

INTRODUCTION

Over the past couple of decades, Americans have been subjected to a systematic propaganda campaign to discredit science. Championed by ultra-conservatives, this campaign has come alarmingly close to accomplishing its goal by elevating people who don't have a clue what they're talking about to the same level as scientists who have worked long and hard to understand tough environmental problems. Having gained a foothold, propaganda is extremely difficult to reverse because of how it morphs with memory and learning. If you hear something enough, you're not only going to remember it, you're also more likely to believe it. Our survival is wired that way.

One of the most effective forms of propaganda is the *cherry-picking technique*. Richard Crossman, British deputy director of psychological warfare during World War II, explained why:

It is a complete delusion to think of the brilliant propagandist as being a professional liar. The brilliant propagandist is the man who tells a selection of the truth in such a way that the recipient does not think he is receiving any propaganda. The art of propaganda is not telling lies, but rather selecting the truth you require and giving it mixed up with some truths the audience wants to hear.¹

Today's propaganda campaign against science is focusing special attention on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), one of the most critical of federal agencies. What business, industry, and many Americans want to hear is that the EPA is hurting the economy, destroying jobs, and intruding into people's private lives. Lifted right out of the "cherry-picking" handbook, today's EPA is demonized for overregulation. There's some truth to these charges—the agency can be overly prescriptive—but the reality is much more complicated. Establishing any environmental regulation relies heavily on scientific findings and is a lengthy, challenging, and often futile undertaking.

Consider a few examples. Among the thousands of new chemicals, many of them highly toxic, none were added to drinking water regulations for over two decades. Agriculture is today's most pervasive source of water pollution yet is almost entirely unregulated. After nearly half a century, major battles are still being fought over which waterbodies are subject to regulation under the Clean Water Act. And then there's the EPA's role in regulating greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act, which has set off the environmental version of the Civil War.

The Trump administration has become the most serious threat to the agency to date, but the war on the EPA can be traced back decades. The most far-reaching damage has come from undermining the foundation upon which the agency's legitimacy rests—its scientific capability and integrity.

This book takes the reader on a journey into some of today's most pressing environmental problems and how the EPA has become increasingly stymied in addressing them. We examine the science, politics, and human dimension of these issues. This is not an all-inclusive compendium of every problem facing the EPA or all that the agency does. It's also not a technical book about environmental policy or a history of the EPA—although we dip into these topics as needed. Rather, the purpose of this book is to explore the challenges of regulation and how the war on science is crippling the EPA's ability to regulate almost anything. What's at stake is our environmental protections.