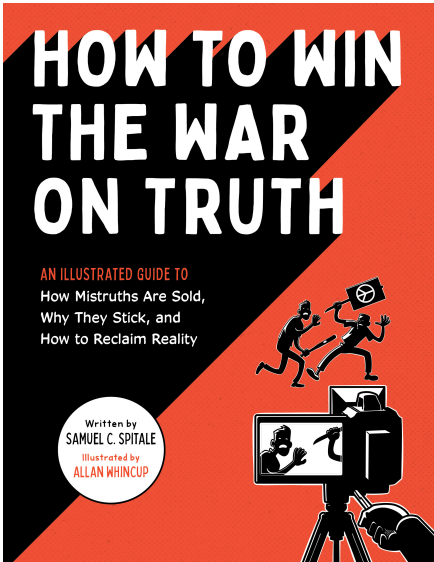


HOW TO WIN THE WAR ON TRUTH

By Samuel C. Spitale

Educators Guide



- [Overview](#)
- [Introduction](#)
- [Chapter 1](#)
- [Chapter 2](#)
- [Chapter 3](#)
- [Chapter 4](#)
- [Chapter 5](#)
- [Chapter 6](#)
- [Chapter 7](#)
- [Chapter 8](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [Further Reading](#)

OVERVIEW

The average American encounters up to 10,000 media messages a day. It's no wonder we struggle to separate news from all the noise—and there's a hell of a lot of noise! From welfare queens to WMDs, climate change to critical race theory, and the War on Drugs to the War on Christmas, much of what Americans believe is more mistruth than truth—and that's by design. What was supposed to be the Information Age has instead become an age of misinformation.

How to Win the War on Truth is an illustrated guide to debunking misperceptions, falsehoods, and fake news that cloud the media landscape. It exposes the secrets of media manipulators in the ongoing battle to get inside our brains and sway public opinion. It's the story of how the powerful use the tools of persuasion to enrich themselves at the expense of the public and, in the process, swindle us with our own consent.

How to Win the War on Truth is filled with real-world examples to help readers recognize and resist the pull of propaganda. Intended for teachers, students, librarians, and academics, this study guide provides discussion topics, reading strategies, and application exercises to engage students, develop their critical thinking skills, and help them to become more savvy media consumers.

INTRODUCTION: Post-Truth Nation

Americans often mistake *media consumption* for *media literacy*. We think we understand media because we consume so much of it, but our media diet is awash in fake news, false claims, and outright fabrications. This is a result of America's unregulated *marketplace of ideas*, where

corporate interests sell consumers their worldview just like any other product. Successful propaganda has five trademarks:

- (1) It ignores the full picture in favor of simple black-and-white narratives (Chapter 2)
- (2) that appeal to our unconscious cognitive biases (Chapter 3)
- (3) to evoke negative emotions, like fear and outrage (Chapter 4)
- (4) that divide us into market segments of in-groups and out-groups (Chapter 5)
- (5) for the economic benefit of the power class (Chapter 6)

KEY TERMS AND TOPICS

- The marketplace of ideas: the belief that truth will inevitably prevail when competing with falsehoods, lies, and misinformation
- Media consumption: behaviors such as watching TV, listening to podcasts, reading magazine articles, scrolling through social media feeds, et cetera
- Media literacy: the ability to identify and differentiate types of media messages, such as an infomercial versus a commercial versus a newscast
- Truth (facts, data) versus post-truth (feelings, beliefs)
- Censorship through noise: the idea that there's so much misinformation that we can't tell what's true and what's propaganda

APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. *Truth versus post-truth.* As the author Charles P. Pierce observed in his 2009 book *Idiot America*, “Fact is merely what enough people believe, and truth lies only in how fervently they believe it.” Define the term *post-truth* and discuss the differences between truth and post-truth. Have students differentiate between facts and feelings in common thoughts (“If I miss the bus, I’ll be late for school” versus “If I miss the bus, I’m a loser”) or current events (“Trump lost the 2020 election” versus “I feel that that Trump could not have lost without massive voter fraud”).

2. *The marketplace of ideas.* As the author Michael Goodwin has written, “in the ‘marketplace of ideas,’ some ideas have been heavily subsidized.” Discuss what this term means and what this looks like in our daily lives.

3. *Tort law.* Inspired by the hot coffee story, have students research whether their state has restrictions on lawsuit payouts, for both economic and noneconomic (pain and suffering) damages. How might these limits impact their quality of life if they were injured on the job? Who benefits from these restrictions, and who loses?

CHAPTER 1: Propagating the Faith

The modern advertising industry is traced to Edward Bernays, who applied his uncle Sigmund Freud’s psychological insights to mass marketing. Bernays’s methods were so successful in Nazi Germany that the term *propaganda* had to be rebranded as *public relations* after the war. The same principles live on in its offshoots: *marketing*, *advertising*, *publicity*, and *branding*. Examples of each of these concepts illustrate how they’ve been widely absorbed into American culture, from publicity (Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade and the Hollywood sign), to marketing (Valentine’s Day and coffee breaks), to advertising (product placement and influencers), to branding (Chilean sea bass and Family Values), to PR (“Give a Hoot! Don’t Pollute!” and Iraq’s WMDs).

KEY TERMS AND TOPICS

- Mass media: TV, radio, print, and any other medium used to communicate to the masses
- Mass communication: the sharing of information through media such as TV, radio, print, etc.
- Propaganda: information that is biased or misleading that is used to promote a particular point of view or sell us something
- The types of propaganda:
 - Marketing: the broader business strategy behind all creative forms of communication used to promote a product, which includes advertising, public relations, publicity, branding, and any other means of promotion.
 - Undercover marketing: marketing that may not be obvious, such as when an actor is paid to pass out samples of a new drink at a bar or when Sony hires people to pose as tourists to ask passersby to take their picture only to rave about their Sony camera
 - Advertising: any paid message created with the intent to sell a product, such as a TV commercial, a magazine ad, or a billboard in Times Square
 - Product placement: the practice of placing a branded product in a TV show or film
 - Sponsorship: the act of paying to sponsor an event in exchange for name recognition
 - Sponsored content: advertising designed to look like other content in which it's placed, for example, social media posts sponsored by companies you don't follow (this is also called native advertising)
 - Celebrity endorsement: a paid relationship between a brand and an influential individual
 - Public relations (PR): the act of shaping a person's image or a company's message so that they remain favorable in the eyes of the public. Whereas marketing and advertising involve spending money to promote a product, PR is about working the information system to promote a message for free, such as leaking information to the press, putting out a statement on Twitter, or getting a magazine to profile a celebrity's philanthropy.
 - PSA (public service announcement): a PR message that aims to change public perception or raise awareness of an important issue, such as drunk driving or fire prevention
 - Branding: a carefully constructed image of a product that separates it from its competitors. This includes its name, logo, positioning, core values, and promise to consumers.
 - Slogan: a memorable word or phrase used to positively characterize a brand
 - Publicity: anything designed explicitly to attract public attention, like a press conference or photo opportunity
- Sleeper effect: forgetting the source of false information, as well as the fact that it's false, while remembering the information itself
- Illusory truth effect: believing something is true because we've heard it repeated so many times

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Journalism is the only form of mass communication not trying to sell us something. Journalists seek only to inform and uncover truth. The other forms of mass communication—marketing, advertising, PR, publicity, branding—are intended to obscure truth. They are selling a product, a belief, a politician, or a policy. Because of exploitation of mass communications outside of journalism, consumers can no longer identify fact from fiction. Have students discuss or write about the importance of journalism in society. What are the dangers of journalism being overwhelmed by propaganda? Why is it important to distinguish journalism from propaganda?

APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. *Media Consumption.* Have students identify all the types of media they consume. How do the mediums differ? How does the information shared differ between mediums? What are the pluses and minuses of each medium? (For instance, TV is great for showing us local events, but radio is better helpful while driving.)

2. *Propaganda.* Task students with differentiating the types of propaganda by having them find examples of advertising, marketing, publicity, and public relations. Have them identify what each example is selling.

3. *Branding.* Consider the identity of the following brands. How do they differ?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • Ben & Jerry's vs. Häagen-Dazs | • Neiman Marcus vs. Walmart |
| • Whole Foods vs. Food4Less | • Colin Kaepernick vs. Tim Tebow |
| • MTV vs. TV Land | • Bernie Sanders vs. Donald Trump |

What is your personal brand? How do your friends identify you? What qualities do people think of when they hear your name? (For example: smart, athletic, witty, etc.)

4. *Slogans.* How many three-word slogans can you think of? Can you identify the brands they go with?

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Coke is it. | • Just say no. |
| • Just do it. | • I like Ike. |
| • I'm lovin' it. | • Ideas for Life |
| • Where's the beef? | • Don't be evil |
| • Breakfast of champions | • Tough on crime |
| • Do the Dew. | • Stop the steal |
| • Fair and Balanced | • War on Drugs |
| • Black is beautiful. | • Build the wall. |
| • Yes we can. | • Maybe it's Maybelline |
| • I'm with her. | • Beanz Meanz Heinz |
| • Taste the Feeling | • Grace, Space, Pace |
| • Imagination at Work | • Feel the Bern. |
| • Drain the swamp. | • Lock her up. |
| • Drill, baby, drill | • Diamonds are forever |
| • Taste the Rainbow | • Maybe it's Maybelline |

5. *Modes of Propaganda*. Discuss examples of product placement, sponsorships, sponsored content, or celebrity endorsements that students have noticed in their daily lives.

6. *Effects of Propaganda*. As Edward Bernays wrote, “Modern propaganda is a consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea, or group. . . . Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country.” Have students discuss, or write about, if they agree or disagree with this statement.

CHAPTER 2: Cutting Out Complexity

Journalists (and storytellers) strive to tell us what to think *about* by depicting the full story of an issue, with all its complexity and shades of gray. Propagandists, however, tell us *what to think* by cherry-picking a single narrative and honing it into a simple black-and-white message. This message, or slogan, is repeated and reinforced until it becomes an ingrained belief, such as that marijuana is a gateway drug, or that more firearms make us safer. These beliefs are designed to appeal to our hidden biases so that they will stick.

KEY TERMS AND TOPICS

- Fast thinking versus slow thinking
 - Fast: reflexive, unconscious, automatic, routine, but prone to error
 - Slow: reflective, conscious, effortful, complex, and more reliable
- Black-and-white thinking versus critical thinking
 - Black-and-white thinking: thinking in overly simplistic binary terms of positive or negative, right or wrong, good or bad
 - Critical thinking: thinking that allows for complexity, nuance, and objective reasoning
- Narrative versus the full story
 - Narrative: a narrow perspective or singular point of view
- Narrative fallacy: constructing cause-and-effect relationships between events that may or may not be true, that provide a compelling story

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Differentiating between *what to think about* and *what to think* is similar to distinguishing between fact and opinion. Journalism strives to tell us what to think about, while propaganda tries to tell us what to think. Have students compare news articles on a single topic from a variety of news outlets. Which articles are focused on facts and information, and which are based on opinion? Which articles tell us what to think about, and which try to tell us what to think?

APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. *Fast versus slow thinking*. These exercises are designed to illustrate the difference between fast and slow thinking—how our brain produces an intuitive answer, which is often incorrect. Once we slow our thinking we can override our faulty impulses and figure out the correct answer and begin to think critically. Have your students answer the following:

- If a boy has five piles of sand, and a girl has five piles of sand, and they put them together, how many piles would there be? (Answer: 1)

- If a plane of emigrants flying from Canada to the United States crashes on the border between the two countries, where would you bury the survivors? (Answer: You don't bury survivors.)
- A father and a son are in a terrible car accident. Both are rushed to the emergency room, but the father doesn't make it. When the kid goes into surgery, the surgeon says, "I can't operate on this kid. He's my son!" How is this possible? (Answer: The surgeon is his mother.)
- There is a spot of mold on the wall. Each day, the size of the mold doubles. If it takes 100 days for the mold to cover the whole wall, how many days did it take for the mold to cover only half the wall? (Answer: 99 days.)
- If a rooster lays an egg at the peak of a slanted roof, with one side at a 45-degree angle and the other at a 30-degree angle, which side will the egg roll off? (Answer: Neither, roosters don't lay eggs.)
- How many of each animal did Moses take on the ark? (Answer: Noah brought animals on the ark, not Moses.)
- A peppermint and a candy cane cost \$1.10 total. The candy cane costs a dollar more than the peppermint. How much does the peppermint cost? (Answer: \$1.05)

2. *Fact versus opinion.* For the statements below, have students identify which ones are facts (telling us what to think about) and which ones are opinion or propaganda (telling us what to think).

- The US has the best health-care system in the world.
- The US pays more in health-care costs than any other developed nation.
- The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.
- The US has less than 5 percent of the world's population but owns half of the world's firearms.
- Raising the minimum wage will lead to higher unemployment.
- Increasing the minimum wage means low-level employees will have more money to spend.
- Every generation is better off than the previous generation.
- Once adjusted for inflation, salaries have not risen with the cost of living over the past forty years, but instead they have stagnated.
- Anyone can improve their position in life if they work hard.
- Upward mobility is largely determined by the socioeconomic position one is born into.

For the opinion statements that tell us what to think, identify the multiple narratives each statement leaves out.

3. *Narrative fallacy.* As Daniel Kahneman wrote in *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, "The confidence that individuals have in their beliefs depends mostly on the quality of the story they can tell about what they see, even if they see little." Have students discuss the narratives they tell themselves. Are they the hardworking overachiever? The kid who's too cool for school? The one who can't seem to do anything right? Discuss how the narratives we tell ourselves may be narrative fallacies that help us make sense of the world from our own narrow viewpoint but that may not be shared by others.

CHAPTER 3: Bias and the Brain

As the behavioral economist Daniel Kahneman noted, we process information in two ways: by thinking *fast* (automatic, emotional) or by thinking *slow* (deliberate, reflective), i.e., by engaging in critical thinking. Propaganda appeals to our fast neural connections, or *heuristics*, which become our biases. Biases are introduced through *priming* and cemented through *confirmation bias*. Becoming self-aware of our biases, and actively seeking to rewire them, is the foundation of the type of psychotherapy known as cognitive therapy. Remaining unaware of these mental patterns allows propaganda to prosper—because it appeals to our biases in order to manipulate us emotionally.

KEY TERMS AND TOPICS

- Heuristics: mental shortcuts that help us simplify the decision-making process
- Implicit bias: an unconscious attitude that we apply to our understanding of the world, our actions, and our decisions, without realizing it. It often relies on stereotypes.
- Priming: exposing people to certain things so that they are influenced without realizing it
- Confirmation bias: paying attention to information that confirms existing beliefs, while filtering out information that conflicts with them
- Availability heuristic: our tendency to give greater weight to examples we can easily bring to mind, even if they are inaccurate or unlikely
- Cognitive dissonance: an unpleasant mental state that arises when our thoughts about the world clash with reality. Seeking internal harmony, we make an unconscious decision to ignore new evidence in order to protect our existing beliefs, even if they're false.
- Motivated reasoning: actively seeking out information that reinforces or confirms existing beliefs rather than information that challenges them
- Law of inertia: a body at rest tends to stay at rest, as humans are conservative by nature and inclined to leave things well enough alone unless pushed by extraordinary circumstances to embrace change
- Willful blindness: the tendency to ignore new information and deny uncomfortable truths that we'd prefer not to acknowledge or deal with
- Privilege: the luxury of dismissing uncomfortable truths because we have not personally experienced them
- Semmelweis reflex: the tendency to reject new information that challenges old paradigms

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Selective attention. One of the problems with priming is all the stuff that we don't notice. This concept is known as selective attention, and it can be illustrated in a fun experiment. Instruct students to watch a short video (link appears below) in which six people—three in white shirts and three in black shirts—pass basketballs around. While they watch, they must keep a silent count of the number of passes made by the people in white shirts. At some point, a gorilla will stroll into the middle of the action, face the camera and thump its chest, and then leave. See how many students notice the gorilla. Discuss how unreliable our own experience can be, especially when we are primed to notice something else, and how easily we can deceive ourselves about the world around us. The video can be found at

http://www.theinvisiblegorilla.com/gorilla_experiment.html.

APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. *Implicit bias*. Have students take the Implicit Bias test on pages 81 and 82 and discuss. Or have them take one of the online tests by Project Implicit at

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html>.

2. *Priming*. Tell half the class story A (below) and the other half story B. Then have them all name an animal that starts with the letter E. Discuss how they were primed.

- A. It's the middle of the afternoon on Independence Day. "I'm proud to be an American" by Lee Greenwood plays on the radio. The sky overhead is blue and sunny. A child sits on a red, white, and blue blanket and completes a crossword puzzle.
- B. You are sitting at your work desk in a cramped office. The Toto song "Africa" plays on your computer. You open a new tab in your Safari browser. You go to the Banana Republic website to order a pair of cargo shorts.

3. *Confirmation bias*. Write the number that comes next in each sequence:

- a. 3, 5, 7, 9,
- b. 20, 25, 30, 35,
- c. 50, 100, 150, 200,
- d. 2, 3, 5, 10,

D isn't so easy, is it? That's because the first three sequences followed a consistent pattern, which created confirmation bias, which made it difficult to see the pattern in the fourth sequence. The answer to D is 20. Each new number in the sequence is the sum of the previous numbers.

4. *Availability heuristic*. Read the list of author names below. Then have students list as many names as they can recall.

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| • Michelle Alexander | • Michael Shermer | • Jane Austen |
| • Stephen King | • Danielle Steele | • J.K. Rowling |
| • Jason Stanley | • Steven Pinker | • Kurt Andersen |
| • Malcolm Gladwell | • Judy Blume | • Agatha Christie |

If they are like most people, they will remember only the names of the most famous authors or the authors they are familiar with.

5. *Privilege*. Have students take one of the following white privilege tests and discuss their results:

<https://hd.ingham.org/Portals/HD/White%20Priviledge%20Unpacking%20the%20Invisible%20Knapsack.pdf>

<http://monitoracism.eu/check-yourself-the-white-privilege-test/>

CHAPTER 4: Emotional Manipulation

Emotions are the hidden motivator (the *subtext*) behind our thoughts and actions (the *text*). Our emotional attachment is what makes propaganda stick, because people make decisions based not on reason but on feeling. Negative emotions like hate, fear, spite, and anger trump all others emotions because of our *negativity bias*. This is why political smear campaigns are so successful and why partisan media specialize in outrage. Identifying the core emotion behind a media message is key to exposing propaganda—and key to understanding why we think, shop, and vote the way we do, from buying bottled water to believing a border wall will stop illegal immigration.

KEY TERMS AND TOPICS

- Putting the *emotion* in emotions: how they activate us to action
- Text versus subtext
 - Text: what is explicit
 - Subtext: what is implied
- Emotional awareness
 - Identifying emotions in film/TV
 - Identifying emotions behind common narratives and beliefs
 - Identifying emotions in our daily lives
- Negativity bias: our tendency to react more strongly to negative stimuli than to positive stimuli
- Fear appeals and how they are used to sell products, politicians, and policies and often used to cover a lack of evidence that a real threat exists
- Hitler's propaganda directives:
 - Appeal to negative emotions
 - Repeat falsehoods
 - Direct anger at adversary

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence, or EQ, describes the awareness and regulation of our emotions, whereas our intelligent quotient, or IQ, measures our ability to solve problems and think logically. It's believed that our EQ can have a greater influence on our success in life than our IQ. Becoming aware of our emotions can help tame them. Have students keep a journal for a week in which they periodically reflect on what they are feeling. Have them label their emotions, such as bored, anxious, disappointed, embarrassed, excited, etc. Train them to identify their emotions whenever they are highly aroused.

APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. *Emotions in our daily lives.* Identify the emotions that drive these actions:

Questions:

- a) Throwing a dish against the wall. (anger)
- b) Jumping up and down after receiving good news. (excitement)
- c) Giving a sad friend a hug. (comfort, empathy)
- d) Kissing your spouse. (love, affection)
- e) Bouncing your knee up and down while waiting for the results of blood work. (worry)

- f) Saying a prayer after surviving a near car accident. (gratitude)
- g) Covering your eyes while watching a slasher movie. (fear, terror)
- h) Throwing your child a surprise birthday party. (love, joy)
- i) Posting on Facebook that you won a spelling bee. (pride)
- j) Putting money in the Salvation Army can during the holidays. (altruism, charity)
- k) Eating the last cookie, even though you've already had more than your share. (greed)

Answers:

- a. Anger
- b. Excitement
- c. Comfort, empathy
- d. Love, affection
- e. Worry
- f. Gratitude
- g. Fear, terror
- h. Love, joy
- i. Pride
- j. Altruism, charity
- k. Greed

2. *Emotions in social media.* Identify the emotions that these hypothetical tweets are trying to evoke in response to the news headline CALIFORNIA PASSES CAP AND TRADE BILL TO LIMIT CARBON EMISSIONS FROM STATE'S BIGGEST POLLUTERS.

- "When you hear what the California Governor just did, you'll never want to leave the state again!" @ClickBaitForAdDollars (curiosity, excitement)
- "Big Government Gone Too Far with Job-Killing Regulation" @BigOilRefinery (disgust, anger)
- "Government Overreach Divides Californians in Name of Green Energy" @InternetTroll (disgust, discord)
- "Liberty Under Siege: How Radical Fringe Threatens Business" @ConspiracyWebsite (fear, paranoia)
- "I promise I will not stand for some Socialist Dictator's Attack on Capitalism." @PanderingPolitician (anger, fear)
- "New legislation doesn't go far enough to curb climate change; exempts too many polluters from compliance." @ScientistsForBetterWorld (doubt, concern)
- "Governor in pocket of green energy? Windmill farm among biggest corporate campaign donors." @PartisanCableOutlet (suspicion, disgust)

3. *Emotions in the voting booth.* Consider the issues that drive us to vote. What emotion underscores each issue? Is it a positive or negative emotion?

1. Funding Social Security:
2. Cutting taxes or keeping taxes low:
3. Ensuring equal protections under the law for all citizens, regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation:
4. Guaranteeing health care to all individuals:
5. Cutting government regulations so that industry can regulate itself:

6. Building a border wall to keep out illegal immigrants:
7. Restricting voter access by requiring voter ID:
8. Getting off fossil fuels and switching to renewable energy:
9. Keeping government small:
10. Making public college tuition free and ensuring primary education is properly funded:
11. Reducing social welfare programs such as food stamps:
12. Expanding Medicare and Medicaid:
13. Abolishing affirmative action:
14. Reforming campaign finance regulations reform to get money out of politics:

4. *Emotions in mass communication.* Revisit the examples of advertising, marketing, branding, publicity, and PR from Chapter 1's application exercises. Identify the emotions that each example of propaganda evokes.

4. *Text versus subtext.* Have students read a short story or watch a scene from a film and then identify the subtext.

6. *Fear appeal.* "If it's scary, be wary," advise Brooks Jackson and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, the founders of FactCheck.org. "A raw appeal to fear is often used to cover a lack of evidence that a real threat exists." Have students research a fear-driven belief or advertisement and determine if the fear is warranted. (For instance, fear of flying, fear of home invasions, fear of vaccines causing autism, etc.)

CHAPTER 5: Dividing and Conquering (an Audience)

When propagandists reduce their stories to simple black-and-white narratives, the characters of their narratives are no longer real, complex people; instead they become what Walter Lippmann called *stereotypes*. These stereotypes are easily divided by biases, which propagandists turned into the strategy of *target marketing*. When these targeted groups (ex. are divided for political gain, it's known as *identity politics*, and when they are pitted against each other and dehumanized, it results in *tribalism*, the foundation for every war ever fought. This division between in-groups and out-groups, us and them, makers and takers, is the reason for our uncompromising political climate, as well as a danger to democracy, because demagogues can exploit this tension for power and profit.

KEY TERMS AND TOPICS

- Stereotypes: black-and-white narratives about people/things that we rely on as a cognitive shortcut, or heuristic, to more easily process the world
- Target marketing: the strategy of segmenting people by demographics in order to sell them stuff
- Demographics: statistical data that marketers use to group people, such as age, income, religion, gender, etc.
- Ideology: a collection of shared beliefs that influence thinking and behavior
- Identity politics: when politicians target groups of people according to their demographics or ideologies
- Tribalism: viewing those with differing views as dangerous opponents
- Demagoguery: exploiting hate and anger for political gain

- Demagogue: any leader who amasses power through emotional manipulation, particularly by invoking anger and prejudice rather than by appealing to logic
- Affect heuristic: when our emotions influence our judgments and decisions
- Mirror neurons: neurons that cause us to intuitively mimic the emotions and behavior we see in someone else
- Authoritarianism: the blind submission to an authority who promises to solve all our problems
- The authoritarian personality: someone who has a binary worldview, an aversion to complexity, a strict obedience to authority, an intolerance of diversity, and a strong resistance to changing their beliefs
- The urban/rural divide
- How social media algorithms divide the populace
- Manichaeism: a binary religious belief that everything is either absolutely good or absolutely evil, with no middle ground, no ambiguity, and no shades of gray

APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. *Identity*. Have students complete the personal identity inventory on page 132. Have them consider the in-groups to which they belong. What are their stereotypes? Have them consider the out-groups that correspond to each in-group. What are the out-group's stereotypes?

2. *Tribes*. Have students form groups comprising people with different identities (i.e., combining students of different races, genders, or religions, combining athletes with nonathletes, etc.). Then have them work together to find commonalities within the group that can form a tribe (i.e., all born the same year, all on Instagram, all read Harry Potter, all love pizza, etc.).

3. *Target marketing*. Consider the target audience for these products. During which TV shows would you advertise them to reach those consumers? What events would you sponsor? In which magazines would you run ads? I'll provide a few examples to get you started.

- Lipstick: *Cosmopolitan* magazine, *America's Next Top Model*, sponsor a fashion show
- Organic vegetables: billboard near farmers market, Whole Foods mailer
- Soccer cleats: sponsor a sports tournament, ad in *Sports Illustrated*
- Diet pills: advertise during *The Biggest Loser*, ad in a fitness magazine
- Hip new DJ: pop-up add on Spotify, ad in *Rolling Stone*
- Baby formula:
- Hearing aid:
- Sugary cereal:
- Fabergé egg:
- Hunting knife:
- Printer cartridges:
- Honeymoon destination:
- Mew sports drink:

4. *Stereotyping*. "We are told about the world before we see it," wrote the journalist Walter Lippmann. "We imagine most things before we experience them. And those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception." Have students consider things they have opinions on, or perceptions of, that they have not

personally experienced. For instance: China if they've never been to China, vegetarian food if they've never eaten vegetarian food, a TV show that they've never watched, etc.

CHAPTER 6: Power, Profit, and Propaganda

As the social psychologist Alex Carey theorized, the three greatest political developments of the 1900s were the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda (to protect an organization's power against democracy). This relentless pursuit of profit has led to a proliferation of propaganda. By convincing consumers to think like corporations, these economic titans influence public opinion so that it becomes public policy. This proves that the true ruling power in society rests with those who wield influence through the media. The modern movement was propelled by the Powell Memo and flourishes under think tanks, lobbying groups, front groups, and deregulated airwaves, these groups work to make their economic policies, which favor private wealth over the public good. The result: a growing inequality that now rivals that of the Great Depression and threatens economic stability.

KEY TERMS AND TOPICS

- Democracy versus capitalism
 - Democracy: a system of government in which every citizen has the ability to elect representatives to legislate and ensure the government provides civil protections and public services that don't have a profit incentive
 - Capitalism: an economic system in which businesses control the means of production in order to make money.
- Laissez-faire economics: an economic model in which the market is free to do what it wants without government oversight or interference
- Neoliberalism: an ideology of laissez-faire market principles that includes deregulation, privatization, and small government
- Lobbyists: corporate representatives who to seek to influence Congress, sometimes by directly drafting bills for representatives to sign
- Think tanks: politically motivated institutes that often advocate for industry and economic policies that benefit their wealthy backers
- Pretense balancing: when news outlets appear to show both sides of a political debate but tilt heavily toward the side of a corporate think tank
- Overton window: the range of social, political, or economic ideas accepted in the public sphere at a given time
- Dunning-Kruger effect: an illusion of knowledge in which the more we think we know about something, the less we tend to actually know
- Politics and power dynamics—if money equals power, then politics is about the fight for that power
- Freedom of the individual versus freedom of the market—every political decision (and all legislation) can serve only one group of constituents at a time (business or labor, corporation or consumer, etc.)
- The labor class (left) versus the business class (right)

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Front groups. Front groups are organizations that appear to be grassroots community coalitions but that are created and backed by industry and that usually seek to oppose government

regulations. This is also called *astroturf* lobbying because it's a fake movement that pretends to be real. These groups are basically propaganda operations pretending to look like ordinary Americans. Some examples of front groups are Citizens for a Sound Economy, Committee to Protect Jobs, Tennessee Center for Policy Research, Center for Consumer Freedom, Citizens for Fire Safety, Freedom of Expression Foundation, Coalition for Americans at Risk, Freedom Task Force, Citizens for a Free Kuwait, American Energy Alliance, Global Climate Coalition, Trucking Information Service, Information Council for the Environment, Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse, Lawsuit Abuse Watch, and Greening Earth Society. Have students watch local and national election TV ads and note the groups that paid for them. Have students research the groups online. Are they authentic citizens groups, or are they front groups? Does their position benefit everyday people or business? If they are front groups, discuss the logic behind the deceptive names.

APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. *Democracy versus capitalism.* Have students discuss how issues often pit democracy against capitalism—how political stances are usually aimed at protecting the freedom of the individual or freedom of the market, but not both. As the journalist George Monbiot has written for the *Guardian*: “Freedom from trade unions and collective bargaining means the freedom to suppress wages. Freedom from regulation means the freedom to poison rivers, endanger workers, charge iniquitous rates of interest and design exotic financial instruments. Freedom from tax means freedom from the distribution of wealth that lifts people out of poverty.”

2. *Who benefits.* The single most important step in identifying propaganda is to consider which powerful interest group profits most from propaganda. Identify who benefits from each of the following beliefs. Who stands to lose power if these beliefs are challenged?

- a. There is no link between cigarette smoking and lung cancer.
- b. Racism does not exist in modern America.
- c. We should throw out food products on the “sell by” date, even though the product smells or tastes perfectly fine.
- d. Fracking does not contaminate local drinking water.
- e. The chemical BPA found in plastics is perfectly safe.
- f. Facebook does not have too much power and should remain one company rather than broken into multiple companies.
- g. All drug offenders should get lengthy prison sentences.
- h. Windmills are not a reliable source of energy.
- i. Allowing gays and lesbians to marry ruins the sanctity of marriage.
- j. A diamond ring should cost two months' salary.
- k. Politician X is soft on crime. You should vote for Politician Y.

3. *1 percent versus 99 percent.* For each of the following ideas, identify who benefits: the 1 percent or the 99 percent?

- a. The tax law is changed so that everyone pays a flat rate of 10 percent.
- b. The amount of carbon emissions that factories can pump into the air is increased so that double the emissions can be released without the factories incurring penalties.
- c. A national park is sold off so that it can be mined for fossil fuels.

- d. Funding to public universities is cut by 3 percent.
- e. Net neutrality laws are repealed, deregulating the internet, which means providers can now charge higher rates for more frequently visited sites.
- f. Student loan debt is forgiven.
- g. Super PACs should not have to reveal where their donations come from.
- h. Banks are prohibited from charging fees for ATM transactions.
- i. Breaking up monopolistic conglomerates increases competition.
- j. Single drivers should be able to use the carpool lane if they pay a fee.
- k. Job titles of “manager” or above are exempt from earning overtime.
- l. Walmart’s part-time workers form a union to fight for better wages.

4. *Origins of beliefs.* Where do our beliefs come from? Every belief we hold has been sold to us by someone. Do you believe in ghosts? Karma? That tax cuts stimulate the economy? That good guys always win? That what goes around comes around? Have students consider where their core beliefs come from—parents, friends, TV shows, books, religion, social media, etc. Have them consider who benefits from each belief, regardless of whether it’s true or not.

5. *Think tanks.* Have students select a think tank to research. What is the think tank’s mission statement? What policies do they promote? And more importantly: who funds the institute? Do the funders get what they pay for?

CHAPTER 7: Propaganda Techniques

This section dives into the most common propaganda tactics that corporate and political strategists use to derail debate, from framing (liberal media, entitlements, death tax, states’ rights), to Orwellian language (fair and balanced, Clear Skies Act, political correctness, religious liberty laws), to sowing doubt (the tobacco playbook, global warming, asbestos and lead, low-fat diet), to logical fallacies like ad hominem attacks (fake news, feminazi, McCarthyism, crooked Hillary), red herrings (voter fraud, birtherism, War on Christmas, antifa), and straw man arguments (socialism, death panels, tort reform, critical race theory).

KEY TERMS AND TOPICS

- Doubt: Where science meets resistance (global warming, cigarettes causing cancer)
 - Corporate denial (asbestos, lead)
 - Political denial (2020 election loss, capitol insurrection)
 - Personal denial (sexual abuse allegations)
- Framing: a subtle way of influencing public opinion by controlling the language used and the parameters of the subject matter
 - Orwellian language: a framing tactic in which something is described as the exact opposite of what it claims to be (Truth Social, religious liberty laws)
 - Business frame versus labor frame (worker shortage versus livable wage shortage)
 - Glittering generalities: words that suggest positive connotations while being so generic they are basically meaningless (“new,” “improved,” “best”)
- Straw man fallacy: an argument that deliberately misrepresents an idea so that it’s easier to attack or dismiss (critical race theory is racist or universal healthcare is socialist)

- Ad hominem attack: barely a step above name-calling, this attack is directed at a person's character rather than their argument or position (calling someone who isn't sufficiently pro-capitalist a "commie," calling unfavorable media coverage "fake news")
- Red herring: a distraction that makes a mountain out of a molehill to deliberately distract people from the issues at hand (Hunter Biden, George Soros, War on Christmas, Benghazi investigation)
 - Disinformation: falsehoods or lies created and spread in order to deceive
 - Misinformation: accidental errors, rumors, or false claims unintentionally spread without intent to deceive
 - Whataboutism: creating a false equivalency by misdirecting attention to someone else in order to distract from one's own transgressions

FURTHER DISCUSSION

One of the problems with many of these propaganda tactics is that they whitewash historical injustices. *Whitewashing* is intentionally downplaying some kind of wrongdoing so that it absolves one of blame or guilt. Have students discuss examples of whitewashing in history (near genocide of Native Americans, slavery, Jim Crow laws, etc.).

APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. *Propaganda tactics*. Identify the propaganda tactics (doubt, framing, straw man, ad hominem attacks, red herrings) used in the following real-world examples.

- a. Donald Trump calls Kim Jong-un "little rocket man."
- b. A vintage American Medical Association ad says, "the government domination of the peoples' medical affairs under Compulsory Health Insurance means a lower standard of medical care, higher taxes, damage to research, penalties for the provider, rewards for the improvident."
- c. Someone characterizes gay rights as a "homosexual agenda."
- d. Kellyanne Conway refers to lies as "alternative facts."
- e. An ad proclaims that DDT is safe.
- f. Rush Limbaugh calls the pollsters at Le Moyne College Center for Peace and Global Studies "long-haired maggot-infested dope-smoking peace pansies."
- g. Mike Pence writes an op-ed that states, "Despite the hysteria from the political class and the media, smoking doesn't kill."
- h. A super PAC claims that John McCain's support of stem cell research was essentially using "unborn babies in medical research."
- i. Former President Obama is called a "Muslim."
- j. Skeptical citizens claim that because approval of the COVID-19 vaccine was rushed, it may not be safe and cannot be trusted.
- k. When a politician says he wants corporations evading taxes to pay their fair share, his opponent responds that he doesn't want to raise taxes, unlike his opponent.
- l. Due to corporate negligence, a coal-mining tunnel collapses and kills two employees. So the parent company launches a workplace safety seminar that promotes individual responsibility for keeping one another safe.
- m. A political pundit defends migrant detention centers by saying that "only" six children have died so far.

- n. An Ivy League-educated former secretary of education dismisses critics as being “intellectuals.”
- o. A PR firm forms a front group that wants to abolish rent control in the city. They name themselves Citizens for Affordable Rent.
- p. When Dr. Seuss Enterprises stops publishing six of its sixty-plus titles because they portrayed negative stereotypes, multiple politicians decry the decision as another example of “cancel culture” at work.
- q. Political commentator Michelle Malkin calls peaceful environmental activists “eco-terrorists.”
- r. Pat Robertson says that the “feminist agenda” is a “socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians.” (hint: this one contains nearly all of them!)

2. *Propaganda tactics.* Have students look for examples of these propaganda tactics in partisan news outlets or presidential debates. Discuss how they are used to evade responsibility, smear opponents, or derail an important debate.

3. *Framing.* As writer Erica Jong has noted: “Language matters because whoever controls the words controls the conversation, because whoever controls the conversation controls its outcome, because whoever frames the debate has already won it.” Have students discuss if they agree or disagree with this statement and what they think it means.

4. *Labels.* The terms *politically correct* and *woke* were once positive labels describing an awareness of racial injustice, sexism, and homophobia. Discuss how these labels have been co-opted to mean something negative and how this undermines what the original terms stood for. What social change is curbed by making these labels derogatory? How is the term *cancel culture* used for the same purpose?

5. *Free speech versus hate speech.* Have students discuss the line between free speech and hate speech. When does one become the other? Are there limits to what should or should not be said in the media? How has hate speech led to political violence? Who should be held accountable for such violence?

6. *Symbolism.* Discuss the use of symbols in conveying a political message (Confederate flags, the swastika, an American flag pin, etc.). What subtext or message does each of these symbols convey? What does each symbol say about the people who use it? Does it accurately represent them? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 8: CASE STUDY—The Southern Strategy

This chapter uses the framework laid out in the previous chapters to explain how after the civil rights movement, political strategists exploited racial backlash for power in a campaign known as the Southern Strategy. The Southern Strategy was achieved by using coded narratives like the *welfare queen* (slogans), as well as appealing to the racial resentment of whites (heuristics) in order to evoke negative emotions (spite, anger) that divided voters along racial lines of makers and takers (us versus them) for the benefit of the corporate class (1 percent).

KEY TERMS AND TOPICS

- Altruistic punishment: impulsively punishing an individual for bad behavior, even if it means there are negative consequences for the punisher; also known as spite
- Selection bias: selecting a specific anecdote or example to justify a message, even if it's not representative of the data
- Dog whistles: coded racial language that is used to negatively imply a minority (welfare reform, inner city, states' rights)
- Statistics versus story, or how stories and narratives influence us more than dry data
- Poverty versus the poverty of character myth, and how this played out in LBJ's War on Poverty versus Nixon and Reagan's War on Drugs
- The myth of makers and takers: the us-versus-them dynamic that pits hardworking Americans who pay their taxes against so-called lazy urban dwellers who mooch off the system
- Impact of the civil rights movement on modern-day politics
- Rejectionist voting: the idea that the best way to win election is by demonizing your opponent so that people are motivated to vote against your opponent, rather than campaigning in a way that encourages people to vote for you
- Positive polarization: when a politician defines themselves by their opposition to the other candidate
- Consolidation of corporate power
 - Monopoly: a market in which a single company or producer has exclusive control, with no competition
 - Oligopoly: a market that is dominated by a small number of companies, in which there is very little competition
 - Antitrust laws: laws that prevent the formation of monopolies, or trusts, with the goal of keeping the free market competitive
- The permanent campaign: the nonstop reliance on political consultants to construct a favorable brand image through the news media, political blogs, websites, advertising, radio, and other propaganda

FURTHER DISCUSSION

The progress of the civil rights movement in the 1960s was met with a backlash that resulted in the Southern Strategy, which reinvented racism through coded language and antigovernment sentiment. It was one of three movements that altered the modern political landscape. The women's rights movement and the gay rights movement of the 1970s were met with similar backlash that brought the religious right into the Republican fold. These three rejections of equal rights coalesced into a culture war exploited by the party of business. Discuss how these three convergent forces are still with us today. In what ways are Black Americans, gay Americans, and women in America still fighting the same battles of the 1960s and '70s? Consider the rights each group has won in the past fifty years. In what way are these rights being threatened today?

APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. *Myths*. Have students research and debunk other myths like the examples in the book: the welfare queen, trickle-down economics, and the Loch Ness monster. They might choose to research 9/11 being an inside job, Columbus discovering America, creationism or intelligent

design, ghost stories (often attributed to carbon monoxide leaks) or UFO sightings (which are attributed to weather balloons, flairs, sky lanterns, secret military aircraft, etc.).

2. *Selection bias*. It is often said that the plural of anecdote is not data. Have students discuss what this means and search for examples of personal experiences that may not be representative of the wider collective. (For example, whenever they eat ice cream they may get a brain freeze, but no one else does. Or every time they fly, their flight is delayed.)

3. *Story versus statistics*. Have students demonstrate the power of story over statistics by creating a short story about a dry piece of data, or finding a film or TV episode that does this. Discuss how the story humanizes the information in a way that allows readers to empathize and respond emotionally.

4. *Monopolies and oligopolies*. Have students select an industry, such as cable internet, poultry, eyeglasses, or others, and research how many businesses operate in that field.

5. *The role of government*. According to the historian Ian Haney López, the government has four crucial roles to play in order to ensure broad prosperity: “first, to help people weather the vicissitudes that easily plunge families into poverty, for instance job loss or ill health; second, to provide escalators of upward mobility, such as quality schooling, higher education, and mortgage assistance; third, to build the nation’s infrastructure, thus laying the groundwork for the next great economic boom; and fourth, to rein in marketplace abuses through regulation, and to prevent excessive concentrations of wealth through progressive taxation.” Do the students agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

6. *The myth of meritocracy*. Americans are familiar with the belief that anyone can achieve the American dream as long as they work hard. We just have to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. But according to the former labor secretary Robert Reich, there are only four ways to become a billionaire, none of which is a product of the free market or hard work. They are: 1) exploit a monopoly, like Jeff Bezos or Mark Zuckerberg; 2) act on insider information, like Steven A. Cohen; 3) pay off politicians, like the Koch brothers; and 4) inherit wealth, like the Waltons. (In the US, about 60 percent of household wealth is inherited.) How does this information differ from what we are told about the American dream? Why does the bootstrap myth persist if it isn’t true? Who benefits from this myth? What societal changes are resisted because of this myth?

CONCLUSION

The psychologist Max Wertheimer once noted the distinction between education and propaganda: one changes minds, the other changes emotions. Propaganda replaces thinking with believing, facts with faith, and truth with myth. It overrides reason by invoking irrational fears and tribal anger, eroding empathy, silencing debate, and leaving a path of misinformation in its wake. To fight this *truth decay*, we must evolve beyond the indoctrination of our upbringing, challenge our tribal tendencies, confront our cognitive dissonance, and question who really benefits from our long-held beliefs. At a time when an alarming number of Americans believe things that are verifiably untrue and falsehoods spew nonstop from cable news, talk radio, and Facebook, there’s never been a more urgent need to cure America from its post-truth epidemic.

To paraphrase the father of propaganda, Edward Bernays, those who manipulate the opinions of the masses are the true ruling power in our society. It's time to return that power to the people.

KEY TERMS AND TOPICS

- Truth decay: a set of four related trends:
 - Increasing disagreement about facts and analytical interpretations of facts and data
 - A blurring of the line between opinion and fact
 - The increasing relative volume, and resulting influence, of opinion and personal experience over fact
 - Declining trust in formerly respected sources of factual information
- Living by our values instead of ideologies or beliefs
- Education versus propaganda

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Why local news is important. The Sinclair Broadcast Group, one of the largest media conglomerates in the country, owns 191 TV stations in 89 markets that reach nearly 40 percent of Americans. In 2018, Sinclair forced its news anchors to read a script that made reference to Trump's rhetoric about "fake news." You can access a video [Have students discuss the possible repercussions that such a monopoly has on information sharing. What impact does this have on local news? What dangers are there in having so much information come from one concentrated, partisan news source?](#)

APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. *Education and reeducation.* The futurist Alvin Toffler has noted that "the illiterate of the twenty-first century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." Have students discuss what this means.
2. *Values.* Have students consider the values or principles that are most important to them, such as equality, honesty, charity, responsibility, open-mindedness, and so on. What political stances or causes most support those values?
3. *Convictions.* The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once noted, "Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies." Have students discuss or write about what they think this means. Do they agree or disagree?
4. *Media influence.* Challenge the students to reflect on how the media affects them. Does it tell them which movies they should see? What clothes they should wear? Who they should vote for? Which car they should drive? If they should smoke or not smoke? What acts are social taboos? What words they shouldn't say out loud?
5. Return to the Edward Bernays quote from exercise 6 in Chapter 1. Do students still agree with what they originally wrote? Or has their position changed after reading the rest of the book?

FURTHER READING

INTRODUCTION

- *Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire: A 500-Year History* by Kurt Andersen
- *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* by Daniel J. Boorstin
- *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* by Chris Hedges
- *Twilight of American Sanity: A Psychiatrist Analyzes the Age of Trump* by Allen Frances
- *The Death of Truth: Notes on Falsehood in the Age of Trump* by Michiko Kakutani
- *Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload* by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel
- *True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society* by Farhad Manjoo
- *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters* by Tom Nichols

CHAPTER 1: Propagating the Faith

- *Introduction to Mass Communication* by Stanley Baran
- *The Dynamics of Mass Communication* by Joseph R. Dominick
- *Trust Me, I'm Lying: Confessions of a Media Manipulator* by Ryan Holiday
- *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* by Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson
- *Buying In: What We Buy and Who We Are* by Rob Walker

CHAPTER 2: Cutting Out Complexity

- *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman
- *The Political Mind: A Cognitive Scientist's Guide to Your Brain and Its Politics* by George Lakoff
- *You Are Now Less Dumb: How to Conquer Mob Mentality, How to Buy Happiness, and All the Other Ways to Outsmart Yourself* by David McRaney
- *Story* by Robert McKee
- *Narrative Economics: How Stories Go Viral and Drive Major Economic Events* by Robert J. Shiller

CHAPTER 3: Bias and the Brain

- *You Are Not So Smart: Why You Have Too Many Friends on Facebook, Why Your Memory is Mostly Fiction, and 46 Other Ways You're Deluding Yourself* by David McRaney
- *The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies—How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths* by Michael Shermer
- *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People* by Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald
- *Pre-Suasion: A Revolutionary Way to Influence and Persuade* by Robert Cialdini
- *Willful Blindness: Why We Ignore the Obvious at Our Peril* by Margaret Heffernan
- *Everyday Bias: Identifying and Navigating Unconscious Judgments in Our Daily Lives* by Howard Ross

- *Mistakes Were Made (but Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts* by Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson
- *The Hidden Brain: How Our Unconscious Minds Elect Presidents, Control Markets, Wage Wars, and Save Our Lives* by Shankar Vedantam
- *The Invisible Gorilla: And Other Ways Our Intuitions Deceive Us* by Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons

CHAPTER 4: Emotional Manipulation

- *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things: Crime, Drugs, Minorities, Teen Moms, Killer Kids, Mutant Microbes, Plane Crashes, Road Rage, & So Much More* by Barry Glassner
- *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst* by Robert Sapolsky
- *Foxocracy: Inside the Network's Playbook of Tribal Warfare* by Tobin Smith
- *The Hacking of the American Mind: The Science Behind the Corporate Takeover of Our Bodies and Brains* by Robert Lustig
- *Hate, Inc.: Why Today's Media Makes Us Despise One Another* by Matt Taibbi
- *They Take Our Jobs! And 20 Other Myths About Immigration* by Aviva Chomsky
- *Emotional Equations: Simple Truths for Creating Happiness and Success* by Chip Conley

CHAPTER 5: Dividing and Conquering (an Audience)

- *Why We're Polarized* by Ezra Klein
- *The Anatomy of Fascism* by Robert O. Paxton
- *How Civil Wars Start and How to Stop Them* by Barbara Walter
- *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* by Jason Stanley
- *How Propaganda Works* by Jason Stanley
- *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* by Jonathan Haidt
- *The Death of Democracy: Hitler's Rise to Power and the Downfall of the Weimar Republic* by Benjamin Carter Hett
- *Hateland: A Long, Hard Look at America's Extremist Heart* by Daryl Johnson
- *The View from Flyover Country: Dispatches from the Forgotten America* by Sarah Kendzior
- *What's the Matter with Kansas?* by Thomas Frank
- *How Democracies Die* by Steven Levitsky
- *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* by Timothy Snyder
- *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality* by Richard Florida
- *The Rise of the Creative Class* by Richard Florida
- *American Poison: How Racial Hostility Destroyed Our Promise* by Eduardo Porter
- *The Demagogue's Playbook: The Battle for American Democracy from the Founders to Trump* by Eric Posner
- *The Cruelty Is the Point: The Past, Present, and Future of Trump's America* by Adam Serwer

CHAPTER 6: Power, Profit, and Propaganda

- *Not a Conspiracy Theory: How Business Propaganda Hijacks Democracy* by Donald Gutstein
- *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* by Joel Bakan
- *The Fine Print: How Big Companies Use Plain English to Rob You Blind* by David Cay Johnson
- *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* by Nancy MacLean
- *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* by Jane Mayer
- *Kochland: The Secret History of Koch Industries and Corporate Power in America* by Christopher Leonard
- *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* by Kim Phillips-Fein
- *Life, Inc.: How the World Became a Corporation and How to Take It Back* by Douglas Rushkoff
- *We the Corporations: How American Businesses Won Their Civil Rights* by Adam Winkler
- *A People's History of the United States, 1492–Present* by Howard Zinn

CHAPTER 7: Propaganda Techniques

- *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation* by Drew Westin
- *The Case Against Free Speech: The First Amendment, Fascism, and the Future of Dissent* by P. E. Moskowitz
- *Lies, Incorporated: The World of Post-Truth Politics* by Ari Rabin-Havt and Media Matters
- *The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Deny Science—and Reality* by Chris Mooney
- *The Republican Noise Machine: Right-Wing Media and How It Corrupts Democracy* by David Brock
- *Trust Us, We're Experts! How Industry Manipulates Science and Gambles with Your Future* by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber
- *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You: Lies, Damn Lies, and the Public Relations Industry* by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton

CHAPTER 8: CASE STUDY—The Southern Strategy

RACIAL POLITICS

- *The Long Southern Strategy* by Angie Maxwell
- *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander
- *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* by Carol Anderson
- *How the South Won the Civil War: Oligarchy, Democracy, and the Continuing Fight for the Soul of America* by Heather Cox Richardson

- *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* by Jim Wallace
- *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson
- *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963–1994* by Dan Carter
- *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin DiAngelo
- *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s* by Elizabeth Hinton
- *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* by Elizabeth Hinton
- *White Identity Politics* by Ashley Jardina
- *White Borders: The History of Race and Immigration in the United States from Chinese Exclusion to the Border Wall* by Reece Jones
- *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality* by Tali Mendelberg
- *The Myth of Equality: Uncovering the Roots of Injustice and Privilege* by Ken Wytsma

INEQUALITY AND SOCIOECONOMICS

- *Who Stole the American Dream?* by Hedrick Smith
- *OK, Boomer, Let's Talk: How My Generation Got Left Behind* by Jill Filipovic
- *Economix: How Our Economy Works (and Doesn't Work)* by Michael Goodwin
- *American Amnesia: How the War on Government Led Us to Forget What Made America Prosper* by Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson
- *Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy* by Chris Hayes
- *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* by Nancy Isenberg
- *Poorly Understood: What America Gets Wrong About Poverty* by Mark Robert Rank
- *The System: Who Rigged It, How We Fix It* by Robert Reich
- *The Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution: Why Economic Inequality Threatens Our Republic* by Ganesh Sitaramn
- *The Vanishing Middle Class: Prejudice and Power in a Dual Economy* by Peter Temin
- *Makers and Takers: The Rise of Finance and the Fall of American Business* by Rana Foroohar
- *The Curse of Bigness: Antitrust in the New Gilded Age* by Tim Wu
- *Antitrust: Taking on Monopoly Power from the Gilded Age to the Digital Age* by Amy Klobuchar

THE REAGAN ERA

- *Tear Down This Myth: The Right-Wing Distortion of the Reagan Legacy* by Will Bunch
- *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* by Susan Faludi
- *Reconsidering Reagan: Racism, Republicans, and the Road to Trump* by Kaniel Lucks
- *The Man Who Sold the World: Ronald Reagan and the Betrayal of Main Street America* by William Kleinknecht

CONCLUSION

- *Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know* by Adam Grant
- *Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life* by Jennifer Kavanaugh and Michael Rich
- *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure* by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt
- *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* by Steven Pinker
- *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads* by Tim Wu
- *Skepticism 101* by Michael Shermer
- *The Common Good* by Robert Reich
- *Wages of Rebellion: The Moral Imperative of Revolt* by Chris Hedges
- *The Price of Civilization: Reawakening American Virtue and Prosperity* by Jeffrey D. Sachs