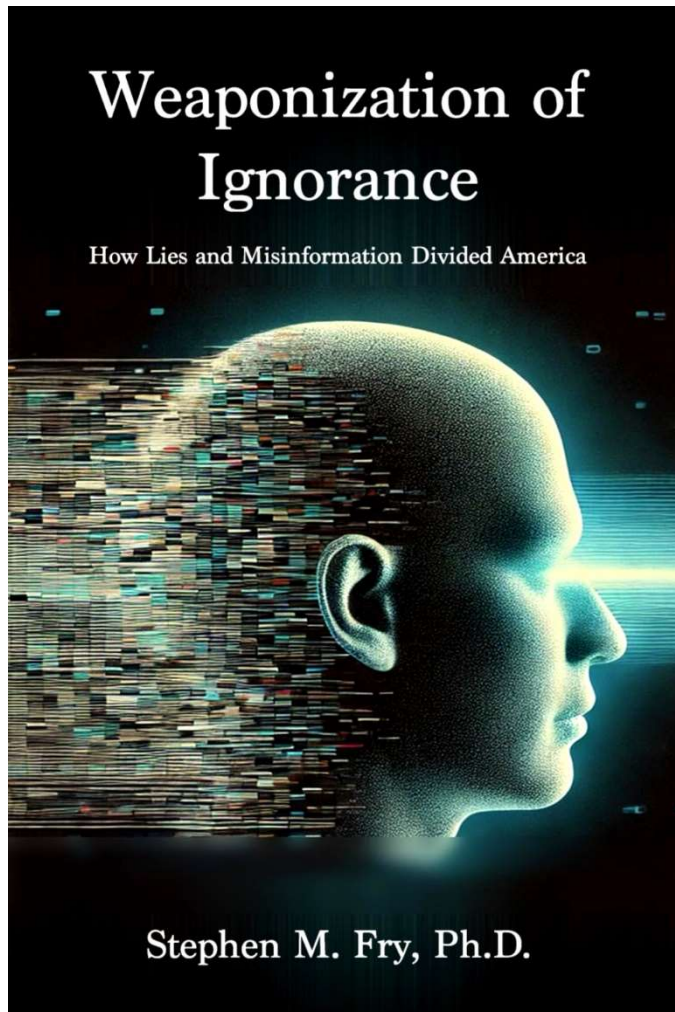


## Stephen Fry warns of truth's fragile state in new book

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*"Weaponization of Ignorance: How Lies and Misinformation Divided America"* by Stephen M. Fry, PhD. El Dorado Hills, CA: SBDI Publishing, 2025, 256 pages, \$18.99 (paperback).



"I used to believe that intelligence and knowledge naturally led people toward rational conclusions," Stephen M. Fry explains near the beginning of *"Weaponization of Ignorance: How Lies and Misinformation Divided America,"* his recently released treatise on a phenomenon currently impacting the lives of everyone on the planet. "I assumed that if individuals were presented with the same facts, they would at least agree on reality – even if they drew different conclusions from it. That belief has steadily unraveled."

"The war on truth is real," the author continues a little further. "If we fail to understand and counter the systems that weaponize ignorance, we risk losing not just the next election – but the very foundation of democracy itself. And it's not just an American crisis – around the world, authoritarian movements are watching, learning, and replicating these same tactics to undermine shared truth."

So begins one of the more sobering books I have had occasion to peruse in recent memory. Contrary to what many readers may automatically assume, *"Weaponization of*

*Ignorance"* is not a partisan attack on either the left or the right. Rather, what Fry presents is a fair and balanced critique of a fairly recent sociocultural development that seeks to undermine our collective understanding of truth in order further an authoritarian agenda. Using dialog that is simultaneously forthright yet immensely complex on multiple levels, he indicts and ultimately convicts those responsible for what he sees as an existential threat to not just the freedoms many of us enjoy and take for granted, but to the potential future progress of human civilization.

The language is accessible to a general audience; the concepts he articulates so effortlessly connect equally with intellectuals and scholars as well as everyday citizens (not that those two designations are mutually exclusive). A central theme permeating his narrative revolves around how ordinary people can be duped into falling for obviously irrational beliefs through well-understood psychological processes including cognitive biases, media dynamics, fragmented information ecosystems, and especially flawed cause and effect relationships that appear on the surface to be inherently plausible but upon closer examination lack any actual substance or relevance.

Consider the following from *"Seeds of Distrust: Historical Grievances,"* the seventh chapter and one I found particularly instructive:

“The 1960s and 1970s shattered the illusion that American institutions could be trusted to act in the public interest. Vietnam revealed not just military misjudgment, but systematic deception by government leaders. Watergate confirmed that political elites could engage in criminal conspiracies – and lie about them for years. For many conservatives, these events affirmed a deeply felt betrayal: that those who claimed moral or intellectual authority could not be believed.”

“Weaponization of Ignorance” is extensively researched, with thirty-four pages of chapter and bibliographical references at the conclusion of the introduction, seventeen chapters, and afterword that comprise the main text. The manuscript is constructed in four major sections: “Part One: The Foundations of Political Ignorance,” which is made up of the first five chapters; “Part Two: Understanding the Appeal – Why So Many Are Vulnerable,” the next three chapters; “Part Three: The Trump Phenomenon and Cult of Misinformation,” chapters nine through thirteen; and “Part Four: Breaking Free from Ignorance,” the concluding four chapters. Fry also includes a “Glossary of Terms,” which I found especially helpful as I made my way through his exquisite little primer.

Unlike many writing in this special category of nonfiction work, Fry does not just describe the scope of the problem. Most thinking people are fully aware that a problem exists – and the extent to which it is interfering with our daily survival and success. Ultimately, the author is optimistic we can overcome the immense challenges we currently face by taking a number of concrete actions at both the microcosmic as well as the macrocosmic levels. He articulates many of the steps eloquently in the final four chapters. For example, note the following from “The Power of Critical Thinking,” the fourteenth chapter:

“One of the most effective ways to counteract ignorance and misinformation is to expose individuals to diverse perspectives. The more people engage with differing viewpoints, the better they become at understanding complex issues, questioning their assumptions, and refining their own beliefs based on evidence rather than ideological conformity... Diverse exposure does not mean accepting every argument at face value but rather engaging with ideas critically while maintaining an openness to new information. In a political environment where misinformation is rampant, the ability to engage with multiple perspectives is crucial to maintaining a well-informed citizenry.”

And also from “The Role of Education and Fact-Based Discourse in Saving Democracy,” chapter seventeen:

“One of the most effective ways to counteract misinformation is to teach students how to think, not what to think. Developing a habit of questioning assumptions and weighing evidence from multiple perspectives prepares individuals to resist propaganda and ideological manipulation. This is especially critical in an era where social media amplifies false information at an unprecedented rate.”

Fry has a BS in Physics, a MS in Electrical Engineering, and a PhD in Quantum Electronics (all from UCLA) as well as an MBA in Financial Analysis from National University. He has published dozens of scientific papers as well as nine books on medical terminology. Some readers may be familiar with “Air Travel Adventures: Tales of a 5 Million Miler,” in which he describes some of his travel adventures, including meeting former president George Bush and being on one of the last planes to land at National Airport on the morning of 9/11. In his spare time, he runs marathons and is an expert-level downhill skier. He currently resides in California with his wife Cindy and their border collie Graham.

Perhaps Yahoo Finance sums it up best: “Fry's synthesis bridges scientific insight and the lived experience of modern American politics. The result is a book that empowers readers to recognize manipulation, question sources, and help rebuild a shared commitment to truth.”

I could not agree more. Highly recommended.

*Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, WKU.*