

**SHIP OF FOOLS: HOW A SELFISH
RULING CLASS IS BRINGING AMERICA
TO THE BRINK OF REVOLUTION**

(TUCKER CARLSON)

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Ship of Fools extends the recent run of books that attack the American ruling class as decayed and awful. However it is characterized, as the professional-management elite, the Front Row Kids, or one of many other labels, all these books argue the ruling class is running our country into the ground, and most argue it is stupid and annoying to boot. I certainly agree, and I also tend to agree with the grim prognostication in the subtitle, that revolution is coming—that is, this will end in blood. What this book fails to offer, though, just like all these books, is any kind of possible other solution. Which, after a while, reinforces the reader's conclusion that there is no other solution.

Not a word in this book is truly original. That's not to say it's bad: Carlson is highly intelligent and well informed, and his book is extremely well written, clever, funny, and compelling. As with most current political books, Donald Trump appears often, not as himself, but as a phenomenon, whose rise deserves and requires explanation, and who therefore implicitly frames the book, though the author stops mentioning him about halfway through. Carlson's thoughts on Trump, however, are no more original than the rest of the book, the basic conclusion of which is that actions have consequences, and Trump is a natural consequence of the actions taken by our ruling class. In Greek myth, when you sow the earth with dragon's teeth, you get fierce warriors; today, when you harrow the disempowered with rakes, you get Trump.

Carlson, in his Introduction, recites a familiar litany, of the evisceration of the middle class and the emergence of the new class system, where there is a great gulf set between the ruling class and the mass of Americans. Part of the gap is money, shown by increased income and asset inequality. Part of the gap is status, as shown by behavior, such as consumption habits, but even more visible in differences in opportunity, where many desirable options are available to those who pass elite filters such as attending the right universities, and are wholly unavailable to

the rest. Few people, of whatever political persuasion, would deny the emergence of this gap; it is what conclusions to draw that are in dispute.

This widening horizontal fracture between mass and elite is reflected in the political parties. The Democrats have shifted from a party of the masses, to a party focused on elite concerns, such as “identity politics, abortion, and abstract environmental concerns.” They ignore existential threats to the non-elites such as the loss of good manufacturing jobs, the opioid epidemic, the dropping life span of the non-elite, and that Obamacare and crony capitalism handouts to the insurance companies and lawyers have made insurance unaffordable for the working class. The Republicans have always been more focused on the elite (until Trump), and so have shifted position less, but are no less blameless. Carlson recognizes that the common Republican talking point, that nobody in America is actually poor by historical standards, is mostly irrelevant for these purposes. Inequality is perceived on a relative scale, and it creates envy. As Jonathan Haidt has explained at length, for many people’s moral views, fairness is a key touchstone, and abstract economic arguments are not an adequate response. And whatever the causes or rationales, this abandonment of the masses by both parties leaves nobody with power representing the non-elite.

Now, I think this horizontal fracture analysis of the political parties is a bit too simplistic. I see American politics as a quadrant, in which neoliberal Democrats like Hillary Clinton have more in common with elite-focused Republicans like Jeb Bush than they do with either Bernie Sanders Democrats or Trump Republicans, who have much in common with each other. Carlson collapses this quadrant into a duality, in essence lumping Clinton and Bush into one group, and Sanders and Trump acolytes into another. This conceals certain critical issues, especially between the two portions of the quadrant that constitute those excluded from the ruling class. But I suppose Carlson’s main goal is to highlight the elite/non-elite distinction on which he builds his case.

The rest of the book is an expansion on this Introduction, in which history is intertwined with analysis of the present day. Carlson heavily focuses on immigration, i.e., “Importing a Serf Class.” This is the issue most clearly separating the ruling class from the ruled. Democrat and Republican elites have actively cooperated to flood America with alien immigrants, legal and illegal, against the wishes and interests

of the masses. Diversity is not our strength, “it’s a neutral fact, inherently neither good nor bad. . . . Countries don’t hang together simply because. They need a reason. What’s ours?” Carlson contrasts Cesar Chavez, who hated illegal immigrants as wage-lowering scum, with today’s elites, who demand illegal immigrants so they can be waited on hand and foot in their gated palaces. These changes are reflected in the official programs of the parties and in the pronouncements of their mandarins—or they were, until Trump showed up, and modified the Republican approach. What is more, they extend now to seemingly unrelated single-issue pressure groups—the Sierra Club, for example, now shrilly demands unlimited immigration, increased pressure on the environment be damned.

Immigration, though, is just one example of how the elites now ignore the legitimate interests of the working class. Apple treats workers (Chinese, to be sure) like slaves, but burns incense at the concerns of the elite such as gender inequality in management, so no attention is paid to the workers—the time of Dorothy Day is long gone. Amazon treats its employees as human robots, yet nobody in power complains. Facebook corrupts our youth through deliberate addiction and is chummy with killer regimes, yet no Congressman challenges them for that. Meanwhile the Democratic Party has exiled real representatives of the masses, whom they used to lionize, such as Ralph Nader. How do the elites reconcile this behavior in their own minds? They are united in their belief that their elite status is the result of merit, what Carlson cleverly calls “secular Calvinism.” The masses have less because they deserve less. That is to say, elite liberals, in particular, no longer challenge the hierarchy on behalf of the truly powerless, which is, as Jordon Peterson points out, the traditional and valid role of the Left. Instead, they denigrate the powerless, the bitter-clingers, the deplorables, while assuring themselves that because they focus on elite matters supposedly related to “oppressions,” such as granting new rights to homosexuals (a wealthy and powerful group), that they are somehow maintaining their traditional role.

Carlson also covers “Foolish Wars,” in which the masses die for elite stupidity, such as George W. Bush’s delusion that the Arab world wanted democracy. Again, the cutting humor shows through: “One thing that every late-stage ruling class has in common is a high tolerance for

mediocrity. . . . The talentless prosper, rising inexorably toward positions of greater power, and breaking things along the way. It happened to the Ottomans. Max Boot is living proof it's happening in America." Trump, at least in the campaign, saw the demands for ever-more foreign wars as what they are—an abomination. The ruling classes, on the other hand, are all for more wars—a departure from the past, especially among Democrats.

It's not just Max Boot that Carlson attacks by name. He slices up Bill Kristol for several pages. It is brutal. (I was a young intern in the White House when Dan Quayle was Vice President and Kristol his chief of staff. Kristol was a preening moron even then; unlike a fine wine, he has not improved with age.) Carlson also savages Ta-Nehisi Coates at length, although that's a bit like thrashing a man tied up in a gimp suit, too easy. Referring to Coates's miserable book, he says "It's a measure how thoroughly the diversity cult has corroded the aesthetic standards of our elite that the book was greeted with almost unanimous praise, which is to say, lying."

Next comes free speech. Liberals used to support free speech, no matter the cause; now the elite is eager to violently suppress speech that displeases them (or, more accurately, speech that threatens them by proving to be effective in eroding their power). Such suppression is primarily something pushed by the Left, though the elite Right is happy to cooperate. Carlson adduces the infamous dawn SWAT raids on conservatives by elite Democrats in Wisconsin, led by Milwaukee district attorney John Chisholm, judge Barbara Kluka, and prosecutor Francis Schmitz (who have escaped punishment, so far, unfortunately, although if the revolution that Carlson seems to predict arrives, hopefully they will be remembered). Brendan Eich and James Damore also make an appearance, as individuals persecuted by the elites, in the form of corporations, for their speech.

Carlson makes an important point here, one ignored by the odious coterie of inside-the-beltway corporate Republicans and #NeverTrumpers—that even though they are not subject to the First Amendment, it is false that corporations who behave this way cannot or should not be disciplined. As he notes, "Government regulates all sorts of speech in the private sector." What government doesn't do is regulate speech in a way that protects conservatives—restriction of

speech is a sword used only to enforce the dominion of the Left. The Right needs to weaponize it against the Left, not to defend an abstract and unnecessary principle that is ignored when harm is done to them. As I have written elsewhere, a good place to start would be legislatively forbidding all sizeable corporations from any discrimination based on speech or other expressive action (such as donating money to a cause) that the federal government could not legally forbid (in essence, no viewpoint discrimination). The law would be enforced by massive statutory damages (\$500,000 per occurrence), one-way fee shifting against the companies, and a huge federal enforcement bureaucracy empowered with broad discovery powers. This would apply both to protect employees and, critically, to protect all speech and actions of the public where the corporation, such as Twitter or Facebook, offers a supposedly neutral platform for the public to make statements. It would further apply, beyond mere speech, to forbid discrimination by all entities providing services analogous to common carriers, such as payment processors, notably PayPal, and credit card processors, whose services are now being selectively denied to suppress conservative speech. In addition, online shopping platforms such as Amazon would also be deemed common carriers, not permitted to refuse to list any non-illegal good for sale if they held themselves out as acting as a seller of general merchandise, or as acting as a platform to match third-party sellers and buyers. All this would be a good start to break the power of the corporate Left; it would be a change from conservatives' belief that private businesses should be left alone, but if they won't leave us alone, there is no reason we should leave them alone.

Identity, and its uses by the ruling class, swing next into the author's crosshairs. Carlson notes the elites don't bear the costs of the "diversity cult"; the masses do. The elites whip up fear of white supremacists as a political tool, even though the sum total of real white supremacists is trivial and they have no power. That is, the elites inflame racial passions for every group but whites, not realizing how dangerous that is. Of the obvious question, why whites shouldn't organize as a group, Carlson points out that some have asked the question, "but so far they have been self-discrediting: haters, morons, and charlatans. What happens when someone calm and articulate does it?" I am not eager to find out, but we are probably going to.

And, on feminism, Carlson notes the inconvenient truth that women are far less happy, as reported by the University of Chicago's longitudinal General Social Survey, than they were forty years ago, and that those with traditional views of sex roles are much happier, in general and in their marriages, than their harpy cousins. The latter, though, are dominant in the elites; Carlson here names and shames Sheryl Sandberg. Moreover, the elites mandate a focus on their obsessive concerns about sexual behavior, including demanding the masses endorse claims utterly divorced from reality. "Men posing as female weight lifters isn't the biggest problem Western civilization faces, but it's an ominous symptom of deeper rot. When the people in charge retreat into fantasy, and demand that everyone else join them there, society itself becomes impervious to reality." Non-elite men, meanwhile, are treated like dirt, can't find jobs, and die at ever-younger ages, and the elite doesn't care—in fact, it (mostly) discreetly celebrates. Finally, on environmentalism, elites don't care about the actual environment, cleaning up the trash, but rather about abstractions like supposed global warming, while they urge their private jets to greater speed.

It is a fast and compelling read. True, every so often Carlson missteps when talking about history. No, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the crown prince of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, assassinated in 1914, was not "a second-string Austrian nobleman." Nor is it even remotely true that "Divide and conquer. That's how the British ruled India." Equally untrue is that "The right to express your views is the final bulwark that shields the individual from the mob that disagrees with him." The right to own and carry effective military weaponry, enshrined in the Second Amendment, is that right. Speech is a distant second as a bulwark. For a very smart man, Carlson seems to avoid any but recent history, and given these examples, that is probably a wise choice for him.

OK, so far, so good. The book is worth reading—as I say, nothing original, but for those not attuned to such matters and looking for a primer, an excellent read. I eagerly looked forward to the last chapter, or rather the Epilogue, "Righting the Ship." That was a mistake. It is less than two pages. It offers bad history, suggesting that the only two alternatives are a system of oppressive rulers and oppressed serfs, and democracy. The former, supposedly, is the norm; our democracy is special, but it is under attack. Carlson therefore offers us, or rather our

ruling class, two options: suspend democracy, or “attend to the population . . . If you want to save democracy, you’ve got to practice it.” The alternative is likely civil war.

This is not helpful. Leaving aside that democracy is far from the only system that has provided a proper equilibrium between the ruling class and the masses (as Carlson himself admits when talking at length about the disappearance today of *noblesse oblige*), Carlson offers no reason at all for the ruling classes to take his advice. Why would they? Even if they accepted his analysis, which they don’t, and won’t, there is zero historical example of a late-stage ruling class reforming itself voluntarily. Carlson’s Epilogue is just so much space filling. I suspect he knows that, too, which is why his Introduction is longer and more apocalyptic—because he thinks that rupture is the future, and only hopes it will involve minimal violence. Rupture is almost certainly inevitable, but the end result is unlikely to be the saving of democracy as it exists now, since democracy is an inherently unstable system and at least partially responsible for the core fact of which Carlson complains, the rot of the ruling class. Thus, this book is a decent introduction to the topic of ruling class vice and decay, but no more.