



## Historian's Scrapped Segment on Tucker Carlson's Show Is a Masterpiece

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Earlier this week, Fox News host Tucker Carlson invited Dutch historian Rutger Bregman on his show to discuss the merits of imposing higher taxes on the rich, an idea that is as popular in America as it is reviled inside Fox News headquarters. Bregman earned Carlson's attention with a spirited address at the most recent Davos World Economic Forum in which he argued in favor of such policies as some of the wealthiest people on the planet looked on in abject horror.

What starts as standard-issue Carlson fare—a "conversation" in which the host interrupts with snarky bromides and sarcastic whinnies—devolves quickly after Bregman points out the absurdity inherent in Carlson, a multimillionaire, railing constantly against the evils perpetrated by "elites."

No one's saying that at Davos, just as no one's saying it at Fox News, right? And I think the explanation for that is quite simple: Most of the people at Davos, but also here on this channel, have been bought by the billionaire class, you know? You're not meant to say these things. So I just went there and thought, "You know what, I'm just going to say it, just as I'm saying it right here on this channel."

A few minutes later, Bregman offers a hypothesis about why Fox News takes such a consistently pessimistic view of economic policies that most of its own viewers favor: "What the family—what the Murdochs basically want you to do is to scapegoat immigrants instead of talking about tax avoidance," he says. After Bregman cites Carlson's longtime association with the Cato Institute as another example of self-interested punditry, the host embarks on an O'Reilly-esque "WE'LL DO IT LIVE" journey of his own.

**BREGMAN:** You've been taking their dirty money. They're funded by Koch billionaires, you know?

**CARLSON:** Wait, why don't you tell me how it *does* work?

**BREGMAN:** Well, it works by you taking their dirty money. It's as easy as that. You are a millionaire funded by billionaires. That's what you are... You're not part of the solution, Mr. Carlson. You're part of the problem, actually. It's true, right, that all the anchors on Fox News, they're all millionaires. How is this possible? Well, it's very easy! You're just not talking about certain things.

Carlson counters that because Fox News doesn't air in the Netherlands, Bregman must never have watched it, as if paying for a robust cable package is the only way for anyone to catch *Hannity* in its entirety every weeknight. (Bregman giggles: "Have you heard of the Internet?") Carlson, ever the professional, concludes as follows:

I want to say to you: Why don't you go fuck yourself, you tiny-brained—and I hope this gets picked up—because you're a moron. I tried to give you a hearing, but you were too fucking annoying.

Presumably, this humiliating segment would never have aired or even been mentioned on the show but for Bregman's decision to publish his audio earlier this week, which compelled Tucker to address the incident during last night's program. His explanation is as stupid as the original tantrum, and almost as satisfying: The insinuation that the Murdochs exercise editorial control over the show, Carlson said, was just "too much."

Longtime *Tucker* fans know that watching him antagonize guests is not an unusual occurrence, which raises the question: What about this particular interaction made it impossible for Fox News to air? Let's let him explain!

I did what I tried hard never to do on this show, and I was rude. I called him a moron, and then I modified that word with a vulgar Anglo-Saxon term that is also intelligible in Dutch. In my defense, I would say that it was entirely accurate. But you're not allowed to use that word on television, so once I'd said it out loud, there was no airing that segment.

*I cursed, which made everything that had occurred up until that point utterly unsalvageable.* To the list of "technologies of which Tucker Carlson is blissfully unaware," we can apparently add video editing software.

Again, Tucker Carlson is the most consistently combative personality in Fox News' primetime lineup; more so than his colleagues, he derives immense satisfaction from accusations of racism and xenophobia, because although these terms are accurate descriptors of his conduct, their deployment, to him, means that he won the debate. These nightly sparring sessions fit neatly into Fox News' culture-war narrative that conservatism and/or whiteness in America is under attack, and allow viewers to take vicarious joy in his on-screen efforts to trigger another lib.

Acknowledging the reality—that he is a well-compensated mouthpiece who does the dirty work of shadowy, fearmongering billionaires—is the sort of thing that could spell doom for his career, though, if his audience were to grasp it. Why should any middle-class American listen to one more second of Tucker Carlson shrieking about the dangers of immigrant caravans and greedy socialists when he has every financial incentive to obfuscate the real causes of economic inequality and social injustice? He knows it is a question with no good answer, and so he'll do anything—even pretend the bleep button doesn't exist—to avoid inviting it.