

How American Businessmen Made Us Believe that Free Enterprise was Indivisible from American Democracy: The National Association of Manufacturers' Propaganda Campaign 1935–1940

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In *Merchants of Doubt*, two of the present writers (Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway) told the story of a small group of prominent physicists who made common cause with the tobacco industry and libertarian think tanks to cast doubt on the scientific basis for concern about a set of environmental and public health issues. They did this by challenging scientific evidence, cherry-picking data, and offering “alternative facts,” such as the claim that climate change was caused by natural variability or that most lung cancers were attributable to radon or asbestos.¹

In writing that book, a key question for us was this: why would distinguished scientists, including a former president of the US National Academy of Sciences, reject science and proffer disinformation instead, in effect betraying the very enterprise of which they had so long been a part? The answer, we found, was their commitment to the principles of laissez-faire economics, coupled to a belief that government intervention in the marketplace puts us on the slippery slope to socialism. Drawing on George Soros, we characterized their views as “free market fundamentalism”; the conviction that a free market system is not merely the best way to deliver goods and services at competitive prices, but that it is the only economic system that does not threaten political liberty.² On this view, any system in which the government intervenes to control, manage, influence or even nudge the marketplace must, invariably, lead in time to government control of people’s lives. Thus, Fred Singer (one of the four main protagonists in our story) declared in defense of the tobacco industry that “if we do not carefully delineate the government’s role in regulating . . . dangers there is

essentially no limit to how much government can ultimately control our lives.”³

Singer made that comment while challenging the evidence of the harm of second-hand smoke. If second-hand smoke caused many of the same diseases as direct inhalation (and a few more to boot, such as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), then most reasonable people would agree that it was appropriate, fair, and even necessary for governments to regulate it. Therefore, rather than attack regulation head on, Singer and his colleagues attacked the scientific evidence suggesting the need for it. This was the consistent pattern that we identified: downplay, dismiss, and even deny the scientific evidence of problems that require government intervention to fix. This was the common theme that united otherwise disparate issues, such as the harms of tobacco and the risks of anthropogenic climate change.

For Singer and his colleagues – all physicists who had worked during the Cold War on American weapon and rocketry programs – the rejection of environmental science was linked, in their minds, to the protection of liberty: the liberty of individuals to decide for themselves what products to buy and use and what harms to accept or reject. They saw their political work (defending free market capitalism) as an extension of their Cold War scientific work (building weapons systems intended to contain communism and protect America from the Soviet threat). Indeed, while some of them had worked in the 1970s with the tobacco industry, their attacks on environmental science, particularly climate science, accelerated in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the Cold War ended. Finding a new enemy, they focused on environmentalists, who they viewed as “watermelons”: green on the outside but red on the inside. Anti-environmentalism became a new form of anti-communism, a new front in the war to defend the American way of life.

In promoting contrarian and skeptical views of climate change, acid rain, the ozone hole, and the harms of tobacco use, the doubt-mongers made common cause with a set of libertarian think tanks, such as the CATO Institute, Competitive Enterprise Institute, Acton Institute, and Heartland Institute (among others), who promote the neoliberal framework of deregulation, low rates of taxation, and limited government. Often the arguments of these think tanks were framed in ways that were the same or very similar to those of our “Merchants of Doubt”: that government interference in the marketplace threatens political freedom, and only a market-based system can preserve political freedom.⁴ Hence, defenders of freedom must defend free-market capitalism.

These views can be traced in the mid-twentieth century to the work of neoliberal economist Frederick von Hayek and the followers of the Mont Pelerin Society. However, when they were first widely promoted in the 1940s, neoliberal ideas were not widely accepted. Among several reasons for this, the Great Depression was too recent for most people to be persuaded by the idea that markets should be left to their own devices. John Maynard Keynes had convinced most political leaders in Europe and North America that business cycles should be tempered by government policies to stimulate demand during sluggish periods and curb it during robust ones. Keynesian economic thinking was applied during the Great Depression in both the United States and Europe, and continued to dominate economic policy for decades after, so much so that in the early 1970s, President Richard Nixon declared that “I am now a Keynesian in economics,” referencing Milton Friedman’s 1965 statement: “We are all Keynesians now.”⁵ This leads to the question: how and why did the neoliberal belief in the power and beneficence of markets – and the impotence and maleficence of governments – come to have such purchase, not only among a handful of Cold War physicists, but among influential American think tanks, political leaders, and the American people at large?

THE PROBLEM OF NEOLIBERALISM

Von Hayek published his seminal work, *The Road to Serfdom*, in 1944. He argued that political and economic freedom were two sides of the same coin, because any government that sought to control the national economy would necessarily need to control important aspects of its citizens’ lives, such as where to work and where to live, and this would, in time, slide into more egregious assaults on liberty.

Von Hayek was an economist but his most influential argument was not primarily economic, but political. He argued that capitalism and freedom are linked, so if we wish to preserve political freedom we must preserve economic freedom as well.⁶ The crux of the argument is that a free market is a form of distributed power: various individuals making free choices, every day, hold power in their hands and prevent its concentration in centralized government. Conversely, centrally planned economies entail not just the concentration of economic power, but of political power as well. Thus, the free market is a bulwark against totalitarianism, and against tyranny. Conversely, centralized economies threaten freedom by concentrating power.

As Bruce Caldwell put it in the introduction to the 2007 edition of *The Road to Serfdom*: “[Hayek believed that] full scale planning requires that the planning authorities take over all production decisions; to be able to make any decisions at all, they would need to exercise more and more political control. If one tries to create a truly planned economy, one will not be able to separate control of the economy from political control.”⁷ In Hayek’s own words: “. . . the unforeseen but inevitable consequences of socialist planning create a state of affairs in which, if the policy is to be pursued, totalitarian forces will get the upper hand.” Thus, von Hayek opposed even modest forms of social democracy, such as the British National Health Service, believing that such modest interventions in the marketplace would pave the way for more immodest ones.⁸

These views became framing propositions for the influential Mont Pelerin Society, created in 1947 to promote neoliberal thinking, whose founding statement declares: “without the diffused power and initiative associated [with private property and the competitive market] it is difficult to imagine a society in which freedom is effectively preserved.”⁹ We see here the foundations for historian David Harvey’s observation that “the assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market . . . is a cardinal feature of neoliberal thinking.”¹⁰

In the context of the end of World War II and the beginnings of the Cold War, we can fathom the credibility of some of these concerns. Right-wing totalitarianism had been defeated in Germany, but left-wing totalitarianism was ascendant in the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies, where many citizens had been stripped of political and religious liberty. Behind the Iron Curtain – as the boundary between eastern and western Europe soon came to be called – there was a strong association between centralized economic planning and the suppression of individual liberty.

On the other hand, the basic premise of neoliberal philosophy – that political and economic liberty are inseparable – was more an axiom than an empirically demonstrated truth, and even at the time there were reasons to doubt its veracity, or at least its generality. The most obvious was the history of the United States. In the nineteenth century, the country pursued a largely capitalist, market-based economic system, but this offered no guarantee of freedom: for the first half of its existence, the “land of the free” permitted chattel slavery to exist side-by-side with market capitalism. And in the second half of its history, the United States allowed the de facto refusal of liberty to former slaves and their descendants. Nor did women share the political freedoms that male citizens enjoyed, either in

the United States or in Europe. Liberty in these market economies was substantially curtailed in ways to which neoliberals turned a blind eye.

Further evidence that capitalism and freedom did not necessarily go hand-in-hand emerged in the mid-twentieth century in Chile, where General Augusto Pinochet (with the help of the American CIA) overthrew a democratically elected socialist government to install a violent and brutal capitalist dictatorship that ruled for seventeen years. Meanwhile in China, when the government embarked on a program of economic liberalization following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, many observers assumed that political liberalization would follow in its wake. That expectation was not fulfilled, and economists had to coin a new term to describe the emerging Chinese system: “market authoritarianism.”¹¹

Moreover, contra Hayek, social democracy in Europe did not lead to serfdom. On the contrary, various studies and opinion polls suggest that the world’s healthiest democracies are the European social democracies, which are also home to many of the happiest and healthiest citizens. In contrast, the United States, which has far less in the way of social welfare than most Western European countries, was rated twenty-fifth in the world by *The Economist’s* Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index, behind, for example, all the Scandinavian countries.¹²

Or consider Iraq, where, after the fall of Saddam Hussein, the US attempted to impose a strict market logic (including the immediate sale of state-owned enterprises and abolition of unions) on the theory that it would support the emergence of democracy; the result was anything but democratic. The Iraqi trade minister, Ali Abdul-Amir Allawi, criticized the thinking that motivated US actions as characterized by a “flawed logic that ignores history.”¹³ A similar pattern emerged in Russia, where US economists advised a rapid transition to a market economy, believing it would support the emergence of democratic institutions.¹⁴ What emerged instead was a corrupt oligarchy, which subsequently attempted to undermine electoral democracy in the United States.¹⁵

Yet, ironically, while western Europe had already disproved that social democracy must necessarily lead to full-blown socialist planning, and even as the examples of Chile, China, Iraq, and Russia were disproving the assumption that economic and political freedom went hand in hand, neoliberal ideas were ascendant in Europe and the United States. Ronald Reagan is remembered for his efforts to cut taxes, decrease the size of the federal government, roll back environmental regulations, and promote the idea that economic growth was best achieved by trusting to the “magic of the marketplace,” but in the United States deregulatory enthusiasm

began before Reagan, in the administration of President Carter (who fostered the deregulation of the aviation industry, of trucking, and of a number of other things). It continued under Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and in some ways, even Barack Obama. Clinton, working closely with the British Prime Minister Tony Blair, promoted the idea of a “Washington Consensus,” framed by the neoliberal principles of low taxation, trade liberalization, deregulation, the protection of property rights, and the promotion of competitive markets. The use of the term “consensus” was clearly intended to signify that all reasonable people recognized the validity of these positions, even as the “consensus” paid little (if any) attention to the need for appropriate regulation to protect workers, consumers, and the natural environment, or to prevent or redress uncompetitive practices and remedy market failure.¹⁶

Today, in light of the increasing problem of income inequality and the existential threat of climate change, many scholars and citizens have begun to challenge the dominant neoliberal logic.¹⁷ Nevertheless, economists and politicians still routinely invoke the “magic of the marketplace” to suggest that most problems are best left to the private sector to solve, and public opinion polls show that a large percentage of the American people trust business more than government.¹⁸

How did this state of affairs come to be? How did a set of views that were considered quite marginal when first proposed, and which were then shown to be empirically inadequate (as well as arguably amoral), come to be so influential? As is usually the case, historical evidence suggests a complex story, and we do not suggest that we could satisfactorily answer this question in a single chapter. However, one part of the answer, we suggest, is the role of organized efforts over the course of many decades to convince the American people of the virtues of neoliberal principles, in particular the political and social merits of the free enterprise system and its inextricable link to freedom and democracy. And one part of this effort – the focus of this chapter – was an organized propaganda campaign, which began in the 1930s as a reaction to the New Deal, and relied heavily on the use of radio, the dominant electronic media of the time.

Even before the publication of *The Road to Serfdom* or the founding of the Mont Pelerin society, the idea that government intervention in the marketplace was not just economically misguided, but also threatened American freedom, was promoted by a network of American businessmen centered around the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). For nearly a century, and supported by and allied with other trade associations, conservative thinkers, political and religious leaders, and

libertarian think-tanks, NAM constructed, nurtured, and promoted a narrative in which the protagonist was “free enterprise,” and the antagonist was, variously, socialists, unions, and “the government.” This narrative has been used to justify tax cuts, roll back regulation, and deny the reality of market failure. A key tenet of the narrative is that political and economic freedom are indivisible – what NAM leaders called the “indivisibility thesis,” a thesis they were already promoting in the United States several years before the publication of *The Road to Serfdom*.¹⁹ This paper focuses on one part of that story: the NAM propaganda campaign of 1935–1940 and the use of radio in that campaign.

NAM AND THE ORIGINS OF THE INDIVISIBILITY THESIS

By the late nineteenth century, it had become widely accepted that capitalism could not be left entirely to its own devices: the marketplace required government oversight to protect workers, to protect consumers, and even to protect capitalism from itself. While some of this oversight could be done on the state level, increasingly the demand was for the federal government to become involved. The 1890 Sherman Anti-Trust Act, for example, was designed to protect competition in the face of monopolistic practices. The 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act was intended to protect consumers from misbranded, adulterated, contaminated, or otherwise dangerous food and drugs. (In 1938 it was amended to include cosmetics.) And the 1916 Keating-Owen Act attempted to protect children from dangerous labor.

However, as the twentieth century unfolded, leaders of American business and industry, organized under the umbrellas of the National Association of Manufacturers and the American Liberty League, fought back against these government initiatives. In response to unionization and the pressure to ameliorate working conditions – particularly the effort to implement workmen’s compensation and limit child labor – they promulgated the idea that unregulated capitalism was “the American way.” They also insisted that taxation – including the federal income tax – would damage business and industry by draining funds that would otherwise be used for investment. Thus, they offered both a positive vision – support individual enterprise – and a negative prescription – limit government involvement and taxation.

Their narrative drew heavily on the metaphor of a “tripod of freedom.” This was the claim that American democracy rested on three legs – representative government, civic and religious liberty, and free

enterprise. Like a tripod, it would only stand if all three legs were intact and strong. This became the basis for arguing against any weakening of economic freedom – by which they meant the freedom of businessmen to run their operations as they saw fit – such as, for example, the enforcement by either unions or law of an eight-hour work day or a minimum age for child labor. Closely linked to this metaphor was the idea that political and economic freedom were indivisible, inseparable, and inextricable. Therefore, even modest regulations, if mandated by law, threatened American liberty.

We call this the “indivisibility thesis,” drawing on the use of that term by NAM board member J. Howard Pew.²⁰ In December 1948, Pew wrote to Rose Wilder Lane, the libertarian daughter of writer Laura Ingalls Wilder, who had influenced her mother to tell the story of her childhood as a libertarian morality tale.²¹ Lane had explained to Pew her view that there “existed in fact no need for regulation or control of industry.”²² Pew agreed, but his arguments had a sharper focus. They hinged on the rights of businessmen, buttressed by the philosophical position that freedom was indivisible.

I . . . am an ardent supporter of freedom, and all that it comprehends – religious freedom, political freedom, industrial freedom, freedom of speech, of the press and of assembly, and I might add freedom of choice, which is probably the most important of them all. I believe, too, that freedom is indivisible; when a part is taken away, that which remains is no longer freedom. To illustrate, suppose we should lose our industrial freedom; then it would require a compulsory form of government in order to enforce the decrees having to do with the conduct of industry, and a compulsory state can brook no freedoms.²³

Pew’s example of industrial freedom was neither random nor incidental. From the early-twentieth-century defense of child labor, to the mid-century attacks on the New Deal, American business leaders had argued that any compromise to business freedom threatened the fabric of American social and political freedom and with it the American way of life.

The argument had taken a number of forms. In its 1939 Declaration of Principles, the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) had asserted their faith in the principle of “inseparability”: arguing that constitutional representative democracy, free enterprise, and civil and religious liberty were “inseparable fundamentals of freedom to be cherished and preserved.”²⁴ A few years later, NAM developed and promoted the tripod of freedom metaphor: 1) free speech, free press, free religion; 2) representative government; and 3) Free Enterprise (the latter often made

into a proper noun). NAM insisted that if any leg were compromised, the entire tripod would fall.

At the core of [our] strategy has been the idea of establishing free enterprise where it rightfully belongs – as one of the three great elements (along with the civil liberties of free speech, free press, and religious freedom, and the representative form of democratic governments) which go up to make the American way of life.²⁵

Note the use of the word “strategy”: these arguments were not simply the beliefs of a group of leading American businessmen, they were the core of a political *strategy*, which included a propaganda campaign to persuade the American people of the veracity of these beliefs. NAM promoted the indivisibility thesis and the tripod of freedom narrative via a variety of “educational” and propagandistic activities, including advertising campaigns, leaflets and brochures distributed to schools, libraries, religious leaders and women’s clubs, and even a nationally syndicated radio program. The materials often included versions of American history that insisted (counterfactually) that American was built by “individuals,” with government playing little if any role.²⁶

As historian Kim Phillips-Fein has shown, in the 1930s the “free enterprise” campaign was linked to business opposition to the New Deal and, more broadly, to Republican opposition to FDR.²⁷ Through its Advisory Committee on Public Relations and its National Industrial Information Council (NIIC), NAM promoted the tripod of freedom theme through newsletters, billboards, short films, feature films, lecture series, a textbook campaign, and more. A particularly important element of their propaganda campaign was a radio program entitled *The American Family Robinson*.

THE AMERICAN FAMILY ROBINSON

Most NAM propaganda materials were intended to reach employees in their workplaces, children in their schools, or citizens in their clubs and churches, but one component of the campaign reached directly into American homes and drew on the electronic media of the era: a radio show entitled *The American Family Robinson*. Launched in 1935, the long-running series was the single most expensive item in the NAM public relations budget, and likely the one that reached the most people. It was also the element of the campaign that reached outside a business community already in agreement with its message, and into the homes of ordinary Americans. In doing so, it would have reached many Americans who

might not have otherwise harbored strong views about American business or free enterprise, who might even have belonged to unions, or been sympathetic to socialism or other non-individualistic philosophies.²⁸

The American Family Robinson was the brainchild of Harry A. Bullis, vice president of General Mills and the chairman of the NAM's public relations committee. Each episode was fifteen minutes long and distributed free of charge to interested radio stations. NAM described it as emphasizing "the countless benefits which derive from living in a free country, with civil and religious liberty, representative democracy, [and] free private enterprise," – in other words, promoting the tripod of freedom message.²⁹ The association's goal for *The American Family Robinson* was to "sell the 'American way of life' to the American people" – to claim faith in the free market as a defining dimension of the American identity.³⁰ By NAM's own reckoning, it was a central component of their declared mission to help industry "tell its story."³¹ From 1934 to 1940, it was syndicated by the World Broadcasting System, and by the late 1930s nearly 300 independent stations were broadcasting it.³²

The show followed the adventures of the Robinson family in the aptly named manufacturing town of Centerville. We meet Luke Robinson, the family patriarch and editor of the *Centerville Herald*; his wife Myra, a radio host; their children Betty and Bob; Betty's husband Dick Collins; assorted relatives and friends; and other Centerville citizens. Like the rest of America, Centerville is feeling the effects of the Depression.

In one plotline, even the *Herald* – a "sound business" if there ever was one, Myra declares proudly – verges on collapse. This creates the opportunity for the program to show how, despite the challenges of the Depression, market capitalism is still the best option for the American people.

In a move perhaps unintentionally parodic of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* the town claims to represent the "center": its name emphasizes its purported ordinariness, and by implication that of the Robinsons, a quintessential "middle" American family. The show's politics, however, are firmly to the right of center. Each fifteen-minute episode of the folksy drama has sustained stretches of dialogue arguing against "foreign," "visionary," "experimental," or "utopian" theories, particularly ones that involve tax increases or deficit spending. The program was so blatantly anti-Roosevelt that no network would touch it; when James P. Selvage, the NAM's vice president for public relations, attempted to pitch the series to NBC, an NBC script editor wrote of the show: "the definite intention and implication of each episode is to conduct certain

propaganda against the New Deal and all its work.”³³ The program nevertheless gained a large following.³⁴

NAM was of course not unique in using radio to spread its message: radio was the dominant form of electronic mass communication in the 1930s, reaching 83 percent of American families by the end of the decade.³⁵ Certainly, the Roosevelt administration was not shy about using radio for its messaging. One series produced by the Department of the Interior with assistance from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was “Americans All, Immigrants All,” broadcast from November 1938 to May 1939 on CBS, which highlighted the contributions of the many ethnic and cultural groups who helped build America with episodes dedicated to such topics as “The Negro,” “The Irish,” “The Germans,” and “The Jews.”³⁶ More influential still were Roosevelt’s famous fireside chats. In this context, NAM saw its radio efforts as self-defense, as well as a method for warding off the political anger of people who resented business and the large incomes of business leaders.

The American Family Robinson lifted its title from the Swiss pastor Johan David Wyss’s 1812 novel *The Swiss Family Robinson*, which in turn borrowed its central idea from Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Wyss’s novel tells the story of a Swiss family, en route to Australia, which finds itself shipwrecked on a tropical island in the Pacific. Their new home (unlike Crusoe’s) turns out to be Edenic, filled with succulent fruits and magnificent creatures. The family grows prosperous. During ten years in isolation, they build something resembling a Swiss farm, complete with farm houses, fields, gardens, a fishery, and domesticated animals. The industrious family colonizes the island: they turn its previously untouched wildness into a microcosm of successful and efficient European civilization.

The Swiss Family Robinson began as a series of bedtime stories told by Wyss to his four young sons to arouse their curiosity about the natural world and instill Protestant values.³⁷ From its inception, then, the radio program was like the novel: episodic and didactic. In particular, both sets of Robinsons cherish the work ethic. But whereas the characters in *The Swiss Family Robinson* perform their labor by hand – spinning flax, making candles, salting fish – which is its own source of pleasure and sensory delight, in the world of *The American Family Robinson* work takes place mostly in factories and is an index of character and patriotism.³⁸ In short, where *The Swiss Family Robinson* preaches Protestant piety, the American reboot takes as its religion free-market fundamentalism.

The show imparts its lessons about the value of private enterprise and the benevolence of business through long stretches of dialogue or monologue, or in the form of debates between the commonsensical editor, Luke Robinson, and his trouble-making socialist brother-in-law, “Windy” Bill. Bill is emblematic of the lazy and hypocritical socialist: a sponger living off the generosity of the hard-working Robinson family. Instead of working at an honest living, Bill pursues get-rich-quick schemes and utopian dreams; in one episode he runs for mayor representing the “Sociological-Economical Reform and Golden Age Reincarnationist Party.” His vocal support for “visionary wealth-sharing programs” annoys Luke and others in the town: one Centerville judge pronounces him a “pompous windbag” (hence the nickname Windy) before throwing him in jail.³⁹

Bill always loses his arguments with Luke, Myra, Dick, and the other voices of “sound business principles” who, in Luke’s words, “seek to maintain our economic structure rather than sacrificing it to radical theories.” Bill offers superficial versions of liberal criticisms of free markets, which are readily refuted. In one early episode, for example, we hear this exchange between a fluty-voiced Bill and the sonorous boom of the show’s pro-business hero:

Bill: That’s business for you: the big fellas ganging up against the little fellas . . .

Luke: That’s just a childish defense for lack of initiative. Who are the big fellas, anyway? Why, they’re the little fellas willing to work hard enough under the same rules as apply to you and me, and become big fellas . . .

Bill: Business has got to be taken out of the hands of businessmen.

Luke: And put into the hands of theorists, who never met a payroll for workers on Saturdays, I suppose?

These arguments are repeated through dozens of episodes. Luke’s characterization of the anti-business position as juvenile or “childish” predates the British concept of the “nanny state,” but anticipates its likening of governmental intervention to parental or maternal protection. And whereas big government is bad, big business is good.

Luke assures the listener that rich business leaders enable, rather than impede, social mobility in America, because men like Henry Ford started out as mere workers, just like you and me. “Every big company was a small company once,” one character points out (with

no acknowledgement of the government contracts that made some of those companies, such as railroads, big). Reforms that involve government spending or tax increases are “theories,” “experiments,” and “loose talk.” By contrast, the claim that the path to recovery is the stimulation of business through lower taxes is taken as fact.

The program inserts editorial commentary through Myra’s radio show and Luke’s newspaper. Myra’s program, for example, hosts a letter-writing contest inviting listeners to respond to the question: “What will speed recovery?” Most of the letters read aloud on the show are endorsements of private industry. Then Bill, writing under a false name (and of course hoping to win the cash prize) offers a preposterous suggestion: “With all the money that is stored in our beautiful Treasury building, we could all make a new start. The government could divide it up. A home, a car, a swimming pool for everyone . . . big grown-up children singing happily.” This obviously ridiculous proposition encapsulates the (allegedly) infantilizing effects of government intervention and, in particular, the utopian recklessness of New Deal policies. And the program makes clear that windy Bill claims to want socialism for the people, but what he really wants is money for himself.

Direct appeals to the listener break in on the program’s storylines, sometimes with little relation to the events of the episodes in which they are embedded. On occasion the show’s writer seems slyly aware of this. In one episode, Betty rushes weeping to her mother (Myra): Dick, Betty’s husband, has rushed off to Chicago without explanation and Betty is worried the marriage is in trouble. (The radio listener knows that Dick has gone to pursue one of “Windy” Bill’s schemes.) In response, Myra launches into a long speech about how the manufacturing industry can “take care of its own.” Betty asks, hiccupping with sobs: “What does this have to do with Dick?”

Ironically, the program’s peripheral characters tend to be more colorful than the blandly pro-business Luke and Myra. “Windy” Bill, the show’s token socialist, is the most entertaining major character and the one who most consistently advances the plot through his harebrained business schemes, his meddling, his political ambitions, and his romantic pursuit of a histrionic – but rich – Centerville woman. Bill was originally conceived as an incidental character; letters from fans convinced NAM to make him a regular.⁴⁰ Some of the show’s strongest moments are comic stretches featuring Bill with a lampshade stuck on his head, or Bill’s wealthy love interest

shuttling farcically between Bill knocking at her back door and a rival knocking at the front – scenes that no doubt delighted the show's listeners but did little to instruct them in the virtues of private enterprise. They did, however, contribute to the message that socialists were preposterous (and women untrustworthy).

Alongside its idealization of capitalism, the show also idealized the nuclear family and the domestic home. The Robinsons celebrate, in Luke's words, the "ideals of American home life," guarded by wives and daughters.⁴¹ Just as the show depicts the *Centerville Herald* as a microcosm of American business and Centerville as a microcosm of American life, the Robinson is a microcosm of the ideal American family. The family's struggles are America's struggles. And the Robinsons weather their challenges, the show's narrator tells us, "like the true Americans they are."⁴²

In its didactic appeals to listeners, *The American Family Robinson* cycled through a variety of anti-New Deal and anti-socialist tropes. One idea, however, is consistently presented with peculiar and repetitive force: that reform efforts are "foreign theories" that threaten the American way of life. In various episodes, "foreign theories" are likened to a hostile invasion. "If this country's gonna switch from Americanism to socialism or totalitarianism or some other kind of foreign government," one character insists, we all might find ourselves working for a dictator, "instead of doing business the American way." This fearmongering moves quickly from socialism to totalitarianism to foreign tyranny, eliding any distinctions among them. At times the language veers into a militaristic register: Myra declares in one episode that the country is waging "a battle between the fundamental system we built up and a whole host of foreign invaders, all bringing every kind of artillery." Whatever the New Deal economic reforms are – socialist, totalitarian, or simply dangerously unrealistic – they are, above all, un-American.

What listeners would not have known was that, at the same time they were listening to Luke and Myra rail against foreign theories, the program's sponsors were literally importing foreign theorists and their theories – the Austrian economists F. A. Hayek and Ludwig von Mises – as a key part of their efforts to convince Americans that economic and political freedoms were inextricably bound. Listeners might also not have realized that while Luke insisted that not a single European country has "a system that works better than ours," and that Europeans suffered low wages with "none of our

American conveniences,” one could well have argued at the time that in several ways, the European economy served ordinary people better. European farmers, for example, had the convenience of electricity before American farmers did.⁴³

One additional point was important to NAM, particularly after 1939: the role of American industry in the war effort. In one episode, Luke complains to another man in a diner, telling him the United States lost billions during World War I because of too much government control over the production of weapons, planes, and other military materials. The moral: manufacturers, not politicians, know how to produce military equipment. Our industrialists, Luke sighs, “are the best in the world”; they can’t afford to make mistakes, because if they did, “they’d have been out of business long ago.” Myra, too, swoons over the captains of industry. Moving from a reflection on the security of her home to the security of her country (the first a stand-in for the second), Myra pronounces: “I know the businessmen are doing everything possible for national defense: we’ll be secure, all right.” The path toward national security is simple: the government needs to let the industrial system get to work with as little regulation as possible.

This message underscored the basic intent of the whole program: to convince the American people of the benevolence of both manufacturers and of the free enterprise system, and to link both to democratic governance. In a 1939 comment to the National Association of Broadcasters, NAM emphasized the pro-business and not “anti-anything” nature of this series. “It is the avowed purpose of the American Family Robinson program to present openly, and as effectively and attractively as radio will permit, the fundamental principle that freedom of speech and of the press, freedom of religion and freedom of enterprise are inseparable and must continue to be if the system of democratic government under which this country has flourished is to be preserved.”⁴⁴

From 1939 into the 1940s, this became the key idea of nearly all NAM arguments. Sometimes it was expressed as the “inseparability” of political freedom, religious freedom, and economic freedom, other times as their “indivisibility,” as in a 1937 NAM PR memo that declared that “free enterprise is as much an indivisible part of democracy and the source of as many blessings and benefits as are our other freedoms of speech, press and religion,” the same language that J. Howard Pew later used in writing to Rose Wilder Lane.⁴⁵ Either way, the concept was reinforced – and indeed,

made the official, public position of NAM – in a press statement released on December 9, 1939, and adopted by the Congress of American Industry. It began:

In a world torn by war and dictatorship, Americans live at peace and in freedom. The best assurance that we shall remain free and at peace is our own internal unity and strength . . . Here, people have faith in constitutional representative democracy, in free enterprise, and in civil and religious liberty as inseparable fundamentals of freedom to be cherished and preserved.⁴⁶

These fundamentals were responsible for giving the American people the “greatest degree of personal freedom, the widest opportunity, and the highest standard of living in the world.”⁴⁷ In short, the goal of *The American Family Robinson* radio program, as a central part of the NAM propaganda campaign, was to establish free enterprise “as one of the three great elements (along with civil liberties . . . and the representative form of democratic governments) which go up to make the American way of life.”⁴⁸ Its goal was to persuade the American people that free enterprise was indivisible from the American way of life.

CONCLUSION: THE CHARACTER AND IMPORT OF DISINFORMATION

Disinformation can take many forms. In our previous work we have focused on two forms that have been recently prominent in American culture and politics: the misrepresentation of scientific facts and the promotion of misleading narratives.⁴⁹ In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the denial of the harms of tobacco use, the risks of acid rain, the dangers of stratospheric ozone depletion, and the threat of anthropogenic climate change all involved the widespread and at times egregious misrepresentation of scientific facts. But behind these empirical misrepresentations was a misleading narrative: that if we were to admit and address these challenges, we would put our personal liberty in peril and threaten the American way of life. As President George H. W. Bush famously declared in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change: “The American way of life is not up for negotiations. Period.”⁵⁰

This narrative, it turns out, is much older than the struggle to address climate change or the battle to regulate tobacco.⁵¹ Decades before the tobacco industry insisted that government restrictions on tobacco were the leading edge of tyranny, the National Association of Manufacturers

promoted a sweeping narrative that placed free enterprise at the center of American democracy and American life, and insisted on its foundational equivalence to representative government and civic and religious liberty. The free-market system, NAM insisted through *The American Family Robinson* radio show and other propaganda materials, was no less central to the concept and creation of the American republic than were representative government and freedom of speech.

This narrative was at best incomplete. Among other things, by insisting that free enterprise was a founding ideal of the American republic, NAM elided not only the long and dark history of American slavery, but also a substantial history of government intervention in the marketplace through tariffs, infrastructure development, state-chartered enterprises, and many other intercessions.⁵² By insisting that broad-based American prosperity and leisure was the outcome of the free enterprise system, NAM elided the role of unions in insuring that prosperity was in fact broadly distributed – and not merely concentrated in the hands of a small number of industrialists – and that American workers had leisure time to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

In his 2018 book on neoliberalism, historian Quinn Slobodian stresses that many thinkers lumped under the label “neoliberal” did not, in fact, believe in unfettered markets. To the contrary, they were concerned with what sorts of institutions, methods of governance, and forms of global order would permit the proper functioning of markets.⁵³ He argues, therefore, that what these thinkers were most concerned with was the “insulation” of markets from politics as an institution-building project. And he insists that a significant portion of neoliberal thinking, particularly in Europe, did not conflate free-market capitalism with democracy.

This may be so, but if European neoliberals did not conflate democracy and free enterprise, many American captains of industry did, consciously and deliberately so. However, they did work to insulate business practices from the workings of democracy by attempting to persuade the American people that the best way to protect American freedom was by letting businessmen run their businesses as they saw fit, unrestrained by government regulations or unionization. In the NAM portrait of America, businessmen knew best. Or, to paraphrase what would later be said with regard to General Motors, what’s good for American business is good for America.

NAM largely lost the fight for the hearts and minds of Americans during the Depression and the New Deal, but they did not give up. After the war, J. Howard Pew would play a major role in funding a conservative

Protestant network to shift the thinking of mainline and evangelical Protestants to be more favorable to free market arguments. These ideas were further promoted through outreach to conservative Christian groups, who later became part of the coalition that brought Ronald Reagan to power.⁵⁴

Whereas earlier proponents of market fundamentalism were primarily motivated by resistance to Progressive Era and New Deal reforms, Reagan offered a new, more positive prescription. Responding to the economic difficulties of the 1970s – low growth with high inflation, also known as “stagflation” – Reagan argued that Western economies were over-regulated and their citizens and businesses over-taxed. In 1983, he introduced the language of the “magic of the marketplace,” declaring, for example, that the “growing economic interdependence of our world is creating a ripple effect of good news for those countries committed to . . . policies which allow the magic of the marketplace to create opportunities for growth and progress, free from the dead weight of government interference . . . ”⁵⁵ He also revived the indivisibility thesis, insisting in many speeches on economic freedom as inseparable from, and foundational to, political liberty.

The “Reagan Revolution” was thus less a revolution than a reversion to an older economic and political narrative. What was revolutionary was the way in which this narrative became mainstream: by the 1990s, both Republican and Democratic administrations were promoting deregulation and accepting the idea that market-based solutions were preferable to alternatives. Some market-based solutions to environmental problems worked: in 1990, for example, President George H. W. Bush signed the Clean Air Act Amendments that instituted an emissions trading system to reduce the pollution that was causing acid rain, and, as a result, acid emissions were greatly reduced.

But they didn’t all work. Or, rather, in most cases they weren’t even tried, as the conservative commitment to market fundamentalism led the Republican Party increasingly into overt denial of market failures, most conspicuously climate change. In the face of Republican opposition and even ridicule, President Clinton was unable to introduce a carbon pricing system into Congress. By the administration of George W. Bush, market fundamentalism was on full display, now firmly linked to the denial of climate change. Barack Obama pushed back against climate change denial, but was largely unable to act in the face of an uncooperative Congress. In 2016, President Donald Trump revived denial with a vengeance, declaring climate change to be

a “hoax,” and rolling back environmental regulations of all kinds under the rubric of “making America great again.” Today, the greatness of America is again being equated with unregulated capitalism.

The history of the NAM propaganda campaign reminds us that both false factual claims and misleading narratives are pernicious. False factual claims confuse us about the character of a problem: whether climate change is real, whether smoking causes cancer, whether immigration is the cause of industrial unemployment, etc. The resulting confusion is pernicious, because it undermines our will to act, either by persuading us that an alleged problem is not in fact a problem or by diverting us from its true causes.⁵⁶

But misleading narratives may be even more damaging, because they are so much more difficult to correct. This is particularly the case, as in the example of *The American Family Robinson*, when they are presented as fictional accounts and therefore cannot be subject to the complaint that they are factually false.⁵⁷ Yet such fictional stories – such misleading narratives – can do profound damage, because they mislead us about who we are and how we came to our present situation.

NOTES

1. Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, reprint edition (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2011). For a specific discussion of the framework of “alternative facts,” a phrase which we coined before Kellyanne Conway, see Jen Viegas, “‘Alternative Facts’ Have Plagued Science for Decades,” *Seeker*, February 19, 2017, www.seeker.com/alternative-facts-have-plagued-science-for-decades-2272707511.html; Erik Baker and Naomi Oreskes, “It’s No Game: Post-Truth and the Obligations of Science Studies,” *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, 6, no. 8 (2017): 1–10, <https://social-epistemology.com/2017/07/10/its-no-game-post-truth-and-the-obligations-of-science-studies-erik-baker-and-naomi-oreskes/>.
2. George Soros, “The Capitalist Threat,” *The Atlantic*, February 1997, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1997/02/the-capitalist-threat/376773/; George Soros, “I’m a Passionate Critic of Market Fundamentalism,” *The Guardian*, July 13, 2018, www.theguardian.com/business/2018/jul/13/george-soros-im-a-passionate-critic-of-market-fundamentalism; see also Mark Breslow, “George Soros: Beware Market Fundamentalism,” *Dollars and Sense*, February 1999, www.dollarsandsense.org/archives/1999/0199breslow.html.
3. S. Fred Singer and Kent Jeffreys, *EPA and the Science of Environmental Tobacco Smoke*, Alexis de Tocqueville Institute, May 1994, BN: T131749030, Legacy Tobacco Documents Library, 2.

4. A particularly explicit exposition of environmentalism as a threat to freedom can be found at Dixie Lee Ray, "Dixie Lee Ray on the 'Environmental' Movement," *Science and the Environment*, Fall 1992, www.vlrc.org/articles/59.html.
5. "The Economy: We Are All Keynesians Now," *Time*, December 31, 1965, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,842353,00.html>; "Nixon Reportedly Says He Is Now a Keynesian," *New York Times*, January 7, 1971, www.nytimes.com/1971/01/07/archives/nixon-reportedly-says-he-is-now-a-keynesian.html.
6. The central economic argument of neoliberalism, as David Harvey explains, is that "the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second guess market signals," and so any form of economic planning is bound to fail. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2. However, most neoliberals go far beyond this insight – which is quite possibly true – to argue against regulation, including environmental protection and worker safety, and against taxation, which leaves governments handicapped in their efforts to protect workers and the environment, to support education, or indeed do much of anything, while also undermining efforts to redress income inequality. On income inequality, see Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, reprint edition (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2017). In our forthcoming work, *The Magic of the Marketplace: A True History of a False Idea*, Erik Conway and I build on an important argument of Alfred Kahn: that neoliberals have conflated two different senses of regulation. One is market regulation, as in regulating a natural monopoly like telephone service or railroads. The other is regulation designed to address market failures like workplace safety and environmental protection. In the 1970s, there was a strong, empirically supported argument for the deregulation of markets that were not natural monopolies, such as aviation and trucking. However, that was used by some to argue against environmental protection, workplace safety, and the like. The second sense of regulation might be better described as management. The demonization of the concept of regulation can be challenged further, given that in all organisms, it is essential for survival.
7. F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom: Text and Documents – The Definitive Edition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 30.
8. The logical (or illogical) leap that many then made, to some extent including Hayek himself, was from regulation to planning. Clearly these are not the same, but they become conflated in much subsequent neoliberal rhetoric.
9. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 20.
10. Harvey, 7.
11. Stefan Halper, "The World of Market Authoritarianism," *American Spectator*, October 2, 2009, https://spectator.org/40803_world-market-authoritarianism/. Some use the term "authoritarian capitalism" or "illiberal capitalism" e.g. "Authoritarian Capitalism," in *Wikipedia*, August 31, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Authoritarian_capitalism&oldid=913270898.
12. Andrea Germanos, "United States Doesn't Even Make Top 20 on Global Democracy Index," *Common Dreams*, January 11, 2019, www.commondreams.org

- [.commondreams.org/news/2019/01/11/united-states-doesnt-even-make-top-20-global-democracy-index](http://commondreams.org/news/2019/01/11/united-states-doesnt-even-make-top-20-global-democracy-index).
13. Thomas Crampton, "Iraqi Official Urges Caution On Imposing Free Market," *New York Times*, October 14, 2003, www.nytimes.com/2003/10/14/business/iraqi-official-urges-caution-on-imposing-free-market.html. Quoted in Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 7.
 14. Janine R. Wedel, *Shadow Elite: How the World's New Power Brokers Undermine Democracy, Government, and the Free Market*, reprint edition (New York: Basic Books, 2011).
 15. Robert S. Mueller III, *The Mueller Report: Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election* (New York: Melville House, 2019).
 16. The emergence of the Washington Consensus in the 1990s is particularly ironic given the simultaneous emergence of the scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change, which Lord Nicholas Stern has called "the greatest and widest ranging market failure" ever. See Lewis Smith, "Stern's Report: 'If We Act Now, We Can Avoid the Very Worst,'" *The Times*, October 31, 2006, www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sterns-report-if-we-act-now-we-can-avoid-the-very-worst-lbp2c3dtm7. Harvey notes that, whereas Richard Nixon once famously said "we are all Keynesians now," Clinton and Blair could have said instead that "we are all neoliberals now." Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 13.
 17. See for example Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015); Joseph E. Stiglitz, *People, Power, and Profits: Progressive Capitalism for an Age of Discontent*, 1st edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019).
 18. Niall McCarthy, "Americans Trust Business More Than Government [Infographic]," *Forbes*, February 5, 2015, www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2015/02/05/americans-trust-business-more-than-government-infographic/. Neoliberal ideas do not necessarily require hostility to government, but in practice this is often the case. Thus, the widespread American belief in the "magic of the marketplace" – the belief that social problems are best solved by "the invisible hand of the marketplace" unperturbed by government intervention – ends up being linked to the corollary claim that markets are efficient and governments are inefficient. For this reason, *ceteris paribus*, government intervention is generally a bad idea, and government, in general, is viewed as suspect. Of course, there is also another, older American tradition that reinforces these views, exemplified by the famous adage that "the government that governs best, governs least." Many people are surprised to find that its source is Henry David Thoreau. One commentator suggests that it was not original to Thoreau, but that he is certainly the most likely source for its widespread persistence. See Eugene Volokh, "Who First Said, 'The Best Government Is That Which Governs Least'? Not Thoreau," *Washington Post*, September 6, 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2017/09/06/who-first-said-the-best-government-is-that-which-governs-least-not-thoreau/.

More than any other people, Americans share a faith that markets are efficient and government is not, a widely held view expressed in both the

- Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, from New York to California, by both business leaders and academics. NYU Professor Jonathan Haight conveys some of this devotion when he said: “You’re not crazy to worship markets. Markets really are amazing things.” Quoted in James Hoggan and Grania Litwin, *I’m Right and You’re an Idiot: The Toxic State of Public Discourse and How to Clean It Up* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2016), 39.
19. During this time, Ludwig von Mises was consulting to NAM, so it may well be that he was the source of the concept. On the other hand, NAM leaders were articulating the indivisibility thesis well before Mises began to work with them.
 20. On Pew see “J. Howard Pew Papers, 1902-1971,” Philadelphia Area Archives Research Portal, http://dla.library.upenn.edu/cocoon/dla/pacscl/e/ad.html?fq=subject_topic_facet%3A%22Anti-communist%20movements%22&id=PACSCL_HML_1634.
 21. Christine Woodside, *Libertarians on the Prairie: Laura Ingalls Wilder, Rose Wilder Lane, and the Making of the Little House Books* (Arcade Publishing, 2016).
 22. J. Howard Pew to Rose Wilder Lane, December 30, 1948, Hagley Library, J. Howard Pew Papers (Accession 1634), Box 17.
 23. J. Howard Pew to Rose Wilder Lane, December 30, 1948. It’s interesting that this is a form of what psychologists call “catastrophic thinking,” which is recognized as a common component of anxiety disorders. Alexander Bystritsky et al., “Current Diagnosis and Treatment of Anxiety Disorders,” *Pharmacy and Therapeutics*, 38, no. 1 (January 2013): 30–57, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3628173/.
 24. “Declaration of Principles Relating to the Conduct of American Industry,” December 8, 1939, Hagley Library, J. Howard Pew papers (Accession 1634), Box 2 (NAM 1939–1940), 1.
 25. NIIC slide show, May 11, 1944, Hagley Library, NAM Folder: NIIC objectives 1943–45 (2/2), Series III, Box 845. For how this argument evolved over time, see NAM Series VII Industrial Relations Department, Box 134, Folder “Jobs-Freedom-Opportunity, Educational Programs 1953–54.”
 26. NAM’s arguments recapitulated the work of the National Electric Light Association (NELA), who in the 1920s had sponsored a major propaganda campaign designed to discredit public power by insisting that privately generated electricity was cheaper and more reliable than municipal – or state-run electricity, and that public power was socialistic and un-American. This campaign involved advertising, editorials in newspapers (many ghostwritten), the rewriting of textbooks, and the development of school and university curricula designed to extol the virtues of laissez-faire capitalism and demonize government intervention in the marketplace. The campaign worked in part by finding, cultivating, and paying experts to endorse the industry claims and cast doubt on factual information supplied by independent third parties. When its activities came to light, NELA was disbanded, but other groups continued the effort.
 27. Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W. W. Norton,

- 2009). See also Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the “American Way”: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement*, 1st edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
28. Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, “Creating a Favorable Business Climate: Corporations and Radio Broadcasting, 1934 to 1954,” *Business History Review*, 73, no. 2 (1999): 221–255, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3116241>.
 29. American Family Robinson promotional pamphlet, 1938, Hagley Library, Series I, Box 111, Folder “American Family Robinson (6/40).”
 30. Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business*, new edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001). This raises the question of why the President’s propaganda might be considered acceptable but NAM is not. We would argue that citizens listening to FDR’s fireside chat knew that they were listening to political speech, but listeners of *The American Family Robinson* might have felt they were simply listening to an entertaining program. The NAM put out the program under the name “National Industrial Council,” and each episode ended with the tag: “This program is produced by the National Industrial Council.” In the various episodes to which we listened, NAM is mentioned by name only once – in dialogue (one of the characters says that industry, and especially the NAM, is “for peace”), but not in credits. So, a listener would not have understood who, exactly, was responsible for the views being promoted.
 31. Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*, 13–15.
 32. William L. Bird, Jr., *Better Living: Advertising, Media, and the New Vocabulary of Business Leadership, 1935–1955*, 1st edition (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 54; Fones-Wolf, “Creating a Favorable Business Climate,” 231.
 33. Bird, Jr., *Better Living*, 58–59.
 34. Fones-Wolf, “Creating a Favorable Business Climate,” 230; “National Assn. of Manufacturers Given 7,960 Free Radio Hours; Business Versus Government Issue,” *Variety*, December 18, 1940, 29.
 35. Fones-Wolf, “Favorable Business Climate,” 223.
 36. “Americans All, Immigrants All,” in John Dunning, *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30–31.
 37. J. Hillis Miller, introduction to *The Swiss Family Robinson* (New York: Signet Classics, 2004).
 38. See John Seelye, introduction to *The Swiss Family Robinson* (New York: Penguin, 2007), xv–xvi.
 39. For the discussion of *The American Family Robinson* that follows, we have used MP3 recordings of radio broadcasts preserved on *The Old Time Radio Catalog*, available online at www.otrcat.com/p/american-family-robinson. This source has admirably preserved a large sample of episodes, but it has not preserved reliable episode titles or airtime dates; therefore we list our references by episode number. We quote from the following episodes in order of reference: episode 68; episode 3; episode 2; episode 40; episode 52; episode 8; episode 71; episode 6; episode 46; episode 53; episode 56; episode 51; episode 43; episode 2; episode 39; episode 52; episode 55.

40. Bird, *Better Living*, 57.
41. Later, General Electric Theater would promote the same ideal.
42. The idea of “true Americans” supports an additional element of the show, which, while not the main concept, is clearly evident: that of the heteronormative nuclear family. The “pink” socialist “Windy” Bill – lilted-voiced, perpetually unemployed, and frequently emasculated (in one episode a group of workers give him a scare by hoisting him up on a steam shovel) – has no place within the heterosexual nuclear family that the show cherishes. He intrudes, unwanted, on Luke and Myra; he later tries to move in with newlyweds Betty and Dick. “Windy” Bill Winkle – like his literary ancestor Rip Van, another idler – dreamily removes himself from the obligations imposed by work and family. When Bill arrives at Luke and Myra’s house, he boasts of his culinary tastes and offers to “revolutionize” the Robinsons’ dinner table. Luke and Myra rebuff him. “We’re pretty simple folks,” Myra says. “We like simplicity.” The lesson is obvious. The family – like the country – must protect itself from misguided reform, and that includes misguided foreign theories and foreign food, and perhaps even foreign (European?) forms of sexuality.
43. Naomi Oreskes, “The Fact of Uncertainty, the Uncertainty of Facts and the Cultural Resonance of Doubt,” *Philosophical Transactions. Series A, Mathematical, Physical, and Engineering Sciences*, 373, no. 2055 (November 28, 2015): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2014.0455>; Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, *Inventing the Magic of the Marketplace: The True History of a False Idea* (forthcoming), ch. 2.
44. “The American Family Robinson,” Reports, The National Association of Broadcasters, vol. 7, no. 32, August 11, 1939. Hagley Library, Series I, Box 111, Folder “Public Relations Radio NAB reports, August 11 1939.”
45. (NAM, 1937a, p. 2, NAM (1937a) “The Role of the NAM Public Information Program,” unpublished memorandum, Hagley Library, (Accession 1411), Series I, Box 112. Burton St. John III, “A View That’s Fit to Print,” *Journalism Studies*, 11, no. 3 (June 1, 2010): 379, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700903290585> also refers to this framework as the inseparability of “democracy and capitalism.” We agree that that is the underlying message, but that linguistic formulation emerges later, most conspicuously as the title and central argument of Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
46. “Declaration of Principles Relating to the Conduct of American Industry,” December 8, 1939, Hagley Library, J. Howard Pew papers (Accession 1634), Box 2 (NAM 1939–1940).
47. *Ibid.*
48. NIIC slide show, May 11, 1944, Hagley Library, NAM Folder: “NIIC objectives 1943–45 (2/2),” Series III, Box 845. For how this argument evolved over time, see NAM Series VII Industrial Relations Department, Box 134, Folder “Jobs-Freedom-Opportunity, Educational Programs 1953–54.”
49. Oreskes and Conway, *Merchants of Doubt*; Charlie Tyson and Naomi Oreskes, “The American University, the Politics of Professors and the Narrative of ‘Liberal Bias,’” submitted to *Social Epistemology Review & Reply Collective*.

50. Thalif Deen, “U.S. Lifestyle Is Not Up for Negotiation,” *Inter Press Service News Agency*, May 1, 2012, www.ipsnews.net/2012/05/us-lifestyle-is-not-up-for-negotiation/.
51. Two scholars who have recognized this are Wendy Wall, *Inventing the “American Way”* and Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*. In our forthcoming book, *The Magic of the Marketplace: The True History of a False Idea*, we will show that the idea goes back even further; to early twentieth century arguments against restrictions on child labor, and against the development of municipal electricity.
52. Gary Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present*, revised edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), esp. 62–64.
53. Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 5 and 2, respectively.
54. Oreskes and Conway, *Inventing the Magic of the Marketplace: The True History of a False Idea*.
55. Ronald Reagan, “Presidential Radio Address,” September 29, 1984, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, www.reaganlibrary.gov/sspeeches/major-speeches-1964-1989.
56. Scientists almost invariably focus on factual claims, because they know, or believe they know, what is true and what is false, or at any rate believe that it is possible to distinguish between what is true and what is false, and they have the evidence to bring to bear on the matter. They believe that false claims can be corrected by correct information. Recent history has demonstrated that this belief is often wrong: in the face of true and false claims, many people are simply left confused, and some even harden their false beliefs despite corrective evidence. See Dan M. Kahan, Hank Jenkins-Smith, and Donald Braman, “Cultural Cognition of Scientific Consensus,” *Journal of Risk Research*, 14, no. 2 (February 1, 2011): 147–174, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2010.511246>; Dan M. Kahan et al., “The Polarizing Impact of Science Literacy and Numeracy on Perceived Climate Change Risks,” *Nature Climate Change*, 2, no. 10 (October 2012): 732–735, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate1547>.
57. Many recent disinformation campaigns about climate change fall into this latter category: they do not involve explicit lies, but they are misleading, at times deeply so. See Geoffrey Supran and Naomi Oreskes, “Assessing ExxonMobil’s Climate Change Communications (1977–2014),” *Environmental Research Letters*, 12, no. 8 (August 1, 2017): 084019, <http://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/aa815f>.