



America's Ruling Class

Angelo M. Codevilla, a professor emeritus of international relations at Boston University, has written a sweeping essay, "America's Ruling Class — and the Perils of Revolution," that cries out for the widest possible readership. Codevilla's essay covers immense territory without losing sight of fundamentals, ties together a breathtaking number of loose ends — and although leaving out at least one important part of the story, leaves us with a realistic sense of what we are up against if we are to save this country.



Have you ever wondered why, when they had the chance, the Republicans didn't "do something" about abortion — or reverse discrimination, or the emergence of gay rights, or political correctness generally? After all, they controlled Congress from 1994 until 2006, and held the White House from 2000 to 2008. The flip side to the question: How does someone that even conservatives, if they are honest with themselves, have to admit is a man of at best marginal qualifications —George W. Bush— get anywhere near the White House? Or how do some people move effortlessly from the corporate or banking world (Dick Cheney from Halliburton or Timothy Geithner from the New York Fed), or from academia (Larry Summers and Elena Kagan from Harvard) into the upper echelons of government? Or, finally, how someone can ask Nancy Pelosi point blank where the U.S. Constitution authorizes the federal government to force members of the public to buy private health insurance or face severe penalties through the tax system, receive the cynical retort, "Are you serious?" and this does not make headlines?

Actually, marginal people have risen to the top everywhere — throughout government, in academia, in mainstream media, and elsewhere: even on the Supreme Court, as the Elena Kagan appointment testifies. The explanation seems peculiar to the way American culture has gone over the past century: political contacts, or connections, have come to matter more than ability. This begs the question: contacts with whom, and connections with what?

Codevilla's answer to that question is, at first glance, familiar, but he has his own take on it. At some point during the past century, America became an oligarchy with a ruling class that identifies more with European values than American ones. This ruling class consists of a small minority of the population, under ten percent. Its members inhabit international high finance, are recipients of TARP bailouts, and control multinational corporations that enjoy cozy relationships with the federal government that thwart competition. This *ruling class* controls all three branches of the federal government, obviously including both major parties; it also controls mainstream media and ensures that mediocre columnists such as Paul Krugman and Maureen Dowd are given prominence in the *New York Times* while thousands of *real* writers out in the hinterlands don't dare give up their day jobs.

Now, of course, one could argue that every large civilization has ended up with a ruling oligarchy, but American oligarchism has taken a unique turn. Codevilla observes: "Today's ruling class, from Boston to San Diego, was formed by an educational system that exposed them to the same ideas and gave them



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remarkably uniform guidance, as well as tastes and habits. These amount to a social canon of judgments about good and evil, complete with secular sacred history, sins (against minorities and the environment), and saints. Using the right words and avoiding the wrong ones when referring to such matters — speaking the 'in' language — serves as a badge of identity.”

In other words, there is the ruling class, which despite any number of cosmetic differences of emphasis, speaks a remarkably uniform language — and then there are the rest of us, which Codevilla calls the *country class* — not “country” in the sense of rustic, or rube, or hick (as hostile elitist readers will doubtless interpret this questionable choice of a term), but in the sense of those who identify with this country (i.e., nation) and its founding principles. They believe implicitly that America is, or was, a unique place (not an “idea”), with a unique set of values that centered around belief in God as a source of transcendent morality, the importance of a strong family unit, the idea that communities ought to be autonomous instead of ruled by bureaucrats hundreds of miles away, and in meritocracy: the idea that people should rise to their station in life based on personal merit and achievement instead of through political networks. They don't trust concentrations of wealth and power that answer to no one.

The ruling class, and that small percentage of the general population (approximately a third of the public, often working in government jobs) who identifies with it, regards the country class as “retrograde, racist, and dysfunctional unless properly constrained.” Those in the country class who trouble to think about the issue quickly realize they cannot trust the ruling class, whose members look out for their own and not for the good of the country. Members of the ruling class are sometimes, after all, blatantly dishonest in their quest for power and in the connectedness through which they protect one another and scratch one another's backs, as Codevilla notes:

“If, for example, you are Laurence Tribe in 1984, Harvard Professor of Law, leftist pillar of the establishment, you can ‘write’ your magnum opus by using the products of your student assistant, Ron Klain. A decade later, after Klain admits to having written some parts of the book, and the other parts are found to be verbatim or paraphrases of a book published in 1974, you can claim (perhaps correctly) that your plagiarism was ‘inadvertent,’ and you can count on the Law School's dean, Elena Kagan, to appoint a committee including former and future Harvard president Derek Bok that issues a secret report that ‘closes’ the incident. Incidentally, Kagan ends up a justice of the Supreme Court.”

For years now, the ruling class's shills in the media have lied about the inflation rate, speaking of a “core inflation” that excludes rising food and fuel costs — where most actual inflation takes place. The purpose of the lie is to obtain a politically acceptable number. Since 1994 it has lied about the unemployment rate, through the expedient of excluding “discouraged workers” from its official numbers. The reason is the same: An unemployment rate of 9.5 percent won't rouse the rabble, as a rate in the neighborhood of 20 percent might do.

What does the ruling class really believe? First and foremost, they believe in their own superiority and fitness to rule — to the point of willingness to impose their rulership on foreign peoples (think of our longstanding meddling in the internal affairs of Middle Eastern nations, which continues to win us enemies). They don't believe in God, and would remove every vestige of Christianity from the public square if they thought they could get away with it. What they believe is the materialistic or naturalistic corruption of modern science, which invites, at best, an ethic of hedonistic utilitarianism (all of us ought to strive to maximize pleasure and minimize pain). Given this ethic, human life loses its sense of intrinsic value; your value is what is in your pocket or bank account, where you are stationed in society, and whether someone with more money and power than you can make more money from you.



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The ruling class touts “equality” as a social value but doesn’t believe in it for a minute. After all, the ruling class see itself as superior to the country class in every respect. By “equality” the left has always meant “equality of result,” which in turn meant an ever-elusive proportional representation of, e.g., women to men in corporate boardrooms or in academic history departments, or of black to white firefighters. “Equality” in this context has long been a rationalization for ever more legal or bureaucratic interference.

Given materialism, of course, “equality” makes no sense except as propaganda. The countless ways in which we are materially unequal overwhelm any credible meaning we can attach to the term. Obviously we can no more begin at the same economic starting line than we could be born with identical physical endowments. The country class, since the founding of the country, has therefore meant by “equality” not material, but moral, equality before God. We were created in God’s image, are equally sinners in God’s eyes, and equally in need of salvation; in the civic realm, we have sought equal treatment under the law and have worked for such. Such efforts emerged in British common law and were brought to America where they were incorporated into our founding principles.

What the ruling class really believes in is power — its own. “Our ruling class’s agenda is power for itself,” observes Codevilla. “While it stakes its claim through intellectual-moral pretense, it holds power by one of the oldest and most prosaic of means: patronage and promises thereof.”

Thus it creates vast political networks and client classes: federal employees, union members, women (if they are radical feminists), minority groups (so long as they are left-liberal). Again, given a worldview rooted in materialism, power becomes the ethical bottom line; for rank-and-file members of the ruling class, money — the capacity to “earn” a comfortable living even as those in the country class struggle through the worst economy since the Great Depression — is how they keep score. Think of those statistics showing that federal employees, who mostly identify with the ruling class, now earn several times what can be earned in the private sector (especially small business) where the country class predominates.

What worries Codevilla is that the two classes are more divided and distrustful of one another than any two groups have ever been in U.S. history. The divide between the ruling regime and much of the rest of the country is wider, he believes, than that between North and South back in the mid-1800s. Lincoln, he tells us, reminded Northerners and Southerners that they “prayed to the same God. By contrast, while most Americans pray to the God ‘who created and doth sustain us,’ our ruling class prays to itself as ‘saviors of the planet’ and improvers of humanity.”

The ruling class wants power, because its members believe, with pivotal French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that individualism and human institutions have corrupted a pristine human nature of fundamental goodness. They believe, with Enlightenment humanists, that the human condition can be meliorated indefinitely — *but only if the right people are in charge*. Naturally, the ruling class believes itself to be the right people, uniquely qualified because, like Plato’s philosopher-kings, only they can see the Big Picture. Only they have what it takes to reengineer society as a whole according to the designs of technocrat advisors to career politicians. They see the country class as too ignorant, backward, short-sighted, and — above all — racist, sexist and homophobic to grasp what must be done (its members *love* that three-word combination!). Therefore the country class has to be led by the nose if possible, and forced where necessary. Example: Pelosi’s belief that the feds can coerce people into buying health insurance if they won’t do their betters’ bidding on their own.

The ruling class especially hates the fact that the country class has begun waking up — sometimes via



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the Internet, which is circumventing mainstream media; and sometimes just through the brute, in-our-faces realization that something is terribly wrong when the federal government/Federal Reserve complex can create hundreds of billions of dollars out of thin air to bail out big banks and other large corporations while they and their neighbors are being foreclosed on. The country class became furious when it learned, for example, of the bonuses paid to Goldman Sachs employees while their number couldn't find any decent work.

Unfortunately, the ruling class controls most of the wealth in the country, and is very well organized. The country class is not well organized, not experienced in political matters, largely because its members are not oriented mentally towards government. Hence their innate naïveté about how the political process in this society now works. The largely leaderless Tea Party Movement is a case in point — currently the most visible manifestation of the country class, it is ever in danger of being hijacked by the ruling class element in the Republican Party (neocons), or of breaking up due to squabbles over priorities (“should we fight abortion or focus on reining in, compelling the feds to get their financial house in order?”) One thing is for sure: The ruling class is scared to death that this movement will coalesce into a unified force. Their shills have pulled out all stops in vilifying it and politicians associated with it. The ruling class is desperate to inculcate a media image of Tea Partiers as racists, for example, or as uneducated rednecks, or as believers in “conspiracy theories,” or fanatical would-be theocrats. Taken together these are assumed to discredit it. South Carolina gubernatorial candidate Nikki Haley's level of support within the Tea Party is already being used against her.

With divisions in the country widening and increasing militancy emerging on both sides, if neither side backs down, a clash is inevitable. The trillion dollar question remains: *How does the country class take this country back from the ruling class?* Especially given the former's inexperience, lack of organization, lack of money, and lack of control over this country's dominant institutions including the two major parties. Here Codevilla's conclusion strikes me as somewhat weak. The Democratic Party being fully under the control of the ruling class, the only hope the country class has is to work through the Republican Party: “In the short term at least, the country class has no alternative but to channel its political efforts through the Republican Party...” He adds immediately, though, that “the Republican Party does not live to represent the country class. For it to do so, it would have to become principles-base, as it has not been since the mid-1860s. The few who tried to make it so the party treated as rebels: Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan.” Or think of Ron Paul, whose treatment by the Republican Party during 2007–08 was shameful. Dr. Paul's experience offers a solid argument why the country class probably cannot count on making the Republican Party its vehicle in the long run. His massively popular (within the country class, that is) effort last year to have the Federal Reserve given a full audit was thwarted. Despite country class inroads at state and local levels the national Republican Party remains the province of the Newt Gingriches and Lindsey Grahams.

Codevilla toys with the idea that the country class ought to imitate the successful methods of the ruling class in seizing control of successive components of Republican Party machinery — but inexperience would doubtless stand in its way. There is only one means I know of to defeat the ruling class, and that is to undermine its credibility to the point where critical masses of ordinary people simply stop listening to it and obeying its dictates. Some states have already begun moves in this direction. Think of the rebellion against REAL ID a few years ago; or consider the nullification movement which is increasingly active in several states (about which Thomas Woods Jr. has written [a bold and intriguing book](#)). Imagine a scenario in which, when 2014 gets here, millions of people simply refuse to purchase private health insurance even when the federal government commands them to, brushes off federal “assistance”



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knowing it will come with strings attached, and then refuses to kowtow to IRS penalties. The federal government could conceivably send troops into particularly recalcitrant areas, but under such a scenario, perhaps prompted by years of economic hardship, this could well strengthen the country class's resolve. If efforts at brute force failed, the powers standing behind them would simply lose credibility.

The ruling class will have been damaged by its utter failure to revive the struggling economy — by the growing self-evidence of its incompetence in the face of economic reality, which dictates that in the last analysis no one, no matter how wealthy or powerful, can create genuine prosperity through a debt-based fiat money system which eventually precipitates inflation, crisis and dysfunction.

There is much more to be said about this highly compelling essay, both in support and in occasional criticism: It has long been one of my pet peeves that an obviously knowledgeable writer can discuss the rise to dominance of this society's ruling class without a mention of the [Fabian Society](#), for example. The closest Codevilla comes is his realization that the social engineering mindset of the ruling class can be traced at least to the Fabian-led Progressive era and, in particular, to the Woodrow Wilson administration. Fabian methods of penetration and permeation merit sustained attention.

What is more likely, though, is that in the long run the diminished standard of living of millions of ordinary people in an economic system that simply refuses to "recover" outside of Wall Street and government numbers is going to be the ruling class's downfall. People are going to demand jobs, and when the system cannot supply them, eventually — one can hope — a critical mass will begin to take matters into their own hands, dealing with one another in cash or in precious metals outside the system of business licenses and tax ID numbers if necessary. I know of one couple, both of them long-term unemployed, who have begun working off the books landscaping people's property. If such trends catch on through word of mouth, a silent economic rebellion against the ruling class that amounts to more than Tea Party meetings and futile gestures within the Republican Party will have begun.

Photo: Banker and industrialist J.P. Morgan talks things over with Thomas W. Lamont, a partner in his banking house, and counsel John W. Davis, just before the Senate Banking Committee investigation opens into the affairs of the House of Morgan, in Washington, May 1933: AP Images



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