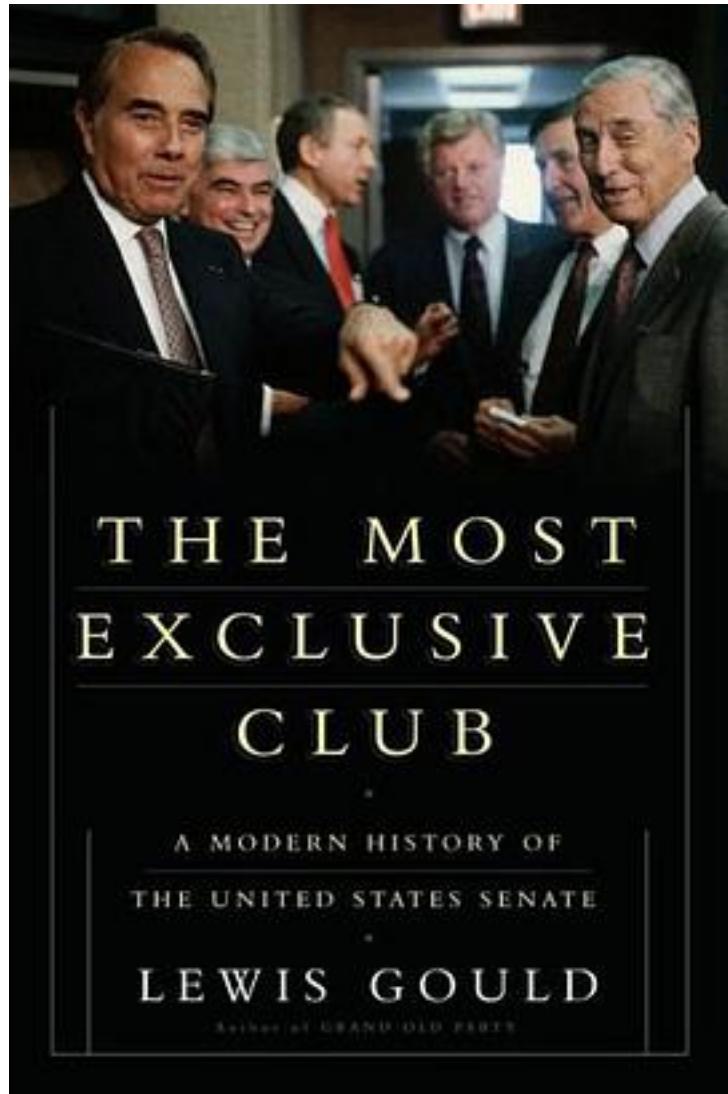


The Most Exclusive Club



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Book Description

The first complete account of the modern United States Senate, and the people who shaped its role in the twentieth century

The Senate was originally conceived by the Founding Fathers as an anti-democratic counterweight to the more volatile House of Representatives, but in the twentieth century it has often acted as an impediment to needed reforms. A hundred years ago, senators were still chosen by state legislatures, rather than by direct elections. Now, in the wake of the 2004 elections, and the consolidation of Republican control, the Senate is likely to become a crucible of power shifts that will have enormous impact on American politics in the twenty-first century.

In *The Most Exclusive Club*, acclaimed political historian Lewis Gould puts the debates about the Senate's future into the context of its history from the Progressive Era to the war in Iraq. From charges of corruption to the occasional attempt at reform, Gould highlights the major players, issues, and debates (including the League of Nations, the McCarthy hearings, and the Iran-Contra affair) that have shaped the institution. Beyond the usual outsized figures such as Lyndon Johnson, Strom Thurmond, and Barry Goldwater, Gould also tells the story of the lesser-known Senate leaders who have played a vital role in America's upper house.

Filled with colorful anecdotes, this is a long-awaited history of one of the most powerful political bodies in the world, written by a master. Gould's sweeping narrative combines deft storytelling with a fresh look at the crucible of contemporary political debate and decision-making.

From Publishers Weekly

The history of the U.S. Senate in the 20th century is one of evolution from a genteel debating society into a collection of bitterly partisan politicians, half of them seeming to eye runs for the White House as they joust for media coverage. As Gould, a historian at the University of Texas (Grand Old Party) relates this disheartening history, a number of themes recur, including periodic battles over the filibuster (especially its use by Southern Democrats defending Jim Crow from the 1930s to the 1960s) and too many senators' chronic alcoholism, sexism and egomania. Inevitably, the book focuses on shifting institutional mores (such as the emergence of year-round fund-raising and campaigning after the advent of television) rather than the substance of policy debates. Gould's assessment of the Senate's historical performance is relatively bleak, noting that, for "protracted periods," it functioned "as a force to genuinely impede the nation's vitality and evolution." And he offers jaundiced assessments of the legacies of some men routinely described as giants of the Senate, such as Robert La Follette, Robert Taft and especially Richard Russell, the much admired six-term senator from Georgia, whose political gifts were deployed in the service of virulent racism. 20 b&w photos.

From Booklist

A prolific chronicler of American political history (1968: The Election That Changed America, 1993), Gould inspects the twentieth-century record of the U.S. Senate. Generally disenchanted with the body and its obstructionist propensities, Gould briskly enunciates his criticisms of Senate procedures and concentrates on the senators themselves. In the self-important surroundings of Capitol Hill, personalities and animosities have had significant political ramifications, which connect with the

electoral rhythms to shape Gould's narrative. One large theme is the mirage of fame, Gould arguing that the most famous senators, such as the progressive Robert La Follette, the isolationist William Borah, or the egomaniacal Lyndon Johnson, are marginal to institutional history. Gould rates as more important obscure figures such as John Worth Kern (for engineering Woodrow Wilson's legislative program) and James Allen (for perfecting the filibuster in the 1970s). Much in the news, the filibuster's history will be Gould's current-events selling point, and his gallery of the Senate's cads, sots, and segregationists, plus its members principled or corrupt, will lead readers into the world of senatorial social and parliamentary customs.

Gilbert Taylor

Book Dimension

length: (cm)23.4 width:(cm)16

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