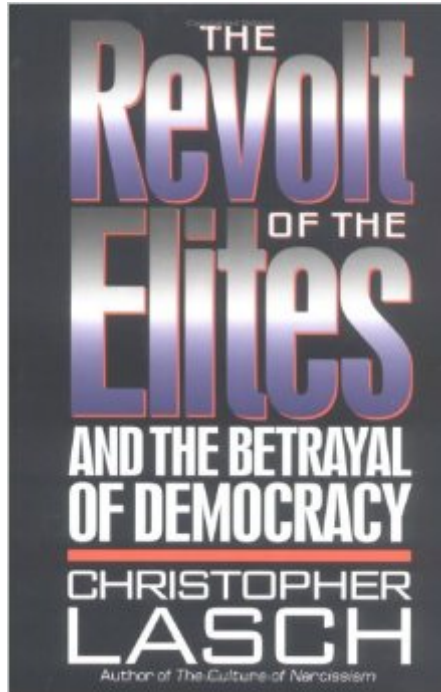


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The Revolt Of The Elites: And The Betrayal Of Democracy



Synopsis

In this challenging work, Christopher Lasch makes his most accessible critique yet of what is wrong with the values and beliefs of America's professional and managerial elites. The distinguished historian argues that democracy today is threatened not by the masses, as Jose Ortega y Gasset (*The Revolt of the Masses*) had said, but by the elites. These elites - mobile and increasingly global in outlook - refuse to accept limits or ties to nation and place. Lasch contends that, as they isolate themselves in their networks and enclaves, they abandon the middle class, divide the nation, and betray the idea of a democracy for all America's citizens. The book is historical writing at its best, using the past to reveal the roots of our current dilemma. The author traces how meritocracy - selective elevation into the elite - gradually replaced the original American democratic ideal of competence and respect for every man. Among other cultural trends, he trenchantly criticizes the vogue for self-esteem over achievement as a false remedy for deeper social problems, and attacks the superior pseudoradicalism of the academic left. Brilliantly he reveals why it is no wonder that Americans are apathetic about their common culture and see no point in arguing politics or voting. In a powerful final section Lasch traces the spiritual crisis of democracy. The elites, having jettisoned the moral and ethical guidelines provided by religion, cling to the belief that through science they can master their fates and escape mortal limits. In pursuit of this illusion they have become infatuated with the global economy. Their revolt, the author warns, is diminishing what is worthwhile about American life. This volume, completed just before the author's death, continues in his tradition of vigorous and original thought and should stir soul-searching among readers concerned about the future of America and its democracy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In "the Revolt of the Elites" Christopher Lasch powerfully and persuasively contends that the values and attitudes of professional and managerial elites and those of the working classes have dramatically diverged. Although the claim is controverted, many of us on the right (especially social conservatives) agree with the quasi-populist/communitarian notion that democracy works best when all members of society can participate in a world of upward mobility and of achievable status. In such a world, members of society will perceive themselves as belonging to the same team and care about ensuring that that team succeeds. But how can society achieve this sort of mutual interdependence if its members are not part of a community of shared values? As Christopher Lasch explains: "[T]he new elites, the professional classes in particular, regard the masses with mingled scorn and apprehension." For too many of these elites, the values of "Middle America" - a/k/a "fly-over country" - are mindless patriotism, religious fundamentalism, racism, homophobia, and retrograde views of women. "Middle Americans, as they appear to the makers of educated opinion, are hopelessly shabby, unfashionable, and provincial, ill informed about changes in taste or intellectual trends, addicted to trashy novels of romance and adventure, and stupefied by prolonged exposure to television. They are at once absurd and vaguely menacing." (28) The tension between elite and non-elite attitudes is most pronounced with respect to religious belief.

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