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001	Webpage	The Skull and Bones Classes of 1968 & 1969	3	07/31/2001	P6/b6;

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Appointments and Scheduling, White House Office of

SERIES:

McCathran, Ellen - Subject Files

FOLDER TITLE:

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POLITICS

George W., Knight of Eulogia



*A rare look inside Skull and Bones, the Yale secret
society and sometime haunt of the presumptive
Republican nominee for President*

by Alexandra Robbins

*(The online version of this article appears in two parts. Click here to
go to part two.)*

ON High Street, in the middle of the Yale University campus, stands a cold-looking, nearly windowless Greco-Egyptian building with padlocked iron doors. This is the home of Yale's most famous secret society, Skull and Bones, and it is also, in a sense, one of the many homes of the family of George W. Bush, Yale '68.

Bush men have been Yale men and Bonesmen for generations. Prescott Bush, George W.'s grandfather, Yale '17, was a legendary Bonesman; he was a member of the band that stole for the society what became one of its most treasured artifacts: a skull that was said to be that of the

Apache chief Geronimo. Prescott Bush, one of a great many Bonesmen who went on to lives of power and renown, became a U.S. senator. George Herbert Walker Bush, George W.'s father, Yale '48, was also a Bonesman, and he, too, made a conspicuous success of himself. Inside the temple on High Street hang paintings of some of Skull and Bones's more illustrious members; the painting of George Bush, the most recently installed, is five feet high.

Discuss this article in the politics & society conference of Post & Riposte.

More on politics & society in *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Atlantic Unbound*.

From *Atlantic Unbound*:

"Bush vs. Gore," by Jack Beatty (March 8, 2000)

Scenes from the first presidential debate of the 2000 election campaign.

"Is W. Inevitable?", by Christopher Caldwell (November 17, 1999)

It looks like George W. Bush has the nomination in the bag. Here's a scenario of how he could lose.

Related links:

The Order of Skull and Bones

"Everything You Ever Wanted to Know, But Were Afraid to Ask." Comprehensive information about the Skull and Bones society, posted by ParaScope, a tongue-in-cheek conspiracy-theory Web site.

George Bush Jr.'s Skeleton Closet

A collection of disparaging information about George W. Bush. Posted by a site called The Skeleton Closet: "You've come to the right place for dirt, attitude and opinionated character reviews of all the Presidential

There were other Bush Bonesmen, a proud line of them stretching from great uncle George Herbert Walker Jr. to uncle Jonathan Bush to cousins George Herbert Walker III and Ray Walker. So when George W. was "tapped" for Skull and Bones, at the end of his junior year, he, too, naturally became a Bonesman -- but, it seems, a somewhat ambivalent one.

New members of Skull and Bones are assigned secret names, by which fellow Bonesmen will forever know them. Some Bonesmen receive traditional names, denoting function or existential status; others are the chosen beneficiaries of names that their Bones predecessors wish to pass on. The leftover initiates choose their own names. The name Long Devil is assigned to the tallest member; Boaz (short for Beelzebub) goes to any member who is a varsity football captain. Many of the chosen names are drawn from literature (Hamlet, Uncle Remus), from religion, and from myth. The banker Lewis Lapham passed on his name, Sancho Panza, to the political adviser Tex McCrary. Averell Harriman was Thor, Henry Luce was Baal, McGeorge Bundy was Odin. The name Magog is traditionally assigned to the incoming Bonesman deemed to have had the most sexual experience, and Gog goes to the new member with the least sexual experience. William Howard Taft and Robert Taft were Magogs. So, interestingly, was George Bush.

George W. was not assigned a name but invited to choose one. According to one report, nothing came to mind, so he was given the name Temporary, which, it is said, he never bothered to replace; Temporary is how Bush's fellow Bonesmen know him today. (In recent interviews I asked a number of Bush's Bonesmen classmates about the name and elicited no denials.)

The junior George's diffidence in the matter of his secret name seems to reflect a larger ambivalence toward Yale and its select, the most elite of whom are the members of Skull and Bones. The elder George holds his fellow Yalies -- particularly his Bones brethren -- in great esteem, and over the years has often gone to them for advice. George W., in contrast, has publicly made a point of his disdain for the elite northeastern connections that shaped his father's world and, to some extent, his own. Fay Vincent, the former commissioner of baseball, who is a Bush family friend and himself the son of a Bonesman, says, "Young George is as unlikely a Bonesperson as I've ever met." Young George has not attended a Yale reunion since he

the Presidential
Candidates."

**Biography of
President George
Bush**

A brief biography, with
photographs. Posted by
the George Bush
Presidential Library.

Young George has not attended a Yale reunion since he graduated.

Bush's dismissal of Yale and all it stands for may be a response to the repeated charges of political opponents that he is not much more than a papa's boy. Kent Hance, who trounced Bush in his 1978 congressional race, insinuated that Bush was not a true Texan and accused him of "riding his daddy's coattails."

If George W. truly wanted to detach himself from his father and from the traditions of a long line of ancestors, he chose a curious path -- in effect, retracing his father's footsteps.

SKULL and **Bones** is the oldest of Yale's secret societies and by far the most determinedly secretive. As such, it has long been an inspiration for speculation and imagination. It still is. The society is, of course, the inspiration for the new Universal Pictures thriller *The Skulls*, about a nefarious secret society at an Ivy League school in New Haven. In 1968, when George W. Bush was in Skull and Bones, there were eight "abovegrounds," or societies that met in their own "tombs," and as many as ten "undergrounds," which held meetings in rented rooms. In an article in the 1968 Yale yearbook *Lanny Davis*, a 1967 Yale graduate and a secret-society member who would go on to become a White House special counsel in the Clinton Administration, described how **Bones**, famous for its distinguished list of members, held more sway than the others.

Come "Tap Day" ... if you're a junior, despite the fact that you've banged your fist at the lunch table and said, "This is 1968," and have loudly denounced societies as anachronisms, when the captain of the football team is standing by your door and when the tower clock strikes eight he rushes in and claps your shoulder and shouts, "Skull and Bones, accept or reject?" you almost always scream out, "Accept!" and you never, never, pound your fist at the lunch table, not for that reason ever again.

Fewer than a tenth of Yale's 1,400 seniors are members of the university's secret societies, which many undergraduates view as self-serving vehicles for real and aspiring aristocrats. Certainly this view seems to have some validity when it comes to **Bonesmen**. Until 1992, when it became one of the last two secret societies to admit women, **Skull and Bones** had a history of picking the same kinds of people over and over. Davis's yearbook article explained,

If the society had a good year, this is what the "ideal" group will consist of: a football captain; a Chairman of the *Yale Daily News*; a conspicuous radical; a Whiffenpoof; a swimming captain; a notorious drunk with a 94 average; a film-maker; a political columnist; a religious group leader; a Chairman of the Lit; a foreigner; a ladies' man with two motorcycles; an

ex-service man; a negro, if there are enough to go around; a guy nobody else in the group had heard of, ever.

Indeed, George W.'s 1968 brethren slip easily into the desired slots: among them were the Olympic swimmer and gold medalist Don Schollander; a future Harvard Medical School surgeon, Gregory Gallico; a future Rhodes scholar, Robert McCallum; the Whiffenpoofs' pitch, Robert Birge; Donald Etra, an Orthodox Jew; Muhammed Saleh, a Jordanian; a future deputy director of the National Institute of Mental Health, Rex Cowdry; and the black soccer captain Roy Austin. Only George W. himself fell into none of the aforementioned categories. He was generally regarded as a legacy tap.

Given the society's history as an incubator and meeting point for rising generational elites, it is not surprising that an especially susceptible kind of "barbarian" -- the Bones term for a nonmember -- has long seen the society as a locus of mystery, wealth, and conspiracy. One doesn't need to scratch deeply to uncover accusations of sinister ties with the CIA, the Trilateral Commission, the Illuminati, the Council on Foreign Relations, even the Nazis. It turns out that the Yale admissions committee that voted to admit George W., despite his poor record at Andover, included three members (out of seven) who were Bonesmen; those seeking evidence of malign influence will surely raise an eyebrow. (For the conspiracy-minded, the most useful *omnium gatherum* is the British writer Antony C. Sutton's feverish 1983 tract *An Introduction to the Order*.) World domination aside, the most pervasive rumors about Bones are that initiates must masturbate in a coffin while recounting their sexual exploits, and that their candor is ultimately rewarded with a no-strings-attached gift of \$15,000. Bonesmen, who are sworn to secrecy at initiation, have not publicly denied or confirmed these rumors; they have usually made a point of refusing to speak to the press about the society at all. As *The Skulls* was about to be released, and as George W.'s quest for the Republican presidential nomination looked increasingly certain to succeed, the society sent all members a memo reminding them of their vow of silence. Still, as I recently discovered in the course of looking into Skull and Bones, not all Bonesmen see the necessity of remaining tight-lipped about a society whose biggest secret may be that its secrets are essentially trivial.

THE story of Skull and Bones begins in December of 1832. Upset (according to one account) by changes in the Phi Beta Kappa election process, a Yale senior named William Russell and a group of classmates decided to form the Eulogian Club as an American chapter of a German student organization. The club paid obeisance to Eulogia, the goddess of eloquence, who took her place in the pantheon upon the death of the orator Demosthenes, in 322 B.C., and who is said to have returned in a kind of Second

Coming on the occasion of the society's inception. The Yale society fastened a picture of its symbol -- a skull and crossbones -- to the door of the chapel where it met. Today the number 322, recalling the date of Demosthenes' death, appears on society stationery. The number has such mystical overtones that in 1967 a graduate student with no ties to Skull and Bones donated \$322,000 to the society.

(The number 322 has also been a particular favorite of conspiracy-minded hunters for evidence of Skull and Bones's global connections. It was the combination to Averell Harriman's briefcase when he carried classified dispatches between London and Moscow during World War II. Antony C. Sutton claims that 322 doubles as a reminder of the society's mother organization in Germany; the American group, founded in 1832, is the second chapter -- thus 32-2.)

In 1856 Daniel Coit Gilman, who went on to become the founding president of Johns Hopkins University, officially incorporated the society as the Russell Trust Association, and Skull and Bones moved into the space it still occupies. The Bones tomb is forbidding only on the outside. Marina Moscovici, a Connecticut conservator who recently spent six years restoring fifteen paintings from the Skull and Bones building, describes the atmosphere inside as "funny spooky." She says, "Sort of like the Addams Family, it's campy in an old British men's-smoking-club way. It's not glamorous by any means."

"Bones is like a college dorm room," a 1980s Bonesman told me. "Ours was a place that used to be really nice but felt kind of beat up, lived in. There were socks underneath the couch, old half-deflated soccer balls lying around." Dozens of skeletons and skulls, human and animal, dangle from the walls, on which German and Latin phrases have been chiseled ("Whether poor or rich, all are equal in death"), among moose heads, sconces, medieval armor, antlers, boating flags, manuscripts, statuettes of Demosthenes, and a pair of boots that one member wore throughout his active duty with American forces in France during World War II. The gravestone of Elihu Yale, the eponymous eighteenth-century merchant, was stolen years ago from its proper setting in Wrexham, Wales, and is displayed in a glass case, in a room with purple walls.

Continued...

*(The online version of this article appears in two parts.
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Alexandra Robbins, a 1998 graduate of Yale University, is on the staff of *The New Yorker's* Washington bureau.

Illustration by Pat Oliphant.

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