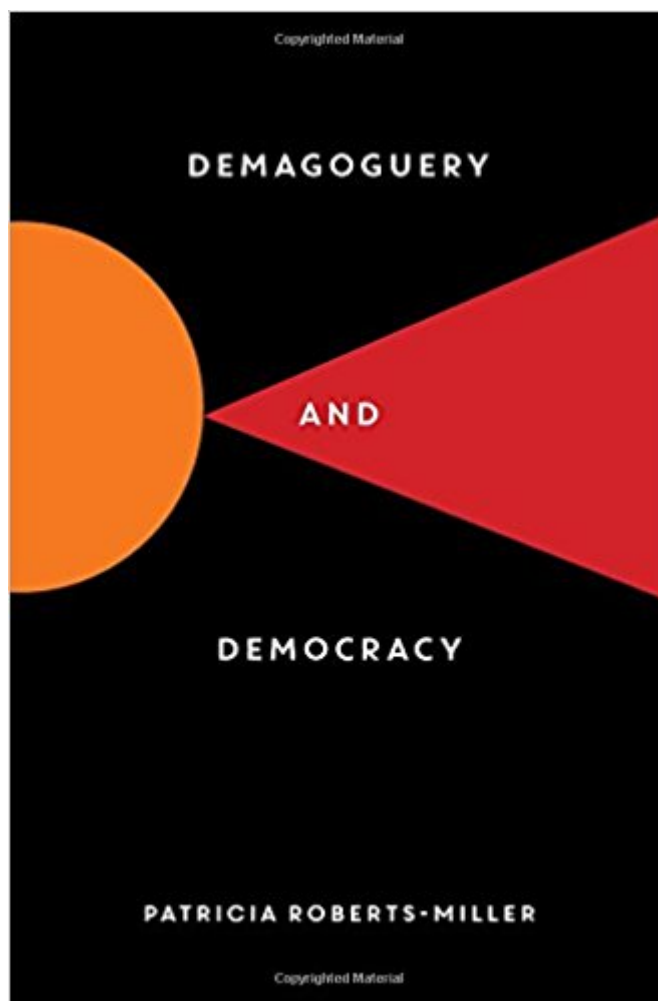


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# Demagoguery And Democracy



## Synopsis

A clear-eyed guide to demagoguery and how we can defeat it. What is demagoguery? Some demagogues are easy to spot: They rise to power through pandering, charisma, and prejudice. But, as professor Patricia Roberts-Miller explains, a demagogue is anyone who reduces all questions to us vs. them. Why is it dangerous? Demagoguery is democracy's greatest threat. It erodes rational debate, so that intelligent policymaking grinds to a halt. The idea that we never fall for it—that all the blame lies with them—is equally dangerous. How can we stop it? Demagogues follow predictable patterns in what they say and do to gain power. The key to resisting demagoguery is to name it when you see it and to know where it leads.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"If you are looking for a book to hand to those friends who are never wrong, always certain, often disdainful of others, and convinced that their arguments are irrefutable, then this is the book for you. Martin J. Medhurst, Distinguished Professor of Rhetoric and Communication, Baylor University "In Demagoguery and Democracy, Patricia Roberts-Miller does for demagoguery what Hannah Arendt did for evil in Eichmann in Jerusalem. She takes a familiar concept that seems straightforward and obviously detestable, and she challenges her readers to understand it for its complexity, and more importantly, to see how connected we all are to it. Demagoguery and Democracy is one of those rare books that is

simultaneously approachable and complex, timely and timeless, and absolutely indispensable for understanding not just how to confront demagoguery, but also how to strengthen democracy.

—Ryan Skinnell, Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Writing at San José State University, and author of *Conceding Composition: A Crooked History of Composition's Institutional Fortunes*

“Roberts-Miller writes clearly, economically, and usefully so that we might recognize demagoguery for what it is—a discourse that depoliticizes politics—and start making our arguments more democratic, which is to say inclusive and fair instead of demonizing and menacing. Admittedly, demonizing is the easier option, but this small book makes a large case for deliberating instead.”

—Robert L. Ivie, Professor Emeritus in English (Rhetoric) and American Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington

“A timely guide for all who care about the quality and character of our democracy—from professors of rhetoric to family members at the Thanksgiving table.”

—Janet M. Atwill, Professor of Rhetoric, University of Tennessee

“Everything we know about demagoguery is wrong, and misinformation can be fatal for democracy. Fortunately, Patricia Roberts-Miller's concise and insightful guide to the rhetoric of dangerous populism is the antidote. Using accessible examples—everything from squirrels to former Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren—and clear language, Roberts-Miller points the way toward a compassionate public discourse that rests on principle. Prepare to be made uncomfortable, though; we have met the demagogue, and sometimes, it is us.”

—Kel Munger, journalist and book critic

Patricia Roberts-Miller, PhD, is a Professor of Rhetoric and Writing at the University of Texas at Austin. She is the author of *Fanatical Schemes: Proslavery Rhetoric and the Tragedy of Consensus*, *Voices in the Wilderness: Public Discourse and the Paradox of Puritan Rhetoric*, and *Deliberate Conflict: Argument, Political Theory, and Composition Classes*.

Roberts-Miller offers us an extremely timely essay without resorting to a polemic, or even naming the obvious example of demagoguery in our time. Instead, her named example is, surprisingly, Earl Warren, not as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, but when he was Attorney General of California. Following Pearl Harbor he argued that Japanese Americans in general were an imminent security risk, and Warren was largely responsible for their internment during World War II (something I did not know). This provides some comfortable distance and encourages dispassionate consideration. The author's definition of demagoguery as essentially the perception of one's in-group (good) from

out-groups (bad) probably could use some further discussion, even argument, but it is sufficient for her purposes. A demagogue's followers tend to be nearly immune to rational argument but Roberts-Miller spells out many of the fallacies they are subject to and suggests ways they can be--preferably kindly--reasoned with.

The Trump presidency would seem to be the ideal time for pondering demagoguery and Patricia Roberts-Miller, as Professor at the Department of Rhetoric and Writing at the University of Texas, appears particularly well placed to shed light on that phenomenon. Her

*Demagoguery and Democracy* is a relatively short book (of just over 130 pages with a fairly large typeface) and the central text would be shorter still if its definitions of various forms of fallacious argument had been relegated to a glossary. It is, nevertheless, a densely argued and thought-provoking book which considers what demagoguery is, how it operates and what can be done to address it. The style of writing is always engaging although sometimes uneasily sliding from the scholarly (talk of rhetors and arguments *ad verecundiam*) to the colloquial ("rhetorically pantsed"). The arguments are usefully illustrated with examples which are sometimes abstract, sometimes drawn from personal experience and sometimes historical, with the antebellum South, Weimar and Nazi Germany and the internment of those of Japanese ancestry in World War Two comprising the most important points of reference. Although Roberts-Miller acknowledges that demagoguery has its roots in Ancient Greece, for her it became the dominant mode of US public discourse in the days leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This is somewhat ironic as those who purchase her book might feel that they've done so on a false prospectus insofar as she rejects the conventional understanding of the term *demagoguery* (comprising rhetorical appeals to the emotions rather than to the reason of the masses), preferring to define it as a form of identity politics in which the world is seen in binary, polarized terms, so that they are automatically assumed to be mendacious whilst we believe ourselves to be the embodiment of integrity, authenticity and light. I suspect that this is a view of politics which, even post-Brexit, applies far better to the United States than to the United Kingdom. Demagoguery, we are further told, is not about what politicians do but about how we, as citizens, argue, reason and vote. This is the most tendentious part of the book for even in the age of social media it is surely the politicians, the spin-doctors and the denizens of mainstream media outlets who frame public discourse, demagogic

or otherwise, rather than you and I. It follows from this that Roberts-Miller's four strategies "that might help correct our course" are misconceived. We are told, for example, that "We can work to reduce the profitability of demagoguery by consuming less of it ourselves, and shaming media outlets that rely heavily on it." But by definition those in thrall to what she refers to as the factionalized media "informational enclaves" will not be sufficiently self-reflective to take such steps because they won't even appreciate the existence of the problem in the first place. It is doubtless true that empathy provides the key to "open the Faraday cage of demagoguery" and highly desirable that people should have open minds and not posit statements that are unfalsifiable but what if some hearts are always hard, if some minds are always closed and some people are simply constitutionally incapable of recognising a valid argument? It is certainly an unhappy paradox that those who would benefit most from reading Roberts-Miller's book are precisely those people who will never do so. In short, this is a stimulating read, with Roberts-Miller making a very powerful case that we need to think about how we argue and not just what we argue, as well as clearly identifying what makes particular arguments good or bad. Nevertheless, I can't help feeling that she's largely preaching to the converted and doing so on the basis of some rather problematic assumptions.

Patricia Roberts-Miller, PhD goes deep diving into the bowels of the hateful rhetoric that is poisoning Americans. She does it so we don't have to. She studies it and writes about it in order to shed light on it and so that hopefully the light will help clean up our great threat.

Everybody who is deeply concerned with where our democracy is headed should read this. It's not long, but is dense. Although I took courses in Rhetoric in college, this still offered much in the way of insightful review, plus valuable connection to real-time events. This isn't a tip sheet to 'spot the demagogue'. It's a well-reasoned tour through what demagoguery is historically, what it's become today, and why it matters so very much. Yes, you do learn to identify demagoguery, too.

It does a good job. Nice. Well-pleased with quality & good price Very happy with this product! will purchase products from this company again, as needed. quick purchase and delivery. Perfect Gift Ideas!

Review is viewable at Ian Wood's Novellum on Blogspot

Everyone everywhere should read this book. We all need to examine our own methods of argumentation and be willing to be uncertain or wrong. We need to apply the same rules to all parties involved in the argument. Demagoguery is easy, deliberative democracy is hard. But it's worth it.

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