

The Establishment in Kansas City: A Historical View



Western Historical Manuscript Collection
Kansas City

Charles N. Kimball Lecture

Richard P. Coleman, Ph.D.
October 16, 2006

INTRODUCTION

to the October 16, 2006
Charles N. Kimball Lecture

David Boutros

Associate Director, WHMC-KC

Good afternoon Elite of Kansas City; and also you wannabes. My name is David Boutros, Associate Director of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, the host of the Charles N. Kimball Lecture Series.

Richard Coleman asked that I stress a point to you that his work is a scholarly observation of the Establishment Class in Kansas City. Those of you who have looked at his book know that already—after all it has charts and tables. But I would like to put Dr. Coleman's work into context, without hopefully stepping on the toes of others following me to this podium.

Beginning in the early 1950s, the Chicago School of Sociology's Committee on Urban Development decided that Chicago, their original laboratory city, had grown too "complex" and began looking for another appropriate city, rejecting several because they were either too small or were one-industry towns. Kansas City had a critical advantage in that the Kansas City Trusts and Foundations had established Community Studies, Inc. to investigate varying aspects of the city's assets and needs. Moreover, Homer E. Wadsworth, the dynamic executive director of Trusts and Foundations, arranged meetings with the local elites whose cooperation was necessary for the success of the extensive social research. The Committee rationalized its choice with the statement that Kansas City had characteristics "that might be taken as typical, in most respects, of American urban life." Simply put, Kansas City was large enough to possess the experiences of an urban center, yet was small enough to be a manageable case study.

The result of the decision to study Kansas City was, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, at least three broadly interrelated projects with teams, both local and from Chicago, working in their respective specialties. One, of course, was on social status on which Richard worked. Another looked at aging and was, and I think may still be, the seminal investigation in that field (by the way, all the raw research including blind interviews, analysis, and other data, is here at WHMC-KC.) The third study began under the direction of Richard Wohl, but later taken over by A. Theodore "Ted" Brown, was the Kansas City History Project, one of the earliest attempts to apply the social sciences to increase the understanding of the economic, social, and political evolution of a city. The Kansas City History Project served as one of the foremost models for urban history studies throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and, for Kansas City, resulted in a group of valuable theses and dissertations as well as a number of important monographs.

The purpose of the original Kansas City History Project was to compile the necessary data and provide an analytical story of the development of an urban community. The Project thrived at a time when critical questions about the nature and role of cities were being asked. The scholars went beyond their traditional roles of training students in history and the social sciences, and provided the public with a sense of place and time. They made an effort to inform policy and

future decisions that would impact on the development of the community through a number of their programs and publications.

The need for the History Project remains, though revised to accommodate the intervening experiences in urban development, both locally and nationally. Whereas the Project designed at the end of World War II focused on the changing position of a city relative to its rural hinterlands, the current challenge is principally to understand the city contrasted with its suburbs. Rather than looking to write a single city's 'biography,' as had been undertaken by Dr. Brown, today the emphases would be to comprehend the more non-linear, organic complexity of varying relationships among individuals, groups, and communities. Political borders have become less important in defining actions and goals. The focus of a new history project would be the economic and social dynamic of the modern metropolitan region. The underlying rationale still holds, however, the crisis of the modern city requires analysis in order to inform decisions and policies.

To introduce our speaker today, is Michael Churchman...

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Michael S. Churchman

Author, *High Ideals and Aspirations:
the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1933-1993*

Good afternoon. I am delighted to join in welcoming you to this program that we have all anticipated for some weeks. If you have ever wanted to know who's who in Kansas City you have really come to the right place this afternoon. This is the chance to find out about our town's leaders from the 1880s, when they all lived on Quality Hill, to the present time when they all seem to have migrated to Mission Hills. The local who's who in this case, however, is not a thick reference book in a red binding but it is in fact appearing in human form—a walking, talking book who is our speaker. You have just heard from Dave Boutros about some of the background of his early studies starting at the University of Chicago in the 1950s—studies which resulted in gathering data on Kansas City's social status phenomena; data which has been used in succeeding studies. A further step on our speaker's journey was in Boston at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at Harvard where there was a Joint Center for Urban Studies, and from 1969 to 1980 Richard produced a number of studies and the publication entitled, *Social Standing in America*. And then in the third phase of our speaker's career he moved closer to subject, settling in nearby Manhattan, Kansas, as Professor of Marketing at Kansas State University. He became professor emeritus there in 1997. Being a professor of marketing was his day job, but at night he continued his study of the Kansas City establishment. And now his night job has resulted in a long anticipated book, *The Kansas City Establishment: Leadership through Two Centuries in a Midwestern Metropolis*. Now here I add that our speaker is barely computer literate; his machine of choice is an antique Royal typewriter and his records are on 5 by 8 file cards. But that's not for us to worry about today—those cards will probably be Dave Boutros' problem at some date far in the future. Meanwhile we will enjoy hearing about the *Establishment in Kansas City: An Historical View*. It gives me great pleasure to introduce Dr. Richard P. Coleman. Richard...

The Establishment in Kansas City: A Historical View

Richard P. Coleman, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus of Marketing at Kansas State University

October 16, 2006

I'm going to start today's talk by clarifying what I mean by "Establishment." Establishment, as I use it in title and text, is a word that probably everyone in this room has employed in conversation for as long as can be remembered... so it may surprise you to know that it was not introduced into general American usage until August 1961. In that month's issue of *The American Scholar* magazine, an essay appeared, written by Richard Rovere, with the title: "Notes on the Establishment in America." Rovere was importing Establishment from Great Britain, and applying it to the American scene as follows: "The Establishment is a general term for those people in finance, business, and the professions who hold the principal measure of power and influence in this country irrespective of what administration occupies the White House." Within weeks, every columnist was quoting Rovere, and before too many more years had gone by, our rebellious college youth were adopting Establishment as their favorite derogatory phrase for all the leadership forces, national or local, that they blamed for Vietnam and/or ethnic-racial discrimination.

Establishment took on a more precise meaning when a book by Digby Baltzell was issued in 1964 with the title: *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America*. Baltzell, a Wharton School sociologist, referred to the Protestant Establishment as "the nation's traditional upper class that has established the social norms for [upper-status] life in America... [whose members belong] in their respective communities to the right churches, most exclusive men's and women's clubs and country clubs, and send their children to private preparatory schools." In essence these were the people listed in major cities' Social Registers.

Then in 1982, Frederick C. Jaher, a history professor at the University of Illinois, published *The Urban Establishment*. In this book he compared the uppermost social status groups in six cities, classifying three as old-family aristocracies—this was in Boston, Philadelphia, and Charleston, South Carolina—and the other three as more contemporary leadership forms. The latter three cities were New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles, where a sprinkling of the most accepted newer rich had been merged in with families of longer top-standing (three, five, or seven generations). Kansas City's Establishment is, as you will hear, much more like the second three than the first, being comparatively dynamic and democratic.

The "Historical View" of the Kansas City Establishment presented in today's talk traces back to nineteenth century origins, then follows the group through to the winter of 1999-2000, illustrating both the constancy and change in its membership mix. I will now briefly explain my own personal history of research, writing, and thinking that has gone into this project, following David Boutros' advice that it could be interesting per se and help legitimize the findings for listeners.

My research involvement with Kansas City began when I arrived here by train from Chicago on Friday, September 19, 1952. I had been selected to join a team of Ph.D. students from the University of Chicago's Human Development program who would be spending three years in Kansas City on a social-psychological study of the middle-age experience. (This research was being funded by the Carnegie Foundation.) Kansas City was the study's chosen site when Homer Wadsworth, then director of the Association of Trusts and Foundations and its Community Studies subsidiary, invited our Chicago team to come to Kansas City, where we could share office space with his group. I was going to be the social status analyst and responsible for, among other things, testing the social class theories of my professor, W. Lloyd Warner, who had developed them in two smallish towns of New England and the Deep South. I was to determine whether his proposition applied equally well in a major Middle Western city. In Warner's theory the American public could be divided into six social status classes that he named upper-upper, lower-upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, upper-lower, and lower-lower.

To test Warner's hypothesis and develop my own picture of the Kansas City social class ladder, I conducted well over two hundred interviews and informal conversations with a cross-section of the citizenry in the first few months of our study. Already by the second month (in late October, that is), I had concluded that Warner's theory fit well enough to the Kansas City situation—EXCEPT that his characterization of the upper-upper top stratum as strictly old families who were in the second, third, or fourth generation of local prominence did not apply equally to Kansas City. All my opening interviews with men and women whom I had been told were among Kansas City's leadership elite reported that the 1952 top crowd contained several families that were completely new to the high-status scene, with the Joyce Halls most commonly named as examples. Everyone said that the criterion for top status in Kansas City was acceptance into certain exclusive cliques and clubs, not family lineage per se, and certainly not wealth. The very best expression of this proposition came from Mrs. Gleed Gaylord, who was publisher of the *Kansas City Independent* from 1939 to 1983. Her seven-word summary said it all: "Golfdom's fairways are Kansas City's social stairways" (she ranked the top four golf and country clubs in 1, 2, 3, 4 order—and then called the rest "the grassroots of suburbia"). It was this body of imagery about a relatively democratic top rung on the Kansas City status ladder that led me by the third month I was here into a private investigation of determining what portion of top-status Kansas Citians in the early 1950s were new family instead of old and fathoming how and why they got to the top. Ultimately, I expanded this study of family ins and outs in the top status world to the entire history of people at this social level—but in the beginning it was just 1952-1953. Meanwhile, in my official role as status analyst for the middle-age study, I developed an Urban Status Index for measurement of social class position and used it to place the 480 Kansas Citians whom we had sampled into the appropriate one of the six social classes. That became the main data I used for my doctoral dissertation, "Social Class in Kansas City," and then the first book, *Social Status in the City*, published 1971.

As a sidebar, I want to inject here that in the Spring of 1954, when our team was some halfway through our community sampling, *Life* magazine published a ten-page feature story that compared Kansas City with St. Louis via photos and text. *Life's* central point was that while St. Louis could be described as "socially stratified," Kansas City was "a social free-for-all." To quote further, *Life* wrote: "Back to back in the middle of the United States, are two cities 225 miles across the state from one another, that are in outlook and temperament radically different; Kansas City is young and brash, facing the West, while St. Louis, old and mellow, reflects the East and South as a settled, dowager city, its cultural life envied throughout the United States." (As you listeners undoubtedly recognize, *Life's* story was a typical journalistic extreme.) The Kansas Citians I interviewed were in partial harmony with the *Life* feature to the extent that they insisted time and again that "there is a great generosity here toward people making the grade," that "people here aren't necessarily stuck in the same class as their parents." Beyond that, however, the Kansas Citians with whom

I discussed this article felt *Life* had gone too far with its phrase “free-for-all” which suggested almost unlimited, standard-less access to high status. A preferred view was: “The better a family’s total qualifications and connections, the higher it ranks on our social ladder.” Family background was always acknowledged as one of these qualifications, but as often mentioned were cultural interests, a flair for club life, participation in civic activities, long-standing friendships, and monetary position. And always the ultimate measure was club memberships — as in Mrs. Gaylord’s pronouncement.

When my role in the Kansas City middle-age study was concluded in 1957, I left academia for a career in motivations research, consulting to industry and government, first with Social Research, Inc., in Chicago through 1969, then with the Joint Center for Urban Studies of MIT and Harvard until in 1979 I won a two-year grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to physically return to Kansas City and gather all the data I needed to trace leadership back to the 1880s. Once here in my Midwest homeland, I decided to become a professor at a Big Eight university so I could die on the hard-money of tenure. When Kansas State came through first with an offer in its Marketing Department I accepted (after all, KSU is only a two-hour drive away from Kansas City). During all those forty years, 1957 through 1997 when I retired, I never left off spending as much spare time as I could find for it on my KC leadership hobby. I managed to read every issue of *The Independent* back to its start in 1899 and I subscribed to the *Kansas City Star* off and on, especially “on” since 1979.

To briefly summarize everything else I did, let me first say that the most valuable books that I consumed on Kansas City history and biography were Dr. Theodore Case’s 1888 volume and the *Kansas City Star*’s 150th anniversary piece in 2000. I obtained membership lists from all the leading social clubs at various points in time, plus art institutions, social service organizations, civic associations, and government agencies. I scoured at least fifty universities’ yearbooks, including all editions of the KU *Jayhawker* and MU *Savitar*, to learn about the collegiate years of students from Kansas City and those who moved here. I conducted another 100 interviews in 1979-1981 — and I created 6,000 social biography cards about everyone who passed through the Establishment since the 1880s and another 20,000 cards for people of the next higher status levels and participants in civic leadership posts who were not of Establishment standing. These I sorted when creating all the statistics and tabulations that you will find in the back pages of my just-published book on The Kansas City Establishment.

Enough for research process, now for the Establishment history line I propose. It is a most interesting facet of this history that through the first three decades of Jackson County settlement, beginning in 1821, most of the memorable names were associated with Westport and Independence; Westport as main portal for migration to the West and Independence as Jackson County seat. Through that period both places were far more populous and prosperous than the scraggly trading post and ferry site at Missouri River’s edge that was variously known as Chouteau’s Landing, Westport Landing, and Town of Kansas. The name best remembered from these lightly inhabited starting years at river front is that of James McGee, the first English-speaking settler; he crossed the Missouri from Clay County in 1828 to buy farmland that in time became the east edge of downtown; McGee Street honors him. Meanwhile, out in the county the names long-associated with streets and buildings have been those of missionaries to Indian tribes, large landholders, outfitters for emigrants, entrepreneurs in overland freighting, early-day congressmen-lawyers, and innkeepers. The best-remembered of the latter is John Harris, proprietor of that era’s favored Harris House Hotel and father of Mary Francis Harris whose marriage to Seth Ward, the richest of traders with the Indians, established one of Kansas City’s most illustrious family lines, the Wards of Ward Parkway.

Once the tiny riverfront community was incorporated in 1850, a shift in its direction began. A missionary’s son-in-law, Dr. Johnston Lykins, is one who made the move and soon became second

mayor plus unofficially the first “city father,” as well as rich in investments. Robert Van Horn migrated in as newspaper editor, and shortly served as prime city booster, ultimately a congressman, and centrally important in accomplishing the legislation that resulted in the first railroad bridge to cross the Missouri River toward the West—which, as we all know, transformed Kansas City into the region’s “City of Destiny,” far surpassing its up-river rivals of Leavenworth, Atchison, and St. Joe, not to mention its earlier Jackson County superiors, Westport and Independence.

The original example of a family that brought a touch of Eastern refinement to Kansas City was headed by Kersey Coates, who arrived in 1854. Kersey had been sent here by Philadelphia investors who expected to profit through his efforts to change Kansas City from a pioneer trading post to an important wholesaling distribution center. Kersey had been educated at the Andover prep school and his wife, Sarah, was like himself, from a cultured Quaker family. Through the thirty-three years of Kersey’s residence before his death in 1887, he not only built an opera house and the city’s most fashionable hotel, but also invested sufficiently in his own right to leave an estate of \$2 million (worth \$60 million in today’s money). Kersey had also played an important role in the Bridge, primarily as the lead man in securing Boston financing.

Following the Bridge’s completion in 1869, Kansas City’s population zoomed from a pre-bridge level of barely 5,000 to 32,000 in 1870, 56,000 in 1880, and 135,000 in 1890. This population boom brought in quite a number of Eastern-educated lawyers and physicians who formed a gentry elite, and, of equal importance, also coming in were families who quickly achieved considerable wealth in manufacturing, wholesaling, and retailing. Earliest among the latter were the meat-packing Armours, the first brother arriving in 1870; a decade later came the Morses from Boston who financed the stockyards, much of city transit, and commercial real estate; then in 1881 the August Meyers transferred his corporate smelting business from Leadville, Colorado, to the Argentine district of Kansas City, Kansas. These three families, along with the Coates and Thomas Bullene, amounted to a Big Five in the Establishment’s origin years. Thomas Bullene had by this point become known as “The Merchant Prince of the Missouri Valley” for his role in establishing the legendary department store Bullene, Moores and Emery. In the middle 1880s, these families joined by another eighty-five, constituted what knowledgeable Kansas Citians referred to as the city’s “Head Set” —the total membership, by my count, was 112 men and 90 women.

In 1882 a core of these men founded the Kansas City Club at a meeting in the Coates House Hotel. The previous year Sarah Coates started a women’s reading-and-discussion group, named “The ‘81 Club,” that has ever since been the most prestigious in Kansas City of its category. Also started in the 1880s by “Head Set” members were the Provident Association and Women’s Christian Association, the two leading social welfare organizations of the era. Then in 1885 Kersey’s daughter Laura and her young friends created a Sketch Club that soon graduated into the founding of an Art Association and School of Design (the forerunner of today’s Art Institute). At the same time, Fall 1887, the Priests of Pallas were organized and staged their first parade, with many Head Set men as officers and committee chairs. Thus were the 1880s the decade when the Head Set established clear dominion as Kansas City’s top stratum. Two other characteristics of the Head Set should be mentioned here: one is that almost all its members resided in Quality Hill to the west of downtown, which had been established by the Coates as the “socially smart” neighborhood when they built their estate in the 1000 block on Pennsylvania. The other is that most were members of the Second Presbyterian Church or First Congregational, if not Grace Episcopal. I should also say that almost all were from Northern states, were on the Union side in the Civil War and were very urban, not Southern plantation, in values and style of life pursued.

One final point must be made about this Establishment-starting “Head Set”: when its 200-plus members are compared for family background with the 700 or so men and women then identified with the next-highest social level, a very big difference is revealed. Sixty-one percent in the Head Set would seem to have originated in families of distinction in Kansas City or elsewhere (as judged

from the biographical materials I found), while only 24 percent of the next-most prominent claimed such origins. Note, however, this means that 39 percent of the Head-Setters were from middle-class or even working-class parentage—indicating that the group was definitely a mix in family background, which has been the case in less degree ever since, even still in 2000 A.D.

One thing I must make clear right now is that the 1880s Head Set of 200 members was a tiny, tiny sliver of Kansas City's population at that time—not accounting for quite one-fourth of one percent of all adults—and this set the pattern for the next 120 years; your super-elite top stratum never amounted in numbers to much more than one-third of a percent vis-à-vis the wider population. A second thing to make clear is that the Kansas City I am talking about is the Missouri-centered city whose social system is a separate entity entirely from the social systems of Kansas City, Kansas, and Independence, Missouri.

In the 1890s the Head Set remained small, but grew apace with the city at large, adding some fifty new family lines, including as most socially prominent the Harvey House Harveys who moved from Leavenworth to establish corporate headquarters in Kansas City. The most important civic development was that a group of Establishment men, led by August Meyer, formed a Municipal Improvement Association with the purpose of designing a parks-and-boulevard system that would beautify the previously unattractive city which some even dared call "ugly." In 1896 the Kansas City Country Club was incorporated on land where Loose Park is now, with all the Establishment's golfers joining, thus initiating the club's longtime standing as Number One. Three years later, 1899, *The Independent* started publishing, as chronicler for social world happenings—and serendipitously making my research infinitely easier.

Through the first fifteen years of the 1900s, the Establishment grew to a size over three times its Head Set origins, no longer small at 750 members. The *Independent* began experimenting with new labels, such as "the haute monde," "Capital S Society," "smartdom," and "vanity fair," the latter two referring especially to the female membership. Modernization was a vital theme in the top-stratum world, dramatically affecting communication and transportation in daily life: the telephone replaced servant-delivered messages, while the automobile replaced horse-drawn carriages. The Establishment abandoned Quality Hill for Hyde Park, and social life became increasingly centered at the Kansas City Country Club. Establishment men spoke of their favorite activities as "motoring," "golfing" (with many belonging to two or three clubs where they could play the game), and "lunch at the club." While for Establishment women, new developments included founding of a Junior League in 1911 and the downtown Woman's City Club in 1917. It is also in these years that William Rockhill Nelson's newspaper empire supplied him with the fortune that made his art-museum gift to the city possible.

The eleven years following Allied victory in World War I saw further growth of Establishment membership, slightly outpacing the city's own—and a second residential relocation, this time en masse out to J.C. Nichols' Country Club district. Most especially, the 1920s can be characterized in the Establishment's experience as a Golden Age of Fashionable Fun and Fortune Building. Civic contributions went into decline; pursuit of the dollar took priority for the household head during the daytime hours; and expensive leisure figured even more strongly for both genders at evening time and on the weekends. Cultural support was not strong because Kansas City was not yet blessed with an art museum, a university, or a locally organized and enduring symphony.

The depression 1930s were marked first by a significant portion of dropouts from the Establishment, precipitated by the Stock Market Crash in October 1929. Slowly but surely, however, this was overcome as new members were sought for financial maintenance of the clubs and were found among the men and families who were surviving, even thriving, despite the economy's furies. The extravagant social life that flourished in the 1920s was replaced by seriousness of purpose. Volunteering for civic causes increased markedly, especially in the cultural area, stimulated by three events of 1933: the starting of classes at the University of Kansas City, the beginning of annual

seasons of a Philharmonic, and dedication of the William Rockhill Nelson Museum of Art. Non-partisan participation in government also significantly increased: first, with an Establishment-led crusade to throw the Pendergast machine out of power, then with the effort's success which featured election of one of the Establishment's own, John Gage, as mayor.

We now come to what I think of as the Kansas City Establishment's Grandest Age. This is the fifteen years that began shortly after VJ Day's end to World War II. A spirit of victory, celebration, and exuberant optimism invested life in Kansas City. The Kansas City business community prospered, first by serving the pent-up demand (from wartime austerity) for almost every form of consumer goods, and secondly by responding to the Baby Boom that started in 1946. A result was an increase in financial standing for most Establishment families and the emergence of a myriad of New Money families, especially prominent among this latter being the Auto Dealer and Home Builder.

Testimony to this surging prosperity was the rise of the Saddle and Sirloin Club as the city's primary booster-promoter. The club's leadership by Big New Money provided the centerpiece for *Life* magazine's "social free-for-all" story—and many Older Money Establishment men joined the club both as a public relations gesture and in order not to be left out of the high spirits. Equally symbolic of the era's booming economy was the River Club's founding in 1949. Its reputation as "the swankest club in Kansas City" was affirmed when it became the favored mingling place for the richest of Old Money families with the richest (and most socially inclined) of New Money men.

The women's world similarly experienced enlivening changes. In 1947 the Junior League adopted a new member policy, which was explained by one of its presidents who said: "We are no longer a debutante's league—we are now taking in much larger classes of provisionals in order to satisfy all the requests for volunteers we are getting." In consequence a Junior League invitation was no longer an automatic definition of Establishment inclusion—but it did offer an effective channel for ultimately moving up. Two years later, in 1949, the American Royal began asking leading daughters of both New and Old Money families to serve as Belles of the American Royal Ball each year (the acronym BOTAR was soon attached). Then in 1954, a Jewel Ball was inaugurated to raise funds for the Philharmonic and Nelson Museum; every June thereafter daughters of Establishment families were introduced as debutantes at the Jewel.

Through the early years of the postwar boom, the Establishment showed, more than ever before, a rather generous attitude toward including new families into its clubs, informal social circles, and favorite civic organizations. Thus, by the middle 1950s, its share of the adult population reached an all-time high, exceeding one-third of one percent (though just barely)—the membership total was now 1,780. The gains to this level from previous growth mirrored the story from earlier decades in that its driving source came from addition of new family lines. In this way the Establishment continued to project an exciting membership mix of upwardly mobile men and women with successor-inheritors whose involvement was second and third generation. This, of course, is what my Kansas City interviewees had all along insisted was the case.

As the 1950s drew toward their end and the 1960s began, there was a cooling down I noticed in the Establishment's dynamism and inclusive ambience. By John F. Kennedy's inauguration in January 1961, the Establishment's population share had slipped below the one-third of one percent mark—and that was only the beginning of a precipitous fall-off down to just one-fifth of one percent in the late 1990s. The Grand Years had slid away. I could now count only 1,970 men and women as Establishment members, while there had been as many as 2,100 in the early 1970s.

Cataloging what accounts for this decline is easy. For one, there was the college-led rebellion against the national Establishment inspired by opposition to the Vietnam conflagration; a sizable number of Kansas City's own sons and daughters were lost to the Establishment forever via behaviors associated with that opposition. An allied phenomenon is that ever since the middle 1960s there has been considerable pressure from media and the political left-wing for greater

minority representation in all manner of civic leadership groups; the attractiveness of Establishment identification has suffered some diminishment.

Another important change that has reduced the Establishment's population share is the dramatic decline in local ownership of retailing, manufacturing, and banking concerns. Kansas City owners have been replaced in significant measure by transient executives who may take on civic leadership roles as public relations gestures, but do not thereby become treasured, lasting members of the Establishment. At the same time, there are fewer heirs to Family Old Money who have remained in Kansas City or returned after college to take on inherited leadership roles.

Despite this decline in population share, the Establishment's importance in community leadership would not seem to have declined proportionately—at least not by 1999. This proposition may surprise—but it reflects the findings from several leadership polls and stories presented through the twentieth century's concluding years in the pages of the *Kansas City Star* newspaper and Ingram's magazine. One example was this: when several hundred civic leaders were asked on four different occasions to name "Who are the most powerful persons in Kansas City when it comes to getting things done?" 35 of the 43 most frequently cited individuals were from the Establishment. These 35 were a combination of men whose membership can be traced back to ancestor-leaders in the first third of the 1900s with some of very recent vintage in their rise.

Let me turn away now from Establishment history to Establishment demographics and sociology. Here I will be setting forth my observations about membership qualifications and connections that have operated to determine who has been in the Establishment and who not.

The qualifications and connections that would seem to be most important from one era to the next relate to social mobility issues—moving up into the Establishment, staying in, or no longer belonging. As a starting point it must be said: long, long term continuity in the Establishment is amazingly absent. Only fifteen of the original Head Set family lines were still represented by descendants in the year 2000. The great five original families—Coates, Bullene, Armour, Morse, and Meyer—were mostly gone by 1930, and of the total starting ninety, only one was present in 2000 with a male heir bearing the honored family name—all the rest of the continuity came through females.

The most "telling" statistic is that families have lasted in the Establishment an average of only fifty years. Part of this brevity traces to families moving away or dying without offspring to continue the line, but a significant share can be blamed on the genetic rule of Regression Toward the Mean; this means that the statistically average children of very impressive parents are not quite so impressive—i.e., they have regressed toward the mean. This is a central explanation for my finding that 45 percent of Establishment children decline out of the Establishment, whether they continue in Kansas City or move elsewhere (by the way, that is 40 percent of daughters and 50 percent of sons). A psychological rule also plays in: This is the Law of Lost Incentive. Kansas Citians cited this with phrases such as "no further peaks to climb" and "lack of challenges."

A final set of numbers I will give are my best estimates on the historic source of Establishment members who attain this status from lower origins. My best estimates are to this effect: one out of every four persons who are launched into adulthood from families of lower-upper class status in Kansas City have wound up Establishment members here or elsewhere—meanwhile it would seem that maybe only one out of every hundred from upper-middle professional and managerial parentage manage this leap, a mere one out of a thousand from lower-middle white-collar origins and a miniscule one out of twenty-five or fifty thousand from a blue-collar background. A minor portion of persons who have risen into the Establishment accomplish this move by marriage; most of the rest do not manage it until they have reached later middle-age. This means that the distribution of members by class of origin varies markedly by age group: in the younger years the Establishment is mostly inheritor sons and daughters, but for the late fifties age group on, a considerable majority comes from the newly elected in their first-generation of Establishment status.

As for the role of wealth and income in governing the ins and outs of Establishment membership, a first thing to understand is this: the belief by average Kansas Citians that the richer a family the higher its status bears little relationship to social reality. The best illustration of this error comes from *Forbes* magazine's annual listing of the 400 wealthiest Americans. In the 26 years of these listings, sixteen Kansas Citians have been included at least once, but only seven have belonged to the Establishment at the time of their inclusion. This has frequently reflected active rejection; the multi-multi-millionaire's (now billionaire's) personality and/or lifestyle has simply not met the Establishment's standards. Looking back through the years before *Forbes* listings, the same proposition applies: approximately half of the super-super-rich have fallen outside the Establishment at any given point in Kansas City history.

This observation leads to our basic principle, which is that occupation matters greatly in affecting Establishment inclusion. The clientele served and connections established are far more socially consequential than income per se. An obvious example is that lawyers who are trust advisors to Establishment families or counsel to the most respected corporations have often been themselves in the Establishment, while criminal defense attorneys or lawyers whose high incomes stem from consumer claims litigation are virtually never; the Establishment's favorite internists and pediatricians may be welcomed "into the club" as it were, while many a much-wealthier specialist is not when introverted and/or lacking a socially talented wife. Retailers of luxury goods are much likelier to have gained Establishment membership through the years than have proprietors of 24-hour stores or any commercial operation catering to lower income customers; ministers of churches with parishioners of high status have frequently been honored with ex-officio memberships in "the right clubs" while Elmer Gantry types of great popularity among the lower echelons are not; headmasters of elite private schools (or headmistresses) have frequently been considered part of the Establishment, but not public-school superintendents with twice the income. The occupations most frequently found in the Establishment are those in the world of finance—trust and investment advisors, specifically, and bank executives generally—precisely because the clientele and connections are most favorable.

A final observation: while annual incomes average higher in the Establishment than in any other status group, the internal range is great; some widows and young couples will be getting along with incomes maybe no more than fifty percent above citywide average—although overall the Establishment mean tends to figure around eight times that of the typical Kansas City family.

Studying Establishment education, we encounter two stories of special interest. One concerns mobility in-and-out, the other is about the years when college was attended.

Regarding this second, there is a crucial date: 1960. Before 1960 the majority of Establishment sons and daughters attended a collegiate institution that had long been classified in their world as one of "The Right Schools"; after 1960 almost all of these legendary "Right Schools" altered their admission policies to require that entering students record much higher scores on the application examinations than before. The resulting change was as follows: from 1887 through 1959, 35 percent of Establishment sons became undergraduates at Harvard, Yale, or Princeton, and another 25 percent at other Ivies, or equivalents such as Stanford—this was nearly three times the portion of lower-upper Kansas City sons with similar undergraduate experiences. The same was true of Establishment daughters—three times as many of them went to Seven Sisters colleges and other prestige women's schools as did lower-upper girls of their generation. Beginning in 1960 the portion of either sex or of both status levels who have gone to the schools of longtime right name has been cut to barely one-third; instead the great majority now have to content themselves with attending what I call "The Right Enough Schools." Examples of these are, among the privates: Tulane, Vanderbilt, SMU, TCU, Occidental, and Denison—and, among the publics, virtually all the well-known flagships: KU, MU, the state universities of Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado, and North Carolina, etc., where, ideally, a prestige Greek-letter fraternity or sorority will be joined.

The collegiate influence on mobility is of this order: among that 45 percent of sons and daughters who have declined out of the Establishment in their adult years, the dominant portion got their start in that direction when they did not acquire a prestige college credential. In contrast most of the men and women who have been, in any generation, the Establishment's newly risen members, moved upward first as collegians when they were on the leaderly side wherever they went to college, if not in the Ivies or Seven Sisters, then at Big State U, either a flagship or land-grant version—and if not that, then at a professional school.

The religious affiliation story for Kansas City's Establishment parallels in one important respect what has been reported for a lot of other places: namely, the Episcopal denomination reigns supreme. For Kansas City facts my source is every obituary for Establishment men and women printed in the *Kansas City Star* or *Independent*, 1952 to 2000. Throughout this half century the Episcopalian church mention averaged right at 44 percent, with three churches each cited in significant portion: Grace and Holy Trinity, St. Paul's and St. Andrew's. The denomination in second place—at a pretty far back 13 percent mention—has been the Presbyterian. Third, I've found the Disciples, with almost all their 7 percent total in just one church, the Country Club Christian on Ward Parkway. These numbers are incredibly close to what Digby Baltzell reported for Philadelphia's Social Register listees: 42 percent Episcopalian and 13 percent Presbyterian. Frederic Jaher, writing in *The Urban Establishment*, noted a similar Episcopalian strength in Boston, Chicago, and Charleston, and Dixon Wecter, author of *The Saga of American Society*, traced this to the denomination's aristocratic identification as the King of England's church.

The Catholic position relative to the Establishment is quite opposite from the Episcopalian; in the early 1950s Catholics were numbering only 7 percent, but in the 1990s they had risen to a 9.5 percent portion—which still compared most unfavorably with their area-wide 20 percent level. It was generally assumed by Kansas Citians with whom I talked that part of this under-representation traced to long-ago animosity toward the Pendergast machine.

The Jewish history in Kansas City's Establishment world has been wholly different from the Catholic, although in each instance characterized by elements of discrimination. For a long time Jews experienced total exclusion from the men's town clubs, the Junior League, and every country club (except, of course, their own)—but that is gone now, disappearing first in the late 1960s. An entirely different story applies when we see that daughters of Jewish families were included among the BOTARS and Jewel Ball debutantes right at the onset of those presentation events in the early 1950s. The rule I have adopted in this confused situation is to include in each era's Establishment that portion of Jews who seemed to be treated by Gentiles as “image equals” (if not “identicals”)—in that they shared membership on many a civic and corporate board. Employing this principle, I started with a 2 percent level of Jewish membership in the 1915 Establishment and advanced that up to 12.5 percent in the 1970s. That latter figure was at least four times the Jewish portion of Kansas City adults.

Visions of “being a good citizen” have for many years now been uniting the Establishment across all divisions of internal rank, religion, education, income, and lineage. In the Establishment world this has meant, as one member worded it, “giving back to the community for the good fortune that has blessed our lives.” Phrases to that effect were repeated time and again by the Establishment men and women I interviewed in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

Living up to that ideal has been practiced most often via arts patronage and contributions to cultural institutions. The Nelson-Atkins Museum has rated highest in this category with as much as 90 percent of its volunteer leadership coming historically from the Establishment. Serving community needs through health and welfare organizations has rated second in Establishment favor—and here working for St. Luke's Hospital and Children's Mercy Hospital has generated special enthusiasm recently. In the civic promotions area the American Royal has drawn the most involvement since the 1970s, sharing with historic preservation in Establishment participation.

All along, Establishment men and women have been least inclined toward government as an avenue for their energies. They have especially eschewed running for office, avoiding the controversies involved, with chances of humiliating defeat very off-putting. Just think of it: in the city's 156 years of incorporation, an Establishment member has served as mayor a mere 27 of them; this is only four mayors out of 55 elected to the office. The number from the Establishment who served on the city council or in the state legislator is similarly sparse. A much, much larger portion have occupied appointive posts. A prime example is that when the School Board was appointed, back in the nineteenth century, almost all its members were from that era's Head Set, but once that Board became elective, hardly any Establishment people have put themselves up as candidates. The favored boards to serve on by mayoral or gubernatorial appointment have been those dealing with the arts or handling municipal trust funds.

Benefit events for cultural or charitable causes have come to occupy center position in the Establishment's social calendar the past thirty years. In the most recent ten, some 200 such events per year have been covered pictorially and verbally in the press. Of these, the Jewel Ball has been serving annually as the Establishment's ultimate public show.

What the future holds for this Kansas City leadership stratum we must wonder. I raise this question because as the twentieth century ended and the twenty-first began, the nation's serious magazines and newspaper columnists increasingly proposed that The Long-Honored Establishment, USA, Is Losing Out—and, of course, this could include Kansas City's.

Vanity Fair magazine has, since the middle 1990s, been publishing each year a photographic essay entitled "The New Establishment," with its forty or fifty members drawn entirely from Information Age Industries—no financiers, lawyers, or cabinet-level government figures mentioned. There have even been suggestions that the changing admissions policies of our elite universities are generating a new brain-centered status structure. And in many a scenario, money, pure and simple, is pictured as overturning the historic rules of Who Stands On Top. For this we can blame the stratospheric incomes pocketed by hedge-fund profiteers, Fortune 500 CEOs, and Silicon Valley Techsperts, not to mention entertainment celebrities. Just how much the old-line Establishment's community standing has been imperiled by this economic flood has no certain answer; are the standards changing of Who Can Join What and Who Dines with Whom?

The Kansas City Establishment experience, as I have continued thinking about it, would seem to be showing "cracks" in its foundation—I see some challenging dispersion and diversity, less centrality and uniformity. On the one hand there is the drive to re-center Kansas City by renovating downtown... yet simultaneously the periphery is moving further and further out, its office parks and shopping centers ever more prosperous and populated. I feel the upper-status world may not be so neatly stratified as when I came here in Fall 1952. The *Life* magazine "free-for-all" story may be closer to reality now, less exaggerated, than it was 52 years ago. Still though, as far as I can tell, the Establishment (while moving more behind the scenes than before) may be continuing as dynamic and small-d democratic as ever.

Questions and Answers

Boutros: We have time for questions. (Quiet...)

Coleman: There shouldn't be any. (**Boutros:** especially if they have already read your book.) Heather Paxton said my book would be controversial, but apparently no body here feels that way.

Question: I came to Kansas City about 35 years ago as a sophomore at the Art Institute. I have met a lot of people in the business community and one thing that really surprised me in this town was that anybody who is anybody knows everybody. But my question is this: why have we failed to have a common vision and purpose for the city? Why are we so fragmented and we have lost the history and significances of the American Royal, the architecture of downtown, the intellectual institutions are weaker? Why if anybody who is anybody knows everybody—I learned that 30 years ago—and yet we have lost the city? Thank you.

Coleman: Well, I am sorry I don't think I have any information that would give an answer to that. I have studied what has happened up to 2000 and I am not sure that I even understand that the city has been lost. Now, many people think that one of the problems in this city is the state line dividing the community and certainly most all the city's upper middle class and upper class has moved outside Kansas City's city limits and heavily reside in Johnson County. When I first came here I learned that North Kansas City was not the most honored place for residence—but now with Zona Rosa and all those McMansions in Clay and Platte counties, it has become quite acceptable. I sorry that is not a good answer to your question, but it is the best I can do.

Question: Richard, the one thing that I have not heard you talk about is the long history of residential segregation in the Kansas City.

Coleman: That has nothing to do with the Establishment per se, and that's why I haven't discussed it. Now I would suspect that by the year 2010 perhaps one percent of the people who would then be considered Establishment may be from the African-American segment. As of 2000, I could not find any who were treated as persons who were invited into Establishment homes on a regular basis for just friendly conversation. There now appear to be a few who are moving in that direction. One example might be Maurice Watson who has been chairman of Barstow's trustees. And I think Cordell Meeks,* had he been a Kansas City Missourian instead of a Kansas City Kansan, might well have qualified for inclusion a year or so ago—but he died almost immediately after being elected chairman of Children's Mercy Hospital. As to your question on residential segregation, I would suggest from my conversations with Establishment members that this was not something they felt that their personal efforts could correct; it was too big a society-wide problem.

Thank you.

* Cordell D. Meeks, Jr. (1943-2006), District Court Judge of the 29th Judicial District in Kansas.

WHMC-KC

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Questions about the use of or donations to the Collection should be directed to David Boutros, Associate Director of the Kansas City office. (816) 235-1543; WHMCKC@umkc.edu.

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Cover photo: Mission Hills Country Club, 52nd Street and State Line. A view of the golf course (#10 Tee), November 3, 1915. *J.C. Nichols Company Scrapbooks (KC0054), WHMC-KC.*

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