

The Demagoguery Checklist

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Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness a little bit smaller. -- George Orwell, *1984*

What you have to understand is that these are bad people. -- Dick Cheney on why inmates are imprisoned indefinitely, invisibly, and without legal representation at the Guantanamo concentration camp

Demagoguery is the attempt to persuade through the arousal of primitive emotions and unquestioned prejudices.

The following checklist is designed to help detect the deliberately propagandistic elements in any speech, sermon, or other public proclamation or communication. What differentiates demagogic propaganda from straight talk is the attempt to fog and manipulate the audience's awareness instead of appealing to its rationality and realism, those qualities upon which every democracy depends. Therefore the more of the following that are present, the more underhanded the communicate. *All forms of demagoguery seek to unify one group at the expense of another while convincing the audience of the necessity for doing so. Psychologically, all when deliberate are expressions of pathological immaturity laced with aggressive, paranoid impulses.*

1. Hypnotic rhythms ("We will be strong, we will unite, we will not fail...") intended to lull the attention into trance-like suggestibility.
2. Scapegoating: the attempt to "otherize" a given population (e.g. the Mexicans, the Arabs, those who don't share our views). Psychotherapists call this dynamic *projection*, an evacuation of our darker motives onto handy opponents.
3. Sweeping generalizations and oversimplifications. Free trade will erase poverty, more weapons will win the war on terror, banning assault rifles is an attack on personal freedom, etc.
4. Black-and-white categorization (we are good, they are evil; we're right, you're wrong).
5. A tone of sanctimonious moralizing.
6. Noble-sounding justifications for rigidity, oppression, intolerance, incompetence, indifference, or violence.
7. The replacement of concrete details with vague appeals to traditional values (patriotism, family, God, church).
8. Intolerance of disagreement ("you're either with us or against us").
9. The branding of the adult capacity for critical self-examination as misguided, unpatriotic, or disloyal.

10. Group narcissism disguised as loyalty (our truth is the only Truth; we are Number One; etc.).
11. No room given to healthy self-doubt or the recognition of ambiguous realities in a given situation.
12. Recurrent appeals to the "self-defense" argument as a justification for domination.
13. A childlike assumption of entitlement.
14. A childlike sense of omnipotence.
15. Euphemisms (e.g., "targeted defense" rather than "assassination"; "spiritual guidance" and not "intimidation").
16. Imposition of group norms described in terms of unity and solidarity (we do this for the good of all).
17. Minimization of the potential dangers of one's actions; whitewashing of unjust consequences.
18. Peer pressure, subtle or outright.
19. Threats, implied or overt.
20. Blaming the opponent for one's own aggressive actions.

It takes tremendous courage to resist the lure of appearances. The power of being which is manifest in such courage is so great that the gods tremble in fear of it. -- Paul Tillich

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