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Rhodes Scholars, Oxford, and the Creation of an American Elite

Thomas J. Schaeper, Kathleen Schaeper

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Each year thirty-two seniors at American universities are awarded Rhodes Scholarships, which entitle them to spend two or three years studying at the University of Oxford. The program, founded by the British colonialist and entrepreneur Cecil Rhodes and established in 1903, has become the world's most famous academic scholarship and has brought thousands of young Americans to study in England. Many of these later became national leaders in government, law, education, literature, and other fields. Among them were the politicians J. William Fulbright, Bill Bradley, and Bill Clinton; the public policy analysts Robert Reich and George Stephanopoulos; the writer Robert Penn Warren; the entertainer Kris Kristofferson; and the Supreme Court Justices Byron White and David Souter.

Based on extensive research in published and unpublished documents and on hundreds of interviews, this book traces the history of the program and the stories of many individuals. In addition it addresses a host of questions such as: how important was the Oxford experience for the individual scholars? To what extent has the program created an old-boy (-girl since 1976) network that propels its members to success? How many Rhodes Scholars have cracked under the strain and failed to live up to expectations? How have the Americans coped with life in Oxford and what have they thought of Britain in general? Beyond the history of the program and the individuals involved, this book also offers a valuable examination of the American-British cultural encounter.

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