

THOSE PRIVATE CLUBS

How well do Jews and non-Jews mix socially in San Francisco?

There was a study of this question at upper-register levels a few years back. A list of 25 "socially elite" non-Jews; and 25 "socially elite" Jews was drawn up. All fifty were shown the alphabetically combined list and asked to indicate those with whom they were socially acquainted.

Within each group there was predictably a high level of acquaintanceship. About 97 per cent of the Jews said they were socially acquainted with all the other Jews. About 91 per cent of the non-Jews said they were socially acquainted with all the other non-Jews. But only 59 per cent of the Jews said they were socially acquainted with the non-Jews; and for the non-Jews, the figure was 65 per cent.

Well, at a less rarefied level, such figures would come as no surprise to us. We tend to accumulate social acquaintances at synagogue or at B'nai B'rith and Hadassah meetings, where non-Jews don't normally hang out. "Integration" doesn't mean the dissolution of in-groups; it means that there is unimpeded intercourse between members of various in-groups as they participate in public life: politics, business, and so forth.

And that's why the level of acquaintanceship among the "socially elite" of the Jews and non-Jews was being studied. The conventional wisdom has long been that there is a direct relationship between social acquaintanceship and business success. Therefore, the exclusion of Jews, and others, from socially elite private clubs has prevented them from moving up in the executive suite. "The private club," the saying went, "is where the deals are made."

A couple of academics, Richard Zweigenhaft and G. William Domhoff, have gathered some studies and recent evidence about the conventional wisdom, in a book entitled *Jews in the Protestant Establishment*. They suggest that the role of the private social clubs in excluding Jews from the executive suite has become exaggerated. Apparently there are not that many deals being made in the clubs these days that could not be made elsewhere.

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In fact the corporations control the private clubs, rather than the other way around. Most private social clubs would go out of business today if corporations did not buy memberships for their executives. If the corporations are anti-semitic to begin with, they may use club membership as a convenient criterion for promoting those they want to promote. But if they are not anti-semitic, the lack of club membership will not keep them from promoting someone. And there are now, indeed, other ways for successful Jewish corporate leaders to interact socially with the Protestant establishment, such as joint activity in cultural institutions.

The Jews have become a more significant part of the corporate elite than of the social elite. A 1976 Harvard Business Review study of 444 top business executives, mostly presidents and chairmen of major American companies, found that over 85 per cent were Protestants; about 5 per cent were Jewish -- about twice our population percentage, although a little below our college graduate percentage -- and only about 10 per cent were Catholic. But it is still true that Jews haven't achieved their business success in the choice corporate and financial sectors of the society which are still controlled by the "Protestant establishment." Only about one per cent of the top bank executives in the country, for example, are Jewish.

However, exclusion from private social clubs is apparently not a major factor in this disability.