



A FIELD GUIDE TO WINGNUTS

Right Wingers Racists
Misogynists Jihadists
Homophobes Fascists
Sexists Anti-Semites
Fundamentalists Bigots
White Supremacists
Islamophobes Angry Crackpots
Climate Change Deniers
Hate-Filled Conspiracy
Mongers and their ilk

HOW THEY THINK & WHY THEY ARE SO DANGEROUS

LUCY HAYS NESBEDA



A FIELD GUIDE TO WINGNUTS

CONCEPTS
CONSEQUENCES
& COURSES
of ACTION

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A FIELD GUIDE TO WINGNUTS

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WARREN FOR PRESIDENT CAMPAIGN.

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Executive Summary

It is unfortunate but true: a significant subset of the human family operates from a place of fear and hatred, intolerance and bellicosity. We ignore the potential damage that this minority can manifest at our peril; during times like ours, where disruption and turmoil are in ascendancy, fear-driven hate-mongers always seem to gain traction.

Specifically, I am referring to right-wing extremists and religious fundamentalists, who share significant attributes that are at variance with the larger population. For the purposes of simplicity, I call this group “Wingnuts”; they are comprised of those who engage in overt derogation of others by virtue of their identity, which includes race, nationality, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, political affiliation, physical or intellectual ability, appearance or any other orientation. And derogation can run the gamut from hate speech and trolling through violence and full-on genocide. Research indicates that Wingnuts constitute about 37% of the population at any given time.

A Field Guide to Wingnuts draws from a wide variety of disciplines to create a comprehensive understanding of the perception and inner life of this pernicious and potentially dangerous population. This briefing imparts my major findings to Warren for President; my hope is that you find it strategically useful.

Of particular concern is this: the attributes that define Wingnuts render them especially susceptible to manipulation. Corrupt actors use this vulnerability as a means for exercising power. I call these actors “Puppet Masters”; they roughly coincide with Warren’s 1%, and also include the denizens of the right-wing echo chamber, corrupt religious leaders, and nefarious foreign actors who are intent upon disrupting democracy.

It is important to emphasize that, while Wingnuts are conservative, not all conservatives are Wingnuts. It is also true to say that the Republican Party created the environment where a Trump Administration could happen. Republicans have abandoned principled conservatism to embrace Wingnut extremism. This has profound and troubling implications.

We have all experienced how difficult it is to communicate across the liberal/conservative divide. A major reason for this has to do with huge differences in how we view the welfare of others. We liberal Democrats concern ourselves with ensuring that everyone has what they *need*. Conservative Republicans, on the other hand, feel that people should get only what they *deserve*. And, they have lots of distinctions they use to judge the relative worthiness of others. Indeed, much of what follows seeks to describe how Wingnuts claim entitlement over others.

Through my interdisciplinary research, I have identified four core attributes that define and describe Wingnuts:

- > FEAR, which serves as the driving force of Wingnut radicalization. Fear impairs mental and emotional functioning, drives everyone to the political right, and is too often weaponized as a political strategy.

- > INTOLERANCE OF AMBIGUITY refers to the black and white, shallow thinking that typifies how Wingnuts deal with complex issues. When nuance is expunged, so is compassion. The absolutist thinking that results manifests totalitarianism.
- > DOMINANCE DEFERENCE denotes the ways in which Wingnuts relate to authority and regard social hierarchy. Wingnuts much prefer authoritarian leadership, seek to ensure that their tribe dominates others, and seek to reinforce structural inequalities.
- > ATTENUATED RELATIONSHIP TO WHAT IS REAL concerns Wingnut affinity for romanticized versions of history, conspiracy theories, and other false narratives.

Powerful Puppet Masters exploit these attributes to manipulate Wingnuts to act in ways that are often against their own interests. The result is a democracy that is becoming increasingly frail.

Warren's fearlessness and commitment to anti-corruption activism serve as a much-needed and powerful antidote to our perilous times. It is my hope that the enclosed data and theory can contribute to this important campaign.

Note for busy readers: the whole paper will take about 30 minutes to read. However, you can scan just the **bold copy** to get a solid overview.

Introduction

Donald Trump and his administration present an existential crisis for American democracy. And, it's irrefutable that the Republican Party created the operating environment wherein a Trump Presidency was possible. It is doubtful that American democracy, as we know it, will survive a second Trump term in office.

It's important that we understand the current nature of our political polarization clearly: From an ideological standpoint, the Democratic Party is pretty much where it's been for the past several decades. The Republican Party, however, has gone haring off into the lands of the berserker right. **“Polarization” is a phenomenon singularly attributable to Republicans.** Recent findings confirm that the **current GOP is to the right of UKIP, the Le Penn gig and even the Austrian Freedom Party, which is unambiguously neo-Nazi.** Hate crimes, mass shootings, and overt racism are all on the rise; Trumpism has come to be equated with the most toxic forms of identity-based violence, with all that implies.

A Field Guide to Wingnuts seeks to understand how the denizens of the toxic right function: their motivations, rationalizations, and their understanding of their world. I hope to have my Field Guide published in good time for the election. In the meantime, I am offering key lessons and insights to Warren for President, to ensure that you have this information as soon as possible. This investigation has explored new research from a wide variety of fields, including neurology, social psychology and other behavioral sciences, as well as theology and political philosophy. While I have citations galore, I omit them here for purposes of clarity and brevity.

Wingnuts, for the purpose of this project, are defined as those who self-identify as right-wing conservatives, members of a fundamentalist religion, or both. The overlap between these two groups is substantial, for reasons we'll be getting into.

We're essentially talking about those who engage in the overt derogation of others by virtue of their identity. This includes race, nationality, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, political affiliation, physical or intellectual ability, appearance or any other classification. In other words, *racists, misogynists, homophobes, xenophobes, bigots, both jihadists and Islamophobes, white nationalists, the anti-immigrant crowd, and others of this ilk.* And, derogation runs the gamut from trolling and hate speech, through violence targeted towards those of an identified group, all the way to genocide.

Framing the Discussion

- > *As a species*, it looks like we are pretty much **50/50 liberal and conservative.** And, from an evolutionary perspective, this makes sense. Conservatives keep us safe; liberals innovate new ways for going forward.

- > A more accurate statement about our political orientation is that **most of us are both, trending liberal or conservative depending upon the topic at hand**. The vast majority of Americans who identify as “moderate” are among this mixed bag, which includes Independents, as well as traditional “lunch box Democrats” and the long-lost ranks of liberal, pro-civil rights Republicans.
- > **Research suggests that Wingnuts comprise about 37% of the population**. Everywhere, at all times, across the globe. Alas.
- > **At this point in time, Trump’s base = Wingnuts = the Republican Party**. As all others have abandoned ship. We should take comfort in the fact that Trump has failed to increase his base, while being very clear that the real damage being done by this powerful minority is incalculable.
- > **Conservatism does not equal Wingnuttery**. Part of our current political crisis has to do with the loss of any principled, intellectually coherent, conservative voice. The principled right has always played an important, legitimate, and much needed role in our national politics. The Republican Party has abandoned this role, and something drastic will need to happen on the right side of the aisle if this voice is to be restored.
- > **Wingnuts are especially vulnerable to manipulation**. This is a consequence of the specific attributes that define them. An astonishingly small number of powerful, greedy and dishonest actors have been brilliant at manipulating Wingnuts towards their own ends. **This crew, which coincides with Warren’s 1%** currently calling the shots in Washington, are what I call **Puppet Masters**. Additional Puppet Masters include fundamentalist leaders and the denizens of right-wing media, like Rush Limbaugh, Alex Jones, and the jolly jesters at Fox News. And then, of course, there is Vlad the Bare Chested, who seeks the destruction of democracy around the Globe.
- > **The ascendancy of Wingnuts is not a singularly American phenomenon**. The whole world is witnessing the emergence of right-wing intolerance and the manifestation of political projects sourced from toxic nationalisms and hatred. It is important to track this trend, as this phenomenon is contagious, and there is a transnational multiplier effect.
- > **Wingnuts are, for all intents and purposes, essentially bonkers**. *And you can’t negotiate with bonkers*. Because the Republican Party is now wholly owned and operated by Wingnuts and the Puppet Masters who are manipulating of them, “negotiating” with the current GOP is a waste of time and precious energy. **In these sorry circumstances, bipartisanship and “working across the aisle” have to be off the table**. Continuing to be clear-eyed and direct about this distinguishes Warren from other contenders for the nomination. Especially when it comes to Biden, who seems to be operating entirely from his experience about how it used to be. Not how it is.
- > **The entire Republican Party needs to be indicted for the off-the-rails, corrupt enterprise it really is**. Seriously. The roster of crimes that can and should be laid at the feet of the Republican Party is long and grim, going back to the Nixon Administration. For now, this should be

the work of surrogates, operating at arm's length. After the nomination, this should be the work of the entire Democratic Party; it should be the Party's goal to disqualify all Republican candidates as morally and ethically viable options. *Voting Republican should be equated with being a hate-filled racist who is OK with ongoing wide-spread corruption.*

Some Preliminary Differences Between Liberals and Conservatives

Some fun facts, wherein our stereotypes are validated by scientific research:

- > Conservative households really are tidier, and have more cleaning supplies and stuff that helps to keep everything organized. In contrast, liberal households are more likely to be sloppy, and have more art supplies (and/or other creative stuff) around.
- > American conservatives listen to a remarkably narrow selection of music, far preferring country, gospel, or classical over all other genres. And, big surprise, they overwhelmingly prefer trucks.
- > Conservatives prefer humor that is pun-based, or driven towards a clear punch line or pay-off. Liberals, in contrast, like humor that is existential, absurdist, and go for material that is often transgressive and seeks to break the bounds of "normal" discourse.
- > Liberals are far more open to new and novel experiences, and are not especially fussed about straying outside the bounds of traditionally established standards of behavior. From a conservative point of view, liberals are "hedonists"
- > Lastly, liberals and conservatives do, indeed, like different foods. Really. Turns out that some foods like broccoli and arugula actually taste more bitter to conservatives. Conservatives like to stick to the familiar while liberals are off seeking the new and novel. The burger-and-beer versus artisanal-goat-cheese-and-Pinot Noir divide is real.

More Seriously, However

A major distinction between liberals and conservatives has to do with how we regard the welfare of others.

Liberals are concerned with ensuring that everyone gets what they need. As in, if you are sick, you need a doctor. Period. Same goes for decent housing, access to transportation, and good schools for your kids.

Conservatives, on the other hand, are all about people getting what they deserve. And the distinctions that ensue about who is deserving becomes a whole Thing.

This difference generates two very divergent ideas about what is fair. For liberals, fairness is about ensuring that everyone's needs are met, and that the rules apply to everyone. For conservatives, it's unfair that their hard-earned money is taken as taxes and then spent upon people who do not deserve the succor that they are receiving.

This umbrage over resources being “wasted” on the “undeserving” is what drives conservative fury over much of the liberal project, which includes foreign aid, the social safety net (which, of course, they are perfectly willing to use for their own needs) as well as the promotion of human rights and civil liberties, here and abroad. **Embedded in these attitudes are very specific ideas about entitlement.**

Reagan created the “welfare queen” as a durable villain in American life, “unfairly” sucking up resources that she did not “deserve.” This narrative was used to validate the things he wanted to do, like give tax breaks to rich people and erode the social safety net. Republicans have been singing this tune ever since.

Warren is redirecting accountability to the 1%, who are actually responsible for the misery currently being experienced by financially fragile Americans. Because no one is OK with being ripped off or cheated, anti-corruption feels like a stance that can resonate with a broad sector of the American electorate.

However, we need to be clear that Wingnuts do not care about *fairness*. Nor do most conservatives. No political pitch that asserts fairness as a core value will move those on the right. Especially where they see arguments about fairness being equated with resources going to populations they despise.

Four Useful Models for Understanding the Political Divide

1 : George Lakoff’s use of Metaphor: Strict Father versus Nurturing Parent

In Lakoff’s conception, conservatives view the world through a **Strict Father** paradigm, whereas liberals see things through the lens of a **Nurturing Parent**.

The Strict Father metaphor is sourced out of a world-view that perceives danger at every corner, ruthless competition as being the order of the day, and all humanity as inherently evil. Only a strong male can keep a family safe under these circumstances. It is a *father’s* role to provide for order and safety in this dog-eat-dog, zero-sum world, *because no woman is up to the challenge.*

Masculine strength is perceived as the only sure bulwark against certain chaos and disaster. This implies very specific ideas about manhood and implies that the only appropriate role for women is as subservient, caretaking nurturers. Discipline and following the rules is of primary importance, and only those who are obedient are deserving of success; disobedience is equated with sinfulness. **Critically, compassion and fair play are viewed as evidence of being “weak.”**

In contrast, the Nurturing Parent model is about respecting differences and sponsoring the success of everyone. In this view of the world, people are perceived as being mostly good. Nurturing Parents share responsibility for making decisions, and are less concerned about who is “in charge.” **Conformity and obedience take a back seat to a celebration of difference and individuality.** Nurturing Parents view it as their obligation to meet the diverse needs of others, acknowledging that no single strategy works for everyone.

In the Nurturing Parent model, mutual support, collaboration, and the ability to see another’s point of view are considered to be essential skills for success. Instead of only following externally determined rules, there is a focus on taking personal responsibility for choices and actions. **Courtesy and compassion are core virtues, and concentrated power is viewed with distrust.**

These two vastly different ideas about the world translate into very different models for what government should do, what it should look like, who should be in charge, and who gets to benefit from the institutions and policies that get manifested.

Implications for Warren for President

- > **The Strict Father model rigidly conserves old-school ideas about masculinity and the role of women.** This is one reason why it will be a challenge for any woman to score a majority of votes from men. Especially conservative white men. Even those who self-identify as “center right” or “moderate” flip out over the idea of a woman in charge. Many men will not admit this when asked. Of course, we should note that Clinton won the popular vote in 2016, even while losing white men by a considerable margin.
- > **The current Republican project is focused upon protecting and extending white male hegemony and entitlement, in alignment with the Strict Father paradigm.** There was a narrative that bloomed after the 2016 debacle that asserted that Trump won because of rural white fears about losing economic ground in the face of a rapidly evolving economy. This has been debunked. *We now know that the most salient emotion driving Trump’s base was fear over losing social status in the face of the advancement of women and people of color.* I won’t belabor the glaring alignment between the Strict Father model and Trump, as I assume this is evident and obvious.
- > **This model clarifies divergent perceptions of the human experience:** collaboration and sharing versus zero-sum competition; mankind as essentially good versus essentially evil; trust versus fear; compassion versus obedience. We will see these themes again.
- > **This model also shows divergent attitudes towards formal authority and power.** This will be another major theme, as we will see.
- > **Both Warren for President and the Democratic Party should be mindful of the implications of what Lakoff suggests: we operate out of a different moral universe, and we need not apologize for our compassion and concern for equality.**

2 : Confirmation Bias

We like to think of ourselves as paragons of rational thought. Alas, this is not how our brains actually work. Instead, when confronted with a choice, we make a mostly unconscious gut decision, and then seek information that confirms that reaction. It needs to be emphasized that we all do this; we relentlessly edit the data we consume in order to reaffirm our biases, and our already-decided idea about how our reality is constructed. Not only do we all do this, we all are largely unconscious of this process.

This is Confirmation Bias. As in, we seek out data that confirms our already established bias. Stuff that doesn't fit our gut reactions gets elided and ignored. How bad is this dynamic? A whopping 98% of what our brain does happens beneath our conscious awareness. We operate on automatic pilot, and a big part of what our brain is doing while we are not paying attention is weeding out data that is dissonant with our established understanding of the nature of our reality.

Even worse, there is a biologically embedded feed-back loop built into this process. Whenever we experience validation of what we already believe is true, we get a nice little bump of dopamine. The more we seek confirming data, the more we crave the bump, and this means that we can become actually *addicted to confirming information*. We all have this capacity to gorge on confirmatory information, buzzing along in a nice haze of dopamine, while avoiding looking at data that upsets our happy little biased apple carts.

However. There is a variance between liberals and conservatives here, and a significant one. Research indicates that **liberals are far better at overcoming their Confirmation Bias**, and are more willing to consider information that is contrary to their preconceived prejudices. **Conservatives are more likely to be more strongly biased, are less willing to consider alternative points of view, and tend to carry their bias into more areas of interest.** And the more conservative, the more this dynamic comes into play.

Why This Matters to Warren for President

- > **Conservative predilection for Confirmation Bias renders them more susceptible to false narratives, ginned up conspiracy theories and the whole fakery of the right-wing echo chamber.** Conservative consumers of right-wing media are literally addicted to the dopamine bump they get whenever they hear what they want to hear. Fox News and others use this.
- > **Confirmation Bias serves to maximize other pernicious attributes of Wingnuttery.** As we will see.
- > **Confirmation Bias helps to keep conservatives stuck.** This is a big reason why “converting” a right-winger or fundamentalist is such a heavy lift.
- > **Again, we need to keep a clear distinction between center-right conservatism and Wingnuttery.** Variances in Confirmation Bias is a huge factor. One group is reachable and the other is not. The more clarity we have over the difference between conservatives and Wingnuts, the better we can think strategically about where to spend effort and where to conserve our energies.

3 : Moral Foundations Theory

This model goes a long way to explain the deep-seated and unreconcilable difference between liberals and conservatives: **we think about issues differently because we have different embodied reactions to what we experience in life.** Here's how this works.

We live in physical bodies, which have experiences, which we understand as emotions. These emotions rattle around in our clever hominid brains and get expressed as moral intuitions or concerns.

The easiest example to understand how this works is to consider the emotion of *disgust*. As in: oh gross! The meat's gone off and it's all maggoty. Or yuck, that dude is covered with suppurating sores. We feel disgust, and that disgust motivates us to avoid eating food that will make us sick, or catching a communicable disease. The moral concern that results from our experience of disgust is *purity*.

Pretty much everyone values cleanliness. Of course, from a concern for good hygiene, we can extend our desire for purity to issues of *sexual* purity, and from there it's a few small steps to get to issues of *genetic* purity, and even *doctrinal* purity, for both our religious and political lives.

Another example is *anger*, which almost always has to do with issues of *justice* and *fairness*. We get pissed off when we feel like we've been violated, or whenever we witness injustice being imposed upon others. Anger is our go-to emotion whenever expected norms are disrupted.

Our physical experience of emotions translates into *moral intuitions*. These vary enormously from person to person, which translates into differences in our moral priorities. The following table lists out several common emotions and the moral concerns that result.

Emotion	Moral Concern
Anger	Fairness, justice, and the rights of self and others
Compassion	Care of others, meeting other's needs, protection from harm
Respect	Obedience, regard for those in a position of authority
Group Pride	Loyalty, patriotism, in-group love
Disgust	Purity, including sexual, genetic and doctrinal purity

Liberals and conservatives do not engage with this roster of moral concerns in the same way. *Liberals and conservatives do not agree about policy because they have very different visceral, embodied, reactions to the same situations.*

Liberals care especially about issues of *justice and fairness*, and in *caring for others*. Anger at injustice and compassion for those in need are core drivers of the liberal political orientation.

Conversely, conservatives care enormously about issues of *loyalty, obedience and purity*. They care that the rules are being followed, and that the welfare of their own is being tended to. They take enormous pride in their tribe; the concern for purity relentlessly permeates the conservative understanding of their moral world.

Events that prompt liberals to respond with outrage and compassion (for instance, a human rights abuse) are likely to illicit nothing but vague disdain from conservatives, if those affected are outside of their favored in-group. Conversely, the sorts of things that outrage conservatives (often having to do with issues of loyalty, or obedience to those in charge) leave liberals bemused at best. **This is a big reason why political campaigns that are designed to communicate core values have little to no impact to those in the other party. And, why it's so bloody hard to communicate across our (increasingly polarized) political divide.**

This model, in combination with the Strict Father/Nurturing Parent metaphor, also serves to explain the massive difference between right and left when it comes to expressions of patriotism:

- > **On the right, patriotism is about obedience and loyalty to the state**, which is seen as an appropriately powerful father figure. This is the domain of “my country right or wrong” and “love it or leave it”.
- > **On the left, however, patriotism implies an obligation to work towards a more perfect nation.** Protest movements, social justice projects, and even acts of civil disobedience are seen as legitimate expressions of patriotic love of country.

So we on the left weep and rage over the abuse of refugees on our southern border, while from the right we hear, at best, crickets. But God forbid a thoughtful, respectful professional athlete take a knee during the National Anthem before a football game. Outrage!

However, this model, as presented, has limitations. Moral concerns have been cherry picked in order to promote specific arguments about tribal politics. There are other emotions – along with their concomitant moral concerns – that have been left out.

Some of these are listed below; I include them because they provide additional insight as to how emotions contribute to our political lives.

Emotion	Moral Concern
Contempt	Shirking obligations
Disdain	Out-group animus and derogation
Guilt	One's own transgressions
Shame/humiliation	Loss of place in the social hierarchy
Embarrassment	Violation of social norms, loss of relationship

Emotion	Moral Concern
Gratitude	Reciprocity, equality, interconnectivity
Awe	The virtue of others, spiritual connection
Happiness, joy	Right relationship, alignment

Applying this model to the Warren Campaign

Moral Foundations Theory is enormously useful as a sort of magic decoder ring for understanding the feelings and impulses of those on the other side of the political divide. Here are some examples of how these insights have practical application:

- > **Warren can reach across the political divide through the Moral Foundation of Loyalty.** Aspirational statements sourced from the Moral Foundation of Loyalty can go a long way towards making a connection with those in the center-left through to the center-right. Because, damn it, we love our country too.
- > **Conservatives are especially concerned about meeting obligations, and have huge contempt for those who blow off responsibilities.** The right views those on the left as irresponsible, hedonistic, self-centered and self-indulgent. They are also big proponents of “personal responsibility” and fear the “nanny state.” **Warren can neutralize these concerns by:**
 - **Continuing to present herself as steady and responsible**, someone who has always worked hard, made sacrifices, and followed the rules.
 - **Being a Grandmother.** That she is post-menopausal is a big plus. No one can worry about her being a “loose woman” “using her gender” to get ahead.
 - **Eschew any trappings of entitlement**, wherever entitlement can be equated with eliding or avoiding the kinds of obligations that most people are responsible for. This got Hillary into endless trouble. Warren needs to present herself as someone who still makes her own bed in the morning.
- > **For conservatives, disdain of others, “out-group animus” is this Whole Thing.** We’ll be getting into this issue in some depth later. This is a core progenitor of toxic Wingnuttery.
- > **The shame/humiliation/embarrassment nexus is a significant driver of social isolation and radicalization.** Despite this, I find no mention of these in the current literature; these distinctions are mine. I also consider these to be gendered, with shame/humiliation being a male concern and embarrassment to be more feminine.

Campaigns do themselves no favor when they shame those with whom they disagree. At the same time, saying what is true is critically important. This implies the need to be very strategic about the source of messaging. Use surrogates wisely.

- > **Male violence is almost always the result of shame and/or humiliation. Especially the humiliation of the male ego.** This has significant implications, particularly in terms of how we deal with fragile young men. The current model of toxic masculinity is a terrible trap that does disservice to both men and women.
- > **Again, conservatives do not care about fairness. They simply don't.** And, it's best to never expect the Moral Foundations of compassion to resonate on the right. Especially among conservative males.
- > **Gratitude and awe are universal. As is the pursuit of happiness.** Aspirational language is the great unifier. These Moral Foundations point to the way out of the great divide. Warren has gotten the moral outrage thing down, and her fierceness is inspiring. She has the knack of having people leaving her rallies full of hope. The more she can amp this up the better!

4 : Theological Considerations

Our religious lives and our political lives are close reflections of each other. Both engage us in core issues of identity, values, and moral priorities. We need to consider theology if we are to get a good handle on the Wingnut mind and experience. Specifically:

Fundamentalists and conservatives view the Divine as a Strict Father, while those on the left tend to engage in Spirit through the lens of Nurturing Parent. How one views God influences how one regards religious authority, and establishes one's tolerance for rules, hierarchy, and the concentration of power. Theologians use *eminence* and *imminence* to describe this difference. An eminent God rules from on high, and is in charge of everything. Imminence perceives all creation as being endowed and imbued with the Divine. *An eminent God is an external authoritarian. An imminent God is intimate, as the Divine is experienced as being everywhere all the time.*

Fundamentalists view scripture as literal fact; a more accurate term may be "literalist". Fundamentalists/literalists rob sacred texts of their most compelling power – as transcendent myth, able to impart wisdom to the devout through changing times and circumstances. Interpreting sacred texts as literal truth is limiting and often problematical, as sacred material often does not track with facts that are universally accepted in broader society (the age of the Earth, for example, or evolution).

Fundamentalisms exist as encapsulated, sequestered positions in opposition. Fundamentalisms are more the same than they are different, no matter the faith tradition or geological position. Attributes of jihadism are virtually identical to extreme Zionism, or Fundamentalist Hinduism (along the lines of Modi's party) or Christian fundamentalisms now extant in America.

Specific Attributes of Current American Christian Fundamentalism

Part of our Pilgrim and Calvinist heritage is belief in "predestination", which asserts that God has assigned us our position on Earth: either "saved" or condemned to Hell. There is

nothing we can do about this, except live “as if” we are among the saved. Being able to afford a nice lifestyle, with all the trappings of high-status consumerism, is evidence of being among the saved. This is the essence of the “Protestant Work Ethic” defined by Weber in 1910.

“Belief in a Just Universe” follows from this logic: if one’s station in life is established by the All Mighty, one gets what one “deserves” in life. The only theologically sanctioned course of action is to accept one’s lot in life. **This ideology served as a potent rationalization for the institution of slavery,** and continues to justify ongoing asymmetrical power and status. If God has determined who is master and who is slave, then each person’s condition in life is a reflection of God’s will. Bucking an imposed power structure (ordained by an eminent God) is viewed as evidence of essential sinfulness. Thus Abolitionists, Unionists, Socialists, Suffragettes, and others who seek to disrupt the existing power structure are seen as sources of existential evil.

This distorted logic manifests distinctions about who is “deserving” and who is not. In alignment with this cosmology, a poor, black, single mother living in sub-standard housing with poor access to health care, transportation, or a living wage is singularly responsible for her unfortunate circumstances. Therefore, to lend her assistance is seen to be “against God’s will”. Fundamentalist Christian Republicans are totally OK with innocent children being kept in kennels, so long as nobody uses foul language.

Predestination and Belief in a Just Universe conveniently absolves Fundamentalists from their Christian obligation to be their brother’s keeper. Their cosmology validates structural inequalities; if everyone is getting what God has determined they “deserve”, the need for change disappears. In the face of this magical thinking, the enterprise of Christian charity is obviated as moot.

Southern Christian Fundamentalism and Brown v Board of Education: what happened after this ruling and why it matters.

When it became clear that public schools were going to be forcibly desegregated, **whites fled, creating a new infrastructure of “Christian” schools,** whose independence allowed for continued segregation.

We are now dealing with several generations of the products of these institutions: people whose entire education has been impacted by a Christian fundamentalist filter. Not only has Darwin been expunged from the curricula (along with any serious engagement in the natural sciences) but history, literature and all other subjects have been edited to fit a white, Southern, “Christian” point of view. Of course, these students have never been required to associate with African American students, so no intimate interracial relationships have been allowed to manifest.

These alumni now inhabit school boards, state houses, mayors’ offices, seats in Congress, Governor’s Mansions, and other positions of authority and power. Not only do they view the world in a way that most of the rest of us find problematic, they are profoundly ignorant of core knowledge that is needed for them to do their jobs. More significantly, this is a powerful group of political actors who do not share the same factual understanding of America’s realities as the

rest of the population. They have their own history, science, and understanding of the purpose of government.

Why Christian Fundamentalists Love Trump

(even though he is obviously a Godless Visigoth)

- > **They share his racism, misogyny and xenophobia.** Trump's resentment and aggrieved entitlement over the advancement of women and people of color resonates with the Christian right, who viewed the erosion of white male hegemony as an existential emergency (Obama's election was experienced as a four-alarm calamity). Trump re-asserts white male dominance in ways that Wingnuts view as a victory. Trump's base, including Christian fundamentalists, view him as their champion.
- > **Trump is the paradigmatic Strong Father.** Fundamentalists share Trump's view of the world as dog-eat-dog, where being "strong" is everything, and nothing is more dangerous than looking "weak." All of this is empty bombast, of course, and the belligerent thumping, posturing and roaring tends to freak the rest of us out. But fundamentalists (indeed all Wingnuts) take comfort in a bellowing bully being in charge.
- > **Trump's anti-immigrant activism is in alignment with white Christian fears of "white replacement"?** Immigrants do not "deserve" the goodies that come with residence in America. They need to be removed so white "true" Americans can perpetuate the inequitable power arrangements they believe have been promised to them by their eminent God.
- > **Tax breaks for the 1% are OK, because most of the 1% are white men.** This policy reinforces the proper order of things; fundamentalist Wingnuts view wealth as evidence of being one of God's chosen.
- > **Eroding the Social Safety Net is OK, because it denies benefits to people who do not "deserve" them.** Of course, this causes actual harm to Trump's base too. A combination of magical thinking, Confirmation Bias and Wingnut sequestration from reality keeps this from hitting home.
- > **They have forged a transactional arrangement where their support will be rewarded with the appointment of anti-abortion judges.** So far this has paid off.
- > **As long as Trump asserts dominance as a Strong Father, he can have whatever he wants.** Wingnut comfort with authoritarianism includes giving those in power a pass. Trump is therefore entitled to whatever piece of female anatomy he feels like grabbing. As for charges of corruption. Liberal lies, all of them.

Four Attributes that Define Wingnuts, An Integrated Model by Lucy Nesbeda

1 : Exacerbated Levels of Fearfulness

Social scientists agree that the central, defining attribute of right-wing extremists is an elevated propensity for fear. As we've already discussed, conservatives are relatively cautious, especially when it comes to anything new. This manner of experiencing the world is both a gift and a constraint; caution both ensures safety and limits experience.

Wingnuts serve as both a repository and generator of fear, and it too often happens that they manifest levels of anxiety that are inappropriate for the presenting reality. It is unfortunately easy for this reservoir of ginned-up paranoia to splash all over a larger population.

What fear does

Fear reduces the perception of options available to us. When we're freaked out, our capacity to discern what resources are available or think through a range of options becomes impaired.

Terror, especially, generates a real loss of cognitive functioning. Terror shuts down whole chunks of the rational parts of our brains. During episodes of terror, we devolve from clever strategic hominid to reactive, instinctual critter.

Fear manifests as rage, especially in males. This is the *fight* part of the flight-or-fight response. It's hard-wired, often immediate, and incredibly difficult to manage. Where political variance enters the picture is in terms of threat *perception*.

Fear can take over. Fear sucks up our energy, and narrows our emotional bandwidth. It erodes our resilience, promotes estrangement from our fellows, keeps us preoccupied, and wears us out. Political actors use this: wear the populace down with fear until they are exhausted, numb, and compliant. When their capacity for resistance is eroded enough, you can do whatever you want.

Fear, especially when sustained, drives everyone to the political right. In an environment where everyone is scared, authoritarianism is far more palatable; the drive for a sense of safety wins out over support for civil liberties or human rights. Right wing authoritarians use this phenomenon as a means for gaining power.

Excessive fear fosters zero-sum thinking. In a context where everything is scary, the world is perceived as a dog-eat-dog, every man for himself operating environment, in alignment with the Strict Father paradigm. Fear destroys the capacity for trust and compassion. Distrust, aggression, and self-interest dominate over the impulse to collaborate, to provide assistance to the vulnerable, or to engage with others outside of the small ranks of the sequestered, trusted few. Fear segregates the frightened into positions of isolation.

What Science Has to Say About Fear

The right amygdala is known as “the body’s alarm circuit.” And it ends up that those who self-identify as conservative have larger right amygdala than do liberals. Instead, liberals have a larger hunk of brain called the ACC, which is affiliated with course correction, and taking another look before making a choice. To some extent, our political orientation is hardwired at the neurological level.

Negativity Bias refers to how humans universally focus first, and longest, on bad stuff. Which makes sense, as our ancestors needed to be careful not to step on a snake while picking yummy berries. However, **conservatives have much stronger Negativity Bias than do liberals.** Conservatives have especial difficulty in letting go and moving on. And the farther to the right one is, the stronger their Negativity Bias. Another term for this variance is **Threat Sensitivity**. And the way that conservatives are more easily disturbed and grossed out ties into our understanding of the conservative predilection for the Moral Foundation of Purity.

Remember the filtering impact of *Confirmation Bias*, a trait that we all share. Among Wingnuts, this, in combination with enhanced Threat Sensitivity, manifests as an *active seeking out of scary information*. Which creates a kind of perpetual feedback loop. **Those with enhanced Threat Sensitivity will actively seek out confirming data that validates their fears.**

Ardent conservatives restrict their news consumption to Fox and similar outlets, which delivers a steady diet of stories designed to scare them, and that feeds their well-established prejudices (African-Americans are lawless criminals; Muslims “hate” America; everyone from south of the boarder is a rapist, a drug dealer or both). **Because of the dopamine bump that Confirmation Bias provides, they receive perverse pleasure through having their worst fears repeatedly confirmed. This is the essence of the Fox business model, which seeks to create a viewership perpetually addicted to content designed to confirm their fears.**

Applying this to Warren for President

- > **Warren’s brand is fearlessness.** She benefits whenever she exposes the fear-driven faulty thinking of the Wingnut-dominated GOP. **It also distinguishes her from other primary candidates: courage instead of caution: fighting for what is right and true instead of seeking to appease detractors. Clarity instead of capitulation.**
- > **The right-wing echo chamber is masterful at manipulating and mobilizing Wingnuts** through creating content that carefully resonates with their Confirmation Bias and Threat Sensitivity. Fox and others have manifested a viewership that is literally addicted to what they are peddling.
- > **Wingnuts (a.k.a. Trump’s base) live with perpetually elevated levels of fear. This calls for our compassion, even while we work to limit the real damage done from a position of fear.** If we intend to puncture their fact-free bubble, we will need to devise strategies that help Wingnuts feel safe and respected while they consider alternative points of view. Again, Warren’s projected strength and courage are critically useful.

Thinking About Fear as a Sociological and Political Phenomenon

Storytelling is important, and there are a few plot lines that are so ubiquitous that they should be considered as archetypic. **For our purposes, there is a particular universal trope that relates to the topic at hand, known as the *Myth of Redemptive Violence*.**

This powerful archetype is central to just about every story we tell each other: the penultimate scene where the good guys (usually underdogs) take up arms against evil oppressors and kick ass. The act of violence redeems the hero(s), reasserts the proper social order, and has the additional benefit of imposing well-deserved punishment upon the evil malefactors.

This myth seems to resonate with everyone. As a species, we are all on board with the use of violent force, as long as our favored side “wins”. We may decry an original violent offence, but we all cheer when the Death Star gets blown up, the bad guys get gunned down by the Sheriff, the wimpy kid manages to whoop ass on the class bully, or any other scenario where the bad guys pay and the good guys reassert the social order through the application of violence.

In real life, **use of violence as a go-to strategy is closely tied to Threat Sensitivity. Among Wingnuts, super elevated levels of fear make all sorts of situations seem existentially menacing, and therefore deserving of a violent remedy.** This reactivity is especially toxic where the threat assessment is grossly inaccurate. A classic example of this dynamic is the recent spate of horrors that have come to light to manifest the Black Lives Matter movement. For a disturbingly large sector of our citizenry, a black male is still seen as an occasion for out-of-scale and absurd levels of fear. Black men are viewed as inherently dangerous, and therefore pose a threat (even when they are scrawny teenagers); therefore extreme, and even lethal force is fully justified by the police, even in the case of a routine traffic stop.¹

The Myth of Redemptive Violence is especially favored by Wingnuts, and this has a really bad synergy when combined with their obsession with the bad stuff; the result of the combination of these dynamics is that **Wingnuts are persistently preoccupied with “evil”.** Existential evil is endlessly discussed, described, pondered, and strategized around. **In a world where evil is rampant, hyper vigilance is requisite, and threats are seen everywhere.**

This is because Wingnuts are very quick to externalize their fears, and to project them upon others. Which is to say, they do not spend time and energy exploring feelings of doubt or personal inadequacy. Introspection, or efforts to take personal responsibility? Not so much. **On the far right, everything bad is located squarely in the external, outside environment. Nothing that is going awry in a right-wing conservative’s life is ever their fault. It’s always everybody else’s fault. And for that, they must pay.**²

¹ Here’s the harsh reality: as long as white cops can kill unarmed black men, and experience no consequences, (as no police officer has yet to be convicted for these deaths), by definition, the murder of black males by white cops is, for all intents and purposes, legal.

² Both Timothy McVeigh and Tamarlan Tsarnaev shared this sense of umbrage and entitlement. Both had disappointments in their personal lives, for which they refused to take responsibility. Instead, they blamed vague, totalizing, external forces. They both wrapped themselves up in bullshit religious rationalizations (Christian, in the case of McVeigh, Muslim in the case of Tsarnaev) and acted out from cooked-up positions of ill-usage. In both cases, acts of horrendous domestic terrorism were sourced out of a particularly perverse application of the idea of Redemptive Violence.

For those who inhabit the extreme fringe, evilness can be ascribed to all manner of attributes that do not conform to their narrow worldview. **For Wingnuts, in alignment with their Strict Father/eminent understanding of the world, any group that has the potential of upsetting the status quo are not just upsetting and bad. They are occasions of *sin* and *evil*.**

For example, consider the events during the “Unite the Right” fiasco in Charlottesville Virginia during August of 2017. White males, full of aggrieved entitlement and self-justification, protested the ascendance of “others” (Jews, people of color, “libertards”, “nasty” women, immigrants, the LGBTQ community) as sources of existential threat to straight white male hegemony. From their perspective, the entire fabric of American culture was at risk, and *purity, and a proper deference to obedience and loyalty* needed to be reasserted through heroic acts of *Redemptive Violence*.

There is another serious consequence to this way of experiencing the world: **being scared all the time requires the development of psychological strategies and compensations. *Terror Management Theory* describes an all too frequently deployed approach to, well, manage terror.**

Here’s the strategy: morph fear into rage, and adopt a posture of moral superiority and entitlement. Externalizing one’s anxieties through projecting them on others is a critical step in this process. This endows the too-frightened Wingnut with courage and righteousness. This is extra helpful in instances where fear is combined with the perception of imposed humiliation. **Through this piece of psychological jujitsu, fear gets transmuted into a position of righteousness and claimed power.**

From this self-proclaimed position of dominance and entitlement, **one can then cast oneself in the role of a Righteous Warrior, fighting for all that is pure and in conformity with the established order. *Terror Management requires Redemptive Violence*.** Redemptive Violence is fully justified by those who claim moral superiority as Righteous Warriors fighting a righteous battle against the forces of existential evil³

Externalized fear is the driving force that manifests most of the toxic violence we deplore. Europe’s Jews were responsible for every misfortune that had befallen the German people, therefore, they needed to be eradicated. American Indians were barely human, were dangerous and unpredictable, and were in the way of the creation of a white, Christian, civilized American West, therefore, they needed to be “removed.” African American males are inherently dangerous, therefore, lethal force is justified during any interaction with the police, no matter how trivial the purported offence.

Implications for Warren for President

- > **Warren has an opportunity to create a heroic narrative as she continues to shift responsibility for the suffering of economically fragile Americans from the “Welfare Queen” to the 1%. This story can bring Americans together around a shared common cause.**

³ Recent mass-casualty shootings, perpetrated by white supremacists, is now a global phenomenon. And is emblematic of this dynamic. And, this is the mechanism that drives violent Jihadisms throughout the Globe.

- > **In the Warren narrative, the violence in question is the Economic Violence perpetrated through corruption.** And the corrective is transparency and holding people accountable. This has the potential of binding Americans together in common purpose as a **morally driven quest**. Compliance with the rule of law, not violent action, is the corrective.
- > **Holding powerful interests accountable for the damage that they have done will go a long way towards rebuilding trust in the Government,** and will help to heal an electorate that has been exploited and abused for too long.

How Fears Become Weaponized

As a means for exercising personal power, we have to admit, damn it, that bullying works. Those who are willing to shout and shove, and to be rude and demanding, get what they want. **Bullies use fear and intimidation as well as a willful disruption of social norms as a strategy for keeping others off balance, and for robbing others of their personal power.** Too often the victims of bullies make the calculation that resistance and pushing back isn't worth the effort, so the inconsiderate, the selfish and the demanding get what they want. Which is to exercise power over others.

Bullying is sourced out of a competitive, zero-sum view of the world, and is justified as necessary for survival. **Bullies are also universally characterized by an absence of compassion, empathy, or even common consideration. Narcissism is common; at the extreme end, bullies are outright sociopaths, without a conscience.** It is generally understood that Trump's bullying includes identifiable attributes of narcissism and sociopathy. Moreover, his projection and externalization of his deep-seated terrors is pretty obvious.

As a military strategy, the imposition of terror can be a means for vanquishing the enemy. This can include the tactical use of mass rape, torture, gratuitous killing, and other methods for cowering a population into submission. **An aggressor that demonstrates that there are no bounds to the violence and destruction he will use has a decided advantage: submit or become utterly destroyed.** Genghis Khan was notorious for this. His strategies included the gratuitous slaughter of masses of people as well as a systematic program of raping as many women as possible. Bashar al Assad took a page out of this playbook when he used chemical weapons against his own people. Not only is this strategy an atrocity, the atrocity is the point. A man who will gas little kids will stop at nothing, so surrender is the only option.

For extremists, the execution of violence against ordinary citizens, (a.k.a. "terrorism") serves as both a strategy and a goal. This is obvious, but still needs to be said: terrorism is a go-to means for exercising power for non-state actors. Terrorists seek to traumatize and destabilize the targets of their actions. Often, they seek to foment a violent reaction with the intention of initiating a larger conflict which they regard as a Holy War, and in which they see themselves, the elite and Righteous Warriors, as ultimately victorious. They dispense Redemptive Violence with a vengeance, and imposing fear is both the strategy and the goal.

As a political strategy, ginned-up fear can drive a populace into tolerating governmental intrusion they would otherwise never consider. Opportunistic authoritarians will often take

advantage of a crisis as an occasion for making a quick grab at civil liberties and human rights. For example, the recent attempted coup in Turkey gave Erdogan the permission he needed to begin a systematic stripping of civil liberties from all Turks; he is well on his way towards converting Turkey from a democracy into a dictatorship.

The Bush Administration reaction to the attack of September 11, 2001 is another example. Power hungry factions within the administration (Dick Cheney and his merry band) lost no time in pushing through a realignment of Federal agencies, creating the Department of Homeland Security, with new powers and a huge new budget. This realignment was hustled through Congress with hardly any push back; much of the legislation went largely unexamined. In the face of the trauma that had the country reeling, initiatives that promised an increase in security and safety were adopted with hardly any discussion or scrutiny.

Implications for Warren for President

- > **Warren has a well-established reputation for being unperturbed by bullies.** Her calm courage is one of her great strengths.
- > **In contrast, Biden’s insistence on the need to “reach across the aisle” can be characterized as a kind of cowardice.** Along these same lines, politicians who yelp about proposed gun control measures that “go too far” are exposing themselves as cowed by the mighty power of the NRA. **The role of leaders is to lead, which in some cases includes making the case for a position because it is correct, despite powerful forces allied against it.**
- > **The contrast between Warren’s mature strength and Trump’s unstable posturing couldn’t be greater.** Trump is – in essence – a deeply frightened man. Warren’s contrasting stability and grounded-ness can alleviate the anxieties of the electorate.
- > **Warren’s tough stance against corruption can spark a national movement, calling upon the courage of all Americans against powerful forces determined to intimidate and bully.**

2 : Intolerance of Ambiguity

Conservatives hate ambiguity. Instead they like known knowns, and are driven towards black and white distinctions and choices. This sounds both self-evident and not such a big deal, and falls in line with our commonly shared experience of right-wing and fundamentalist reasoning. However, this attribute has some consequential implications. Because whenever ambiguity heads out the window, compassion and sympathy follow shortly thereafter. Specifically:

Wingnuts Need “Cognitive Closure”

In the face of scary ambiguity, Wingnuts are driven to choose a side as fast as possible. In sorting out how to jump, Wingnuts take their cues from trusted sources of information that are in

alignment with their Confirmation Bias. Not sure how to think about an issue? Listen to Limbaugh, or Hannity, or your pastor, your cult leader, some other source you trust. **Once you are clear where your ideological team stands, you stand with them.**

As a consequence of this process, the accepted position becomes immediately endowed with moral certitude. And the favored stance will include a clear casting of proponents into good guys and bad guys, in alignment with Terror Management Theory. Once a position becomes a moral and political stance, facts become superseded by loyalty to a cause, and one's obligation is to be a righteous crusader against the forces of evil.

The habit of rushing to judgment in the face of ambiguity has another political consequence. **For Wingnuts, not only are chosen positions infused with moral certitude, the very act of rushing to judgment is interpreted as a sign of strength.** Careful consideration of an issue is perceived as “weak,” and those who persist in seeing multiple sides of an issue are accused of being guilty of “moral relativism.” Of course, the ultimate slam of a politician is the charge of being a “flip-flopper.” **From the perspective of the far right, strength means never changing your mind, and reconsidering a position is the ultimate proof of weakness.** While liberals are often freaked out by this ready-shoot-aim approach to policy, conservatives find the lack of ambiguity in the decision-making process comforting.

Wingnuts are in perpetual search for John Wayne, whose characters strode alone into the dawn, untroubled by complex data, to shoot down the bad guy whose evil status was taken as a matter of faith.

Wingnut Are Prone to Shallow, Stuck Thinking

A consequence of the need to rush to judgment is that it's impossible to think through prospective positions thoroughly. Complex information requires effort and attention. For those who find ambiguous situations stressful, it's hard to hang on through a process of making sense of information that may be conflicting or unclear. And, because Wingnuts have the mental habit of externalizing anything that is difficult, they maintain no self-awareness of their internal mental process; Wingnut minds tend to run on autopilot.

Puppet Masters use this dynamic to stampede Wingnuts into adopting positions that benefit those in power. They accomplish this by providing edited fact patterns that transmute dodgy data into iron-clad ideological stances. Puppet Masters then push fealty to their favored position through stimulating Wingnut loyalty to the manufactured One Truth.

A great example of this is the issue of climate change. Once upon a time, there was broad consensus about the dangers of human-generated climate disruption; it really wasn't much of a political issue. Then the Koch brothers spent a ton of money, funding enough specious research to provide themselves with cover, and worked to make “belief in global warming” an issue of culture and political affiliation. Since they began their campaign, the percentage of Americans who are climate change deniers has risen dramatically.

Keeping faith with the One Truth requires a lot of effort and a number of strategies.

- > **One is to stay within a heavily edited fact environment**, consuming information from the few pre-edited sources of information that align with one's preconceptions. Among cults, there are strictures barring communication with "apostates"; or those who have left the fold. Indeed, attempting to leave a Wingnut enterprise can be dangerous, as we see in the case of jihadi groups.
- > **Another is to avoid problematic realities through a rapid deployment of pre-approved chosen narratives.** This involves an application of stereotypes and well-worn tropes. These are almost always trotted out with an attitude of smug certitude, in alignment with the assumed role of Righteous Warrior.
- > And we've all experienced that thing where, when challenged by inconvenient facts, **a Wingnut will launch into an irrelevant argument about something not quite related. This is called "what-about-ism."** This tactic seeks to derail a potential challenge before any deep discussion can happen. This is the favored tactic of that crazy uncle during Thanksgiving dinner.
- > **And, of course, we are all familiar with the tactic of the scorched-earth counter attack.** Challenges to bogus positions are too often met with responses that are way out of scale – a direct form of bullying behavior. Often the counter attack is personal, demeaning, insulting: a verbal assault.⁴ Violence may be threatened, and indeed might ensue.

Significantly, conservatives are *reluctant to apologize*. And the more conservative one is, the more this dynamic comes into play. **Apologizing is seen as "weak"; and, by definition, involves a change in posture, and an admission of being in the wrong.** Strong men stick to their guns. Right or wrong. Give up any idea that Trump will ever have the grace to apologize, or that his base would thank him for doing so.

Recall the endless trouble Hillary Clinton had with the persistent accusations leveled at her over the Benghazi tragedy: the more she apologized, the more Republicans went after her, because they viewed her apologies as a sign of weakness. Imagine if she had taken a page out of the (male) Republican book, and had simply declared the issue closed, that she was going to refuse to address it any further. "Cut it out. Pound sand. I'm done with this." I wonder if this might have put the issue to bed quicker.

I am suggesting that Warren should think very carefully before she issues any apology. While Democrats will accept a statement of responsibility as an act of grace and courtesy, those on the right will view this as blood in the water.

An Erasure of Ambiguity Begets Totalized Thinking

This attribute is the most dangerous aspect of Wingnut Intolerance of Ambiguity. When doubt has no room at the table, then a one-size-fits-all mentality takes over. Rules are rules.

⁴ Trump's recent assaults on four Congresswomen of color was classic, as was his subsequent attack of Elijah Cummings and the district he represented.

No exceptions, mitigating circumstances, or deviations due to context can be considered. The dominant narrative hijacks the capacity of the faithful to think clearly. Wingnuts transmute their existential anxieties into stances of moral superiority, and these positions are inevitably rigid and shallow. ***A reality without ambiguity also lacks compassion, or empathy, or consideration, or forgiveness. Totalized thinking manifests totalitarianism.***

As an example: the singular coherent attribute of Trump's politics is his xenophobia and racism. His followers share this. Trump's "Zero Tolerance" policy towards immigrants is a manifestation of his deeply seated racism, and has created a human rights crisis. In accordance to his orders, no consideration can be given to the real-life circumstances of the people who are attempting to secure refuge in the United States. Instead, immigrants are vermin "infesting" the sanctity of America.⁵ And so, we are confronted with the horror of having very small children torn from their parents, and desperate refugees being housed in the functional equivalent of dog kennels.

Most of us are utterly freaked out by this kind of thinking; the absolute lack of ambiguity and compassion are experienced as scary, alien, and even obscene. But we have to understand that for Trump's Wingnut base, the shallow, clear, and all-encompassing narrative is a source of comfort. Especially once a narrative has succeeded in granting Wingnuts a position of claimed moral superiority.

Once the totalizing narrative is established, the faithful proselytize like fury. Speaking their version of reality to potential new recruits keeps the vision alive, and feeds their needs for obedience, loyalty and purity. Instead of considering alternative approaches to an issue, Wingnuts seek new converts, police their own ranks to ensure doctrinal purity, and go to absurd lengths to express their fealty and loyalty to the Great Cause, however that is constructed.

Fundamentalisms and right-wing parties have a long track record of growing in popularity during periods of turmoil. It should come as no surprise that totalitarianisms are in ascendancy throughout the globe, in the face of climate disruption, massive migrations of refugees, and the current global ascendancy of income inequality.

Intolerance of ambiguity is the source of abominations like Trump's Zero Tolerance immigration policy or the Taliban's imposition of second-class citizenship upon all women and girls. And this is what totalitarian enterprises always do: they flatten out reality into a simplistic, unambiguous space, and impose rules based upon this lack of ambiguity. ***Wherever life gets simplified into black and white, compassion, empathy, and respect for individual rights leave the field. Policies that express intolerance of ambiguity are, as a matter of definition, antithetical to human rights and civil liberties.***

Implications for Warren for President

- > **It's important to track when and how reality is being flattened by those on the right, and to stand up for reality, in all of its three-dimensional complexity and ambiguity.** Democracy demands this.

⁵ Significantly, these specific words demand action. And, we are seeing white nationalist Wingnuts taking up arms in support of his call to action.

- > **It's a better strategy to go after the Puppet Masters, who knowingly peddle bullshit and lies, than it is to go after the hapless Wingnuts who gobble them up.** This is consistent with Warren's anti-corruption position. Many financially fragile Americans feel legitimately victimized. Warren should continue to be clear about who the real villains are, and what's at stake for ordinary Americans.
- > **It's important to name the Republican Party's current barbarism for what it is: nascent totalitarianism. The majority of the American people want no part of this.**
- > **Be aware that the act of apologizing is tricky.** The admission of error is viewed by those on the left as mature and responsible. But from the right, an apology is viewed as a sign of weakness. Be quick to move on.

3 : Dominance Deference

Conservatives relate to authority in ways that are fundamentally different from liberals. We've seen this reflected in the Strict Father/Nurturing Parent dialectic, and expressed in variances in Moral Foundations. Unlike liberals, conservatives in general, and Wingnuts in particular, prefer rigid hierarchies and asymmetrical power arrangements.

Specifically, here in the West, this is what the dominant hierarchy has looked like for the last five centuries:

God
White Straight, Western European Men
White Straight, Western European Women
Other sorts of White Men
Other sorts of White Women
Everyone Else
The Rest of the Natural World

This hierarchy is, of course, in alignment with an *eminent* idea of the Divine: an all-powerful, Strict Father who must be obeyed, and who determines who should be in charge. This worldview is the source of still-dominant ideas about *entitlement*. **Certain white males consider themselves to be entitled to positions of dominance because they view this as having been granted to them by The Almighty.**⁶

Not only does this orthodoxy place particular white males above all others, **it places humanity above and separate from nature. For most conservatives, any assertion of mankind as part of nature generates significant flip out, as it challenges the whole hierarchy. This explains the**

⁶ In 19th Century Britain, a man who murdered his wife was guilty of Capital Murder. But a woman who murdered her husband (even in the face of abuse) was not only guilty of Capital Murder, she was also guilty of Treason and Heresy. Because God, the Church, and the Crown had placed him "over" her. Men could abandon or divorce a wife for any or no reason. Women had no power to divorce, and any property she brought to a marriage was his.

dug-in antipathy that conservatives have for environmental protection, and why they equate being “green” with being soft, wimpy, or otherwise unmanly. Environmentalism places mankind in a relationship of intimacy with the Earth, in alignment with an *imminent* perception of the Divine, and the Nurturing Parent paradigm. Both of which are anathema to those on the right.

This proclivity, which favors hierarchies and the dependence on formal authority, plays out in different ways at different levels of scale.

Dominance Deference at the Individual Level

Wingnuts revere those in power. They are attracted to bullies, strongmen, and autocrats who claim space, voice, and the right to call the shots. Unlike liberals who inherently distrust those who like to throw their weight around, conservatives like the sense of safety they get when a strongman is in control. (I use the “sense of safety” advisedly, as often these situations are often the opposite of safe.)

As part and parcel of this dynamic, Wingnuts are far too willing to cede personal power to the authoritarian of their choice. Wingnuts actively give parts of themselves away: huge, central, essential parts of themselves. **And the authoritarians who prey on them gobble up this power to increase their own clout and sense of self-importance.**

Wingnuts will willingly cede power and control of the specifics of their sex life, their spiritual life and how they worship, even aspects of personal expression and career choice. **Political and religious leaders play the role of perpetual parent**, and a Strict Father at that. **Anxious Wingnuts adopt the role of dependent child**, enjoying the sense of security, inclusion, and clarity that comes with being committed to the Great Man and his Great Cause.

And then there is the flip side of this dynamic: Wingnuts will not only give away personal power to their chosen leaders, they will also seek to acquire reflected glory, power and status from their leaders.

Because they are so heavily invested, **Wingnuts over-identify with their leaders**, and seek to psychologically slipstream on their leader’s greatness. Committed followers of an autocratic leader develop a strong vested interest in the success of the object of their obsession. **Not only will they do whatever they are told, they will do everything they can to enhance the status and further the agenda of their hero.**

This is why Trump’s base will never falter: they have too much emotionally invested in his success. They’ve thrown their lot behind a glitzy reality TV figure whose messaging resonates with their own festering resentments and sense of aggrieved entitlement. They revel in his assault on “political correctness” and his crude bullying. They feel every punch thrown at the left as if they are doing it themselves.⁷ And they will defend Trump to the last.

⁷ New York Times columnist Michelle Goldberg commented on MSNBC that the constant gift that Trump gives to his base is “the tears of liberals.” 2019

It's this over-identification with authoritarian leaders, with its combination of ceding personal power on the one hand and claiming the status of the leader on the other, which makes Wingnuts so dangerous when sufficiently mobilized. They've given away huge chunks of their selfhood. Because their own sense of personal agency has been inseparably intertwined with the object of their adoration, the loss of their leader's glory is experienced as an existential calamity.

Dominance Deference at the Group Level

Issues of relative status have more salience on the right than on the left. This is not only about individual standing; this also concerns the relative status of groups of people. And by "groups" I refer to all kinds of classifications and categories of humanity, however devised. Nationality. Race. Religion. Class. Caste. Gender Identity.

Wingnuts take group ranking very seriously, especially where this refers to maintaining power structures and hierarchies. This involves two conjoined processes: *fostering in-group loyalty*, and what is known as *out-group derogation*. In total, this phenomenon goes by the term "**Social Dominance Orientation**".

The dark side of in-group loyalty is out-group derogation. The ugly shadow of group pride is disdain of others. Among right-wing conservatives, pride for one's identity is coupled with the need to claim *superiority over* others. Here's how this works.

The first is, as stated, **the assertion of supremacy of one's favored tribe. The social sciences folk call this mechanism *Group Based Dominance***, and among the right, a rather astonishing amount of effort goes into claiming, defining and imposing group superiority. This enterprise involves making distinctions between "us" and "other", and the work of creating mythologies about why the in-group is so great and why all others suck. **This is a fear-driven process, where ambiguity is expunged, and where one-dimensional stereotypes are deployed as weapons.**

The other has to do with attitudes of indifference towards the well-being of all those who are outside of the favored group. This is called *Opposition to Equality*. Conservatives in general, and Wingnuts in particular, view the welfare of those outside their in-group with utter indifference. Instead, they are concerned about maintaining the elevated status of their chosen few. **Opposition to Equality is that place where prejudice stops being theoretical and involves active measures that cause real harm.** Racial discrimination is not a passive affair. Nor is misogyny, religious intolerance or extreme nationalism. Those "others" are "undeserving" of equality. The sabotage of efforts to impose equality is fully in alignment with this orientation.

Social Dominance Orientation is what you get at the confluence of rigid hierarchical thinking, exacerbated levels of fear, intolerance of ambiguity, and Confirmation Bias. Extreme conservatives experience a diverse world with visceral disgust; an obsession with purity is part and parcel of this dynamic. The need for the rigid order stimulates loyalty and obedience. Claiming the place of moral superiority helps to manage fear and anxiety. And those who are regarded as lower status *deserve* lousy outcomes. ***Social Dominance Orientation generates the belief that direct action, intended to manifest bad outcomes for those who are despised, is fully justified.***

Dominance Deference at the Systemic Level

Here we're talking about the deep structures of society that serve the needs of some to the detriment of others. Conservatives seek to, well, conserve the status quo, and view incursions into the established order by others (women, people of color) with alarm. **For Wingnuts, any compromise of the received order is viewed as an existential crisis.**

Here's just some of what we're talking about:

- > **Structural racism**, which manifests stuff like barriers to voting by people of color as well as persistently segregated schools. Also, the long-standing racial toxicity of the criminal justice system, both well documented and obstinately resistant to mitigation.
- > **Persistent misogyny** impacts every woman in America, even while new generations continue to chip away at gender-based barriers. Men persist in claiming entitlement over access to female bodies, making sexual harassment, molestation and rape all too common experiences for women, even in the 21st century.
- > **Economic violence** refers to things like red lining, housing discrimination, unequal pay, and disparities in access to healthcare, transportation, healthy food, and other aspects of decent and safe living.
- > **Environmental injustice** refers to the ways in which poor and minority communities reliably suffer the worst consequences of environmental degradation. Toxic dumps, polluting industries, and environmentally catastrophic mining practices disproportionately impact populations with the least power.

All of these examples are about the powerful imposing their will over the powerless, for the purpose of personal gain. There are, of course, efforts that seek to end structural violence, to grant power to the powerless, and to protect vulnerable populations and fragile ecosystems from those who are intent upon exploitation; these exist throughout the globe. All of these initiatives are *liberal* enterprises, driven by the Moral Foundations of Justice and Protection from Harm. Examples include the human rights initiatives enacted by the UN, foreign aid extended by the G7 to less developed countries, refugee relief, and international efforts to mitigate climate disruption.

Conservatives, persistently indifferent to unequal outcomes, want nothing to do with any of this. Instead, they seek to find ways to justify the status quo, no matter how much harm is being done. **Policy and sociology folk refer to the mechanism Wingnuts use to validate the status quo as *System Justification Theory*.** Which goes like this.

First, an overarching mythology needs to be established that explains and rationalizes the status quo, with all of its injustices and unequal outcomes and outright structural violence. Part of this project includes the application of some mighty hefty Confirmation Bias, which might elide atrocities, or deny negative impacts, and instead establishes a filter through which conservatives view reality. Once this story is established, **specific narratives have to be created that serve the needs of people at different places in the hierarchy.**

For those on the top of the heap, there are powerful, deeply rooted narratives that justify the privilege they claim. Birthright entitlement claimed by members of royal families throughout Europe is a classic example.

At the bottom of the heap, among those who choose fealty to the hierarchy (because upsetting the apple cart is too chaotic and scary), a different set of myths are required. **Not only do those at the bottom need to get on board with justifying the entitlement of those on top, narratives must be developed that explain why one's lousy status is right and correct and fully warranted.**

Among conservatives, white male privilege is a given. Among women, there are those who buy into this, who are known to be “good women.” It needs to be noted, that the benefits (within the confines of the system) that redound to those who remain compliant are considerable, and serve to reinforce the status quo. Of course, “uppity women” are another thing entirely, deserving of whatever lousy outcome they experience.

And, especially in the American South, there has long been a common understanding of the distinction between a “good n*****” and an “uppity n*****.” The “good ones” make the calculation to keep their heads down to stay safe. Those who are seen as being “uppity” (often on slim evidence indeed) are subject to horrendous corrective measures. Particular outrage is reserved to those who have been labeled as “good” whenever they transform into “uppity.”

Central to this concept is the idea is that maintaining an asymmetrical power structure requires the collaboration, participation, or collusion of people throughout the hierarchy's architecture. Fear is the fuel that drives this collaboration.

Entrenched asymmetrical power arrangements, kept in place through System Justification, manifests a bunch of lousy outcomes. Here are just a few of the most notable:

- > ***Victim Blaming:*** This is that thing where women and girls who are sexually assaulted are blamed for “getting themselves into trouble.”⁸ Or when a black child is caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. Or immigrants are blamed, just because. Those who claim entitlement are quick to place the blame on their victims, who “should know better”.
- > ***The Cassandra Dilemma,*** which is what I call the whole hot mess around whistle blowers. Despite new efforts to the contrary, speaking truth to power is still hazardous. While we celebrate the courage and commitment of those who speak truth to power, outcomes for whistle blowers remain wretched: careers and reputations destroyed, income lost, lives permanently disrupted.⁹
- > ***Systematic Attacks on Agents of Change.*** We all revere the brave work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., or Gandhi, or Nelson Mandela, or of the courageous suffragists who risked their lives. Of course, while they were doing what they were doing, they were decried as saboteurs and dangerous disruptors of the peace. Few have lived to enjoy a peaceful old age.

⁸The recent example of Dr. Christina Blasey Ford is emblematic. Being out drinking beer with boys put the onus of what happened on her. Because, of course, the boys cannot be held responsible.

⁹ Again, Dr. Blasey Ford is an emblematic example.

- > ***Pernicious Policies:*** Derogatory beliefs give birth to horrendous government programs; Trump’s abhorrent immigration initiatives are a classic example. Other older examples include persistently segregated and underfunded schools, institutionalized housing discrimination, and other structural barriers to the advancement of people of color. Another is the Indian reservation system, where Native Americans are legally stuck in the position of persistent toxic dependency, as permanent “wards” of the Federal Government.
- > ***Defiance of the Rule of Law:*** This is astoundingly common among those on the right. During the Civil Rights era, state governments regularly blew off new Federal statutes that require equal rights and protections. The current Republican Party regularly seeks to undermine fair elections, and to abrogate other laws designed to ensure a fair representative government. From ignoring consumer and environmental protections, to outright fraud, corporate bigwigs are notorious scoff-law whenever they feel that regulations are inconvenient. This proclivity belies the Republican Party’s assertion of being the party of “law and order”.
- > ***Genocide.*** Enough said.

Applications for Warren for President

- > **Dominance Deference is deeply rooted within the psyche of Wingnuts.** Neurological attributes (especially elevated levels of fear), religious cosmology, culture, and received history combine to make changing these attitudes a very heavy lift. Anyone running from the left needs to be realistic about who is reachable and who is not.
- > **Toxic entitlement needs to be called out whenever it rears its ugly head.** How was Lindsay Graham’s behavior during the Kavanaugh hearings OK? How was Kavanaugh’s?
- > **The ways in which Wingnuts over-identify with their chosen leader makes them dangerous when mobilized.** It’s important to be clear-eyed about this: Wingnuts represent a significant threat under certain circumstances. The current spate of white-supremacist mass-casualty events is clear evidence of the real danger Wingnuts represent. And things can get much worse. **When Wingnuts are let down or abandoned by their chosen leader, they are even more dangerous.**
- > **Those in the Christian right need to be held to account for their patently un-Christian attitudes towards the rest of humanity.** This is the work of other Christian leaders, who should be enrolled by the DNC as surrogates.
- > **The deep societal structures of inequality are deeply rooted and resistant to mitigation.** Fortunately, the large majority of Americans have a different idea about what a just and prosperous American future should look like. Making the structural problems clear is an important part of painting a picture of the path ahead; many of the institutionalized inequities are so deeply rooted and ubiquitous as to be almost invisible.
- > **Dominance Deference = Corruption.** Always. Hierarchical systems foster entitlement. And those who feel entitled do not see the rules as applying to them.

- > **Dominance Deference is ecologically disastrous. Corruption is killing the Planet.** Deeply held attitudes that hold mankind as separate from nature are unsustainable. We cannot get to a Green New Deal of any kind until current global corruption is addressed.

4 : Attenuated Relationship to What is Real

This is the last core attribute of Wingnuts: they do not have a very solid relationship with what is real and true. Verifiable reality is too frequently replaced by self-serving myths, idealized versions of history, and a whole hot mess of conspiracy theories.

Wingnuts dwell in an alternative factual universe, comprised of received “truths” that both define their reality and serve to validate their worst hatreds, bigotries and xenophobic instincts. A well-crafted conspiracy theory becomes very durable and sticky when it resonates with deeply established resentments, creates an us-versus-them narrative, and justifies the indulgence of bad behavior. This in turn validates established power structures and hierarchies.

Trafficking in conspiracy theories and false historical narratives are both diagnostic of Wingnut status, and the single factor that drives their most dangerous behaviors. All of the attributes of the Wingnut mind that we have explored are pertinent here, as they combine to create a population especially vulnerable to being manipulated by carefully crafted lies:

- > **Wingnuts have a particularly strong affinity for Confirmation Bias.** For Wingnuts, the need to validate what they believe is ever urgent. This proclivity ties in with Stephen Colbert’s brilliantly conceived idea of “*truthiness*”: stuff that feels like it ought to be true, so we’re going to declare it to be so.
- > **Well-crafted conspiracy theories are almost universally designed to be as scary as possible, in alignment with Wingnut’s elevated levels of anxiety.** Fear has the effect of exaggeration, as scary monsters always increase in size, power and monstrosity as the story gets around.
- > **Because of the ways in which Wingnuts relate to those in authority, they are more susceptible to buying whatever bogus story their leaders are selling.** Carefully crafted language is sourced in out-group derogation and action oriented: the chosen bad guys are always described as vermin of some kind, requiring immediate eradication. False narratives, intended to resonate with Wingnuts, emphasize the Moral Foundations of loyalty, obedience and purity.

Conspiracy Theories Are Old as Dirt

The name and nature of the bad guys changes, but spin is as old as politics and conspiracy theories are as old as humanity. Because conspiracy narratives are (by definition) creatures of the shadows, they can never be fully proven or disproven. Some especially resonant tales never fully die, but many eventually decompose by virtue of their ephemeral evidence.

The best, stickiest, most durable conspiracy stories share some common attributes:

- > **They “explain” some source of strain within the targeted culture.** The greater the sense of stress, the greater the general polarization, the stronger hook a good story has. Periods of cultural disruptions are the perfect breeding ground for conspiracy stories.
- > **In alignment with Terror Management Theory, the reason for suffering is located squarely outside of the targeted population.** “Not our fault! *They* are to blame for our miserable lives!”
- > **The designated villain is imbued with secrecy, and often endowed with super powers.** This means that the bad guy(s) can never be fully exterminated, and the “victims” cannot be held accountable for failing to vanquish the all-powerful enemy.
- > **They validate bigotry, racism and other deeply held resentments.** This feels good, in ways that are quite addictive. Conspiracy stories enhance in-group cohesion and amp up out-group derogation.
- > **The evil-doers are frequently characterized as urban, cosmopolitan elites.** Across the globe and throughout time, Wingnut activism has been repeatedly ginned up against the intellectual classes, with reliably horrendous long-term results.
- > **Conspiracy theories exist as a strange collaboration between the oppressed and the oppressor.** Tyrants tell people what they want to believe, and the narrative that is adopted creates loyalty to and dependency on the leader, and often requires dreadful sacrifice on behalf of the faithful.

Imposed Realities are a Primary Tool of Puppet Masters

Carefully crafted conspiracy theories, and their twin, fake myths about an idealized past, are the primary tool through which Puppet Masters enroll, mobilize and control their Wingnut minions. Too often, the stories that get crafted have nothing to do with the real goal the Puppet Masters seek to fulfill. But, when these stories succeed, they are powerful indeed, and very difficult to debunk. These fake narratives serve several very important, specific political functions.

They manifest an idealized “supposed to be” reality, sourced out of romanticized versions of a glorious past. Look beneath the surface of any cult, fundamentalist enterprise, or right-wing venture, and you will find a deeply shared understanding about how great the old days were.

Would-be tyrants carefully craft a nostalgic, sentimental historical narrative, that is both simplistic and poetic. These tales are sourced from deeply rooted ancestral themes, and are replete with shallow and unambiguous explanations of complex realities. Poetic language resonates with both Dominance Deference and the Moral Foundations of loyalty, purity and obedience.

Mythologies serve to carefully exacerbate resentments. The Grand Narrative is always sourced from a place of zero-sum, of us versus them. They sponsor in-group loyalty and out-group derogation. Language carefully inflames class resentment, racial animus, and nationalistic pride. These

stories are almost always anti-science, anti-intellectual, and express antipathy for urban elites. They promote toxic stereotypes, grant a sense of superiority to the faithful, casting them in the role of Righteous Warrior for the Great Cause. **These stories overtly demand Redemptive Violence.**

The Grand Narrative creates a sense of siege and scarcity. The faithful are always cast in the role of the victim, the underdog, seeking to survive against external forces of evil. This amps up fear, which serves to keep the faithful mobilized and in line. This also exculpates the faithful for responsibility for their less-than-ideal condition, enhances the sense of righteous umbrage, and helps them faithfully maintain the attitude of Righteous Warrior.

Keeping faith with the Grand Narrative keeps the faithful distracted and mobilized. Canny leaders perpetually manifest trivial and inane causes that keep their following busy. These issues are usually superficial, irrelevant, and beside the point. Examples of this dynamic in recent American culture include the “War on Christmas,” and the horrors of flag burning. Similarly, fundamentalisms often require time consuming demonstrations of faith, shallowly conceived, but both distracting and exhausting.

Foundational myths often paint a horrific picture of what “failure” would look like. The grand forces of evil are endowed with magical super powers. This raises the stakes, amps up the fear, and makes bailing out harder to do. Fundamentalisms and right-wing enterprises perpetually view themselves as being on the brink of total annihilation, and fantasies about the enemy are off the hook: all gay men are intent on raping your children; there is an impending “white genocide”; the “Islamification” of Europe is an existential calamity. Quitting is not an option; only staying loyal and obedient will save you from certain doom. Our Glorious Leader will lead us to victory, because the alternative is unthinkable.

Whacky conspiracy theories may be hilarious, but they are never funny

However, they are useful in a diagnostic sense. A deep dive into the particulars of any ginned-up narrative can be enormously informative, in terms of helping us to get a handle on where a particular group of Wingnuts are coming from. Especially if one asks *why* people are attracted to buy into a particular brand of bullshit. And, always: *qui bene?* Who benefits?

Of course, we are living through a particularly tricky time, where social media and the work of highly intentional and malevolent trolls are having far too much influence over the attention and psyche of the electorate. We are catastrophically behind the curve in terms of sorting out how to cope with this. It would be very nice if the Republican Party could find enough integrity and patriotism to commit to doing what is required to secure our elections.

Implications for Warren for President

- > **Always take zany conspiracy theories seriously, even when they are hilarious.** They provide windows into the psyche of Wingnuts, and how they are currently thinking. They also

provide information about the strategic thinking of the Puppet Masters who are intent on manipulating public opinion.

- > **Think carefully about how (or if) to respond to a whacky rumor.** Some require immediate response; others do not warrant acknowledgment. Of course, if a trope proves to be especially sticky, *it will never go away*. There are many who are *still* convinced that Obama is a secret Muslim, born in Kenya. And there ain't nothing that anyone can say that will change their minds.
- > **Sort out how to deploy others to deal with the garbage, while Warren stays above the fray.** The best possible outcome is the exposure of the Puppet Master(s) behind the charade.
- > **If, however, one can expose the lies and corruption in ways that truly convince conservatives (and the occasional Wingnut) that they have been being hornswoggled, you will ignite a firestorm.** There is no greater fury than an idealist whose hero has proven unworthy.

Concluding Thoughts

The Republican Party needs to be held to account for becoming the party of Wingnuts.

After the 2012 elections, there was consensus among Republicans that the GOP needed, urgently, to diversify. Instead, the Republican Party has become wholly subsumed by white supremacy and toxic nationalism. And, damningly, the GOP leadership has decided to cynically go along with this, as a twisted means to stay in power.

Again, the current GOP is so far to the right it should be characterized as outright fascist.

Americans need to be educated about what fascism is, why the label fits, and why this is so dangerous to the future of American democracy. Warren's clarity about this will create a useful contrast to Biden's misguided and out-of-date assurance that bipartisanship with today's GOP is still viable.

The Republican Party needs to be held to account for everything it is doing to deny the right to vote to all Americans. Gerrymandering, voter ID laws, and other overt efforts to hijack elections need to be called out and prosecuted. We should be howling from the rooftops about this. We are currently living under minority rule, as the GOP now only represents 24% of registered voters. Instead of diversifying or moderating their politics to increase their membership, they choose to lie, cheat, and steal to stay in power.

Courage! Fighting for what is right is empowering. On issues like gun control, reproductive rights, and anti-corruption, candidates that are leery of going "too far" are exposing their cowardice. Warren can continue to provide contrast between her moral clarity and courage, and others who are still spooked by the NRA, the 1% and other nefarious actors.

The Democratic Party needs to get religion when it comes to the Supreme Court. We need the White House. We also need a Democratic Super Majority in the Senate. Otherwise, all is for naught. Warren needs to make *reclaiming the Judiciary* part and parcel with her plans for expunging corruption and restoring integrity to the American government.

Corruption is killing the planet. The Republican Party is corrupt. Ergo, the Republican Party is killing the planet. We can't get to a Green New Deal without dealing with powerful trans-national corrupt influences. I suggest the following bumper sticker:

CORRUPTION IS KILLING THE EARTH
VOTE WARREN FOR PRESIDENT

Entitlement is the twin of corruption. If you feel like you are owed, you see nothing wrong with taking. If you feel you are entitled, the rules do not apply to you, and any suggestion of sharing power with others is viewed with horror. The Republican Party is the party of entitled white guys, who howl whenever they are called to account for their entitled behavior. (Cue the tape of the Kavanaugh hearing! The grim history of Jeffery Epstein! And whatever it was that Trump did today!)

It would be great if somebody began to lay out all the crimes committed by Republican Administrations, going back to Dick Nixon. I am just so tired of the pattern we have been experiencing, where the Republicans break everything, and then a Democratic Administration comes in to put things back together, only to have it all broken again by the next Republican. Democratic Presidents have spent so damn much time fixing stuff that they have not had the chance to manifest any real change.

We cannot restore trust in government without substantial work to restore integrity, through transparent and in-depth accounting of the crimes of the corrupt. There is no reason for the electorate to trust their current government. Whenever the Democratic Party lets bad guys off the hook, we prove ourselves to be untrustworthy as well. There has been a persistent pattern where Republican malefactors have been pardoned, or otherwise let off the hook, thereby eliding a full accounting of what happened and why. A thorough Truth and Transparency process would be difficult, divisive. But this kind of full accounting is the best chance we have for restoring trust in government.

An anti-corruption stance owes loyalty to truth and the rule of law. A thorough accounting of corrupt dealing throughout government will inevitably snare a few Democrats in the net. This is how it should be, no apologies. True bi-partisanship and fealty to the Rule of Law means just that.

Finally

Stay grounded. Keep faith with what we know to be true and real. Support each other. Speak your truth and values. Know that the majority of Americans are not Wingnuts, and share your aspirations for an American future that we can all be proud of.

Know that Wingnuts will attack, and use these attacks as validation that you are in the right track. Analyze whatever lunacy they are spewing to discern their motivations. Or, and this is more pertinent, the motivations and strategies of the Puppet Masters behind the scenes.

Use humor to defuse an assault, wherever possible. The best antidote to rage is equanimity, firmly maintained. Keep your temper when they lose theirs. America is exhausted by the level of incivility and partisanship that characterizes our politics. Being courageous, studiously polite, and full of humor paints a strong contrast to the demented howls emanating from the other side.

Develop a rapid and surgical capacity to expose the truth in the face of lies. Especially where the truth exposes the machinations of Puppet Masters. Be sure to explain to the American people where the lies are coming from, and who they are designed to benefit.

Refuse to submit to toxic dominance, or aggrieved entitlement. Instead, call it out, define it, describe it, and explain why it deserves to be ignored and elided. Being a campaign by and for an Uppity Woman should be a banner of pride. As we are all proud to repeat, “Nevertheless, She Persisted”!

There’s a story about a dude who was asked about how he went bankrupt. “Two ways,” he replied. “First gradually, then all at once.” American democracy has been being gradually eroded for some time. We need to be crystal clear about how easily the “all at once” loss of our freedoms can happen.

I hope this has been useful. Thank you for your time and attention.

Lucy Hays Nesbeda

About the Author

Lucy Hays Nesbeda is a policy analyst, an artist, and a shamanic practitioner.

Lucy has had a career, spanning decades, in philanthropy. She was on the Board of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, and engaged in a wide array of enterprises engaged in education reform, child welfare reform, international health issues, and environmental activism. Lucy holds a Master in Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

As an artist, Lucy trained at the Rhode Island School of Design. She works in a wide variety of media, and has exhibited in Boston, New York City, and elsewhere.

Lucy has been studying and practicing shamanism for over 20 years. She was originally trained by Michael Harner and Sandra Ingerman, who were both instrumental in bringing shamanism to the contemporary West. Further study with both indigenous and North American practitioners enriched and diversified her methods and practices.

Her current work sits at the confluence of shamanism and political analysis: an examination of human power in all of its forms and kinds. She researches and teaches shamanism and leadership development, combining the wisdom of our ancestors with the best recent technologies for manifesting change at a systemic level. She teaches internationally, and consults with those who are committed to manifesting transformative change. She cares profoundly about our urgent need for paradigm shift, and seeks to partner with fellow travelers.

A Field Guide to Wingnuts is part of this larger work. In our current environment, where the foundations of democracy are at risk, where hate crimes are increasing in frequency and violence, and where the wholesale denial of climate disruption poses an existential threat, this volume seeks to explain how those on the radical right think: what motivates their perceptions and their politics, and why they present such a hazard.

Lucy currently lives in New Bedford, Massachusetts.