



## **Secrets of the Tomb: Skull and Bones, the Ivy League, and the Hidden Paths of Power**

*Alexandra Robbins*

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**Secrets of the Tomb: Skull and Bones, the Ivy League, and the Hidden Paths of Power** Alexandra Robbins

This is the only exposé of one of the world's most secretive and feared organizations: Yale University's nearly 200-year-old secret society, Skull and Bones. Through society documents and interviews with dozens of members, Robbins explains why this old-boy product of another time still thrives today.

## **Secrets of the Tomb: Skull and Bones, the Ivy League, and the Hidden Paths of Power Details**

Date : Published September 4th 2003 by Back Bay Books (first published September 6th 2002)

ISBN : 9780316735612

Author : Alexandra Robbins

Format : Paperback 236 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Politics, Education, Sociology



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## **From Reader Review Secrets of the Tomb: Skull and Bones, the Ivy League, and the Hidden Paths of Power for online ebook**

### **Sam Cross says**

I'm extremely surprised that the author (presumably) chose to write on this topic of her own volition. The research is there,\* but the organization and inspiration are not, so the book reads like an undergraduate paper for a class the author didn't particularly want to take.

The "secrets" revealed are largely benign and uninteresting, but that doesn't stop the author from repeating them throughout the book. The chapter titles are largely ornamental - the same topics were repeated again and again, regardless of their irrelevance to the section theme.

The most frustrating part of the book is that it's a superficial collection of information without any real exploration. The "facts" are stated, but their significance is not explained in context. Bones alumni contributed to Bush's presidential campaign - so, what? That's not new, not a secret, not shocking, or even mildly surprising. The "hidden paths of power" explained in the book are not hidden, and neither are their implications explored.

If you're looking to glean more than a basic background on the origins of the Ivy League, I would not recommend this.

\*without citation

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### **Sarah - All The Book Blog Names Are Taken says**

Interesting that, while also belonging to a secret society herself - which she casually mentions well into the book unless I missed it earlier - Robbins set out to bring down the mystique of exposing Skull and Bones. Basically, everything you think is probably true about Old Money and the Ivies is actually true and nothing here is terribly shocking. Big surprise, a club that only picks 15 members a year has produced three US presidents - Taft, Bush, and W.

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### **Karen says**

Eh, just ok. It gets long-in-the-tooth in many places when discussing the history of Yale, much of it not related to the society. I decided to read the book because of the publicity about the society during the Kerry/Bush campaign. With all the discussion about what may or may not happen to members who talk, I find it curious if not unbelievable that the author would have access to members who so openly spill the beans--even if she was a member of another secret society. Why on earth would members of one secret society spill their secrets to a member of another, separate secret society? Doesn't add up. Nevertheless, it was an entertaining book. Makes you go, "hmmmm....?"

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### **Heather says**

I have enjoyed Robbins other books, so I was surprised to find this one to be such a painful read. Parts of the book were great; but the rest I had to force myself to read.

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### **Jenn says**

I hated this book! I had previously read one of the author's book and enjoyed that book. But this book was a real let down. I felt led on, that I was going to find out all these secrets! I think I learned more from the movie "The Skulls". Big disappointment for me!

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### **Josh says**

This book read like a term paper, and was just as interesting.

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### **Erik Graff says**

This book was a disappointment, mostly because Skull and Bones turns out, in her exposition, to be nothing more than an association of spoiled kids with silly rites and little social significance beyond serving as one means by which the rich and the powerful network to their own advantage. However, if you hate members of the Bush and the Walker families, all of them, this book will add fuel to the fire.

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### **Alexandra Robbins says**

Sorry, dudes. It's not a satan-worshiping cult. But it is pretty weird.

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### **Victoria says**

Robbins' Secrets of the Tomb has a wonderful thesis but the reader won't be quite sure what that is exactly until the book's last three pages. Therefore, the work is extremely unorganized and confusing. Had Robbins reorganized her work and offered the reader better guidance, Robbins really could have written something very profound by capitalizing off of the power of imagery and running with it. Instead, the book comes off as a hodgepodge of questionable statements and out-of-place personal experiences with a magnificent finish.

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### **Tim O'Hearn says**

When it comes to secret societies, Yale's Skull and Bones is the modern-day equivalent of the Illuminati. The

author's theory (with some evidence) is that it is a bonafide branch of the Illuminati. Regardless, it's hard to believe that a society initiating just 15 members a year with less than 800 living members at any one time could have a roster featuring most of the prominent members of the Bush and Taft families plus John Kerry.

It's a natural source of intrigue--has been for centuries--and Alexandra Robbins wraps it together quite nicely. Though not a "patriarch," she reveals secrets and dispels rumors, having interviewed a bevy of Skull and Bones members. She covers all the bases, way deeper than any Wikipedia page or Youtube video. The tale of the Bonesmen is intertwined with the history of Yale, and, with that, the evolution of higher education in the United States. While not as deep as the fraternal history book *The Company He Keeps*, it's a fascinating sideshow.

There are arguments for and against secret societies through the book. Surprisingly, at the end, the author reveals that she too was in a secret society (Scroll and Key, no less). The point that stood out to me is that several Yalies opined that secret societies, by nature of their exclusivity, served to goad undergraduates to achieve at the highest level possible. The logic is that most people will hate the societies if that's what the crowd is doing, but, secretly, most would die for a "tap" (a bid for membership). Without a chance at this final stamp of excellence, many college students would lose ambition toward the end of their journey. This is applicable, to some level, to mainstream fraternities as well, but, of course, we can't talk about it out loud.

What makes this book a bit of a loser is that it feels like an attack on the Bush family. It was published right before the 2004 presidential election. People seem to forget that George W. Bush was not as highly regarded back then as he is today (the result of a meticulous, subconscious PR campaign). Most people probably also don't know that Alexandria Robbins was the person who broke the story of George Bush's SAT score. To this day, those numbers serve as one of the greatest rebuffs of Bush's "I did it on my own" legacy. In a wild twist, this turned out poorly for the author, because the Bush family is considered off-limits now. Who would have thought!

Enjoyable story about American history and some of the country's most prominent families, but the overtones are too much.

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## **Hillary says**

This was a disappointing read. I was a big fan of "Overachievers," and while "Pledged" was not as interesting, it was still a decent read. The latest book from Robbins, however, was a huge let down. It was almost painful to read, carrying on for pages and pages about Yale history, reciting old poems, and other stories only peripherally relating to the Skull and Bones society. It seemed like she didn't have enough relevant info for a book, so she added a ton of unnecessary filler to stretch it out.

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## **Jill says**

Okay so things I learned from this book:

- 1) Yale is kinda the worst??
- 2) I mean it's probably fine.
- 3) But if you have no experience of it and only read this book, it seems like basically the worst. Elitist, conservative, snobbish, bratty, academically disinclined. Alexandra Robbins doesn't do well by her alma

mater.

- 4) Skull & Bones is the worst of these worsts.
- 5) The patriarchs had hissy fits in the 70s when the current members wanted to include women. wtf. Also Yale only became coed in the 60s?! wtf
- 6) People really cared about the Skull & Bones while George W. was president.
- 7) George W. was also the worst.
- 8) Secret societies are ridiculous and really adolescent.
- 9) Networking is everything and I'm going to be poor forever.

In seriousness:

Overall, this was okay. I read it cause I'm currently into Yale (for ~writing research~), not secret societies, so I found some of the chapters -- particularly the one outlining the Bush connections in excessive detail -- seriously boring. BUT: in the end, Robbins does a solid job of debunking some of the insane conspiracies, and I did really enjoy the history of Yale stuff.

But honestly if anyone seriously thinks secret societies are anything other than pretentious little shits being pretentious little shits, I mean, they shouldn't.

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### **Cwn\_annwn\_13 says**

There is a lot of interesting stuff in this but you have to ask yourself how much the information in it can be trusted because for one the author gets a good portion of it from anonymous Skull & Bones members who talked because they claimed they were tired of hearing so much weird speculation about them. So for one, how can you be sure what they told her was accurate and not intentional disinformation. For another even if what they gave her was true, its still information that they chose to let out but not the whole story. Another big factor that has to make you wonder is it turns out that the woman who wrote Secrets of the Tomb was herself a member of another elitist secret society at Yale, Scroll & Key.

This book is worth reading if your researching S & B but you just have to wonder how honest it is. The best book on the Skull & Bones is *Fleshing Out Skull & Bones* which was edited by Kris Millegan. Antony Suttons work on the 322 cabal is also highly recommended.

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### **Alice says**

DNF at 33%

It was slow going and a lot of dry (to me) history on Yale and the university system in the US. I just couldn't bring myself to pick it up for 2 days so I'm not going to force myself.

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### **Hilary says**

Read this book in a day, skimming some parts. Definitely find it interesting how a club that takes only 15 members a year has "produced" 3 US Presidents (Taft, Bush 1 & 2 - plus John Kerry), Secretaries of State and Defense, members of the CIA, heads of every major bank, and a laundry list of employees in both Bush

White Houses. Definitely confirms what an "old boys club/old money club" our country and our political system really is in many respects. In short doesn't sound like there's much mystery or anything that cool about the club itself as a senior at Yale, but the web of network you're brought into for the rest of your life is stunning ... and creepy.

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