

Groupthink



What is it?

Why should we care about it?

What can we do about it?

What is groupthink?

- groupthink occurs when a group makes faulty decisions because group pressures lead to a deterioration of “mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment” (Irving Janis, 1972, p. 9).



Symptoms of Groupthink

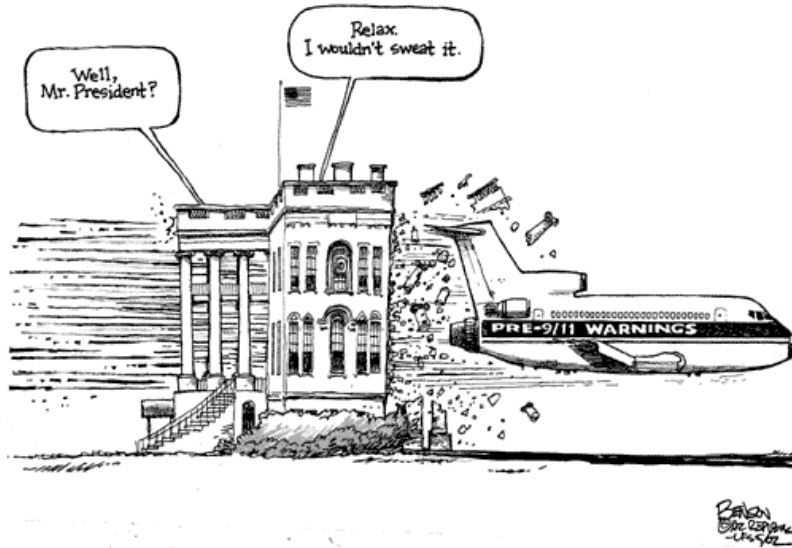
- Illusion of invulnerability
- Collective rationalization
- Belief in inherent morality
- Stereotyped views of out-groups
- Direct pressure on dissenters
- Self-censorship
- Illusion of unanimity
- Self-appointed 'mindguards'

Illusion of Invulnerability

- Creates excessive optimism that encourages taking extreme risks.



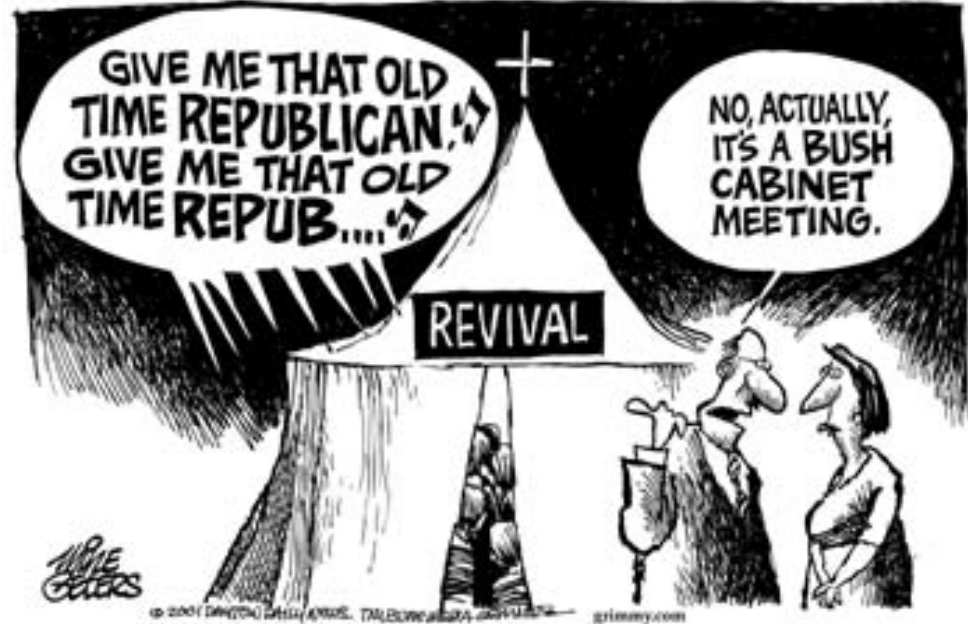
Collective Rationalization



- Members discount warnings and do not reconsider their assumptions.

Belief in Inherent Morality

- Members believe in the rightness of their cause and therefore ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions.



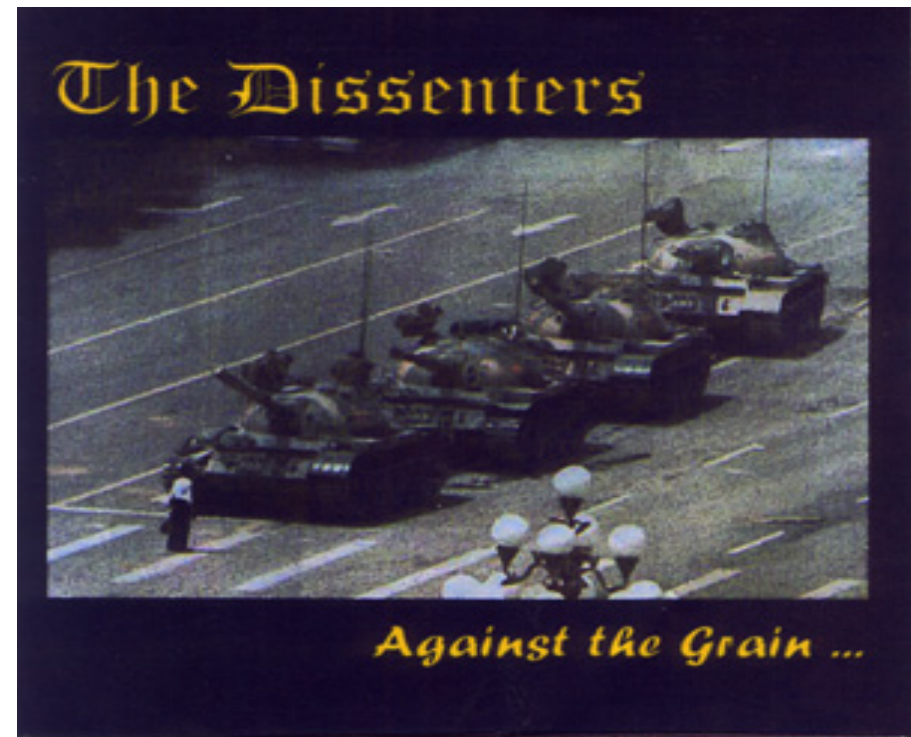
Stereotyped Views of Out-groups



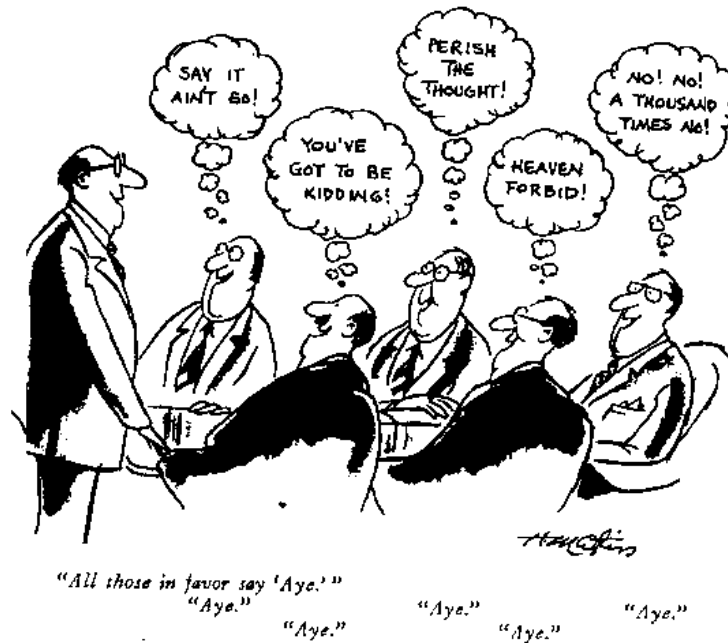
- Negative views of “enemy” make effective responses to conflict seem unnecessary

Direct Pressure on Dissenters

- Members are under pressure not to express arguments against any of the group's views.



Self-censorship



- Doubts and deviations from the perceived group consensus are not expressed

Illusion of Unanimity

The majority view and judgments are assumed to be unanimous.



Self-appointed ‘mindguards’



- Members protect the group and the leader from information that is problematic or contradictory to the group's cohesiveness, view, and/or decisions

Remedies for Groupthink

- The leader should assign the role of critical evaluator to each member
- The leader should avoid stating preferences and expectations at the outset
- Each member of the group should routinely discuss the groups' deliberations with a trusted associate and report back to the group on the associate's reactions

More Remedies for Groupthink

- One or more experts should be invited to each meeting on a staggered basis and encouraged to challenge views of the members.
- At least one member should be given the role of devil's advocate (to question assumptions and plans)
- The leader should make sure that a sizeable block of time is set aside to survey warning signals.

Why should we care about groupthink?



Failure to protect forces at Pearl Harbor in 1941



Bay of Pigs Fiasco in 1961



US Escalation of the Vietnam War



Failed Rescue Attempt of Hostages at US Embassy in Iran



The charred helmet of a U.S. Commando lies in the desert sands of Eastern Iran Saturday, April 26 at the spot where a daring attempt to rescue the American hostages came to a tragic end. A burned-out helicopter, used in the aborted mission, lies in the background.

Associated Press Photo

US Invasion of Iraq: **Groupthink?**



Predetermined Policy Decision about Iraq and Saddam Hussein



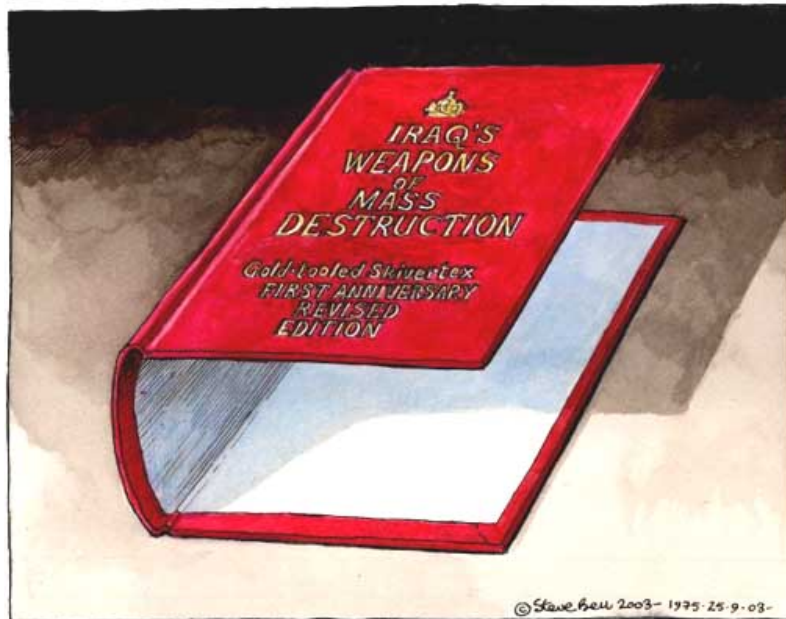
- Discount warnings and do not reconsider their assumptions even as other countries challenge them

Dealing with Dissenters

- pressure not to express arguments against any of the administration's actions.



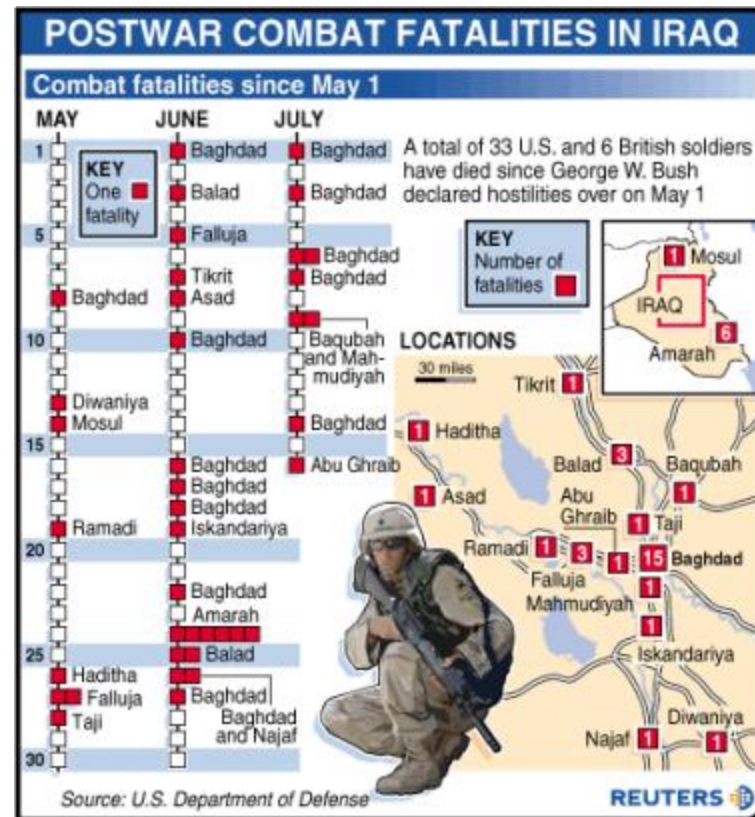
Imminent Danger from Weapons of Mass Destruction



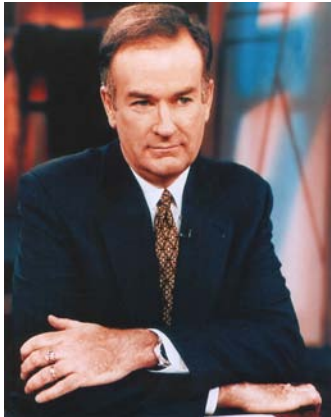
- selective bias in processing information at hand

Limited Examination of Risks of Actions

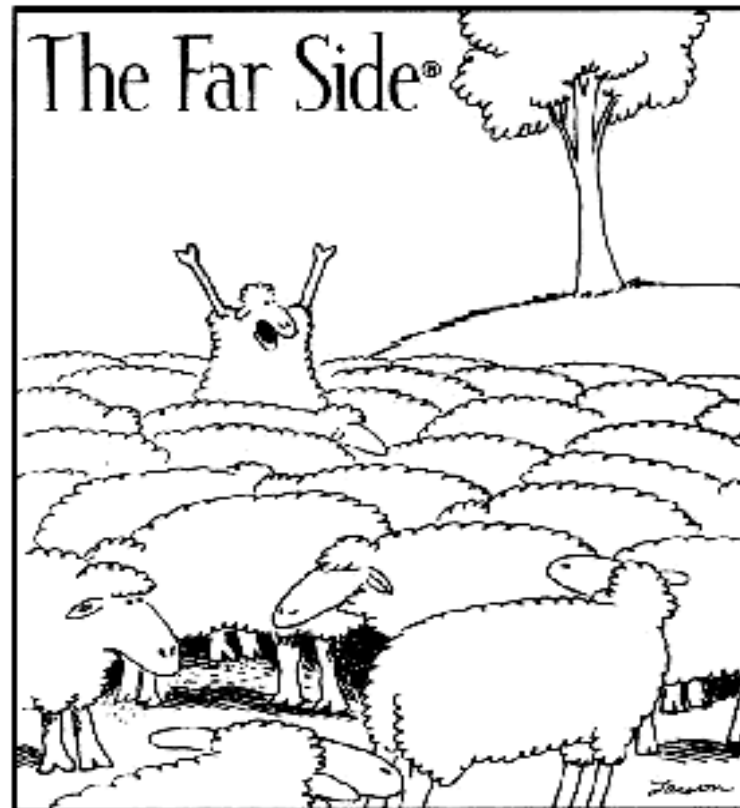
- failure to work out contingency plans



Self-appointed 'mindguards' ?

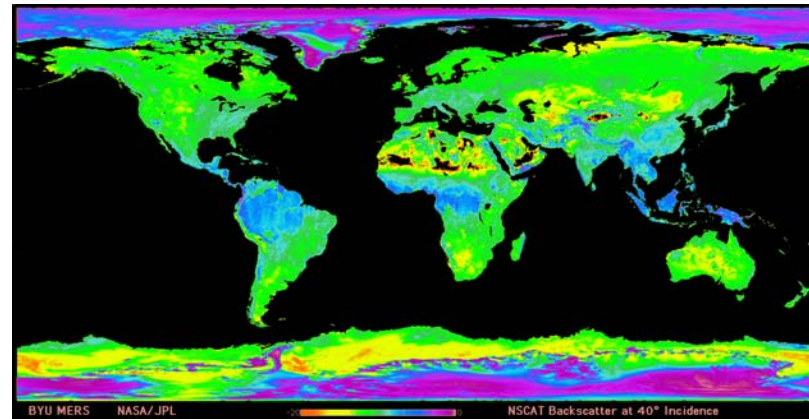


What can we do about it?



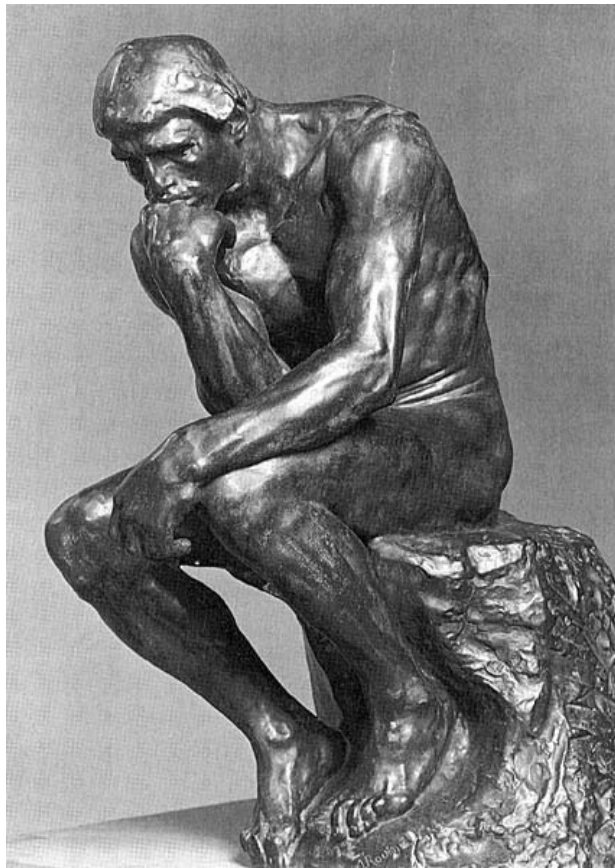
"Wait! Wait! Listen to me! ...
We don't *have* to be just sheep!"

Knowledge is Power



- Access a variety of media sources from around the world
- Think carefully and deeply about actions, policy, and their underlying assumptions

Think About Underlying Assumptions and Implications



Challenge Others to Think



Make a Difference!



I'VE GOT NEWS
FOR THE TERRORISTS.



I WON'T BE AFRAID
TO CRITICIZE MY
COUNTRY'S POLICIES
AT HOME
AND ABROAD.



I WON'T BE AFRAID
TO SCRUTINIZE THE
PRESIDENT AND OTHER
ELECTED
OFFICIALS.



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Pittsburgh
Post-Gazette
RICK
RICE

EVEN IF IT MEANS
BEING BRANDED
UNPATRIOTIC!



BECAUSE THE MINUTE
WE GIVE UP OUR RIGHT
TO FREE
SPEECH.



THEY WIN.

