

The all-seeing eye: a force for good

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The Masonic movement, also known as Freemasonry, is an influential and powerful organisation that rose from the historical Stonemason guilds during the late Middle Ages. Initially made up of medieval craft



guilds, it has evolved into a global network of individuals who work toward social and moral enrichment, personal study, mutual aid and philanthropy. They state their purpose is to encourage individuals to engage in personal growth and social responsibility, with their lodges guided by the principles of love, respect and truth.

Public opinion of Masonic practice varies around the globe ranging from respect and curiosity to outright suspicion and conspiracy theory - the latter due to its members' sworn vows of secrecy and the fact that, historically, some members held highly influential positions.

Leadership and structure of the modern Masonic movement

The modern-day Masonic movement is considerably decentralised, consisting of autonomous regional Grand Lodges that control all smaller lodges within their jurisdiction.

The Grand Lodges themselves operate independently, following their own rules and regulations. However, all strictly follow a core set of Masonic principles. This ideology allows for a culturally diverse range of Masonic practices formed over the years by each lodge in their respective countries.

Leaders comprise of elected officers, the most senior being the Grand Master (GM) of a Grand Lodge. The GM is a revered important role that oversees Masonic activities and ensures the integrity of member actions within each jurisdiction.

Influence and activity of the Grand Lodges vary significantly from one region to another. Some countries see Grand Lodges participating in charitable activities, while others remain introspective, aligning more with the personal and spiritual development of members.

Global influence

The Masonic movement can be found across the globe. The United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) recognises Masonic districts and groups in Canada, the Caribbean, the Bahamas, South America, Europe, West Africa, East Africa, South Africa, India, Australia, New Zealand, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong and Fiji. Freemasonry is, however, notably active in the US, UK, Italy, Spain, Austria, Latin America (Mexico, Argentina and Chile) and France, where its presence has been observed significantly throughout history and still continues. In France, the movement has been incredibly influential, entering the halls of political and social spheres for hundreds of years. Freemasonry there is famed for its intellectual and progressive stance, regularly engaging in debates and actions relevant to secularism and social justice.

Civil and governmental views on Masonic activities shift from region to region. In France, it is seen as a cultural and social institution, although it has faced much criticism and conspiracy theory, particularly from factions that are sceptical of its renowned secretive practice, customs and influence. This stems from several conspiracies recorded throughout history.

One such notable event was unveiled between 1900 and 1904. Under the stewardship of General Andre, French Masonic Lodges and secret intelligence networks were all behind a controlled military promotions process. They created secret documents that evaded official military selection evaluations to favour those officers who were republican, Masonic and free-thinking. Those that were nationalist, Catholic or royalists, faced many obstacles in their career advancements. General Andre's actions clearly put ideological sentiment before traditional military assessments and civil law. To this day, France remains a country where Freemasons are still feared.

Professor Jorma Jormakka at Aalto University wrote in his paper on Masonic theory (Jormakka, 2023), that the Masonic conspiracies of old do suggest that they played vital roles in pivotal historical events. Such events include the American Revolution 1765, the French Revolution of 1789, and the drafting of the Polish Constitution in 1791, that ultimately resulted in Poland being split. They are also said to have influenced the Latin American wars of independence between 1790 and 1860. Jormakka adds that all the lodges involved were considered legitimate by Masonic standards, which indicates the official approval of the Grand Lodges. Historical text reveals that the underlining goals of these Masonic actions were aligned with Enlightenment ideals, usually leftist, but at times, rightist.

In the UK, Freemasonry is seen as a traditional organisation that concerns itself with charitable work and community support. However, in Europe and Latin America, regulatory scrutiny is more serious as a result of historical associations with politics and corruption.

In the US, since the first office was formed in 1789, 46 people have served as President of the United States. Of these, 15 (to include Lyndon B Johnson) are known to have been members of Masonic lodges, starting with the first President, George Washington, and most recent, the 41st US President, George H W Bush. In 1959, it is believed that as many as 4.5% of all American men were Masonic members. Present day members are believed to be a lot more secretive about their Masonic associations.

Recent reported incidents and controversies

In 1981, the Propaganda 2 Masonic Lodge (P2) scandal led by Grand Lodge Master Licio Gelli, rocked the Italian political system following tense debates as to the role of Masonry in Italy. Previously viewed as a network for private deals for the middle classes, it was revealed that a secretive faction existed in Italy in a far more sinister capacity. This secret network consisted of hundreds of Italy's political and business elites, creating fertile ground ripe for illicit dealings, reciprocal favours, and in most cases, immunity from the law. The controversy surrounding the P2 lodge drastically changed the public's view of Masonry.

The Italian mafiosi were also cited as actors within the P2 scandal. During this time, mafia organisations operated within all regions of Italy, in particular in the south. Given their illegal activities entering into legal and public markets, it was almost impossible for the Masons and mafia not to cross paths. Interestingly, Paoli Letizia says in his book 'Broken Bonds: Mafia and Politics in Sicily', "... *the only entity at the time powerful enough to cope with Italian politicians of the era and the diminishing legitimacy of the mafia was the Freemasons*". This says a lot about their power and influence.

In the UK during the 1960s, Masonic members operating within the police was a serious concern. It was revealed that London detectives were active members of the same lodges as high-profile London criminals. It was even reported that criminal bosses were seen on vacation with senior officers in Mediterranean villas. This nefarious activity led to major reforms resulting in custodial sentences for several senior CID officers.

Freemasonry's impact on multinational businesses global influence

Masonic members have, throughout history, participated in significant endeavours and are known to have been instrumental in creating international banks, insurance companies and educational institutions. The following is a list of well-known Freemasons of past and present which includes politicians, celebrities, musicians, athletes and recognised figures. They include former *US President George H.W. Bush, actor John Wayne, singer Elton John, former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, writers Mark Twain and Jules Verne, actor Clint Eastwood, musician Paul McCartney, actor and director Orson Welles, the American animator Walt Disney, Michael Jordan the basketball player, legendary boxer Muhammad Ali, composers Johann Sebastian Bach and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Winston Churchill, Albert Einstein, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, investor Warren Buffett, scientist Sir Isaac Newton, telephone inventor Alexander Graham Bell, Serbian-American engineer Nikola Tesla, Scottish poet Robert Burns and singer Elvis Presley, to name but a few.*

As can be seen, Freemasonry has been a fixture in global history for centuries, formed by some of the greatest minds and influencers through the eras. The huge reach and participation of significant figures underlines the profound and understated impact of Freemasons in both politics and business worldwide.

The appeal of joining this ideology comes from its commitment to standards like brotherhood, self-improvement, love and charity, embodied via complex rituals and symbolism that resonate with members.

Conclusion

Its secretive nature aside, Masonic influence throughout history is evident. Its vast network and camaraderie among influential leaders has no doubt facilitated advances in business and politics. It is these intricate connections that have enabled Freemasons to wield a sort of soft power shaping policy and business strategy from the shadows.

Today, the Masonic movement is very much alive, and its influence persists, quietly rooted in the foundations of societal leadership and governance, reflecting a significant and hidden role in shaping the global landscape. This group of the world's greatest minds has existed for hundreds of years, and it would be unwise to think they will not continue for a hundred more.

"Power resides where men believe it resides. It's a trick, a shadow on the wall."

Varys from George R.R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire.

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