



Totalitarian Ideologies 101

We need to start teaching students to recognize totalitarianism so they can resist it.

Sheldon Bart | August 19, 2026



While we were looking the other way, it seemed, a new version of an old, toxic ideology drifted out of certain academic circles in Europe and into faculty lounges on this side of the Atlantic. In due course, it spread from the universities to K-12 schools. Now, a couple of generations later, candidates infected with the contagion have, with alarming frequency, been seeking and winning elections to municipal and state offices as well as the Congress of the United States.

Like the shapeshifters of science fiction, the scourge of communism has returned in a new and possibly more virulent guise, emphasizing race and gender rather than class. The ultimate goal remains the same—totalitarian control, this time around by the “woke” in place of the vanguard of the proletariat.

The equivalents of Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin are with us today, in the committees of the Democratic Socialists of America and among the

acolytes of Zohran Mamdani, biding their time. Given the clear and present danger, how can we protect ourselves and preserve our republic? And nothing less is at stake.

One thing we can and should do is inoculate the next generation against the contagion. Teaching civics is a good first step. But, in addition, every high school and college student should be required to take a course on totalitarian ideologies so they can recognize one when they see it.

Such a course would isolate the elements common to these ideologies and put them under a figurative microscope. Instructors today rely on what's called a "teaching module." I offer the following as a preliminary "teaching module" for Totalitarian Ideologies 101.

My "module" starts with some general considerations about human nature:

1. Human beings are capable of the most magnanimous acts of generosity and benevolence, as well as the most horrendous displays of malevolence and depravity. The full spectrum of behavior is evident in all peoples and societies known to us.
2. Human beings will say anything and believe anything. What wasn't said or believed yesterday may not only be postulated today but celebrated in some quarters tomorrow. If you doubt this, just look around and listen.
3. Human beings can be made to believe anything. The process has been documented by researchers since the "brainwashing" episodes of the Korean War. It consists of periods of tension and threat alternating with intervals of relaxation and reward. Plus constant repetition of dogma. It can take place just as effectively in a classroom as in a P.O.W. camp.
4. We think we control our beliefs, but in reality, our beliefs control us. If you believe deeply enough that your gender identity doesn't align with the body you were born with, you may be driven to mutilate your own flesh to render it more amenable to your conceptions.

With this background, students can more easily grasp the nature of totalitarian ideologies:

1. Simple, Irrefutable Beliefs

Totalitarian ideologies typically divide a complex world into two simple factions: a malevolent, controlling group and the suffering victims. All the negative aspects of human behavior are attributed to the victimizers. Victims are considered fundamentally just and noble. These beliefs are irrefutable, because if you question them, you will be consigned to the malevolent group, and your views will be discounted.

2. Promise of Utopia

Totalitarian ideologies are expressed in intellectual terms to give what George Orwell called “the appearance of solidity to pure wind.” They also carry an emotional appeal. This is because they are usually grounded in authentic grievances and propound solutions to every social ill. In other words, they promise utopia.

3. Blame and Persecution

The issues may differ, but the path to utopia is always the same: eradicating the designated oppressors. This is how belief controls behavior. If you seriously believe that group X, Y, or Z is the source of all the evil in the world, your belief compels you to root them out.

4. Concentration of Power

To achieve a condition of harmony and grace, it then becomes necessary to concentrate power in the hands of the eliminators. Through the requisite concentration of power, totalitarian ideologies inevitably produce tyranny.

5. The Means Displace the Ends

The effort to eradicate the supposed oppressors ironically winds up inflicting more cruelty and brutality on otherwise innocent parties than before the totalitarians took over. An extraordinary amount of resources are simultaneously allocated to make people believe the beliefs that justify and sustain the revolutionary mayhem. Propaganda substitutes for news. Indoctrination (via tension, threat, reward, and repetition) substitutes for education. Maintaining the new world order becomes the

new measure of success, rather than practical and effective solutions to the original problems.

6. The Illusion of Perfecting Humanity

Greed, envy, anger, and resentment are assumed to be engendered in suffering humanity by the social structures imposed by the ruling cohort. The purported objective of the new world order is to create a new human being, a creature purified of negative characteristics. This effort always fails, because you can turn society upside down, but you can't alter human nature. No matter how many assumed oppressors you eliminate and no matter how you configure the governing institutions, you will be stuck with human beings. And human beings will continue to act like human beings, manifesting the spectrum of behavior described above.

By fleshing out this teaching module, designing a curriculum, and getting it into classrooms, the U.S. Department of Education can perform a vital function for truth, justice, and the American way. It can deny the communists the next generation.

To follow through, the Secretary of Education may have to threaten recalcitrant colleges and school districts with the loss of all federal funding. Considering what comes out of schools of education these days, she may also have to call for volunteers to teach the course.

I'd be the first.



Image created using AI.

Related Topics: [Totalitarianism](#), [Leftists](#)

View & Add Comments  1 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sheldon Bart