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America today is in danger. It faces the threat of domination by a radical, authoritarian right wing that refers to itself as “conservative,” as if it were preserving and promoting American values. In fact, it has been trampling on them.

American values are inherently progressive, but progressives have lost their way. As traditional Americans, that is, as progressive Americans, we are beginning to lose our identity, the very values that have made America a great and free country—a country where tolerance has led us to unity, where diversity has given us strength, where acting for the common good has brought our dreams to fruition, and where respect for human dignity has increased opportunity, released creativity, and generated wealth.

But progressives have so taken these values for granted that we no longer have the ability to articulate a progressive vision. We have lost hold of the terms of political debate, and even ceded the language of progressive ideals—like “freedom” and “liberty”—to redefinition by an extremist right wing. The radical right understands *its* values and knows *its* agenda. It has imposed *its* ideas and *its* language on America. It has dominated public debate, which has allowed it to seize power.

Progressive political leaders have been inhibited in creating

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long-term change by the short-term necessities of running for office and by the need to block disastrous legislation day after day without unified grassroots support. Progressive policy makers can do only so much in the present environment. It is up to the grass roots, outside the Beltway, to find its collective progressive voice, to call once more for the common good, and to form a chorus singing out America.

The Rockridge Institute is part of that chorus and is strongly committed to progressive American values and vision. This handbook is a reflection of our work and our commitment. Progressives feel in their gut what is right. Our job at Rockridge is to turn those feelings into language, to help find the frames that will make our truths visible to others, and to translate our overwhelming sense of what is right into effective arguments.

We perceived a need among grassroots progressives for a short, easy-to-read, systematic account of the progressive vision, for the principles that apply across issue areas, and for all the essentials of framing—a handbook that can be carried around in pocket or purse and accessed over the Internet. Here it is.

There is a lot we have tackled here. We wanted to learn why slogans and spin mostly don't work for progressives. We wanted to clarify the strict father/nurturant parent models, which have been widely misunderstood. We wanted to explain why voters don't respond to laundry lists of programs and policies. And we wanted to show why framing is necessary to serve the truth.

Along the way, we have introduced some new concepts. For instance, we present up-to-date research on *deep framing*—the moral values and political principles that cut across issues and that are required before any slogans or clever phrases can resonate with the public. We look at *argument frames*—the general overall structure of argument forms used by both liberals and conservatives. And we inquire as to why conservatives focus on direct causation while liberals see systemic, or complex, causation.

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Most important, we examine and reject the idea of an ideological “center.” It is not made up of “moderates,” nor is it defined by issues spread across a left-to-right spectrum. Instead, the “center” is made up of *biconceptuals*. The idea of biconceptualism is essential to understanding—and changing—American politics. We explain why progressives can and should talk to biconceptuals in the same way they talk to their base.

A cautionary note about this handbook: Advocacy groups running specific ad campaigns, candidates running for office, and policy makers all have short-term needs—they want language for the next ad, for tomorrow’s speech, and for the upcoming election campaign, and they want sound-bite responses to this morning’s charges by the other side. This handbook is not about quick-and-dirty, short-term fixes to immediate tactical problems. It is about long-term strategy, a strategy for returning America to its progressive ideals. It is about changing the way we do politics. It is about helping America get in touch with its progressive roots.

We hope this handbook begins a process of creating a language of a renewed liberalism. In its online version, it will form the basis of the Rockridge Progressive Manual Project, designed to extend this handbook, step-by-step, to all issue areas, and to do so interactively, with an ongoing dialogue, a national conversation, with grassroots progressives. This handbook is also the seed of the Rockridge Action Network, a network of activists—individuals and groups—who want to speak out on issues and place progressive ideas and values before the public. Contact us online at [info@rockridgeinstitute.org](mailto:info@rockridgeinstitute.org).

All over America, progressives are finding their voices. We hope this handbook will help you find yours.

*George Lakoff*  
*Berkeley, California*  
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