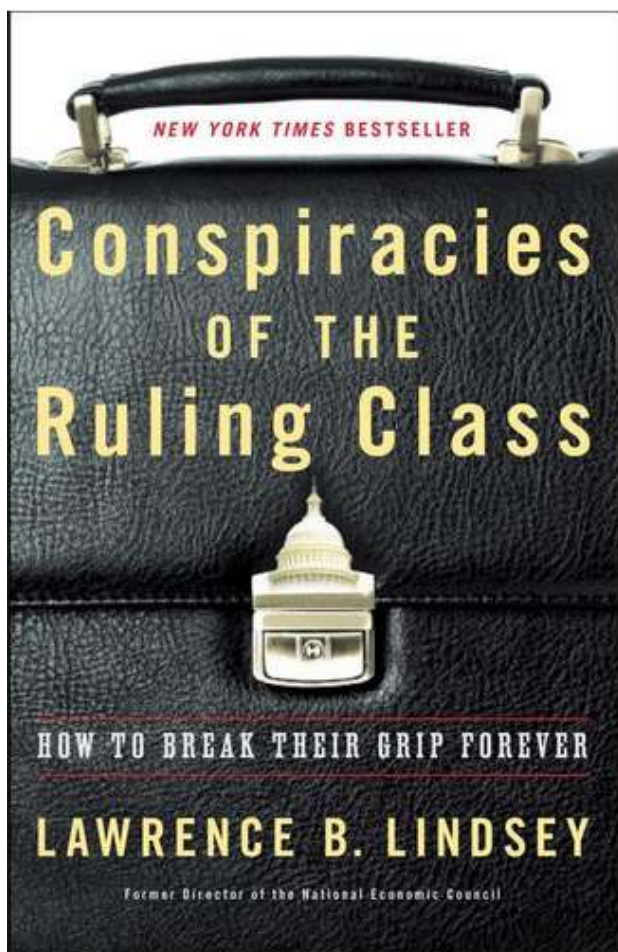


Author turns from gloom to optimism

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*“Conspiracies of the Ruling Class: How to Break Their Grip Forever” by Lawrence B. Lindsey.
New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017, 288 pages, \$17.*



“The American public is angry,” Lawrence B. Lindsey writes near the beginning of “Conspiracies of the Ruling Class: How to Break Their Grip Forever,” his new treatise on what’s wrong with the United States and how to fix it. “They feel the government has become too intrusive, that government has positioned itself as a true ‘nanny state’ and has tried to make itself the source of everything people need, from food, to housing, to health care, to education, to happiness.”

“The public has a right to feel this way,” he continues. “We have been badly governed, particularly in the last quarter century, and the trend is one that is spiraling downward at an accelerating rate. The government has been expanding exponentially and has become bloated, unaccountable, out of touch, and replete with fraud, waste and abuse.”

As I read Lindsey’s thoughtful and compelling indictment of our elected leaders, it occurred to me that his underlying argument does not seem to be particularly partisan. His words tend to ring true regardless of whether the reader is liberal or conservative, Republican or Democrat. Indeed, it

is difficult to argue against many of his talking points. Most Americans have a deep sense that something is fundamentally wrong with our country and even though the root causes of this feeling may vary in explanation and assignment of blame, it is challenging to dismiss the essence of the overall assessment. This is also one of those books you need to read from beginning to end in order to grasp the full significance of the portrait Lindsey is meticulously constructing. He takes us on a journey that begins in the distant past and culminates with today’s headlines (or “breaking news” to use a more contemporary reference).

“Conspiracies” is exceptionally well-researched, with 19 pages of source notes at the conclusion of the 17 chapters that comprise the main text. The narrative is divided into three parts: “The Greatest Threat to Liberty,” which consists of the first six chapters; “Mismanagement of Government by a Self-Interested Ruling Class,” comprising the next six chapters; and “Securing Our Liberty Once Again,” which is made up of the final five chapters. The literary style is warm and fluid, with one segment flowing seamlessly into the following in a progression that both illuminates as well as

reinforces the author's primary thesis. As the reader moves from one meticulously-crafted chapter to the next, the validity of Lindsey's overarching appraisal of the dire straits characterizing our present situation becomes self-evident.

"Critics of credentialism stress that its real purpose is to serve members of the profession and not the public – in this case, students and their families," Lindsey explains in "The Ruling Class Have Earned an F in Education," the ninth chapter and one of my personal favorites, especially given my chosen vocation. "Credentialism serves to falsely heighten the social status of an occupation by making it appear exclusive. The 19th century German political scientist Max Weber called this 'social closure,' because it restricted access to the resources and opportunities in a field to a small number of people willing to jump through the necessary hoops. Conveniently for the ruling class, this means that those individuals most likely to disagree with their views have a difficult time entering the teaching profession."

The unmistakable point Lindsey is making here relates to the self-serving nature of many professions – a nature in which ideology and adherence to tradition and custom is seen as more credible than actual performance. In truth, and as the author so eloquently observes, monopolies are antithetical to continuous improvement and the development and pursuit of ever higher standards of practice. Nowhere is this kind of self-replicating power structure more on display than with our modern-day political hierarchy. More and more, the goal seems to be to maintain the status quo, regardless of whether the people in power have the best interests of those they were elected to serve at heart. And on this point, Lindsey is crystal clear – most of our elected representatives have only one real mission in their lives and careers: to occupy their positions as long as possible.

Lindsey's long tenure in the political arena reaches back to the early 1980s. He was a senior staff economist for tax policy for President Ronald Reagan's Council of Economic Advisors. He subsequently served President George H.W. Bush as a special assistant for domestic economic policy before becoming President George W. Bush's director of the National Economic Council. His undergraduate degree is from Bowdoin College and his master's and doctorate are from Harvard. The author's resume also includes service as a governor of the Federal Reserve System, a fellowship at the Manhattan Institute and a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. Since 2003, he has been chief executive officer of the Lindsey Group, a global consulting firm. His previous books include "Economic Puppetmasters: Lessons from the Halls of Power," "The Growth Experiment Revisited: Why Lower, Simpler Taxes Really Are America's Best Hope for Recovery" and "What a President Should Know: An Insider's View on How to Succeed in the Oval Office."

In the final analysis, Lindsey is guardedly optimistic when it comes to our prospects moving forward (no small feat given the gloomy picture he presents for the first two-thirds of the book). But as he reiterates in more than one passage, the window for replacing the ruling class with real leaders is only partially open and we need to take decisive action before it is too late.

"We, not the ruling class, have the moral high ground," he asserts near the end of "America Is a Cause, Not Just a Country," the concluding chapter. "We need to go forth believing in ourselves and our cause because we have truth on our side. Reminding the world of that fact is going to be the key to permanently breaking the grip of the ruling class on the lever of power."

I could not have said it better myself. "Conspiracies" is well worth the time it takes to read and reflect upon the stark warning Lindsey articulates so well. I recommend this one highly.

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