

Tucker Carlson: A Buckley for Our Time?

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Ship of Fools: How a Selfish Ruling Class Is Bringing America to the Brink of Revolution

By Tucker Carlson

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The Bill Buckley of the paleoconservatives has arrived, and just in time for the Trump era. While Tucker Carlson's rhetorical reach may not stretch as far and wide as Buckley's, he evokes the same gaily combative spirit that young conservatives of the 1960s admired in the founder of *National Review*. Both emerged as symbols of a new and rising movement, an insurgency on the right that delighted in confronting and demolishing the mythology of modern liberalism—"owning the libs" as we say nowadays—as Buckley regularly did on his PBS-aired TV show *Firing Line* and as Carlson does five times a week on Fox News.

Yet that is where the resemblance ends. The "fusionism" of Buckley and *National Review* was a far cry from the unreconstructed America First-ism of an earlier American right, so ably reconfigured by Carlson for the twenty-first century. The original Buckley program brought together the three contending factions of the conservative movement: the anti-communists, the social conservatives, and the nascent libertarian movement. The America First coalition personified by Carlson connects the paleoconservatives, long thought to be the least influential of the right's many factions, with millions of

radicalized middle Americans, the inhabitants of "flyover country"—that is, the least influential people in the nation, the "forgotten people" Trump directly appealed to.

The revolution in conservative thought represented by Carlson sets many of what Buckley would have recognized as the central principles of modern conservatism on their head. Beyond that, however, is the fundamental difference in their respective positions: Buckley came to be part of the political class, the coastal elite that has ruled the nation since its earliest days: Carlson targets those people as the hapless captains of a "ship of fools," the title of his new book.

A decadent and self-isolated elite elected Donald Trump, says Carlson. Yes, somewhat tiresomely, Carlson launches his polemic with the eternal search for whom to "blame" for the victory of the "unappealing," "vulgar and ignorant" Trump. Once we get past this boilerplate, however, Carlson homes in on the real problem: the bicoastal oligarchy that dominates the rest of the country and is determined to hold on to power no matter what the cost.

They invaded Iraq on a pretext, bailed out Wall Street, lowered interest rates to zero, unleashed an unprecedented tide of

immigration, and stood by while the country's manufacturing foundation was eaten away and the middle class collapsed. Yet still, the oligarchs felt entitled to rule, and they certainly expected to continue their rule beyond that November night in 2016, despite the fact that they were lording it over a population with which they had almost nothing in common.

In a phrase that will surely earn him howls of outrage from the guardians of political correctness, Carlson describes the "Latin Americanization" of the U.S. economy, where the income distribution curve is coming to resemble what one might find under a new form of feudalism. The Democrats, once the party of the working class, now advance the interests of the progressive bourgeoisie in D.C., New York, and Silicon Valley.

This Latin Americanization process is not defined merely by the isolation of the ruling class, its arrogance and indifference to the fate of its own people, but also by a major demographic project: the wholesale substitution of more pliable subjects for the voting population. When the East Germans of the German Democratic Republic rose up in rebellion and the communists solicited ideas to get back in the workers' good graces, the Stalinist poet/playwright Bertolt Brecht opined, "Would it not be easier in that case for the government to dissolve the people and elect another?" That is precisely what is happening. The American people never voted for it. Indeed, at every chance they have been given to express their opinion on mass immigration and open borders, the result has been an overwhelming and unmitigated rejection of both.

Carlson raises a question that no one else dares ask, for fear of the answer: Are we a country anymore? Or are we a sprawling borderless empire that simply expands and spreads, unbidden, like some mindless amoeba? "Again and again, we are told that these changes are entirely good," Carlson

writes. "Change itself is inherently virtuous, our leaders explain. Those who oppose it are bigots." We have no common language, culture, history—so why should we remain a country?

Our rulers cannot and will not answer this question. It violates everything they believe, everything they hold sacred: it strikes at the very heart of their worldview. Carlson points out that this country is in the midst of a disorienting, alienating, and potentially dangerous transformation that is changing the kind of country we were into something that may not be a country at all. If you oppose this, you're an enemy of diversity—which is now our highest value.

We are not allowed to debate this: like all religious dogmas, it is beyond dispute, and any questioning of its wisdom is apt to get you run out of town on a rail. The penalty is so high because the policy is so unpopular, except with the bicoastal oligarchy, which imports cheap computer nerds from India to run their companies and Guatemalan nannies to raise their children. Mexican gardeners order their landscapes, while robbers, rapists, and drug dealers in this country illegally spread disorder in the neighborhoods on the other side of the railroad tracks. Not that the elites care: it isn't happening in the leafy suburbs they inhabit, which haven't changed since 1956.

And they wonder why the peasants with pitchforks are on the march. Not even the Bourbons were this indifferent to reality. How could they not have seen Trump and the upsurge of right-wing populism coming? How could they not have realized that, as Carlson puts it, "virtually none of their core beliefs had majority support from the population they governed. It was a strange arrangement for a democracy. In the end, it was unsustainable."

Right down the line, from immigration to foreign policy to the economic policies that enriched Silicon Valley and impoverished

Middle America, the Davos crowd's agenda is the polar opposite of what most Americans want. Indeed, if a single phrase embodies the new conservative dispensation's view of the elite's policy agenda, and its conservative doppelgänger, Trump's supporters on the right often repeat it with ill-concealed contempt: Invade the world, invite the world.

This was the policy of the George W. Bush administration, and, with only slight rhetorical modifications, the mind-set that animated the Obama administration, not to mention most of the 2016 would-be Republican aspirants. Yet Americans of both parties were sick and tired of being lied to about the most disastrous war in their history, so they ignored the establishment outcries when Trump denounced the Iraq War as based on a lie. Trump was supposed to lose the South Carolina primary due to this "faux pas," but as usual the conventional wisdom was wrong: he won overwhelmingly.

Carlson's chapter on our "Foolish Wars" does something I have seen no other conservative work do: it documents the betrayal of the neoconservatives and their attempted reentry into the legions of the left. Max Boot, formerly a minor neocon known for advocating an "American empire," has now become one of many competing gurus of the NeverTrumpers and is busily trying to

convince his newfound leftist comrades that he's really one of them. Carlson's mere listing of all the countries Boot has demanded we hit underscores the sheer craziness and lack of accountability that has dominated our discourse for years.

One almost feels sorry for Bill Kristol—almost!—as Carlson documents the trail of failed predictions ("They'll greet us as liberators!") and disastrous policies initiated by the little Lenin of the neocons. It's a virtually unbroken record of failed bets, miscalculations, and outright lies spelled out over decades—a record that would doom any other pundit to irrelevance, instead of gifting him a prime spot on the cable networks and the op-ed pages.

Buckley made room for the neoconservatives when they defected from a pacifistic Democratic Party in the 1960s. Now Carlson is formalizing their unceremonious exit from the right by giving them a good shove. They'll land on their feet: they always do, like a hobo jumping off a boxcar. Let Tucker's book serve as a warning to the next train they try to hitch a ride on.

Justin Raimondo is the author of Reclaiming the American Right: The Lost Legacy of the Conservative Movement (ISI Books).