Indignation in Political Discourse Thoughts toward an Information Literacy Curriculum

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Indignation in Political Discourse
Thoughts toward an Information Literacy Curriculum

Mark Lenker

Indignant speech blares throughout our polarized political climate, particularly in the press, in social media, and in campaign messaging. Indignation and polarization reinforce each other: defensiveness toward dissenting perspectives gets voiced as angry judgment, and fire-breathing rhetoric on wedge issues drives individuals more deeply into one ideological camp or another. A recent Pew study suggests that prevailing habits among consumers of political media, particularly selective exposure to media that confirms one’s existing outlook, serve only to accelerate the cycle of outrage and division.¹ This pervasive and growing dynamic is essentially an information problem; as such, a timely and relevant education in information literacy should prepare students to reflect on this troublesome feature of our political communication.

I have been developing instruction to address the problem of indignation in the political media, and this chapter gives an account of my learning so far. I follow philosopher Robert Solomon in understanding indignation as a variety of anger that is bound up with judgments of others as morally inferior in a threatening or offensive way (more on this below).² On Solomon’s account, emotions like indignation are appropriate or inappropriate depending on the context in which they occur, especially insofar as they promote or detract from one’s long-term interests.³ I worry that the antagonism associated with indignation works against our interests by goading us into making quick, one-sided judgments on complex political questions, thereby hampering our ability to learn about political matters in a deliberate manner. I want to alert my students to the hazards that indignation
poses in their information lives. My students need to be able to separate substantive political questions from the hostile rhetoric in which the issues are so frequently couched so that they can judge both the issues and the rhetoric on their own merits. I also want my students to consider the impact of indignant rhetoric on the polarized state of our political climate so that they can make responsible choices as creators and distributors of information.

In this chapter, I consider the impact of indignation on individual judgment and social polarization, drawing on the research literature of psychology, political science, and media studies. Having established the harmful influence of inflammatory speech on political discourse, I then examine the nature of indignation itself, relying heavily on Solomon’s account of this judgmental form of anger. Solomon understands emotions like anger and indignation to be an aspect of our experience that we bear a degree of responsibility for (that is, emotion is not just an involuntary response to external events). Because we have some say in how we experience emotion, it makes sense for us to question the appropriateness of our emotions in light of our circumstances and to pursue more fitting emotional behavior in the future. This theoretical grounding in how emotion works is important because it opens up the possibility that education can have a productive influence on our emotional lives. (If one understands emotions to be involuntary reactions, it would follow that educational efforts would be futile—our emotional experiences would follow their own course regardless of the wisdom of our choices). After establishing the plausibility of taking responsibility for our emotional experiences, in the final section of this chapter I propose starting points for information literacy educators to help their students question the influence of indignation on their own learning about politics and its impact on the state of political discourse generally.

Indignation in Political Media: Why Does It Matter?

The indignant tone of our discourse on political matters has distressing implications for the way we use information to make political choices. The rhetoric of outrage exacerbates the antagonism and defensiveness that political questions are prone to engender, and it makes it harder to learn anything about politics that is significantly new, that is, that adds something substantively different from our existing stock of political beliefs. Researchers have documented the impact of this hostility at both the societal and individual levels.

At the macro level, the antagonistic and judgmental tone of indignation makes us increasingly distrust and condemn those with political perspectives that differ from our own, contributing to the astounding rates of politically motivated antipathy presented in a 2016 Pew study. Furthermore, indignant partisanship appears
to have a significant impact on American elections and governance. In their study of negative partisanship in recent American elections, Abramowitz and Webster trace out the large-scale implications of Americans’ increasingly polarized political sensibilities. According to these researchers, the confrontational tone of American presidential campaign politics generates so much mistrust of the opposing party that voters will reliably vote against the opposing party in other national and state elections. In addition to contributing to unprecedented rates of straight-ticket voting, negative partisanship also removes much of the incentive for elected officials to take up bipartisan initiatives when campaigning or governing. If voters are not willing to cross party lines, strategy dictates that elected officials should throw their support behind policies and initiatives that appeal to the electoral base within their own party. The result is increasingly polarized governance.

The negativity Abramowitz and Webster refer to develops out of individual interactions with a dynamic information ecosystem, the tone of which is set by individuals viewing, creating, and sharing information via traditional, electronic, and social media. In the ecosystem’s current polarized state, individuals need to consider the long-term impact of how they express their frustration and how they share inflammatory and confrontational speech. A difficult but necessary question for students to consider is How can I express and stand by my convictions without contributing to the hostility that pervades the information ecosystem?

At the individual level, the inflammatory nature of our discourse makes it difficult to read or view political information without reacting in a partisan manner, which in turn makes it hard for individuals to use the political media to learn anything meaningful. Intuitively, indignation’s angry judgment about the character and views of those representing rival perspectives would seem to contribute to the motivated dismissal of dissenting points of view, as described in research on bias and other forms of motivated reasoning (a broad term used to describe the negative influence of prior beliefs or attitudes on the objective processing of new information). Indeed, an encounter with authoritative information that challenges our opinion can actually lead us to adhere to our existing views more fervently.

Empirical studies also suggest a connection between anger and motivated reasoning, especially the motivated processing of political information. In a laboratory study of information behavior in a simulated web environment, MacKuen, Wolak, Keele, and Marcus found that participants with angry or averse attitudes were less likely to consult information sources that challenged their prior beliefs. A similar study by Weekes induced emotional responses in subjects by having them complete a brief writing exercise on a sensitive political issue. Test subjects were then asked to read a fabricated news article containing popular but inaccurate political claims and to rate their level of support for the information they encountered. Participants who became angry showed an increased tendency to interpret the misinformation in a partisan way, thus reinforcing their existing beliefs.
This connection between anger and motivated reasoning invites conjecture on the relationship between emotion, polarization, and biased processing of information. The polarized character of our political discourse often encourages us to see dissenting voices as threats to our values, our happiness, and in some cases, our very existence. Reacting defensively in such circumstances is understandable, but does it involve missing out on a fuller understanding of contentious issues? An information-literate student should keep this question in mind when looking at polemical material.

Moreover, if political messaging invokes voters’ sense of moral outrage, their indignation makes it much easier for political campaigns to win their support, and the campaigns use this vulnerability to their advantage. A recurring theme in Serazio’s interview study of high-level American political operatives is the idea that American voters respond to emotionally provocative branding and image making and that sharing policy details will actually detract from a candidate’s appeal. In place of actual policy proposals, campaign operatives use evocative imagery and strident messaging on wedge issues in order to establish an emotionally resonant brand for their candidate. Appealing to voters’ indignation is an important part of this strategy:

“Moral outrage and urgency are two things I like to think about,” noted the vice president of a digital strategy firm. “It’s gotta be… ‘I can’t believe this is happening! I’ve gotta do something about it—and I’ve gotta do something about it now!’” Rather than address citizens with cool logic, the consultant seeks out opportunities to escalate hot anger toward extreme—and even exploitative—emotional ends.”

An information-literate participant in political discourse should know that campaigns frequently seek to harness voter outrage for their own purposes, and they should monitor their own indignation accordingly. Students should be ready to ask, Am I being manipulated? How does getting angry help me understand the issue? If I allow this campaign to succeed in making me angry, what do they get out of it? What do I get out of it?

Intuitively, we can see that the indignant tone of our political discourse leads to profound problems, and the research studies alluded to above confirm that suspicion. But before we can take action to address these problems (or at least make our students aware of the implications for their lives), we need to learn more about the nature of indignation itself. Is it an aspect of our experience that education can change for the better? If so, what does it mean for indignation to be more or less appropriate? And what are the implications for teaching information literacy?

My understanding of indignation is heavily influenced by the work of philosopher Robert Solomon. In his book *True to Our Feelings: What Our Emotions Are Really Telling Us*, Solomon presents an account of emotions not as purely internal or subjective states of feeling, but as ways of engaging or interacting with the world. This engagement model for understanding emotions is important because it implies that we are responsible for our emotions, at least to some degree. For Solomon, emotions are more or less appropriate depending on their fittingness to the context in which they arise. This is particularly true in the case of indignation, which Solomon regards as a variety of anger. In this section, I will examine Solomon’s engagement model more closely and draw out the implications for how one might question the appropriateness of one’s indignation.

This contextual approach to evaluating emotion puts Solomon in stark contrast to Martha Nussbaum. In her book *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, and Justice*, Nussbaum examines the experience of anger and finds it inevitably illogical (getting angry does not undo the harm that gives rise to anger in the first place) or petty (getting even with those who slight you is a small-minded concern). For these reasons, Nussbaum concludes that anger is morally indefensible in all cases, regardless of context.

Before considering Solomon’s conception of indignation in closer detail, I will note that favoring Solomon’s account marks a notable development in my own thinking. Prior to pursuing this investigation, my thoughts on anger were much closer to Nussbaum’s. Decades of reading the Roman Stoic philosophers reinforced lessons I learned as a child—anger clouds good judgment; anger breeds divisiveness; anger distracts you from being your best self. I still regard anger as hazardous for these reasons, but Solomon’s work has brought to my attention the fact that there are many reasons to be angry (some of which are legitimate), and many ways for anger to make an impression on the world. I still treat anger with caution (and I think caution is especially needed when considering indignation in political communications), but for certain people, on certain occasions, I acknowledge that it works. This shift in perspective is important for my teaching, especially because many of the people I work with bear considerable anger over political issues, and if I take a hard line against anger in all cases, it would be easy for them to infer that I am judging them in a way that puts them on the defensive. A better invitation to a less guarded conversation would go something like this: “Think about the ways that politics makes you angry. How is that working out for you? Do you feel like your anger is productive? Is it distracting? Do you feel like
there are ways that you could handle your anger better?" Solomon’s contextual approach supports me in raising these questions with students in a genuine way.

In True to Our Feelings, Solomon defines indignation by making an illuminating distinction between indignation and other forms of anger. According to his account, anger arises when we have been harmed or offended (or when we experience the threat of harm or offense). We respond by blaming the offender for what they have done. Instead of accepting what has happened in a docile manner, we take on the attitude of the accuser, either explicitly or in our own minds, ready to hold the offender to account for what they have done. In his study of blame, Franklin describes angry blame as an emotional response that primes us to “protect and defend” people and things we value against disrespect and other threats. A boost of energy often accompanies the transition from victim to accuser, which is why we may actually enjoy the rush or surge that is part of the experience of anger.

Furthermore, Solomon defines anger as “not just a self-enclosed feeling but an engagement with other people and with the world, an engagement that may be more or less warranted, more or less crude or refined, that may be more or less satisfying or more or less morally appropriate.” In other words, instead of an internal phenomenon that takes place entirely in our heads or hearts, Solomon views anger as a mode of interrelatedness with the world, one that influences the way we see others and the way that others relate to us. When we reflect on the appropriateness of an occasion of anger, we are not merely endorsing or regretting a set of internal states; we are taking stock of the way we take part in the world.

For Solomon, indignation has the general characteristics of anger but with an important twist. While anger may stem from actions or statements that offend us personally, indignation is a response to transgressions of standards that are held to be impersonal or universal. As Solomon puts it, “Indignation accuses the other not just on one’s own behalf, but on behalf of some moral principle.” In indignation, one passes angry judgment with respect to injustice or deficiencies of character, which makes the psychological payoff different from garden-variety anger: “The strategic advantage of [indignation] should be obvious. Emerging from a position in which one has been hurt, offended, or humiliated, one repositions oneself as superior, even as righteous.”

Solomon’s description raises important questions about indignation’s influence within the information ecosystem and our participation in that system. Recent Pew studies suggest that prevailing media habits are apt to stoke our anger toward those who disagree with our political views, particularly our tendency to gravitate to sources that reinforce our existing beliefs. Furthermore, distrust of dissenting voices makes it harder to use information to revise one’s perspective on moral and political matters in a meaningful way. Adding to the antagonism that comes from anger and distrust is the moral condemnation that is part of indignation, which makes it tempting to dismiss competing perspectives on political questions as immoral. Indignation and polarization feed on one another, and
both make it difficult to use information to learn anything that we do not already believe.

Indignation also shapes the character of information production. Indignation has a social appeal that mirrors the psychological repositioning that Solomon describes. Assuming the role of angry judge can make one appear to others as a person of incisive discernment, committed to one’s moral convictions. The popularity of indignant expression among politicians, academics, and influential people in the media likely reinforces indignation’s appeal as a way to establish one’s own authority. But what is the impact on political discourse? Does the popularity of indignant voices crowd out other styles of performing or embodying intelligence? Does the rigidly accusatory posture of indignation preclude more pliable yet no less intelligent dispositions like curiosity and wonder?

Solomon considers anger and indignation to fall within the scope of our responsibility, at least to some degree. In some ways, this notion runs contrary to some popular and scientific conceptions of anger, which look at anger more as an involuntary reflex rather than an attitude that we can bear responsibility for. (Part 2 of Solomon’s True to Our Feelings provides an extensive critique of various conceptions of emotion as essentially involuntary.) While it is obvious that we cannot turn our emotions on and off at will, it is also clear that the content of our emotional experience does not lie completely beyond the bounds of our responsibility. After all, it makes sense to raise questions about the suitability of one’s emotions. Is my anger proportionate to the situation, or am I overreacting? Do I avoid or seek out situations that make me experience righteous anger? When I do get angry, do I try to get over my anger quickly, or do I nurse the anger, perhaps because I feel entitled to it? Do I use anger (or the threat of anger) as a way to influence others, to make them do what I want?

It is important to recognize the ways in which emotion is intertwined with choice and judgment because this connectedness implies that educational interventions can have a meaningful practical effect on the ways we experience emotion. A sophisticated understanding of the ways that the political media both convey and inspire indignation and hostility should promote responsible choices about one’s participation in political discourse.

Solomon also considers indignation and anger to be legitimate subjects for ethical reflection. Their appropriateness (or lack thereof) stems from their suitability in light of the circumstances in which they occur. Solomon’s conception of indignation, according to which indignation can be warranted or unwarranted, strategic or reckless, refined or crude, offers a range of vantage points for considering the particulars of a given case. While each of these aspects of righteous anger opens up provocative avenues for examining social and individual behavior, information literacy calls most strongly for extensive reflection on the strategic dimension of indignation. In other words, now that I have encountered inflammatory information, how should I move forward? While it may be an interesting
ethical question to ask whether President Trump’s attacks on his critics via Twitter are morally justifiable (which is essentially a backward-looking question: did he have defensible reasons for making the tweets in question?), that is not the most important question for information literacy. Instead, the essential questions for information literacy look forward: If I allow President Trump’s tweets to make me angry, what impact does that have on my ability to learn something meaningful about the issue in question? If I share this venomous tweet, what are the implications for the health of our political discourse? Does this kind of sharing make our discourse more informative or less so? As Solomon put it, “anger [and indignation are] rational depending on whether or not [they] fit into a person’s longer-term interests.”

Does inflammatory expression on political matters always work against individual and social long-term interests? In spite of the problems I alluded to in the previous section, there are instances in which indignation may actually be useful. Indignation that is proportionate to the circumstances can serve as a stimulus for learning more about a problematic situation. The ideal of the perfectly objective learner, completely unswayed by emotion, is neither realistic nor desirable. If Solomon is correct in describing emotion as “an engagement with other people and with the world,” then it makes sense to expect robust learning where there is full-bodied engagement as opposed to reserved detachment. It is hard to imagine taking a profound interest in a subject in the absence of profound feeling. Indignation can be a part of perking up and taking an interest in the world, particularly in those areas in which a deep gap extends between the way things are and the way they should be. Srinivasan stresses the liberating possibilities of anger, its capacity to restore a sense of agency in oppressive conditions. Indignation regards those conditions as contingent and therefore worth standing up against. It can spur us to think, “Things do not have to be this way—and I can do something about it.” Furthermore, angry blame has the potential to bring accuser and accused into dialogue (even if it is heated dialogue), and dialogue opens up possibilities for learning about one another’s concerns and for the restoration of mutual respect.

According to this line of thinking, indignation can be a part of recalibrating one’s engagement with the world to register when things have gone seriously wrong. In this sense, it can serve as a stimulus to thought and action to address problematic conditions. But indignation can also get in the way of continued recalibration, especially when the adversarial judgment of indignation is consistently reinforced by partisan media. In judging you, I find your conduct and character to be reprehensible, and the media that I read and listen to corroborate my judgment, so my conviction stands. This pattern of thought is not inherently mistaken, but what if it happens to be wrong in a particular case? How could I ever tell? At least part of the answer lies in consistently questioning whether one’s indignation is warranted, especially in light of the heat and hostility that pervade the contemporary political media.
Solomon provides a relevant, flexible account of indignation, one that invites us to question the wisdom of allowing ourselves to become morally incensed over political matters and sharing our outrage with others. The experience of righteous anger can serve as a stimulus to learning, but it can also limit our capacity to learn about aspects of complex political issues that we may not yet fully understand. There is no formula for finding the right balance; success depends upon having the discernment to question the particulars of each given case. As educators, it is our responsibility to prepare our students to consider these questions for themselves. The next section provides starting points for encouraging students to undertake their own examination of media-driven indignation.

Working with Students to Question Indignation

Solomon’s theoretical account provides a basis for working with students to question indignation in political discourse and in their own lives. According to Solomon, we bear a degree of responsibility for our own indignation and for the outrage that we disseminate to others, and we can question the fittingness of our indignant behavior in light of our long-term interests. Earlier in this chapter, we have also considered research on how the indignant tone of political discourse contributes to the polarization of society and to defensive, motivated processing of information by individual learners. These findings should help students examine inflammatory political media and its consequences for how we discuss and learn about complex political issues. As a result, students should be prepared to participate in political discourse more deliberately and more responsibly.

But what will happen if I take up political questions with my students? Will students appreciate the opportunity to share their diverse perspectives and to learn from one another? Will two or three students launch extended rants at one another while the remainder of the class sits in stony silence? Will a student become offended and either leave or complain to administration or to the media? Given the hostility one frequently finds in political discussions outside the classroom, it is easy for one’s imagination to gravitate toward the nightmare scenarios.

According to McAvoy and Hess, pursuing civil discussions in the classroom is both most challenging and most necessary in times of polarization. In addition to the frightening possibilities listed above, one can expect to be questioned by those who suspect teachers of proselytizing to their students on political matters. On the other hand, it is in polarized times that students most need to question the animosity that they see so frequently and to consider alternative ways of discussing political issues. I find this latter point convincing. While I do not hold much hope for higher education to rid the country of our polarization problem single-handedly, I very much want my students to develop their awareness of the
perils of indignant rhetoric. I do not want to see them get duped into throwing their support behind an inflammatory campaign when it is not in their long-term interests to do so; nor do I want them to let media-fueled outrage drive them to a course of action that they will regret later.

For many of us, pursuing this sort of teaching marks a profound departure from our comfort zone of helping students refine their use of library resources. This transition requires considerable preparation and planning. Below I provide suggestions for preparing to facilitate sensitive discussions in the classroom, learning outcomes to organize lesson planning, and content to examine with students.

In their case study of the colleges and universities that lead the nation for voting rates among students, Thomas and Brower find that engaging students in political discussions was commonplace across the disciplines and that faculty at these institutions actively sought out opportunities to improve their skills as discussion facilitators. Teaching librarians who want to talk about political questions with students should also consider pursuing facilitator training. “Facilitating Political Discussions” from Tufts University’s Institute for Democracy in Higher Education is an example of such a program. While that curriculum appears ideal for facilitators who get to work with their students over a relatively extensive span of time, it also looks promising for librarians who work with their students over shorter periods. Equipped with a broad repertoire of facilitation techniques, teaching librarians can select and adapt the best strategies to fit their circumstances.

Below are some starting points one might use to develop a unit or lesson plan on inflammatory media. Alternatively, some of these materials could be used to introduce sample topics for classes on research strategy. These suggestions assume that one is working with undergraduate learners; those working with different populations should make adjustments accordingly.

The overarching goal for instruction on this topic is to equip students to raise questions about the place of indignation in the political media and its influence on their own information use. This goal can be broken down into the following learning outcomes:

- **Outcome 1**: Learners will reflect on their responsibility for their own indignation.
- **Outcome 2**: Learners will consider the impact of indignation on one’s ability to use information to learn about political matters.
- **Outcome 3**: When looking at inflammatory political material, learners will question the purposes of those producing the information, comparing the creator’s or disseminator’s interests against their own.
- **Outcome 4**: Learners will consider the impact of indignant discourse on the health of the information ecosystem.
- **Outcome 5**: In order to provide alternatives to viewing polarization as a matter of personal antagonism, learners will consider historical, economic, and sociological explanations for political polarization.
To prepare students for informed discussion on indignant discourse, consider assigning some of the following readings or videos:

- In chapter 1 of *True to Our Feelings: What Our Emotions Are Really Telling Us*, Solomon conveniently uses the example of anger to introduce themes that he considers in closer detail in the remainder of the book. This first chapter avoids technical jargon, so undergraduates should be able to follow Solomon as he introduces the idea of anger and indignation as experiences that we bear responsibility for (Outcome 1).

- For a thought-provoking examination of why challenges to our beliefs are apt to make us defensive in the first place, direct learners to the first chapter of Maureen Linker’s *Intellectual Empathy: Critical Thinking for Social Justice*. Linker uses W. V. O. Quine’s model of the web of belief to explain our propensity for reacting sensitively when beliefs that align closely with our identities come into question (Outcome 1, Outcome 5).

- To acquaint students with the level of antagonism and distrust that pervades our national discussion of political matters, consider assigning the Pew reports *Political Polarization and the American Public* and *Political Polarization and Media Habits*. Pew studies offer accessible, open-source studies of political and media behavior. They are important sources for students’ continued learning on prevailing attitudes around political questions (Outcomes 2 and 4).

- To give students a sense of how the interests of political campaigns may diverge from their own, consult Serazio’s interview study of high-level political operatives. Save this piece for juniors and seniors: the writing style is challenging, but Serazio’s findings provide an eye-opening exploration of how campaigns seek to stoke voter outrage (Outcome 3).

- The Harvard Kennedy School’s brief video “Jane Mansbridge: 3 Causes of Polarization” considers structural changes that have given rise to polarization. By viewing polarization as a historical and economic development, Mansbridge offers a big-picture view of polarization that may diffuse some of the tension and defensiveness that frequently accompany discussions of partisan politics (Outcomes 3 and 5).

- “Is America More Divided Than Ever?” by The Good Stuff provides an excellent ten-minute introduction to the issue of polarization. The video draws on studies from Pew Research and entertains the notion that our tribalist tendencies influence our information choices, which reinforces the divisiveness of our discourse (Outcomes 2, 4, and 5).

Finally, here are some discussion questions that I have been considering. They are still under development; think of them starting points to adapt to your circumstances:

- When does indignation lead to positive outcomes? When is it self-destructive? (Outcome 1)
Consider a political question that is a hot-button issue for you. How did you first learn about it? How do you keep yourself updated? Do you feel like those sources allow you to give dissenting perspectives on the issue the attention they are due? If not, where could you go to understand alternative perspectives? (Outcome 2)

Consider an advertisement for x campaign or a partisan editorial. What images or language does the ad or editorial use to rouse your sense of moral outrage? What factual claims are presented? Do you feel like the ad provides the full story, or are facts taken out of context? Where would you go to find more information on the issue? (Outcome 3)

How can an individual express and stand by their convictions without contributing to the hostility that pervades the information ecosystem? (Outcome 4)

In the video “Is America More Divided Than Ever?” the host introduces the concepts of tribalism and naïve realism. Give some instances in which you see tribalism and naïve realism contributing to hostility in the political media. (Outcome 5)

The purpose of the materials suggested here is to prompt learners to raise questions about the role that indignation plays in the information ecosystem and about its influence on their own information choices. It may well be that the hostility that feeds on and amplifies our polarized political climate is so deeply entrenched that we cannot overcome it with reasoned arguments about the importance of open-minded learning. Nevertheless, the overwhelming scale of the challenge does not change the duty that we owe to our students. As teachers of information literacy, we need to equip our students to engage in meaningful learning about political questions that have an impact on their interests, whether their success translates to broader social change or not.

But that does not mean that I have given up all hope for change at the social level. This research project has made me aware of a growing group of researchers and public intellectuals who question the polarization and partisan animosity that currently pervade political discourse in the United States. In my more optimistic moments, I take that growth to be a symptom of a subtle but significant shift in our society. I think we are increasingly growing tired of the moral outrage that suffuses the political media, and I think that eventually enough of us will become sufficiently disaffected that the media will notice. My hunch is that the shift in our preferences necessary to make inflammatory politics passé will take place slowly, perhaps over a span of decades, but I also think that education has a part to play in accelerating the rate of change. As voters and consumers demand something different, politicians and the media will have to adopt alternative strategies to regain their interest. If higher education, and information literacy programming in particular, can provide meaningful learning experiences about political questions, those experiences should leave our students with a taste for political
media that is truly informative rather than merely antagonistic. Here’s hoping that our students’ choices will help us get over our habitual hostility and move on to something better.

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NOTES

6. Abramowitz and Webster, “Rise of Negative Partisanship.”
Adopting the role of moral judge in political matters can also enhance one’s sense of self-worth. Joseph Epstein establishes this connection in his characterization of the virtuocrat as one “who is certain that his or her political views are not merely correct but deeply, morally righteous in the bargain…. What he believes to be the goodness of his political views fills him with a sense of his own intrinsic goodness.” Joseph Epstein, *Snobbery, the American Version* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 2002), 155. This association of political opinion with personal virtue likely contributes to rigidity in one’s political views and disdain for dissenting perspectives.


Srinivasan, “Righteous Fury,” 34.


Serazio, “Branding Politics.”


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