

WHO'S DRINKING THE KOOL-AID?

Chapter One

The Anatomy of Political Kool-Aid

from Who's Drinking the Kool-Aid? — Jonestown Revisited by Leroy Godfrey Jr., Volume 1 of a trilogy. Free teaser chapter.

Y'all want to know something that will mess with your mind?

The problem is not that people are dumb.

I need y'all to hear me on this, because it is absolutely critical to everything else in this book. The problem is not that the people drinking the political Kool-Aid are stupid. Some of the brightest people I know — doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers — are drinking it. Some people with Ph.D.s behind their names are drinking it. People who could calculate the trajectory of a satellite are drinking it.

Because intelligence will not keep you from drinking it.

This is about motivation. This is about how the human brain — your brain, my brain, every brain — is wired to protect what it already believes. Scientists call it motivated reasoning. I call it “my mind is made up, don't confuse me with the facts.”

There are three mechanisms. I'm going to give them to you one at a time, because each one builds on the last, and I want you to be able to name them when you see them — in the news, in your timeline, at your kitchen table, and yes, if you're honest enough, in the mirror.

Mechanism Number One: Confirmation Bias

Here is how your brain works.

Your brain goes looking for information every day. It scans the news, it scrolls the feed, it listens to conversations. And here is what it is doing the whole time — it is screening. It is looking for the things that match what it already thinks. And when it finds them, it says, “See? I was right.” And when it finds something that contradicts what it already thinks, it says, “Well, that source is

biased.” Or: “That's out of context.” Or it just — doesn't remember it the next day.

Your brain is not lying to you. It genuinely believes it's being fair. It just isn't.

[GODFREY TRANSLATION: CONFIRMATION BIAS]

Your brain is like that one friend who only tells you what you want to hear. You know who I'm talking about. You can gain 30 pounds and they'll tell you you're looking slim. They mean well. They just cannot tell you anything you don't want to hear. Your brain is that friend.

Mechanism Number Two: Identity-Protective Cognition

Now this one is deeper. And this is the one that explains why showing somebody facts sometimes makes them MORE convinced of the wrong thing.

At some point — and I want you to think about when this happened for you — being a Democrat or being a Republican stopped being just how you vote. It became part of who you ARE. It got threaded into your identity the way your faith gets threaded in, the way your family name gets threaded in.

And once that happened — once the party became part of your identity — a fact that challenges your political tribe started to FEEL like a personal attack.

When a political belief becomes part of a person's identity, contradictory evidence may feel like a threat to belonging, status, worldview, or self-understanding. The person may begin defending the belief as though defending a part of themselves. They become defensive. They dig in. They fight back.

This is why you can show a devoted partisan all the evidence in the world and they come out more convinced of the original position than when they started. They weren't evaluating the evidence. They were defending themselves.

Write that down: defending the tribe felt the same as defending themselves.

Mechanism Number Three: The Double Standard

And this is the one that will expose you if you're paying attention.

Whatever your side does — there is always an explanation. A justification. A context. The same act, done by the other side, is immediately and obviously wrong.

A politician on your side bends the rules? They had no choice. The situation was complicated. You have to understand the context.

A politician on the other side does the exact same thing? Lock them up.

I'm not exaggerating. I've watched this happen in real time. The same behavior — word for word, action for action — is a scandal when they do it and a necessity when we do it.

That double standard is the signature of Kool-Aid reasoning. If your standard changes based on who's being judged, you don't have a standard. You have a jersey.

When the Right Drinks

The 2020 presidential election. Trump, his campaign, and allied plaintiffs filed dozens of post-election cases. Nearly all failed, were dismissed, were withdrawn, or produced no relief capable of changing the outcome. Some ended on procedural grounds; others failed after courts examined the allegations, evidence, or extraordinary remedies requested. No court established widespread fraud sufficient to overturn the certified presidential result. Some of those rulings came from judges Donald Trump himself had appointed. Republican officials in states including Georgia and Arizona joined bipartisan election officials, canvassing boards, governors, judges, and administrators across the battleground states in certifying or defending the results despite enormous political pressure. Donald Trump's own attorney general said the Justice Department had not found fraud on a scale capable of producing a different election outcome.

Evidence sufficient to overturn the certified result never emerged from the court proceedings, the audits, or the official record.

But Mechanism Number One kicked in: dismissed lawsuits, adverse rulings, and confirming audits were repeatedly treated as evidence that the conspiracy was bigger, rather than reasons to reconsider whether the claim had been proven. Every Republican official who certified the results became a traitor. Every court that ruled against Trump became a compromised institution.

Y'all, the ABSENCE of proof became PROOF. That's not reasoning. That is Kool-Aid, straight from the pitcher, no chaser.

When the Left Drinks

Now don't get comfortable over there on the left side. Your cup has got some things in it too.

During the Bush era, Democratic voices were fired up about executive overreach. Warrantless surveillance. Undeclared military action. Serious, legitimate concerns. Then Barack Obama took office. And suddenly drone strikes were “surgical.” Surveillance programs were “necessary.” Military actions without declarations of war were “different.”

The administrations were not identical, and some civil libertarians remained consistent in criticizing both. But many of the underlying powers continued, while much of the partisan language surrounding those powers changed. The jersey had changed — and for too many people, so had the standard.

Then came the summer of 2020. In the middle of a pandemic — when gatherings were being discouraged and churches were being told to stay closed — many public-health professionals signed a letter supporting the racial-justice demonstrations. Now hear me carefully, because this is

where precision matters. That letter did not pretend there was no risk. It named the transmission risk plainly. But it judged the demonstrations against racism important enough to support anyway, with masking and other harm-reduction precautions. A person can believe that was the right call and still notice the shift: the same voices that had preached strict caution weeks earlier were now weighing a cause they believed in against the very risk they had been warning about. The weighing may have been honest. The question this book keeps asking is whether the standard bent when the jersey changed.

And then there was the question of where COVID came from. For a stretch, the idea that the virus might have escaped from a laboratory was treated in many quarters as a crackpot conspiracy — not to be debated, but dismissed. But the honest picture was messier than the dismissal. The intelligence community remained divided over COVID's origin. The laboratory-associated hypothesis was legitimate. It was not conclusively proven — and it was not something careful people were free to rule out by decree. Shutting a live question down early is not science. It is the tribe deciding which questions are allowed to be asked.

And then there were the prolonged school closures. As evidence accumulated that children generally faced lower risks of severe disease than older adults, and as schools developed masking, ventilation, testing, and other mitigation strategies, the balance increasingly shifted toward reopening classrooms. Yet many districts remained remote or hybrid while the educational and emotional costs continued mounting. The test scores that came out afterward showed historic declines, with especially severe losses among lower-performing students and children attending high-poverty schools. Remote instruction materially worsened that learning loss and educational inequality, but it operated alongside other pandemic disruptions.

The brain running motivated reasoning doesn't check what jersey it's wearing before it goes to work. It just protects the tribe.

Common sense is not partisan. But its absence is dangerous regardless of which cup you're drinking from.