time. The late nineteenth century was indeed significant. Yet a tight shot of the Gilded Age leaves out critically important events and issues that happened in other times. That creates a fundamental problem for an analysis of the twentieth-century elites. If you want to widen the angle of the camera lens to look at other time periods, how can you avoid being so influenced by what happened and what has been written about the Gilded Age that you can see later periods clearly and figure out what was happening then? Things get even more complicated when one factors in the economic dynamism of twentieth-century metropolitan New York and the sheer size of its high status population.

Hence my desire to create a statistical study of elites for my chapter on the 1940s. I elected to use a publication entitled *Who's Who in New York (City and State)*. Published in thirteen volumes between 1904 and 1960, *Who’s Who in New York* contains biographical profiles of leading New Yorkers. As sociologists, historians, and other scholars well know, such profiles have a wealth of information that can provide the basis for a detailed and comprehensive statistical portrait of social groups. The eleventh edition, published in 1947, fit the bill. As the full title indicates, *Who’s Who in New York (City and State)* contains entries for people from across New York State as well as from metropolitan New York. My first step, then, involved pinpointing individuals who resided in the 31-county New York metropolitan region and discarding the rest. The next step was to demarcate those metropolitan residents who qualified as “elite” and set them aside for further study. That determination necessarily centered on job descriptions, since, like most biographical dictionaries, *Who’s Who in New York* was intended as a reference for business and professional networking and thus supplied particularly detailed information about employment. Accordingly, the study population consisted chiefly of economic elites — in the definition utilized in my book project, people who

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5 A corollary advantage of the biographical dictionary’s emphasis on work was its inclusion of people who worked in New York City but who resided in New Jersey and Connecticut. Virtually everyone in the survey population worked in New York City. Of the cohort, 2,333 individuals (94.9% of the entire database and 98.5% of those providing workplace information) reported their office location as being New York City. HHEP. It thus possible to use this volume as a tool for studying the entire tri-state metropolis.
made key economic decisions, those who provided support for the decision-makers, and those who served as their retainers. The result of this filtering was a cohort of 2,458 men and women. The full population included well-known figures such as Bruce Barton, Bernard Baruch, Prescott Bush, Nicholas Murray Butler, Bennett Cerf, Allen Dulles, John Foster Dulles, Thomas W. Lamont, Robert Moses, Walter O’Malley, J.C. Penney, Joseph Proskauer, Eddie Rickenbacker, David Rockefeller, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., John D. Rockefeller III, Raymond Rubicam, David Sarnoff, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, Charles Lewis Tiffany, Oswald Garrison Villard, and Thomas J. Watson. But although the group included some very big names, there were many more “everyday” elites who may not have been known outside of their companies or industries, but who nevertheless exercised considerable clout. They were company presidents or vice-presidents, or corporate lawyers, or publishers and editors.

I then used faculty grants to hire research assistants to code the entries and input data into a SPSS-based computer program. With the help of a more statistically-blessed colleague from our economics department, I created a survey form that explored 74 questions. These involved sociological factors such as personal background, education, occupation, place of residence, business affiliations, social associations, and recreational activities. The results of this statistical analysis are not advanced with the view, once commonplace in historical scholarship, that quantification is an infallible method free of the selection bias of qualitative evidence; rather, my belief is that all historical evidence has its uses and its strengths and weaknesses and should be scrutinized and used in tandem with other evidentiary sources.

The findings demonstrated that this was indeed a privileged group. Four-fifths were college graduates. About a third had gone to Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and Columbia. Other leading colleges were Cornell, New York University, City College, Williams, Amherst, and the University of Pennsylvania. Just under one-third identified themselves as lawyers, roughly one-tenth as business executives and another tenth as bankers. The top economic sector was business services, which comprised one-fifth of the total, followed by banking/brokerage, contracting/engineering, health/medicine, manufacturing, and commerce. The people in the survey worked for more than 780 different corporations or firms that did business with corporations. The six leading employers were Milbank, Tweed; Cadwalader,

6 N = College graduates, 1,922 (78.2%), Not college graduates, 424 (17.2%), unknown, 112 (4.6%). HHEP. By comparison, just 5.5% percent of all American men were college graduates in 1940. Claudia Goldin, “Years of School Completed, by Sex, Race, and Ethnicity: 1940–1997,” series Bc743, in Historical Statistics of the United States, Earliest Times to the Present: Millennial Edition, ed. Susan B. Carter et al. (New York, 2006).
7 N = Yale, 246 (10%), Harvard, 219 (8.9%), Columbia, 186 (7.6%), and Princeton, 132 (5.4%), for a total of 783, or 31.8%.
8 Ranging from Cornell, representing 3.7% of graduates, down to the University of Pennsylvania, accounting for 1.3% of graduates, HHEP.
9 N = lawyers, 697 (28.4%), executives, 327 (13.3%), bankers, 281 (11.4%), and engineers, 126 (5.1%). HHEP.
10 N = business services, 556 (22.6%), banking/brokerage, 456 (18.6%), contracting/engineering, 169 (6.9%), health/medicine, 141 (5.7%), manufacturing, 138, (5.6%), and commerce/trade, 114 (4.6%). HHEP.
Wickersham, & Taft; Chase National Bank; Cravath, Swaine & Moore; Chadbourne & Parke; and Standard Oil. Four of these top six entities were corporate law firms. The findings of an interrogation of this data are consistent with other forms of evidence and confirm that this was indeed a privileged group.

This statistical portrait coincided fairly closely with what I already knew about the metropolitan region’s economic elites in this period. While the results reassured me that the survey population could provide a reasonable basis for my chapter, there was nothing new here. So far I hadn’t learned anything that shed light on the social structure and cultural values of the region’s high-status population at mid-twentieth century. Some of the findings were obvious. As it turned out, country clubs became a prime focus of my 1940s chapter, but the data that almost half the people in the study population who had hobbies said that that golf was their favorite pastime didn’t take me very far. It was hardly breaking news that at the time golf was the primary recreational activity of upper-middle- and upper-class American men.

But it can be hit or miss with qualitative sources, too, and not every archival visit yields jewels. It turned out that three of my seventy-four questions were invaluable and got me thinking along the lines that eventually enabled me to make sense of this time period and what happened to New York City’s metropolitan elite after the Gilded Age. These three questions dealt with residential location.

Virtually everyone in the 1947 study group continued to work in New York City, and the Upper East Side was the principal place of residence. But almost half of the people in the survey had their primary residence within the metropolitan region but beyond the city’s borders. They were overwhelmingly suburban dwellers. Their most salient characteristic — what truly stood out — was their geographical dispersal. The leading suburbs were, in rank order, Scarsdale, Bronxville, Montclair, N.J., Greenwich, Conn., New Rochelle, Garden City, and Rye (all locations in New York state unless otherwise noted). This meant that elites were living in three different corners of the metropolitan region — to the north in Westchester County and in Connecticut’s Fairfield County, to the west in New Jersey, and to the east on Long Island. This was a large and dispersed area. While Scarsdale was the elite’s favorite suburb, less than four percent of the people in the project lived there. Taken as a whole, the top ten suburbs comprised just 15 percent of the entire survey population. In total, people resided

11 N = 783 corporations and firms. The figures were Milbank Tweed (15 individuals), Cadwalader (15), Chase (14), Cravath (13), Chadbourne (11), and Standard Oil (10). HHEP.

12 N = 1,348 people (54.8%) indicated that they did not have a hobby and 1,045 (42.5%) indicated that they did. Of those who did report having a hobby, N=496 (48.7%) said that golf was their favorite one; 236 (9.6%) fall into the “other” category; 83 (9.2%) reported tennis; 69 (6.7%), yachting/sailing; and 59 (5.8%), fishing. Hiking/camping/walking, hunting, stamp collecting, skiing, and squash/racquetball elicited fewer responses. HHEP. On the emergence and growth of golf as a pastime, see “Popularity of Golf: The Old Scottish Game,” Current Literature, Sep. 1894, 238, and George B. Kirsch, Golf in America (Urbana, Ill., 2009), 6.

13 N = 2,333 (94.9%) of the entire database and 98.5% of those providing information relevant to this question) people reported their office location as being New York City. N = 1,209 (49.2%) identified their primary residential location as being outside New York City and 1,156 (47.2%) as inside New York City. N = 1,123 (45.7%) residents of the metropolitan region beyond New York City. N = 939 (38.2%) residents of Manhattan. HHEP.
in more than 65 different suburbs. The reason why the number 65 stood out to me is that in the Gilded Age the upper class had tightly concentrated in a single Manhattan neighborhood, Murray Hill, the predecessor of today’s Upper East Side. Something much different seemed to be happening in the first half of the twentieth century.

A second attribute was that there was a conspicuous regional pattern to this geographical dispersal. While elites diffused to the three corners of the metropolitan region — again, Westchester County and Fairfield County in the north; New Jersey in the west; and Long Island in the east — they showed a marked preference for the northern and the close-in Jersey suburbs. Garden City was the only Long Island community in the top ten, and there were only three Long Island suburbs among the top 25 suburbs. The reason for this regional pattern appears to be that in the 1940s upper-class estates still occupied many sections of Nassau County that were most suitable for suburbanization, while relatively more land became available for development north and west of New York City than east of it. In this period, Long Island was weighted toward old money and blue blood rather than toward corporate elites. Of the fifteen communities in Nassau and Suffolk counties that the study population favored, nine were “old-money suburbs” like Lawrence, Oyster Bay, and Locust Valley. There were definitely old-money

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Table: Residential Locations of the New York Metropolitan Elite, 1947

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Elite Residents (N = 2458)</th>
<th>Pct. of Elite Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>1156</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other boroughs</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outside New York City / within</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarsdale, N.Y.</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronxville, N.Y.</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montclair, N.J.</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenwich, Conn.</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Rochelle, N.Y.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden City, N.Y.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rye, N.Y.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larchmont, N.Y.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Canaan, Conn.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summit, N.J.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other metropolitan communities</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outside metropolitan area / unindicated</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>179</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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14 N = 87 residents of Scarsdale (3.5%), 60 of Bronxville (2.4%), 55 of Montclair, N.J. (2.2%), 47 of Greenwich, Conn. (1.9%), 30 of New Rochelle (1.2%), 25 of Garden City, N.J. (1.0%), 24 of Rye (1.0%), 23 of Larchmont (0.9%), 23 of New Canaan, Conn. (0.9%), and 20 of Summit, N.J. (0.8%). EP336. The three Long Island suburbs that were among the top 25 were Garden City (26), Great Neck (11), and Manhasset (22). HHEP.

15 The top 15 were, in order, Great Neck, Manhasset, Huntington, Lawrence, Oyster Bay, Locust Valley, Syosset, Hewlett, Port Washington, Old Westbury, Sands Point, Cedarhurst, Glen Head, and Eatons Neck. The nine that I have identified as “old money suburbs” are Lawrence, Oyster Bay, Locust Valley, Syosset, Hewlett, Port Washington, Old Westbury, Sands Point, and Eatons Neck. HHEP.
suburbs elsewhere in the region, such as Morristown in New Jersey and Greenwich and New Canaan in Connecticut, but they existed in tandem with numerous upper-middle- and middle-class suburbs. I later decided that this pattern of diffusion was significant for enlarging the separation between corporate and social elites — the main development that I saw happening in this period.

To see what was going on, I decided to examine the residential locations of people who were listed in the 1947 Social Register. The Social Register, of course, contains social elites, a very different group than the economic elites in my study population. An analysis of the 1949 Social Register shows that the people listed there had a different residential geography than the economic elites in the study group. The preferred area of primary residence for the Social Register crowd was overwhelmingly the Upper East Side of Manhattan, accounting for one-third of all residential addresses. By contrast, only 13 percent of the corporate elite group lived on the Upper East Side. In dispersing to the suburbs, corporate elites literally distanced themselves from social elites.

Elsewhere in my 1940s chapter, I investigated the composition of the boards of directors of nine major New York City non-profit groups in 1948: the American Museum of Natural History, Columbia University, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Opera, the Museum of Modern Art, the New York Botanical Garden, the New York Philharmonic, the New York Public Library, and New York University. I wanted to see if and to what extent members of the corporate elite were a presence on these boards. It is not possible to draw a hard-and-fast line between board members who owed their rank to their socially prominent families and inherited wealth and those who owed it to their corporate positions, since some board members from socially prominent families were capable business leaders (like Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney, a founder of Pan American Airways and a Canadian mining concern, banker Robert Lehman, and publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger). Nonetheless, it is possible to identify individuals who would have been termed “income men” in a previous generation — those who owed their wealth and prominence entirely to their success in climbing the corporate ladder. These were the members of the corporate elite. Their representation on these boards ranged from a low of twenty-one percent for the New York Public Library to highs of fifty-nine percent for Columbia University and sixty-six percent for New York University.
University. Among the corporate elites serving on these boards were bigwigs like magazine publisher Henry Luce, CBS chairman William S. Paley, RCA president David Sarnoff, IBM’s Thomas H. Watson, Sr., and AT&T’s Walter S. Gifford.19

And where did these top corporate elites prefer to reside? Of the 99 corporate leaders who could be identified as having primary home addresses somewhere in the metropolitan region, 62 percent were situated in New York City, overwhelmingly on the Upper East Side.20 The same was true of corporate leaders who formed what has been called the New York foreign policy elite: James V. Forrestal, John Foster Dulles, his brother Allen W. Dulles, and John J. McCloy, among many others, lived on the Upper East Side.21 Social elites and the top corporate leaders clearly preferred Manhattan — but many other economic elites had diffused to the suburbs.

It is noteworthy that the emergence of upper-class suburbs like Scarsdale, Greenwich, and Garden City in the early twentieth century coincided with the growth of Upper East Side, which by the 1920s had become the city’s premier upper-class neighborhood. The Upper East Side flourished all through the interwar and the postwar periods, as it does to this day, and the suburbs’ emergence obviously did not come at its expense. Indeed, the geographical scope and the growth of wealth in the metropolitan region was nothing short of extraordinary. The Upper East Side was not only the single largest and richest upper-class urban neighborhood in the United States, but multiple upper-class suburbs had appeared in different corners of the metropolitan region.22 This was singular. In Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago, Buffalo, New Orleans, and Milwaukee, downtown upper-class residential districts survived until at least the mid-twentieth century, even as elite suburbs sprouted on their outskirts. But New York City was the only place in this period where a new upper-class neighborhood emerged and prospered in the central city at the same time that elite suburbs were developing on the outskirts.23

19 In addition to annual reports and official publications of these institutions published between 1947 and 1949, other sources for this information included Who’s Who in America, 1948–1949; obituaries, reports of promotions, and wedding announcements in New York Times articles from 1932 through 2001, and articles in The National Cyclopedia of American Biography.

20 N = 61. HHEP.


An upper class that at the turn of the century had emphasized its cohesiveness and its inter-connections had by the 1940s dispersed geographically. Since the mid-nineteenth century there had been divergent social and cultural ways of being a part of the city’s upper class, and to this was now added greater physical and social distance. What was going on here? Country clubs help us answer that question. By the 1940s, there were forty to fifty first-tier country clubs in the metropolitan region and perhaps an equal number that ranked just below them. The social geography of the top-end country clubs was defined by their multiplicity and localization. Unlike the rarified world of the late-nineteenth-century New York City elite men’s clubs, where there had been a well-accepted status hierarchy and a relatively small number of prestigious clubs, country clubs’ decentralized physical geography created a fuzzier pecking order. While the Union Club, the Union League Club, and the Metropolitan Club had occupied the same Manhattan neighborhood, country clubs were widely dispersed, with, for instance, Shinnecock Hills in Southampton, Long Island, more than 100 miles distant from Baltusrol in New Jersey and 60 miles from Winged Foot and Apawamis in Westchester County. Country clubs did compete with one another, especially those that were near one another and that recruited members from the same demographic pool, but these rivalries were diffused. This social geography — like that of the elite suburbs themselves — indicates that elites had segmented into a series of localized social environments where they could forge their own small and intimate communities.24

Many of the people I study in this chapter were beneficiaries of the elaboration of the corporate headquarters complex that had taken root in Manhattan in the late nineteenth century. They were well-to-do and professionally prominent, but the centrality of commuting and career to their lives stamped them and their families as middle class. Few belonged to the Social Register.25 They had emerged from the business world and cared less about social pedigrees and rituals than about providing good management to these massive new organizations. They saw themselves as professionals more than as entrepreneurs. They were proud of their educational accomplishments and many of them had professional degrees, including the M.B.A.

Tangible social gradations existed within this New York corporate elite. There was a bottom zone that consisted of businessmen and

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professionals who made a decent living as middle managers but who so clearly belonged to the middle class rather than the upper class that there was no ambiguity about their social standing. Nor was there any uncertainty about the status of those in the top zone: individuals in this bracket (like magazine publisher Henry Luce, CBS chairman William S. Paley, RCA president David Sarnoff, and IBM’s Thomas H. Watson, Sr.) were eminent business leaders who made huge salaries, amassed considerable wealth, and commanded great power. They had reached the pinnacle of corporate America and were definitely elite.

Yet there was also an intermediary group that straddled the line between the upper and middle classes. Its members are my primary focus because the mode of life they constructed and the ideology they and their successors would later formulate became the basis of a new upper class that would later challenge the prerogatives and meanings of the vestiges of the Gilded Age upper class. People in this intermediate zone had good jobs as corporate presidents, vice presidents, lawyers, bankers, and the like. They made a lot of money and lived well. They were not part of the Social Register set and most did not want to be. They cared more about managing New York’s gigantic and important corporations, organizations, and professional services firms than about social pedigree, and they took pride in their educational and career successes. Their attention to career and their work ethic gave them a middle-class orientation, yet they also wanted to separate themselves from those in the broader middle class who had not reached their level.26

They were hybrids who combined some characteristics of the Gilded Age upper class and some of the twentieth-century middle class. With economic and social forces acting to blur class lines, the problem for individuals in this zone was how to distinguish themselves from that broad middle class, while simultaneously avoiding being mistaken for the nouveau riches and arrivistes whose showiness and posturing betrayed their lack of belonging. To achieve this separation, they used social markers like the suburbs where they lived, the country clubs that they joined, and the private schools where they sent their children. Wealthy suburbs like Rye and Scarsdale in New York and Summit in New Jersey that developed in the early twentieth century became crucial landscapes for them. Corporate elites who moved to the suburbs retained strong ties with the city: they socialized, attended cultural events, and shopped in Manhattan, and

through the 1940s almost all of their workplaces were still located there. Now, though, they could choose to be part of the city and its upper-class world when they wanted to and yet withdraw from it at other times. This allowed them to congregate with people like themselves and pursue distinction on their own terms. In mounting the corporate ladder, moving to the suburbs, and joining country clubs, economic elites did not directly contest the values, practices, or prestige of the blue bloods who had achieved ascendancy in the Gilded Age, but what they did was to create communities and a way of life that were entirely their own. Moving to the suburbs let corporate elites create their own social spaces and their own lives. This was important because it shifted the social structure of the upper class from a vertical ladder where the Manhattan social elite was in the ascendancy to a more horizontal arrangement of separate and only loosely interconnected elite groups, including social and corporate elites. It also muddied the boundaries between the upper class and the middle class.27

From the early nineteenth century, rapid economic growth has continually enlarged and enriched the upper class in New York City, bringing in newcomers, introducing new sources of wealth, generating new communities, and putting great weight on the pursuit of business success and the accumulation of wealth. In this competitive environment, the upper class in New York City has been highly plastic. Taking a biographical approach to the study of the upper class in the early twentieth century demonstrates that this plasticity and competitiveness characterized corporate elites as well. By the choices they made about their work, places of residence, and leisure activities, we can see that these corporate elites used the suburbs, country clubs, and the business world to make their own worlds. They had their own ideas about work, education, and social hierarchy that were at odds with those of social elites. By the 1940s, their understandings had not yet crystallized into a coherent ideology. That began to happen in the 1970s, and is the focus of my last chapter, which scrutinizes the emergence of an anti-elite elite that actively and self-consciously opposed the sensibilities of the Gilded Age upper class and used its opposition to assert its own legitimacy and prerogatives.

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