



The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy

By Christopher Lasch

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"[A] passionate, compelling, and disturbing argument that the ills of democracy in the United States today arise from the default of its elites."
?John Gray, *New York Times Book Review* (front-page review)

In a front-page review in the *Washington Post Book World*, John Judis wrote: "Political analysts have been poring over exit polls and precinct-level votes to gauge the meaning of last November's election, but they would probably better employ their time reading the late Christopher Lasch's book." And in the *National Review*, Robert Bork says *The Revolt of the Elites* "ranges provocatively [and] insightfully."

Controversy has raged around Lasch's targeted attack on the elites, their loss of moral values, and their abandonment of the middle class and poor, for he sets up the media and educational institutions as a large source of the problem. In this spirited work, Lasch calls out for a return to community, schools that teach history not self-esteem, and a return to morality and even the teachings of religion. He does this in a nonpartisan manner, looking to the lessons of American history, and castigating those in power for the ever-widening gap between the economic classes, which has created a crisis in American society. *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* is riveting social commentary.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Cultural critic Lasch, who passed away before this book was published, argues that American democracy is withering in the hands of professional and managerial elites who lack a sense of social and civic values.

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From Library Journal

If you don't think that democracies are being threatened from without by benevolent dictatorships, then maybe you'll agree that they are being threatened from within by self-serving elites. From the author of the best-selling *The Culture of Narcissism* (LJ 4/15/78), who completed this work shortly before his death.

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From Booklist

Best known as the author of the surprise "intellectual" best-seller *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), cultural critic Lasch died last February with the uncertain fate of American democracy much on his mind. In his final book, he locates the greatest threat to democracy in the continuing rise to political and economic power of rootless managerial and professional elites "who have lost faith in the values, or what remains of them, of the West." Lasch sees these elites driving the U.S. "in the direction of a two-class society in which the favored few monopolize the advantages of money, education, and power." He traces the intellectual history that led to the emergence of both the elites themselves and the cultural dilemmas that express the conflict between their attitudes and those of their underlings--ordinary U.S. citizens--in topical chapters on such matters as the concept of social mobility (it will surprise many to learn how recent this idea is), the agreement and disagreement between communitarianism and populism, the decline of civic virtue, the suppression of argument in public affairs, and the abolition of shame as a social psychological tool. These may seem dauntingly weighty matters for enjoyable reading, but Lasch is so pithy and cogent that he produces the kind of book that makes you want to corner friends and read it aloud to them. In discussing the issues, however, Lasch proffers no easy ways out. If he sees any salvation from the withering away of democracy and the tyranny of elite dominance, it lies precisely in salvation. That is, it lies in religious faith--not the childlike reliance upon a benevolent great father that Freud called an illusion but the assertion of "the goodness of being in the face of suffering and evil" and the practice of constant moral criticism and self-criticism in order to dispel the great illusion of modernity and its elites--the illusion of mastery, the conceit that we are the masters of our fate. *Ray Olson*

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