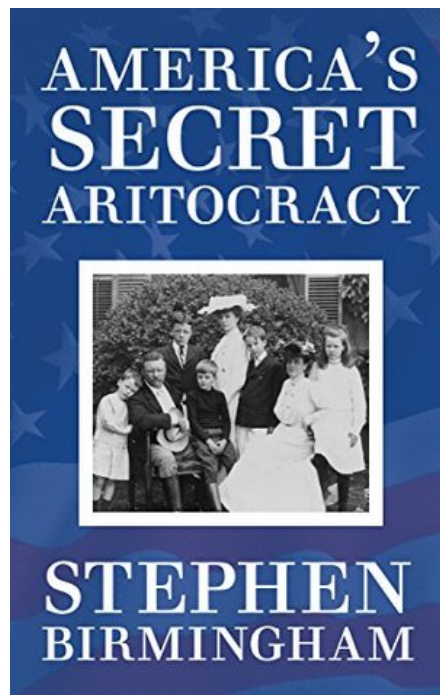




America's Secret Aristocracy

Stephen Birmingham

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America's Secret Aristocracy is a report from inside the shush-shush inner circle of America's upper crust. Full of eccentric family members and well-sourced gossip, bestselling writer Stephen Birmingham spins an entertaining social history.

America's Secret Aristocracy Details

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From Reader Review America's Secret Aristocracy for online ebook

Meg says

Overall very interesting! It does ramble a bit rather than having a directed theme or topic, but gives you an excellent sense of both the families that make up America's "aristocracy" and the values that characterize this way of life. Lot's of excellent historical information that offers pretty deep insight into the "elite" undercurrent of the American culture.

David Steece, Jr. says

Hidden treasure here. Witty, urbane, and full of unusual characters who I've never heard of, despite having done some (very very very little) studying of American history.

Another reviewer said they thought it would be about the people like the "Vanderbilts, Astors, Rockefellers, etc," but what was so interesting to me is that it really only briefly mentions any of those big names (besides Roosevelt and Astor.) Those names that I know something about and represent the titans of American Capitalism. Instead Birmingham zooms in on the aristocracy that predates the Vanderbilts et al. An aristocracy that always had to accommodate wealth, but were—and are—not defined by it. Many of the loftiest families, for one reason or the other, aren't even fabulously wealthy anymore, altho of course many more are still.

Birmingham's central thesis is that America's secret aristocracy, who have no Titles or registries to literally and legally define them, are instead defined by "breeding," a subtle concept that mixes a little of their own ego with a healthy dose of American skepticism and matter-of-factness. They always do "the right thing."

Herein lies the treasure. In this book Birmingham gets at something central to the entire American myth. We are a society that overthrew its monarchy in the name of democracy, egalitarian principles and freedom. We also bought and sold human flesh, mercilessly exploited our fellows, exterminated the indigenous population and on and on. We helped dismantle Europe's empire after WWII, and then proceeded to put our boot on the 3rd World's throat by means of carpet bombing, black ops, torture. America's secret aristocracy is representative (altho not necessarily responsible) of this discrepancy.

As Birmingham shows again and again, from the story of a young lady sleeping out with Indians in the woods in the early 17th century to the story of an old lady in the 1980s stopping a massive midnight beer bash on her property with a steely coolness & a simple question—America's aristocrats are Earthy and not afraid of getting their hands dirty. They'll make their own beds, damnit. Again and again they make a point of rejecting "snobbishness" out-of-hand, yet their very secrecy and orientation toward their "bloodline" absolutely imply an utter exclusivity that can only be called snobbish. That paradox is something I personally just can't understand—not in any moral sense at least.

I guess its something that requires a little better "breeding."

Cwn_annwn_13 says

I thought this was going to be about the shadow government with an emphasis on the old line new england

ivy league blue blood families, Vanderbilts, Astors, Rockefellers, etc. Its about them but its more like if Robin Leach wrote a history book about these families. Social climbing, who had an affair with who, lavish lifestyles, etc. I wasn't into it.

Nancy F. Mynard says

Really interesting

Worth the read, blows a lot of cobwebs away from the upper crust of America. Legends are made to be broken, this is one of the books that does it

Ramesh Abhiraman says

Humorous, historical, going back to the Puritans, mid Atlantic settlers, Virginia old families and traditions and individual family stories.

Tori says

2010- Although gossipy and now sorely outdated, the book did teach me quite a bit about the history of some prominent American families.
