

How Tucker Carlson became the voice of White grievance

By [Michael Kranish](#)

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Tucker Carlson huddled in a low-ceilinged dungeon that had served as a holding pen for Africans bound for enslavement in the United States. It was a July day in 2003 in Ghana, and Carlson stood alongside some of America’s most prominent civil rights leaders.

The conservative commentator, who at the time co-hosted the CNN show “Crossfire,” walked through the memorial, where a guide told how the shackled Africans who did not perish during the voyage were sold as human chattel in America.

The civil rights leaders prayed, cried and sang “We Shall Overcome.” They peered toward the sea from the Door of No Return. But Carlson seemed strangely detached, according to two of the civil rights leaders who were present.

“When we got to the castle and the dungeon, it had an emotional impact on all of us, as Africans in America,” said the Rev. Albert Sampson, a former associate of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Then there was what he called “the tragedy of Carlson.”

“He did not cry,” Sampson told The Washington Post in his first interview about the encounter. “He did not have any intellectual response. He didn’t give any verbal response. It was a total detachment from the reality of the event.”

When Carlson wrote an account of the trip several months later, he sounded derisive, describing how he thought a teary-eyed Sampson “was going to bite me” but instead put his arms on Carlson and said with a smile, “I love you, man.”

“Sampson was trying to make me feel guilty,” Carlson wrote in an account for Esquire. “It wasn’t obvious to me at the time. The idea that I’d be responsible for the sins (or, for that matter, share in the glory of the accomplishments) of dead people who happened to share my skin tone has always confused me. Racial solidarity wasn’t a working concept in my southern-California hometown.”

At the time, Carlson's words were easily forgotten, mere musings from a Washington pundit in his mid-30s with a bow tie and a limited following beyond daytime cable television. His seeming dismissiveness of the emotion of the moment set him apart from many fellow conservatives, who were seeking inroads with Black religious leaders and looking to broaden the appeal of the Republican Party in part by acknowledging the evils of racism. The same month that Carlson flew to Africa, President George W. Bush toured Gorée Island in Senegal, from which generations of enslaved people were shipped to the United States, and decried slavery as "one of the greatest crimes of history."

But Carlson's assessment of his trip to Ghana nearly two decades ago offered an early sign of sentiments that he had been expressing for years — and that would ultimately help transform him into the preeminent voice of angry White America. It is that role that Carlson, 52, now plays every weeknight from his prime-time perch on Fox News.

This account of Carlson's years-long focus on racial grievance, and his rise to the top of the conservative media ecosystem, is based on a review of his books, broadcasts and writings over nearly three decades, as well as interviews with current and former associates, subjects of his on-air attacks and others who have observed his career.

What emerges is a portrait of an ambitious television personality who came of age in privilege — having grown up in an upper-class enclave and attended private schools — but who, by his own telling, is a victim.

Carlson, in his writings and commentaries, has described resentment toward liberals as far back as the first grade. He has frequently ridiculed the notion that America should celebrate diversity and has lashed out repeatedly at the idea that he, as a White person, bears any responsibility for racism against Black people.

Several people who have interacted with him over the years say they don't know what he really believes, but they say they are increasingly troubled by his influence as what one of his former mentors described as a "very talented demagogue."

Two of the leading conservative activists battling critical race theory, an academic construct in which systemic racism is studied, credit him with the rapid rise of their movement, while Black scholars he frequently targets say he mischaracterizes and manipulates their work to suit his agenda.

Carlson's rise has, not coincidentally, come about during a time of extraordinary political upheaval. His audience soared as Donald Trump was remaking the Republican Party around "America first" appeals that embraced further restrictions on migration and a turn away from America's tradition as a land of immigrants. And the show thrived as the murder of George Floyd triggered a visceral debate over systemic racism, and after a pro-Trump mob stormed the

the murder of George Floyd triggered a visceral debate over systemic racism, and after a pro-Trump mob stormed the U.S. Capitol.

Night after night, Carlson stokes resentment among his audience of nearly 3 million — which gave him the highest-rated cable news show in the most recent quarter — and the millions more who absorb his viral outbursts on social media. He blasts liberals, throttles Republican leaders whom he sees as insufficiently devoted to battling the “woke” left, and generally sets the parameters for the far-right anti-elitism that defines today’s GOP.

Carlson has used his influence to spread unfounded claims that have been embraced by many Republican leaders. He has echoed Trump’s falsehood that the election was “rigged.” He promoted the baseless notion that FBI agents were behind the storming of the Capitol. And although he has described himself as “pretty pro-vaccine,” Carlson has questioned the efficacy of vaccination against the coronavirus, saying, “maybe it doesn’t work and they’re simply not telling you that” — leading President Biden’s chief medical adviser Anthony S. Fauci to rebut his “crazy conspiracy theory.”

But on many nights, it is Carlson’s White grievance that dominates the show.

He has questioned whether Floyd’s death was caused by a police officer and says Black Lives Matter is “poison” for the country. He has promoted a claim, embraced by white nationalists, that “the Democratic Party is trying to replace the current electorate [with] more obedient voters from the Third World.”

He has accused Boston University Professor Ibram X. Kendi, author of “[How to Be an Antiracist](#),” of promoting racism. He called a top military leader a “pig” for saying he wanted to understand the role racism played in the Capitol attack. And he has said Black people and their White supporters are on a mission to spread “race hate,” devoting many of his segments over the past year to bashing the ideas behind critical race theory.

“He has positioned himself as the presentable face of White grievance,” said Joseph M. Azam, who resigned in late 2017 as a senior vice president of News Corp., which, like Fox, was controlled by the Murdoch family, because he objected to the company’s tolerance for what he felt were Carlson’s hateful views and other commentary. “He’s on mainstream media, he’s dressed in a suit, he speaks in a way that people see as eloquent and informed, and he’s super confident in what he’s saying.”

While Carlson has denied political aspirations, some in the party have speculated that he might one day use his platform to run for president, just as Trump used his show “The Apprentice” to promote himself in a way that eventually landed him in the White House. Regardless, critics and allies alike agree that after Trump’s defeat and the death of conservative talk-radio icon Rush Limbaugh, Carlson now occupies a singular role in the GOP information universe.

Carlson “has the rapt attention of every conservative policymaker and millions of conservative voters,” Christopher Rufo, a conservative researcher whose criticism of critical race theory during a September 2020 appearance on Carlson’s show prompted Trump to sign an executive order restricting diversity training in federal agencies, told The Post in an email exchange. “The reality is that ‘Tucker Carlson Tonight’ is the highest-rated show in cable news and, to a large extent, Tucker frames the narrative for conservative politics. Tucker doesn’t react to the news; he creates the news.”

Carlson did not grant an interview for this story. After The Post posed questions to Fox News last week and requested time with Carlson, a Post reporter received a text message over the weekend from a number listed in a phone records database under Carlson’s name saying, “It’s Tucker Carlson. I’d love to add comment to your piece. Let me know when you have a minute.”

Carlson did not respond to multiple attempts to reach him again. Fox News later sent a written statement from Carlson in which he said: “You want to make me shut up, so you call me a racist. I’ve seen it before.”

Fox News also released a statement to The Post standing by its star: “Tucker Carlson is an important voice in America which deeply resonates with millions of viewers via our powerful primetime lineup and two in-depth shows on FOX Nation — we fully support him.”

And the network pointed to an August 2020 [article in Variety](#) in which Carlson defends his views on race.

“I’m sure that people who hate my politics will try to discredit them by calling me names, but there is no show that I’m aware of that has made a stronger case for a color-blind meritocracy than ours has,” Carlson told the publication. “I believe that all American citizens, regardless of how they were born, should be treated equally under the law. As I say on a nightly basis, we should not impugn people for things they cannot control, for their immutable characteristics. That is an argument against racism.”

As Carlson has told it, he has spent much of his career reporting that Black people seek to blame Whites for everything and have an unfair advantage, claims that can feed into the narrative of White rage.

“That is something that I have covered up close and personal my entire adult life,” Carlson said in a 2008 [radio interview](#). “The Congressional Black Caucus exists to blame the White man for everything, and I’m happy to say that in public because it’s true.” He said a program designed to help African Americans was akin to Jim Crow laws. “Just because of the color of his skin, he gets an advantage over you.”

An elite upbringing

Carlson's origin story, as he told it in his 2018 book "Ship of Fools," began when he was a mere 7 years old.

His mother had left the family. He was raised in La Jolla, in San Diego, by his wealthy father, Richard Carlson, a prominent Republican who worked in the Reagan administration, oversaw Voice of America and married an heiress to the Swanson frozen food family. From the door of his childhood home, Tucker Carlson overlooked La Jolla Beach and Tennis Club, in one of the country's most expensive communities.

He attended the elite La Jolla Country Day School, where a woman entered his life whom he grew to detest. It was his first-grade teacher, whom he referred to in his book as Mrs. Raymond. He caricatured her as "a parody of earth-mother liberalism" who "wore long Indian-print skirts. . . . She had little interest in conventional academic topics, like reading and penmanship." He recalled her sobbing theatrically at her desk, saying, "The world is so unfair! You don't know that yet. But you'll find out!"

Carlson said he just wanted liberals to "stop blubbering and teach us to read. . . . Mrs. Raymond never did teach us; my father had to hire a tutor to get me through phonics." Thus, Carlson says, he began his sojourn as a conservative thinker, questioning the liberals who he said were all around him, exemplified by his first-grade teacher.

Which is all rather shocking to Marianna Raymond, 77, who remembers Carlson as "very precious and very, very polite and sweet," and said she had no idea, until contacted recently by a Washington Post reporter, that her former student had ridiculed her as a key to understanding him.

Raymond said in an interview that she never sobbed at her desk, didn't wear an Indian skirt and didn't advocate her political views. She said that not only did she teach Carlson reading at La Jolla Country Day School — with a student body that was “very affluent and White” — but that she also was then hired to tutor him at his home.

“Oh my God,” she said, when informed of Carlson's attack against her. “That is the most embellished, crazy thing I ever heard.”

Carlson headed off at age 14 to St. George's School in Rhode Island, where he became known for challenging people to political debates, and then attended Trinity College in Connecticut. He applied to work for the CIA, which he has said rejected him, and got a job working for the conservative Heritage Foundation.

In 1995, Carlson learned Rupert Murdoch was launching a conservative magazine to be called the Weekly Standard. Carlson convinced editor Bill Kristol to hire him. He soon came to the attention of television producers as well.

One of Carlson's first appearances came in 1995 on “CBS This Morning,” where he took on race relations. There were two Americas, Carlson said, because it was “undeniably clear that White and Black Americans see things entirely differently, at least on some questions.”

Carlson said that the country had been having “an intense, loud and sometimes violent conversation about race since the nation began. So I'm not certain it's a question of talking more about race. It's a question of talking more clearly.” He then proposed that there be “less conversation about race.”

One of Carlson's most striking but little-remembered attacks around that time occurred against Trump.

It happened during a November 1999 exchange with another writer on the website about the prospect of Trump running for president on a Reform Party ticket.

“You’ve said it all: He is the single most repulsive person on the planet. . . . That said, I still plan to write about him some time. I don’t think I’ll be able to help it. Horrible as he is (or perhaps because he is so horrible), Trump is interesting, or at least more so than most candidates.” Carlson wrote that Trump and the Reform Party reflected the fact “that ideology as a force in national elections is dead,” before correcting himself to say, “They’re just a bunch of wackos.”

A trip to Africa

Around the time Carlson made his disparaging remarks about Trump, he left the Weekly Standard and became a television host, leading him to write a 2003 book, “Politicians, Partisans, and Parasites,” attacking those on the extremes who followed a party line.

Carlson accepted an invitation from the Rev. Al Sharpton for the 2003 visit to Africa, part of a group that included the philosopher Cornel West and the Rev. Sampson. The trip was billed as an effort to negotiate a peace between warring factions in Liberia, and it included a pilgrimage to sites in Ghana with deep connections to Black history in the United States.

One day, they visited the home of W.E.B. Du Bois, the co-founder of the NAACP who wrote “The Souls of Black Folk” and who lived his final years in Ghana. Then they went to Elmina Castle, where up to 30,000 enslaved Africans each year spent their final moments in a dungeon before being herded onto ships.

When Carlson later wrote about the trip for Esquire, the magazine’s headline said the Black leaders “took the whitest man in America with them.”

Carlson devoted much of the article to his contention that Sampson was trying to make him feel responsible for Whites who enslaved Black people. Carlson, in a paraphrase, wrote that Sampson said that “if you’re looking for a single cause of all the world’s problems . . . look no further than the white race.” He then wrote that Sampson “glanced up and saw me, the physical embodiment of eons of injustice and oppression.”

Carlson wrote that he could barely contain his anger: “I longed for the cathartic release that would come from leaping across the table and smashing his nose.”

Sampson, now 82, said in the interview that he never said the words Carlson attributed to him. “No,” Sampson said. “The other side of it is, why didn’t he embrace the words when I said, ‘I love you.’ He would rather solve a problem with violence than to embrace a man who has given his life to teaching nonviolence.”

Sampson also specifically denied Carlson’s contention that he suggested that Carlson, as a White man, had some responsibility for slavery or any other sins. “Not at all. He wasn’t there in the 1800s,” Sampson said. The Carlson television viewers see today, Sampson said, is an extension of the person he encountered in Ghana. Carlson was, and continues to be, “a proponent of detachment from the pain and suffering of our people,” Sampson said.

Sharpton said he thought at the time that Carlson was conservative, “but it was none of the hostility and none of

depicting us as extremist or racist.” Like Sampson, Sharpton recalled that Carlson seemed impassive about the visit to the dungeon, but the two initially remained friendly. After the trip, Carlson gave Sharpton informal advice about attracting working-class White voters during Sharpton’s 2004 presidential campaign and brought one of his children to hear him preach, Sharpton said. The two appeared together on cable news shows.

Over the years, Carlson’s rhetoric about race hardened, and he has ridiculed Sharpton, calling him a “race pimp.” Sharpton said Carlson “changed,” and that he can only wonder if Carlson “hid” his feelings before or is now playing for ratings.

Foreshadowing Trump

Around the time of the Africa trip, the “Crossfire” show on which Carlson argued a Republican point of view against Democrat Paul Begala came under criticism for dividing the country. Jon Stewart, then the anchor of Comedy Central’s “Daily Show,” famously appeared on the show and urged Carlson and Begala to stop their bickering, which he said was “hurting America. . . . You’re doing theater when you should be doing debate.”

Three months later, CNN’s chief executive said he sympathized with Stewart’s complaint, regretted the partisan tone of the network’s shows and announced he was canceling “Crossfire” and not renewing Carlson’s contract. Carlson said at the time that he had already decided to resign from the show “because I didn’t like the partisanship.” He took a job at MSNBC, but his show, the low-rated “Tucker,” was eventually canceled.

Carlson also spent many hours around that time cataloguing his grievances, calling in to a shock-jock radio host, Bubba the Love Sponge. Carlson belittled Iraqis as “semiliterate primitive monkeys.” He said that people trying to immigrate to the United States “ought to have something to offer. Be hot, be really smart, you know what I mean?”

Carlson also complained about feminists. “I don’t like the feminist crap,” Carlson said, on a recording later made public by the liberal group Media Matters for America. “I hate that and that’s one of the reasons I despise the Democrats because they’re always rolling that crap out. ‘Well, you don’t like him because he’s Black. You don’t like her because she’s a woman.’ Oh, shut the f--- up.”

On one Bubba show, on March 21, 2006, Carlson seemed to foreshadow Trump’s candidacy. He said that Republicans could no longer claim to be the party of fiscal restraint, so the only way a party member could be elected president was to villainize Muslims. “Who’s going to protect the country against, you know, the Muslim lunatics who want to hurt us — is the only thing the Republicans have left.”

Carlson said a successful candidate would have to say, in effect, “Look, I’m a bigot. OK. I’m a bigot. I don’t like Islamic extremists. Like if you are really heavily into Islam — I’m sorry, I just don’t — I don’t care for you that much. And I don’t care what that sounds like, you can call me a racist, you can call me whatever the f--- you want.” He said, “I’d vote for you if you said that. And I think that most Americans would.”

A radio co-host then said: “So, basically we need a racist president. ‘We need to get these Mexicans out of here, and the Islam. Let’s kill all the Muslims.’ ”

Carlson responded: “I think that you’re onto something. I mean, not someone who’s like a Klansman or anything, but someone who’s totally unbound by [politically correct] rules, who will just say whatever the hell he wants. . . . That guy is going to get elected.”

A News Corp. executive resigns

Carlson began working as a contributor for Fox News in 2009, shortly before he co-founded the conservative website the Daily Caller, and he went on to appear on a variety of shows before getting his eponymous program in November 2016, just after Trump's election.

Carlson's show became the most-watched news program on cable television, coinciding with his jeremiads against immigrants and his focus on other issues that appealed to the Trump base.

In June 2017, Carlson tweeted: “#Tucker: Why does America benefit from having tons of people from failing countries come here? @FoxNews”

Azam, who at the time was a News Corp. senior vice president, decided he could not remain silent. A native of Afghanistan who immigrated to the United States with his refugee family when he was about a year old, he was the embodiment of an immigration success story.

Azam retweeted Carlson's insult with this comeback: “If you come upstairs to where all the executives who run your company sit and find me I can tell you, Tucker. #Afghanistan.”

Azam oversaw ethics and compliance at the company's corporate headquarters and properties including the Wall Street Journal; he did not work in the Fox News entity where Carlson was employed. He said he thought to himself: “We're a media company. We believe in the First Amendment rights. So I'm going to respond to him.” Azam said his boss cautioned him to tread carefully, but he heard little else. “I feel like that [tweet] is more than anybody at Fox had ever said publicly,” Azam said in an interview.

Azam said he decided to leave News Corp. about six months later because he could no longer tolerate what he considered the hatred and bigotry from Carlson and other hosts. He has since discussed his initial concerns during a 2019 [NPR interview](#), and now says his worst fears about the impact of Carlson's rhetoric have been realized.

“I think what Tucker does that is so corrosive is he makes people think that he's just putting the question out there,” Azam said, adding later: “And that's a very effective way of communicating with a segment of the population that doesn't know what to think, but doesn't want to be told what to think.”

Azam said Carlson has become so financially important to Fox News that executives are unwilling to reprimand him.

“There are many people across that company who fancy themselves moderates, progressives, sensible Republicans, certainly not racists, conspiracy theorists,” Azam said. “They’re making millions and millions of dollars a year and that income is leading them to censor themselves within the company and treat this stuff as just collateral damage.”

Indeed, when Carlson was sued for slander by former Playboy model Karen McDougal — who said he falsely claimed in December 2018 that she had sought to extort Trump over an alleged affair — his lawyers did not argue that he had told the truth.

Instead, the lawyers said Carlson’s words were “hyperbolic” and that the segment was not “a natural setting in which a reasonable viewer would conclude that he is hearing actual facts.” A judge dismissed the case. (Trump denied he had an affair with McDougal, who had sold her story for \$150,000 to the National Enquirer, which did not publish it under what is called “catch and kill.”)

“The judge ruling the way she did was an open door for everybody to keep falsifying things, exaggerating things, throwing things out there, even though they know it’s not the truth,” McDougal told The Post.

Several days after Carlson made his claims about McDougal, he said the country’s leaders were demanding that poor immigrants be allowed into the United States even if they had no requisite job skills. “We have a moral obligation to admit the world’s poor, they tell us, even if it makes our own country poorer and dirtier and more divided. Immigration is a form of atonement,” Carlson said.

In the outcry that followed, at least 26 advertisers stopped sponsoring his show, according to a tally at the time by the Hollywood Reporter.

Fox News stood by him, accusing “left wing advocacy groups” of trying to “stifle free speech.” The network said in a statement to The Post that the show remains popular with sponsors: “During the last quarter of this year, ‘Tucker Carlson Tonight’ had 150 different advertisers, with national advertisers coming from 12 different categories.”

The show’s most frequent advertiser is MyPillow, which accounted for 19.4 percent of advertising minutes this year aside from Fox promotions, according to TV ad measurement company iSpot.tv. MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell, who continues to push an effort supporting the baseless claim that Trump won the election, said in an interview that his ad placement has nothing to do with Carlson’s show. He said he only runs ads where they are effective, adding, “I don’t watch anything on Fox” because “they aren’t reporting the news about election fraud.”

Attacking critical race theory

As Carlson's influence grows, his racial views are gaining more notice.

In a chapter of "Ship of Fools" titled "The Diversity Diversion," Carlson maintained that White men are accused of causing "poor nutrition, asthma, and broken families in black neighborhoods," of destroying "entire cities very few of them have ever been to," and "in their spare time exacerbat[ing] global warming."

Carlson catalogued what he called a series of efforts by Black people to blame Whites for their economic and social conditions. He insisted that "elites no longer oppose segregation. They no longer insist on treating all races equally. Many instead call for segregation."

As Carlson told it: "You no longer hear much from our leaders about the importance of racial harmony. Almost nobody claims we're really all the same beneath the skin. The emphasis is on our differences. That's the essence of the diversity agenda." He wrote that "the narrative was clear: buried in the heart of every white person is a vial of deadly poison called racism. There is no remedy for this. Whites are born with hate built in."

Carlson, who grew up about 30 miles from the Mexican border, also described in his book his own discomfort with how the country was changing.

"If you grew up in America, suddenly nothing looks the same," he wrote. "Your neighbors are different. So is the landscape and the customs and very often the languages you hear on the street. You may not recognize your hometown. Human beings aren't wired for that. They can't digest change at this pace."

Then Carlson was even more direct. He objected to the idea that "we must celebrate the fact that a nation that was overwhelmingly European, Christian, and English-speaking fifty years ago" is now a mix of cultures.

He rejected the idea that diversity is to be valued, saying that "mass immigration" has destabilized the country. While such views are similar to those expressed by white supremacists, he said it was unfair that expressing them meant "you'll be shouted down as a bigot, as if demanding representation in a democracy were immoral."

Carlson went on to attack some of the leading Black authors on the subject in a highly personal way.

One of his targets was Ta-Nehisi Coates, whose 2015 book, “Between the World and Me,” written as a letter to his teenage son about how to navigate a world full of racial injustice, won the National Book Award and was a Pulitzer Prize finalist. Carlson said it was “intellectually flabby, relentlessly shallow and bigoted.” Coates declined to comment.

One of those whom Carlson put on the cover of “Ship of Fools” was Kristol, his former editor at the Weekly Standard.

Two decades earlier, Carlson said on C-SPAN that he worked “happily” for Kristol. But in the book, Carlson eviscerated his former mentor, saying Kristol had assigned him to do “hit pieces” on conservative commentator Pat Buchanan, who had written scorchingly about the impact of illegal immigration on American culture. Carlson said in his book that “a lot of what Buchanan predicted turned out to be true,” and that he now had adopted some of Buchanan’s views. Buchanan could not be reached for comment.

Kristol said in an interview that he has long been concerned that Carlson was obsessed with “nativism, the quasi-racism, the mean-spiritedness. The combination of those things, I think it’s just bad. It’s divisive.”

Carlson “always had great ambitions to do TV,” Kristol said. “He always wanted to be famous.” Now he has used that fame, Kristol said, to fan the “flames of resentment and hatred. It’s really kind of close to inciting hatred of other Americans at this point. This is why he is so dangerous, in my opinion. He’s a very talented television personality, and he’s a very talented demagogue.”

Claims FBI role in insurrection

Time and again, Carlson looks at an issue and views it through a racial lens.

On Jan. 5, Carlson ridiculed Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) for saying last year that the officers involved in Floyd's death "look pretty darn guilty." McConnell had expressed empathy for Black Americans, saying that for millions of people, the killing of Floyd and another victim of police violence "do not appear as isolated incidents, but as the latest disturbing chapters in our long, unfinished American struggle to ensure that equal justice under law is not conditional on the color of one's skin."

Carlson, embracing Trump's election claims, said McConnell "didn't bother holding hearings on election integrity or mail-in balloting."

"Instead McConnell was busy attacking police officers and eulogizing George Floyd," Carlson said. "Remember him? Saint George, the convicted violent felon who apparently died of a drug O.D., a fentanyl O.D. in Minneapolis?" Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was convicted in April of murdering Floyd. McConnell did not respond to a request for comment.

Then, after months of seeking to dispute reports about the role of white nationalists in the Jan. 6 insurrection, Carlson made the astonishing claim that "FBI operatives were organizing the attack on the Capitol." He said this was spelled out in court documents that mentioned the involvement of unindicted co-conspirators, who Carlson surmised were undercover agents from the FBI.

"So it turns out that this 'white supremacist' insurrection was, again by the government's own admission in these documents, organized at least in part by government agents," Carlson said.

In fact, the government has not admitted any such thing, legal experts said.

Carlson then claimed without evidence that the National Security Agency was reading his electronic communications and leaking them "in an attempt to take this show off the air." The agency felt compelled to deny that Carlson was an intelligence target and said it "has never had any plans to try to take his program off the air."

'It wouldn't have happened without' him

At the heart of Carlson’s rhetoric is his contention that elites are forcing institutions to adopt policies that blame Whites for systemic racism.

On Sept. 1, 2020, Carlson’s guest was Rufo, who had previously appeared on the show to talk about homelessness and public disorder. Rufo told Carlson he had conducted investigations that showed the federal government had undertaken a “cult indoctrination” to convince people that the United States is systemically racist. “What I’ve discovered is that critical race theory has become . . . the default ideology of the federal bureaucracy and is now being weaponized against the American people,” Rufo said on the broadcast.

Rufo’s appearance brought his allegations about government indoctrination to millions of people — including one particularly important viewer: Trump.

The president saw the show and tweeted that critical race theory is “a sickness that cannot be allowed to continue.” Within days, the White House produced a memo saying that no money could be spent by federal agencies on any training related to the theory or the idea of “white privilege,” or training that suggested that any race is “inherently racist.” Trump signed an executive order on Sept. 22 banning sensitivity training seminars for federal employees related to critical race theory.

“It wouldn’t have happened without Tucker,” Rufo said in an email.

President Biden rescinded the order on his first day in office, saying “unity and healing must begin with understanding and truth, not ignorance and lies.”

Carlson and his Fox News colleagues have devoted many hours to promoting their idea that Democrats are using the academic framework of critical race theory to promote racial divisions. They said it wasn’t just the government and corporations, it was local school boards, and Carlson encouraged a national movement to stop it.

Carlson introduced viewers to a children’s book called “Not My Idea: A Book About Whiteness.” The book’s author, Anastasia Higginbotham, said in an interview that the book was designed to give children information about racism and what they could do to respond to it.

The book depicts a parent telling a child: “Our family is kind to everyone. We don’t see color.” The book then says: “Deep down we all know. Color matters. Skin color makes a difference in how the world sees you and in how you see the world.”

Carlson’s guest on the program that night was Elana Fishbein, who said she had clashed with local school officials in Pennsylvania over what she called efforts to use “Not My Idea” and other works to teach her children about racism. Fishbein pulled two of her children out of elementary school to avoid having them being taught in such a way. At the end of her interview, Fishbein urged viewers to visit online platforms she had set up for her new organization, No Left Turn in Education.

Fishbein told The Post in an interview that by the time she left the Fox studio, her group’s Facebook page views had grown from 200 to about 20,000. By the end of the week, she said, the page had more than 1 million views, an assertion that could not be independently verified. In the following weeks, she said, she used the publicity generated by the Carlson show to create state chapters and challenge local school curricula.

the Carlson show to create state chapters and challenge local school curriculums.

“I had no idea I was going to be flooded like that after just one appearance, and I was not ready for it,” Fishbein said.

Carlson has aimed a particular level of vitriol at Kendi, who won the 2016 National Book Award for “Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America.” His book “How to Be an Antiracist” urges Americans to actively fight racism, not just declare that they aren’t racist. The book was on a reading list recommended by the U.S. Navy for its sailors.

On his March 9 show, Carlson asked Rep. Jim Banks (R-Ind.), “How could a book like this — really filth — wind up on a naval reading list?” Banks responded that it was “deeply troubling” that the book was recommended, and he promised to question Navy officials.

Carlson did not disclose that his son, Buckley Carlson, is Banks’s press spokesman. A Fox spokeswoman did not respond to a question about whether the network requires disclosure of such a connection.

As part of the written response from Tucker Carlson sent to The Post by Fox News for this story, he said that “even by the standards of Jeff Bezos’ personal newspaper, going after my family seems pretty repulsive.” Bezos owns The Washington Post.

Neither Banks nor Buckley Carlson responded to requests for comment.

Two months after Banks’s appearance on the show, Carlson aired a video of Banks questioning a Navy official at a congressional hearing about “How to Be an Antiracist.” Carlson said Kendi “promotes racism.”

Kendi, who said Carlson has never contacted him or invited him to be on the show, said in an interview that the Fox News host is cynically mischaracterizing his work to divide people along racial lines and portray anti-racism as racist.

“Unfortunately, the irony is people like Tucker Carlson are imagining that my work, which expresses the equality of the racial groups, which is advocating for policies that eliminate inequity between the racial groups, is somehow divisive or harmful to Americans or to any racial group,” Kendi told The Post. He said Carlson had stripped his book of its context “to paint anti-racism as anti-White, as white supremacists have been doing for decades. . . . He’s a demagogue, and he’s a propagandist, and he’s feeding on people’s fears and dividing us.”

The role of White rage

In recent weeks, Carlson has repeatedly shown video of parents confronting school board members about critical race theory, and then invited some of those parents on his show.

During that time, a number of Republican-controlled legislatures, as well as local school boards, have sought to ban the teaching of critical race theory and related matters. It is not possible to say how many of these efforts are the result of Carlson's programs, but his views have been echoed by an increasing number of Republicans.

On a recent program, as the screen showed a sign that said "anti-white mania," Carlson said that the country cannot survive if people are told that some groups are "inherently oppressed." After having spent months criticizing critical race theory, he said that phrase "doesn't mean anything." What is happening is "race hate," he said. "It is peddled by the people in charge in the hope that it will make them more powerful." He said the teaching of "race hate" has infected the country at its highest levels.

As an example, Carlson cited a June 23 appearance by Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, before a congressional committee. Milley said he wanted to understand the role that "White rage" played in the storming of the U.S. Capitol.

"I've read Karl Marx. I've read Lenin. That doesn't make me a communist," Milley said. "So what is wrong with understanding, having some situational understanding about the country for which we are here to defend, and I personally find it offensive" that members of the military who want to understand racial matters are accused of being "woke or something else because we're studying some theories that are out there."

In normal times, a declaration by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he wanted to understand racism would not be controversial. But to Carlson, it was another opportunity for mockery, if not self-awareness of his own role.

After playing the clip, Carlson laughed at the military leader's words and said: "He's not just a pig. He's stupid!"

What, in Carlson's view, makes Milley stupid? Carlson, who for years has stoked the angry idea that Whites are the ones being discriminated against, told his viewers: "He reads about White rage as if it's totally real."

Alice Crites and Jeremy Barr contributed to this report.
