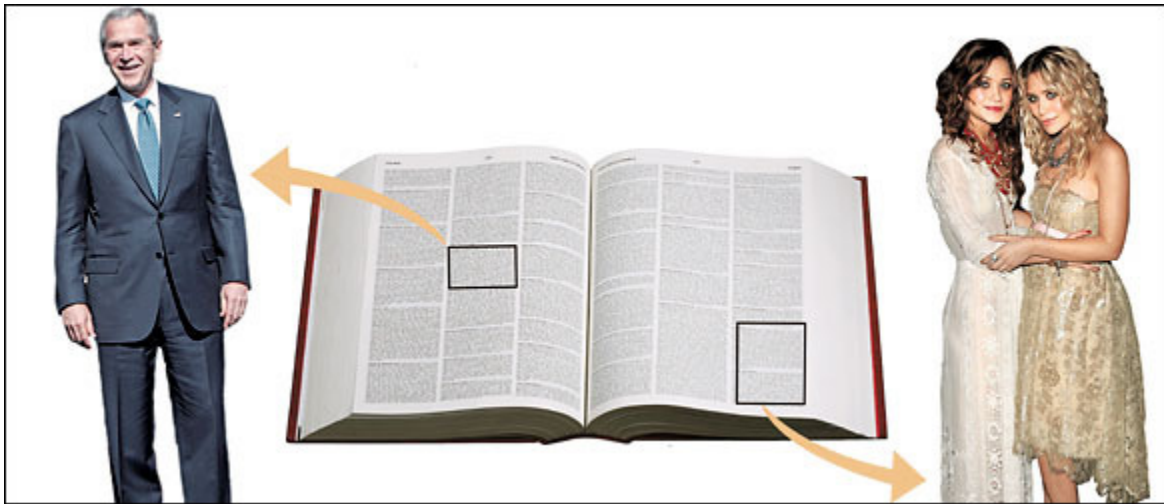


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Who Are You? Why Are You Here?



From left: Chris Jackson/Getty Images, Tony Cenicola/The New York Times, Peter Kramer/Getty Images

In the 60th anniversary Who's Who in America, George W. Bush weighs in with one and a quarter column inches of biographical information. The Olsen twins, right (Mary-Kate, left, and Ashley), garner twice that much space.

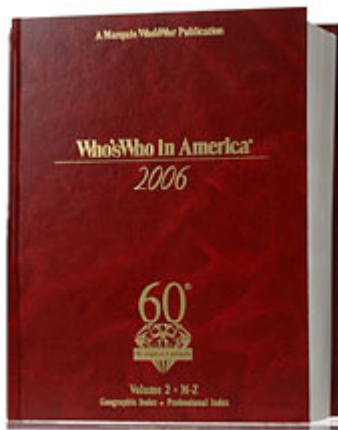
By [WILLIAM L. HAMILTON](#)

THE 60th edition of Who's Who in America, that venerable guide to American achievement, was published last week. The familiar two-volume "big red book," a librarian's Vanity Fair, recognizes 109,000 people and, by their inclusion, recommends them to posterity and to America's collective memory. Kind of like a magazine cover that stays on the stands forever.

But in the era of the Internet and Google, of reality television, gangsta rap stars, celebrity publicists, incarcerated domestic divas and the famous 15 minutes of fame (probably closer to 5 now), who is who?

"I think about this every day," said Jon Gelberg, managing director for special projects at Marquis Who's Who, the book's publisher. He was speaking at the company's offices in New Providence, N.J., where an editorial team of 70, including 12 researchers, make the call on

who's notable and who's not. Talking about his work, Mr. Gelberg sometimes looked as stoical as Hercules.



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Who's Who, traditionally a polite old-boys' club of state supreme court justices, clergymen, explorer/authors, botany professors and other conservatively distinguished academic, government and professional figures, is now - under a two-year-old management team that wants to recognize popular culture just as emphatically - Who's In and Who's Out as well. The crowd squeezed into the latest edition is as much V.I.P. room as reference room. Think of going down in history as the ultimate afterparty.

Who's newly who for 2006? Kanye West, the hip-hop artist; Joel Osteen, the televangelist; Eva Longoria, the actress who plays Gabrielle Solis in "Desperate Housewives"; Ken Jennings, who holds the record for the longest winning streak on the game show "Jeopardy"; and Tony Hawk, the skateboarder. They take their places in American culture's carved stone with presidents, Nobel Prize winners, the entertainment elite and the titans of industry. Back after a one-year hiatus is [Martha Stewart](#), whose stint in jail disqualified her in 2005.

Who isn't who yet? Alice Waters, the mother of new American cuisine. Who was who but isn't for 2006? Beck. Who isn't who, as in "Who?" Rod Strickland, the basketball player, and Linda Evans, a star of "Dynasty," the popular 1980's evening soap opera.

And who will never be who? Victoria Gotti, the author, television personality and daughter of John Gotti. She is ineligible because of the Gotti family's associations with organized crime, what Marquis's editors term "notorious" or "infamous" achievement.

"My life is going to go on without it, believe me," Ms. Gotti said of a Who's Who citation, speaking by telephone from California.

[Monica Lewinsky](#)? Never had a chance.

But with the often upside-down nature of who is celebrated today, or why, occupational categories like organized crime are under review. Socialites, with a few exceptions, like the late, ubiquitous Nan Kempner, are kept out. Paris Hilton, the celebute, was included last year, distinguished, Mr. Gelberg said, by her achievements in three industries: fashion, film and television.

"Popular culture has expanded and grown coarser, so there's no reason not to include Paris Hilton," said Matthew Boylan, a reference librarian at the Donnell Library Center of the New York Public Library. And librarians, to judge from several spoken to, are an egalitarian but tough crew when it comes to reference materials, exhibiting a protective ferocity that might impress the Gottis.

"Are we trying to make it more relevant? Absolutely," Mr. Gelberg said. "Who are people talking about? Who is on magazine covers? People in the hip-hop world, X-Games types. We're adding them in greater numbers. This is a part of culture."

Hard calls, like activists, are subject to debate. Cindy Sheehan, opposing the war in Iraq, is a Who by sheer volume of news coverage in the last year; Randall Terry, the anti-abortionist, is not, largely through oversight and not lack of newsworthiness, Mr. Gelberg said. Mr. Terry is being discussed for inclusion in 2007.

Part of the company's three-year plan to make Who's Who more relevant is to reflect the leadership among African-, Asian- and Hispanic-Americans. Brigida Benitez, a lawyer and president of the Hispanic Bar Association of the District of Columbia, is one example. The guide is also applying a brisk sweep of the broom to names that have gathered dust, not laurels. For 2006, 37,000 names were dropped while 20,000 were added. Marquis Who's Who also maintains a database, available by subscription, of 1.2 million names, including those in the book, those dropped, those being considered and those of the deceased.

For those included, it is a brutal world of column inches: [George W. Bush](#), one and a quarter; Ashley and Mary-Kate Olsen, two and a half between them; Stephen Hawking and Cher, one and three-quarters each; [Madonna](#), two; Noam Chomsky, six.

Though entertainers and other well-publicized figures are not new to Who's Who, which first appeared in 1898, its acceptance of popular culture has evolved. Professional athletes, who were considered laborers, were excluded until 1927, when Bill Tilden, the tennis star and social celebrity, was admitted. When Mae West was denied entrance to the big red book, she told reporters that its editors would not be included in her little black book. In the 1968-'69 edition of Who's Who, John Lennon is present but Mick Jagger is not, reflecting parental attitudes toward the Beatles and the Rolling Stones more than professional objectivity.

If Who's Who in America has created, by mosaic, a portrait of America and its tectonic shifts, its latest edition, with its new recognition of popular culture, is a picture that some might find startling to see - like an unintended look in the mirror. Who's Who is a dry reminder that celebrity for celebrity's sake is now a seasoned American industry as powerful and internationally recognized as steel once was, driven by CD's, movies, fragrances, tabloid romances and the weightless gravitas of pure appearance.

"Hilary Duff, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera - they have enormous staying power," said Kerry Morrison, Marquis's managing research editor. "Compared with Debbie Gibson?" Ouch. Ms. Gibson, whom Ms. Morrison characterized as a "flash in the pan" - Who's Who's worst egg-on-the-face nightmare - was never in the book or the database.

At greatest issue at Marquis is whether Who's Who in America itself is still "Who." With the information highway now an international Interstate, is a 5,919-page, \$749 reference book an authoritative tool and valid portrait of society, or a dinosaur from the print age?

"It had a great name, but the product needed great improvement," said James A. Finkelstein, who with Wilbur L. Ross Jr. bought Marquis Who's Who in 2003. Appearing every other year

until 1992, it is now an annual publication. People will fall in and out of the print edition more quickly than they have in the past, to make it more reflexive as a reference work, Mr. Finkelstein said. The company publishes 16 Who's Who titles, including volumes devoted to American women and to those in education, which are purchased primarily by libraries. A total of 25,000 copies have been sold for shipment for 2006.

How does a who become a Who? There are 73 categories and 800 occupations that constitute guidelines for admission, said Fred Marks, senior managing director. To shake out nominees, his staff reviews lists like the Forbes Celebrity 100 and the Fortune 500, as well as lists specific to various industries and professions. Researchers also compile names from general interest magazines like Time and special interest magazines like The American Lawyer, looking for new candidates or verifying that people included in the last edition are still Who.

"The fundamental standards here are position and accomplishment," said Gene M. McGovern, Marquis's chief executive. "The book fills up fast - Pulitzers, the Fortune 1,000, Congress."

Ms. Morrison added, "With an Oscar, you could stay in until you're dead."

In 2006, 26 percent of those included are women, up from 14 percent 10 years ago.

Those selected are sketched biographically, then contacted for additional information or asked to fill out a form. Finished entries are not uniformly fact-checked.

"How far do they go to verify the information?" asked Susan Newson, head of reference at the East Meadow Public Library on Long Island. "That's the question. You have to assume those selected will not fudge the information or aggrandize themselves, because the list is fairly distinguished."

Speaking for librarians, Ms. Newson added, "We're a little suspicious, but on lesser-known people, we have nothing else." Robert Homer Simpson, for example, the first meteorologist to fly over a hurricane, in 1947, can still be found in Who's Who.

For many of those whose fame is in full bloom, like the hip-hop star Missy Elliott, being included in the book is not just another piece of publicity. She entered the book last year. "I'm more than happy to be in company with Oprah and [Hillary Clinton](#)," she said on Thursday in a telephone interview. "Looking at those accomplishments, it makes mine look very small. It makes you sit back."

Ms. Elliott added: "Reporters always ask me, 'What are the highlights of my career?' This would definitely be a first."
