CIGARS & LIFE’S BURNING DESIRES

34 CIGARS REVIEWED!

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LAMBORGHINI, THE WORLD’S SEXIEST CAR

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CUBAN COUNTERFEITS & HOW TO AVOID THEM

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“Let me just say, I think that one of the saddest things in my life was learning that cigarette smoke was harmful,” says the familiar voice over the phone. “Because I just loved it. I loved it and I will miss it until the day I die of non-smoking related causes.” In a world of anti-tobacco hysterics, that’s a statement most would stray away from in casual company for fear of the emotionally-charged landmines that litter the social landscape. And in the jungle of opinion journalism, it’s an even braver few who would venture out on that limb perched so precariously over the ravenous and blog-capable crocodiles below. But sometimes it’s that penchant for danger that makes a pundit stand out in a country full of commentators.

MSNBC’s Tucker Carlson is an analyst’s analyst, known for his unabashed libertarian-bias as well as his knack for televised opinion-
“Cigar smoking is really one of the great pleasures. If you have time to smoke a cigar and you do it a couple of times, I’d be surprised if you didn’t want to do it again. It’s just one of those things.”

battle. Most notably, these included daily scuffles during his tenure as co-host of CNN's Crossfire (which included an on-air shootout with Jon Stewart that has since worked its way into the canon of classic viral YouTube footage) and even a more recent international brush-up with the nation of Canada, who he once—lovingly—referred to as “America's retarded cousin.” He has since dropped the iconic bow tie, but Tucker has never lost his fire, and remains an exceptionally sovereign voice who is never afraid of a fight. And lately, there's been a brawl to be had about the vilification of the lowly cigar.

Big Brother, Where Art Thou?

“I think that most people are so inept that they don’t realize that they’re giving up an important right, an important freedom,” Carlson scolds. “But they did.” Few commentators are as incensed at the smoking ban movement as Carlson, particularly one California town's recent legislation banning smoking in one's own home if it's part of a multi-story or multi-unit residence. “I mean, the Rubicon's been crossed,” says Carlson. “You no longer have the right to do what you want in your own home. Or what you do to your own body in your home. And by the way, the passive smoking argument is a total canard. I'd like someone to explain to me why smoking in a public park—where there have been some smoking bans—is more dangerous than, say, diesel exhaust. It's a lie. We all know it's a lie. But the difference is that we need to have diesel trucks, or we're not going to get our iPods delivered to Best Buy on time. But smoking isn't popular, so we just crush the unpopular thing. It's really scary.”

Tucker—an admirer of the writings of Barry Goldwater, as well as those of Hunter S. Thompson—has an inherent distrust for city councils and state legislatures that think they know what's best for you. It's an inclination that led to a gig emceeing this past summer's libertarian-leaning "shadow convention" run by genuine maverick and Frank Purdue doppelgänger, Ron Paul. Despite lending his time and name to help amplify the Paul-Call for Federal government on the amoebic scale, Tucker has resigned himself to the belief that a true libertarian party that could stand-up to the Big Brothers on both the right and the left is a (privately-funded) pipe dream. Can a true movement that—in addition to small government romantics—appeals to Militiamen, conspiracy theorists, and Wiccans alike ever truly coalesce?

"The Ron Paul movement has drawn in a lot of thoughtful, smart, good people. But it's also drawn in some crazies. And they tend to just ruin it. Including the 9-11 deniers—they're a really malignant force. So I think it's just a shame. Basically organized libertarian politics is an oxymoron. Libertarians are the most anti-authoritarian people in the world. They have trouble taking direction. You're not ever likely to see an organized political party that's Libertarian. I mean, how would you ever hold a meeting?"

As American as a Cuban Cigar

In contrast to the excitable spastic gusto anti-smoking crusaders have against all things tobacco, it's a product Tucker views in more poetic tones. "I just like tobacco. The country was founded on it. I feel patriotic using it," Carlson declares. "I think it's one of the most subtle pleasures available to man...something I've never grown tired of. I've used it in almost every kind of its incarnations."

Like many cigar smokers, Tucker came over from the world of cigarettes. In true sober, skeptical, libertarian form, Tucker accepts that tobacco has its ill effects, but still thinks the pleasure versus harm quandary should be a decision every adult should make for themselves. "I only started smoking cigars seriously when I quit smoking cigarettes," Carlson admits. "I'm a passionate cigar smoker. I was able to smoke a couple of Cuban Cohibas over the weekend. They have a taste which is so interesting and so complex that you just want to sit and think about it. Tobacco smoke touches some deep part of me emotionally, I can't describe it. I contrast it with alcohol—I don't drink anymore, because drinking dulls me. It makes me less aware and less interested and more passive. Something about tobacco has the opposite effect: it heightens your experience of the world. It doesn't dull it."

Politicians Might Not Practice What They Preach?

At the time of this interview, before the Presidential election, Tucker was busy buzzing around the country covering the McCain campaign. McCain was a candidate who Tucker reveals a true affection for. While no one would have confused McCain for a charismatic man when reading from the teleprompter, Tucker describes the Arizona senator as being actually quite engaging, interesting, fun-as-hell, and vulgar.
“Tobacco smoke touches some deep part of me emotionally. I can’t describe it...it heightens your experience of the world.”

“All of which are qualities I like,” he comments fondly. While McCain is not a smoker, many iconic politicians of decades past have been, with Giuliani, Schwarzenegger, and Clinton still continuing the tradition today. While researching a story for Smoke, I recently came across a mayor of a certain large Northeastern city who has been a champion of a local smoking ban, but was a dedicated patron of several of the local upscale smoke shops (off the record, of course). Being around a lot of politicians, Tucker has seen a lot of—if not hypocrisy, then political expediency—firsthand when it comes to smoking. Barack Obama notably gave up smoking cigarettes before the launch of his presidential bid, officially because his wife Michelle made him (in a dodge disguised as pander to defeated husbands across this great land). But unofficially, of course, it was because a cigarette smoker cannot win elected office in this day and age.

“Poor Barack Obama,” taunts Carlson. “But he’s in tremendous physical shape according to his last physical exam. And it’s considered a deal-killer for him to smoke cigarettes. If he had one Marlboro Red, the election would have been over. There’s always been a wide, if shallow streak of moralism in American life, at various times aimed at various people and behaviors. People who have tried cigars, even those who are into physical fitness, recognize that cigar smoking is really one of the great pleasures. If you have time to smoke a cigar and you do it a couple of times, I’d be surprised if you didn’t want to do it again. It’s just one of those things.”

Unfortunately for those politicians who still dare to smoke on the down-low, the D.C. area recently became one of the last major cities in the East to implement a smoking ban. “I am infuriated by it,” says Carlson. “It even pertains to private clubs. When did it become government’s business what you do in a private club—even in a restaurant? There’s a principal at stake. I understand some people don’t like the smell of cigarettes, but I think there’s a principal worth saving, and that is that just because you’re unpopular doesn’t mean you ought to be crushed.”

Tucker speaks from the heart to issues with a passion most politicians might only feign in the winds of public opinion. But journalists have the good fortune of having no official power, so are therefore given the freedom to champion issues no politician who likes the idea of remaining a politician could get away with. “What if we decided tomorrow that fat people are just too unattractive to deal with?” Carlson poses. “And being fat is bad for your health, we know that—that’s been established….And you could also make the argument that being fat costs the rest of us money. So, why not just make it illegal? People can discount that as an absurd argument, but it’s not absurd, it’s actually consistent with the principal behind smoking bans which is ‘I don’t like it, therefore you shouldn’t be allowed to do it.’ And once you allow that, then you have the tyranny of the majority. It’s frightening.”

Unfortunately, it appears that as a nation, we may be losing the battle for choice on every scale. You can’t smoke a cigar in a casino in Atlantic City or in a public park in California. While there are few who will stand up for the rights of the politically-expedient boogeyman of any given day, we should be thankful for our champions where we find them.

**Tie One On**

What would Santa Claus be without his jolly red hat, Superman without his billowing red cape, or Ms. Pac-Man without her gender-telling red bow? Answer: a jolly, cookie-stealing cat burglar; a fitness enthusiast in a bad Smurf costume; and a digital pizza pie. Sometimes, it is the accessory which makes the person. For many years Tucker Carlson was able to rise above the monotonous sea of cable-TV talking heads by tying a bow tie around his, as one of the youngest faces on cable news chose to be adorned by an accessory usually reserved for old, professorial fuddy-duddies and Nation of Islam members. But soon after he made the move from CNN to MSNBC, Tucker dropped the then-iconic neck ornament which he had sported since high school. So, what was the reason for this seismic shift in neck fashion? “It was pure midlife crisis, and cheaper than a Porsche or a girlfriend.” It’s now been years since the great Carlson midlife crisis-cum-neck transformation, however a Google search of “Tucker Carlson Bow Tie” brings up 51,300 results, compared to the more relevant search of “Tucker Carlson Libertarian” which nets a mere 39,000. What was it about this small piece of red fabric that so affected the news-watching world? “Wearing a bow tie is like having a middle finger permanently attached to your neck: It brings out the hostility in people. I’d worn one since the ninth grade, but it took years to realize how provocative other people consider it. I’m now officially a member of the sartorial mainstream. No one yells at me in train stations anymore. Sometimes I miss that.”