

Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate--The Essential Guide for Progressives

By George Lakoff, Howard Dean, Don Hazen

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Don't Think of an Elephant! is the definitive handbook for understanding what happened in the 2004 election and communicating effectively about key issues facing America today. Author George Lakoff has become a key advisor to the Democratic party, helping them develop their message and frame the political debate.

In this book Lakoff explains how conservatives think, and how to counter their arguments. He outlines in detail the traditional American values that progressives hold, but are often unable to articulate. Lakoff also breaks down the ways in which conservatives have framed the issues, and provides examples of how progressives can reframe the debate.

Lakoff's years of research and work with environmental and political leaders have been distilled into this essential guide, which shows progressives how to think in terms of values instead of programs, and why people vote their values and identities, often against their best interests.

Don't Think of An Elephant! is the antidote to the last forty years of conservative strategizing and the right wing's stranglehold on political dialogue in the United States.

Read it, take action—and help take America back.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
In the first of his three debates with George W. Bush, 2004 presidential candidate John Kerry argued against the war in Iraq not by directly condemning it but by citing the various ways in which airport and commercial shipping security had been jeopardized due to the war's sizable price tag. In so doing, he re-framed the war issue to his advantage while avoiding discussing it in the global terrorism terms favored by President Bush. One possible reason for this tactic could have been that Kerry familiarized himself with the influential linguist George Lakoff, who argues in *Don't Think of an Elephant* that much of the success the Republican Party can be attributed to a persistent ability to control the language of key issues and thus position themselves in favorable terms to voters. While Democrats may have valid arguments, Lakoff points out they are destined to lose when they and the news media accept such nomenclature as "pro-life," "tax relief," and "family values," since to argue against such inherently positive terminology necessarily casts the arguer in a negative light. Lakoff offers recommendations for how the progressive movement can regain semantic equity by repositioning their arguments, such as countering the conservative call for "Strong Defense" with a call for "A Stronger America" (curiously, one of the key slogans of the Kerry camp). Since the book was published during the height of the presidential campaign, Lakoff was unable to provide an analytical perspective on that race. He does, however, apply the notion of rhetorical framing devices to the 2003 California recall election in an insightful analysis of the Schwarzenegger victory. *Don't Think of an Elephant* is a bit rambling, overexplaining some concepts while leaving others underexplored, but it provides a compelling linguistic analysis of political campaigning. --*John Moe*

From Publishers Weekly
Lakoff, a cognitive scientist and linguist at Berkeley, believes he knows why conservatives have been so successful in recent years and how progressives like himself can beat them at their own game. This slim book presents a simple, accessible overview of his theory of "moral politics" and a call to action for Democrats mourning November’s election results. Lakoff’s persuasive argument focuses on two ideas: what he calls "framing," and the opposition of liberals’ and conservatives’ concepts of the family. Conservatives, he says, have easily framed tax cuts as "tax relief" because of widespread, preexisting views of taxes as burdensome, and liberals have had little success conveying the idea that taxes are a social responsibility. In Lakoff’s view, conservatives adhere to a "strict father" model of family, in contrast to liberals’ "nurturant parent" view, and he sees this difference as the key to understanding most of the two sides’ clashes. His writing is clear and succinct, and he illuminates his theories through easy-to-follow examples from current politics. Although the book has been updated since the election, many of its sections were originally written long beforehand, so some comments are outdated (at one point Lakoff wonders, for example, whether George Bush’s support of the gay marriage amendment will help him keep the White House). However, the process of regaining power may be a long one for Democrats, and Lakoff’s insights into how to deal with conservatives and appeal to the general public are bound to light a fire under many progressives.
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Review

"Fascinating insights into why progressives lose good causes and how they can start winning again. You will never listen to a political speech the same way after reading this book."--**Tina Brown**, **Host of CNBC's *Topic A with Tina Brown***

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