

# Bohemian Grove, Jack London, and the cultishness of California's politics

by Brian Lantz

In the black of night, into a clearing of a redwood forest, come red-hooded priests, their way lit by the fire of wooden torches. A funeral dirge moans from the shadows as a casket carrying the corpse of Dull Care follows in procession. Over 1,000 men, waiting in the clearing, solemnly fall in behind the passing casket, as the hooded ones lead their following through towering redwoods and out into another clearing alongside a lake. In the distance towers a huge owl, the goddess Athena, illuminated by fire. Moss hangs from this figure, a grey mass which towers almost 30 feet from the ground.

At the edge of the lake, the bier is transferred by the priest to the Ferry of Care which crosses the lake to the owl shrine. Hamadryads, Greek tree spirits, burst into song as a single huge redwood tree near the shrine is suddenly illumined. The High Priest chants incantations as the corpse of Care is placed upon the funeral pyre before the shrine. But suddenly the torches are snuffed out by a sudden wind and the voice of Dull Care fills the woods! "Fools, Fools Fools! When will ye learn that me ye cannot slay?! The High Priest turns to the great owl, who responds and orders the High Priest to light his torch from the one remaining flame: the Torch of Fellowship. Igniting the funeral pyre, the High Priest throws his torch upon the fire. A chorus of voices among the surrounding trees sings forth as flames illumine the owl and the surrounding priests: "Begone, Dull Care! Midsummer sets us free!" Across the lake from where the cult's followers have watched their rites, the voice of Care can still be heard, gasping for a last breath.

Thus begins each year's gathering at the Bohemian Grove. Among the hooded priests and followers are the United States' most powerful government and business leaders. Xerox, Bank of America, Bechtel, Weyerhaeuser; there is hardly a major corporation that is not well represented. Robert McNamara, George Shultz, George Bush, A. W. Clausen, William F. Buckley, Gerald Ford. They are among those gathering for these druidic rites.

It was at the Bohemian Grove this July that West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt made his illusory deal with Secretary of State Shultz, a man he considered a friend—that Schmidt would not be toppled if he accepted the International Monetary Fund's plans for a "controlled depression," in the advanced sector and mass extermination in the underdeveloped world.

## Origins of the phenomenon

In March of 1872, a group of writers and reporters—many associated with the *San Francisco Examiner*, flagship of the Hearst chain—met in San Francisco to form the Bohemian Club. Today, the waiting list to join this 1,500-member club is over one thousand, each being sponsored by at least three Bohemian members. A 15-man membership committee will pass judgment on each one. The wait could easily be 15 years. There has never been a black member and only two Hispanics. There are few even nominally Jewish members.

The name of the club is a first revealing hint. It is named after the Paris bohemians, the left-over "gypsies" of the Jacobin revolution of 1830. A romanticized counterculture creation of Madame de Staël, Balzac wrote of them in *A Prince of Bohemia*. Puccini in turn glorified them in his anti-republican opera *La Bohème*, launching the bohemians as a full-blown model in the midst of the mid-later-century pogrom against the remnants of neo-Platonic republican culture. And so, in 1882, the entire city of San Francisco welcomed that British pervert, Oscar Wilde, who stepped from his train wearing a Spanish sombrero, velvet suit, puce cravat, yellow gloves, and buckled shoes. "Culture" had come to the "Wild West"!

This event, barely one hundred years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, is symbolic. For California, it was the wedding, so to speak, of "49er" gold, silver, and railroad money with the likes of Oscar Wilde which makes the state's politics what they are—with all their na-

tional ramifications. The Bohemian Club has played a role in this as part of a broader operation: the anglophile takeover of the United States in the aftermath of the Specie Resumption Act of 1879, a takeover that could not have occurred if not for the oafish anglophile susceptibilities of America's newly monied elite. Visiting San Francisco in 1889, Rudyard Kipling, a young British journalist, made use of the Bohemian Club and sneered at its members' pretensions. "It was magnificent," Kipling later wrote. "It was stupendous, and I was conscious of a wicked desire to hide my face in a napkin and grin."

Democratic Sen. Alan Cranston, A. P. Giannini and his Bank of America, Gov. Jerry Brown (whose father Pat is a long-time Bohemian member), Hollywood—the major figures and institutions of California are the creations of this process of aquarianization put in place at the turn of the century. The United States will not be won back to republican principles until the doors of the anti-Semitic, racist Bohemian Club close, and the Bohemian Grove, 2,700 acres of redwood forest, are deeded over to serve some useful national purpose.

### 'Good government' and dynamite

In September 1901, when President William McKinley was fatally shot by anarchist Leon Czolgosz, connected to Emma Goldman's Settlement House, William Randolph Hearst was hung in effigy in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, not without reason. The anglophile Hearst, seeking the Democratic presidential nomination for 1904, had stated months before the assassination in an anti-McKinley editorial in his *New York Journal* newspaper, "If bad institutions and bad men be got rid of only by killing, then the killing must be done." Months earlier, Ambrose Bierce, Hearst-chain writer, Bohemian Club charter member and cultural lion of San Francisco's "art" community, had some of his verse printed in the *Journal* in the aftermath of the assassination of William Goebel, the just-elected governor of Kentucky:

The bullet that pierced Goebel's breast  
Cannot be found in all the West  
Good Reason, it is speeding here  
To stretch McKinley on his bier.

Around the country Hearst newspapers were seized by angry citizens and burned.

The progressive movement, in which the Hearst family has played such an active part, is what made California politics what it is today. By 1910, its "good government" movement, slyly using the Southern Pacific "Octopus" as its foil, had taken control of state politics and elected Hiram Johnson governor. The Bohemian Club, then and now, reflects the nexus of Social Darwinist progressives (Republican and Democrat) and the bohemian counterculture of San Francisco. Terrorism was part of their arsenal.

In 1905, Fremont Older, editor-provocateur of the *San Francisco Bulletin* newspaper, launched a campaign against

the "Reuf-Schmitz Combine," the Union Labor Party-backed circle that had gained control of San Francisco City Hall politics out of the bitter 1901 general strike. The charge was corruption.

Older, who had come from the East to work on the just-launched *San Francisco Examiner*, was a friend of Emma Goldman, Jane Addams of Chicago's Hull House, and Stanford University President David Starr Jordan. That same year, Older traveled to Washington, D.C. and met with Theodore Roosevelt to elicit aid in the campaign. Following this up, Roosevelt sent Victor Metcalf, Secretary of Commerce and Labor, to San Francisco. Metcalf, reporting back in the aftermath of the San Francisco earthquake and fire, warned, "This man [Mayor] Schmitz has turned out pure gold in this emergency."

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That year, Roosevelt arranged for William J. Burns, the famous private investigator, to arrive in San Francisco and begin a "private investigation." Older bankrolled the operation, to the tune of \$100,000, through progressive Rudolph Spreckels, sugar baron and banker; and James D. Phelan, ex-mayor and inheritor of a Comstock silver fortune.

Others brought in were Walter Blum, later of the Secret Service, and A. P. Giannini, an up-and-coming young produce operator and banker who, by then, controlled the 44th District Italian vote. Giannini was a close friend of James Phelan and had been involved in "good government" effort since the 1890s. (In fact, one year after Phelan's election as mayor in 1899 in an earlier anti-corruption campaign, Phelan-backer Giannini had opened up his Bank of Italy and accumulated \$1 million dollars in deposits.)

On Nov. 7, 1906, the graft prosecution was launched. In the course of the trials which lasted five years, the prosecuting attorney was shot and wounded in open court (a young attorney, Hiram Johnson, replaced him), his assailant committing "suicide" in jail; Fremont Older was kidnapped; and San

Francisco County Supervisor Gallagher, providing “vital testimony” against the “combine,” had his home blown up with dynamite! The Combine was swept from power in 1908. In a maneuver that reminds one of Alan Cranston’s “damage control” to keep the Harrison Williams case from exposing Justice Department crimes in Abscam, Fremont Older then turned around and led a “valiant” fight to free Reuf, the behind-the-scenes “brains” of the Schmitz administration, from the penitentiary! The “Octopus,” the by-then Harriman-owned Southern Pacific, who had been the foil against which Hearst, Older, and Phelan and others had railed, publicly supported the operation against Reuf-Schmitz. Labor was disciplined and the progressives came to power in San Francisco.

The coming to power of the progressives in San Francisco was the leading edge of a state-wide effort. Similar campaigns, with similar tactics, were carried out in Stockton, and Los Angeles. In Los Angeles the Good Government and City Club organizations successfully orchestrated the municipal elections of 1910, pitting Harrison Gray Otis, the knee-jerk racist of the *Los Angeles Times*, against the Socialist Party. In October of 1910, in the middle of hotly contested state and local races, the *Los Angeles Times* building was dynamited, killing 21 employees. The trial of the indicted perpetrators, the MacNamara Brothers, orchestrated with Clarence Darrow as defense attorney, changed direction suddenly with a meeting arranged by Lincoln Steffens who was “covering” the trial. Bringing Otis and his son-in-law Chandler together with Otis’s enemies, the Good Government group, Darrow announced to the group that the MacNamara brothers would switch their plea to guilty in return for certain nominal guarantees. The next day in court the change in plea was announced. The socialist election juggernaut, which was threatening to carry the city elections, collapsed, and Otis dropped his longstanding opposition to the progressives, who carried the elections and consolidated control.

With Hiram Johnson’s election as governor that year, Progressive Republicans consolidated power in the state. Johnson produced California’s state constitution and went on to become U.S. Senator. The repercussions of this progressive consolidation have been enormous. The results of Johnson’s new state constitution, along with the “good government” reforms of city election codes and bylaws which had begun in the 1890s, guaranteed that no constituency-based “machine” could consolidate its power. This explains in good part why California is such a hothouse for creations like Jerry Brown.

As well, the Progressive networks were to be the basis of the California Democratic Council, Cranston’s vehicle, which for all intents and purposes created the state Democratic Party starting in 1950—exactly as the progressive Republicans had built theirs 50 years earlier.

Cranston is personally a product of this progressive/bohemian nexus. Cranston’s parents, wealthy real estate operators in the San Francisco Bay Area, were close friends of

Fremont Older and his wife. Cranston credits the Olders with inspiring his politics and landing him his first job—which led to Cranston going to Italy with INS, the Hearst news chain. He wrote back glowing reports of Mussolini’s wonderful government.

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*Spearheading the Bohemian Club ideology was the first president of Stanford University, David Starr Jordan, with his “blood and soil” mythos. Stanford also promoted the narrow British conception of engineers as adjuncts of resource-looting,*

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The Bohemian Club is never far from all of this. Otis and Chandler were and are members. James Phelan was president of the club from 1891-1892 playing de Medici, as one author put it, to the Bay Area’s theosophic existentialist “art” community. Frank Norris, the author of *The Octopus*, the muck-raking book about the Southern Pacific, was an active member as well. And, of course, Fremont Older. Mark Twain was made an honorary member in 1873; Theodore Roosevelt was made an honorary member in 1903.

### **Progressive culture: the Bohemians**

Jack London, the most widely read living writer in the world in the period leading up to World War I, exemplified the “artists” in the Bohemian Club. The son of an astrologist father and a seance-sponsoring mystic, his father skipped town before Jack’s birth, claiming he could not be Jack’s father because he was impotent at the time! That Jack’s parents were members of a free-love sex cult confused matters further. Driven from home by poverty and his mother’s Indian war whoops during seance, London became a pirate and drunk before he ever got out of his teens. Turning to writing, London became a Socialist Party member and propagandist whose writings mirrored the outlook of Mussolini (see *The Iron Heel*). A racist of the first degree, London covered the Russo-Japanese War for the Hearst chain, reporting back in horror that it was up to America to defeat the Yellow Peril. A rabid Social Darwinist and follower of Friedrich Nietzsche, he modeled his writing style on Rudyard Kipling, naming many of his main characters—those that weren’t wolves or dogs—Saxon. Obeying his own call of the wild, London committed suicide with morphine.

The Jesuit-educated James Duval Phelan exemplified the second-generation gold, railroad, and silver money that cultivated epicurean tastes and bankrolled this counterculture—which *was* the culture of San Francisco. Educated by Jesuits or sent East, they attempted to distance themselves as quickly

as possible from their past. The gold strike and railroad money being Protestant, they became Unitarians and Episcopians. The Comstock silver money was largely Irish Catholic. They were trained by the Jesuits. They were leaders in the Bohemian Club and active in politics. James Phelan's political career did not end with the Reuf-Schmitz Abscam operation. He went on to serve as U.S. Senator from 1915-1921.

### **Stanford University: engineering the Empire**

Psychopaths like Jack London have their creators and shamans. London's was David Starr Jordan, the first president of Stanford University.

In March of 1884, Leland Stanford, Jr. died of pneumonia unexpectedly in Venice, Italy. He was 15. Leland Stanford, Sr. was heartbroken. Stanford was one of the "Big Four" Sacramento dry goods merchants who gained sudden wealth and power by building the Southern Pacific Railroad, the western half of the first trans-continental railroad. Like his partners Huntington and Hopkins, he would die without children. Upon their return from Europe to the States, Stanford and his wife, "Unitarian Methodists," were invited by President Grant and his wife to a seance. In this seance, Stanford and his wife were visited and told that they must start a university as an acceptable memorial to their dead son. Such were the dark beginnings of Stanford University.

Touring the United States and England to locate a university president and gain knowledge, the Stanfords, by then among the wealthiest people in the world, visited Columbia, Harvard, MIT, and Oxford offering huge sums of money to win away a major East Coast university president for their college taking shape among the cow pastures of Palo Alto. None would agree, but all seemed to recommend the young president of Indiana State University, David Starr Jordan. Jordan was to serve as Stanford University's president from its founding in 1891 to until the mid 1920s. Perhaps no individual shaped the fascist California ethos more than David Starr Jordan. Jordan explicated a specific Western "blood and soil" cult outlook, the outlook one associates today with back-packing, golden-haired and tanned Sierra Club members, an ethos prevalent up and down the West Coast as well as in Colorado. Stressing the blending of eastern Aristotelian education with a rugged Aryan outdoors naturalism, Jordan, who attempted to live his ethos, argued that this combination yielded the man of "direct action." Jordan's raving eugenics were part and parcel of this outlook. Jack London avidly read and followed Jordan, even sitting in on his classes on "evolution." Jordan is the Bohemian Club ideology put on public display.

In Stanford's first graduating class was a young man named Herbert Hoover, a Quaker who grew up with relatives in Oregon. Hoover, as Jordan was fond of pointing out, was personally molded by Jordan as a model of the Western Aryan man, part of an emerging "natural elite" who, being men of "direct action" and rugged independence, would shoulder the

white man's burden in the emerging frontiers of Asia and Latin America. By the time Hoover was plucked out of a Bohemian Grove gathering to run for President, he was the highest-paid engineer in the world with offices in London, New York, and San Francisco. For Jordan the mining engineer represented his man of direct action, representing civilization in the hinterlands where the new resources were to be found. (This specifically British conception of the engineer, promulgated at Stanford, explains a great deal about the Bechtels, who received their PhD's in engineering from Stanford. (The electrical engineers of Silicon Valley, beginning with Hewlitt and Packard, are a new variant.) While many today view Hoover as a dry, stodgy man who brought the depression down upon our heads, among Bohemians he is revered as a mother figure. The fact that Hoover Institute squats in the middle of Stanford University is not an anomaly.

William Shockley and his sperm bank may be a little embarrassing for some of his colleagues at Stanford but he is no fluke. He stands on David Starr Jordan's shoulders. Jordan, as a board member of the Human Betterment Foundation, helped oversee California's sterilization program, upon which the Nazi's modeled their own! Totally preoccupied with applying Darwinist and Social Darwinist principles to social, political, and biological life, Jordan even kept detailed records of arrests and convictions in Santa Clara County where Stanford was located. He took outspoken satisfaction that County Court Records "confirmed" his race theories. The I.Q. research and tests developed by Tierman and others, including the Sanford-Binet Test, put the university on the frontiers of race science from its beginning. To insure that his students' education would not be too narrow, Jordan brought a number of guest professors west. Among them were William James, who challenged the school to become research-oriented, and Thorsten Veblen. Veblen in particular seemed to have taken Jordan's exultations of the great outdoors to heart. Converting an actual chicken coop and moving it into the forests near the ocean, Professor Veblen made a scandalous habit of "shacking-up" with his students at every opportunity. Jordan had the awkward responsibility of calming Mrs. Stanford, who modeled herself on Queen Victoria, over this seemingly irrepressible faculty problem.

Given Jordan's "blood and soil" fascism, it is not surprising that he was on the founding board of directors of the Sierra Club when the Scotch mystic, John Muir, launched it in 1892. At its founding, the Sierra Club, a more populist version of the Bohemian Club, was made up of 162 college-educated men drawn from Berkeley and Stanford. Five professors including Jordan sat on its board. Jordan's upbringing was in line with this sort of role. From New England stock, Jordan was related to Ralph Waldo Emerson on the side of his mother, Anne Waldo. (Raised a Unitarian, Jordan chose his middle name after Thomas Starr King, the San Francisco Unitarian minister whose book *Christianity and Humanity*, had 'inspired' Jordan as a youth.) David Starr Jordan was made an honorary member of the Bohemian Club in 1899.