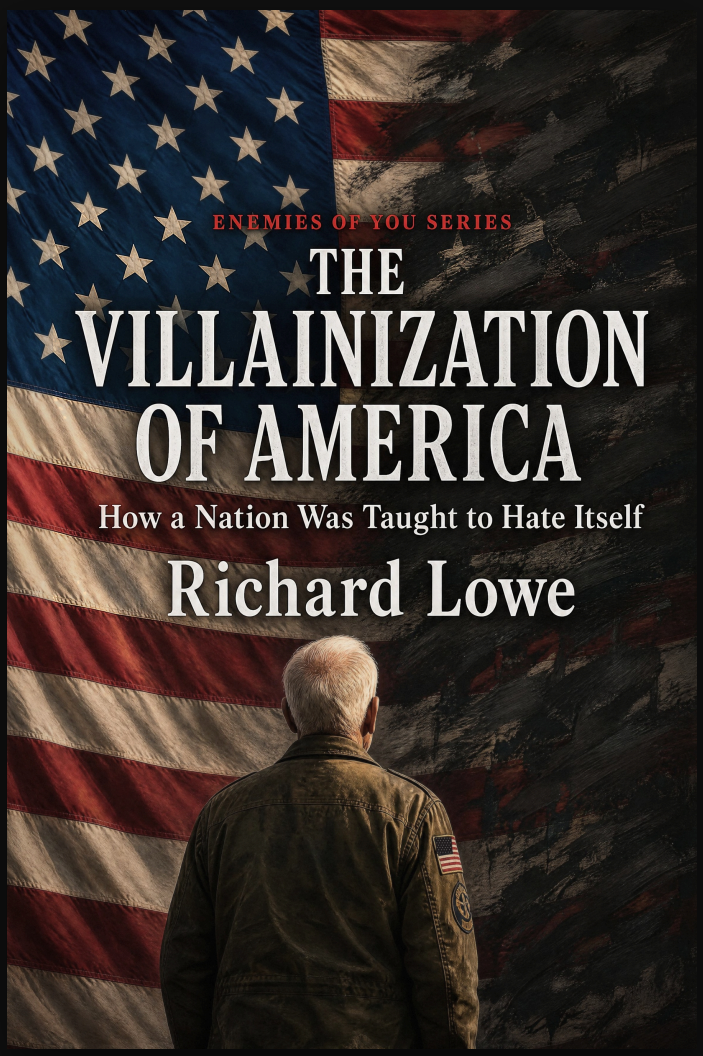
A FREE COMPANION TO THE VILLAINIZATION OF AMERICA

The Reckoning Test

A field guide for telling honest criticism of America from the verdict that America is a villain, and for passing the whole story on.



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How to Use This Guide

Keep it handy when you read the news, look over a school lesson, or sit through a training.

The Villainization of America draws one line and returns to it in every chapter. On one side is reckoning: naming a real failure and pointing toward repair. On the other is villainization: using that failure as proof that the whole country is rotten and always will be. From the outside the two look alike. This guide helps you tell them apart, on any side, including your own.

It has six parts:

1. **Two ways to name a failure**, side by side.
2. **The test**, four questions for any claim, with a worksheet.
3. **Practice cases** taken from the book.
4. **The correction ledger**: what America did wrong and what it did next.
5. **What you can do**, the book's own closing checklist.
6. **Discussion questions** for each part of the book.

> *Naming failures to produce repair is a different act from naming them to produce a verdict. The first is patriotism at its best.*

Part 1: Two Ways to Name a Failure

Both name failures, and both make people uncomfortable. They aim at different targets and produce different results.

	RECKONING	VILLAINIZATION
What it says	This is what happened, this is why, this is the damage it did, and this is what repair looks like.	This is what happened, it proves what this country is at its core, and no change can alter that.
Aimed at	A particular failure	The whole of what America is
Where it starts	With the evidence, and sits with the difficulty	With the conclusion, and uses events as evidence for it
How it ends	Points toward a concrete repair	The indictment never ends
Who disagrees	People worth arguing with	People who are naive or complicit
The citizens it makes	People who know the failures, work to fix them, and still believe the project is worth continuing	People taught it is not worth continuing

Part 2: The Test

The book's Conclusion gives four questions. Run any claim about America through them.

1. **Does it point toward repair, or toward a verdict?** Reckoning names a particular failure and a particular fix. The moment a claim stretches from the failure to the basic nature of the institution, reckoning ends and villainization begins.

2. **Is the same standard applied to the alternatives?** When American power is framed as harmful by nature, ask how the other side handles its own crimes.

3. **Who benefits from your anger?** When something is built to make you angry at American institutions, ask who gains from it, at home or abroad.

4. **Would it pass if your own side said it?** Run the test on the people you agree with. A test that only ever convicts the other side is no test.

The worksheet

The claim: _____

Where I saw it: _____ **Date:** _____

QUESTION	YES / NO	NOTES
Does it name a specific failure?		
Does it name a specific repair?		
Does it stay with the failure, or stretch to the whole institution or country?		
Does it hold other countries to the same standard?		
Does it leave out how America answered for it?		
Who gains if I believe it?		
Would I accept it from the other side?		

Reckoning
A specific failure, a specific repair, the same standard for everyone. Worth hearing out, even when it hurts.

Mixed
True facts carried one step too far. Put the rest of the record beside it.

Verdict
The whole country or institution declared rotten, with no road back.

Part 3: Practice Cases

Each pair below comes from Chapter 26. The evidence is often the same. The conclusion is not.

RECKONING	VERDICT	TOPIC
Slavery was central to American economic development, and its legacy still shows in economic inequality today.	The founding ideals were never real, taught on their own as the meaning of the founding.	History
The Catholic Church covered up the abuse of children for decades. It owes transparency, cooperation with civil authorities, compensation and structural change.	Religious institutions are by nature tools of social control, and their influence should be replaced by the state.	Religion
A search warrant can be challenged in court; an agency that abuses its power can be investigated and reined in by Congress.	The government itself is "the regime," and illegitimate.	Government
A specific charge against a specific office, with a specific fix.	The whole civil service is an enemy, to be obliterated rather than reformed.	Civil service
A charge of fraud in one county: a recount, an audit, a day in court.	The whole system is rigged, after losing those days in court again and again.	Elections
The fault in the universities "lies in who gets hired and who gets heard, and both can be fixed."	The academy is a religion with a university budget.	Universities
For a press that decides the story first, the repair is to report first, hire people who disagree, and print both sides of the argument.	The press is a propaganda apparatus.	The press

The last two verdicts are lines the book says it could have written about the academy and the press, and chose not to, because they fail its own test.

Try your own

A CLAIM I HEARD (RECKONING OR VERDICT?)	HOW I WOULD REWRITE IT AS RECKONING

> *A test that only ever convicts the other side is a weapon with a ruler painted on it.*

Part 4: The Correction Ledger

What separates one country from another is what happens next. Chapter 19 names the crimes. Chapter 22 shows the country printing them, paying for some of them, and teaching them to its children.

THE WRONG	WHAT AMERICA DID NEXT
The secret history of decisions in Vietnam	The New York Times printed the Pentagon Papers. The government sued to stop it and lost 6 to 3 in the Supreme Court in 1971. In 2011 the National Archives released the full report.
Watergate	Senate hearings, a unanimous Supreme Court ruling on the tapes, three articles of impeachment. Nixon resigned on August 9, 1974, and power changed hands without a shot fired.
Spying on Americans: COINTELPRO and NSA programs	The Church Committee, created 82 to 4 in 1975, heard some 800 witnesses and made 96 recommendations. Congress created a standing intelligence committee and passed FISA in 1978.
Slavery and Jim Crow	The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In Mississippi the gap between Black and white voter registration fell from 63 points to 6.
The incarceration of Japanese Americans	The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 apologized in law and paid $20,000 each to 82,219 survivors, more than $1.6 billion.
The Tuskegee syphilis study	Exposed by an AP story in 1972, settled in 1974, and answered with a presidential apology in 1997.
The 1954 coup in Guatemala	CIA records released in 1997; in 1999 a president said on Guatemalan soil that it was wrong.
The Indian boarding schools	An Interior Department investigation counted 417 institutions and at least 973 children who died; a formal presidential apology followed in 2024.

Now ask the same of the regimes the verdict puts beside America

- [ ] Where was the Soviet truth commission on the Soviet camps, written while the Soviet Union still stood?
- [ ] Where is the Chinese government's public report on Tiananmen, or on the Uyghurs in Xinjiang?
- [ ] When did the rulers of Iran apologize to the families of the protesters they killed in 2022?
- [ ] Where is North Korea's inspector general?

> *A villain hides its crimes. It buries the bodies, blames the enemy, closes the archive, jails the historians and calls the inquiry a charade. America prints its crimes.*

Part 5: What You Can Do

"A book like this owes you something to do before it closes." Here is the book's list, made into checkboxes.

Recognize the pattern

- [ ] Run one news story a week through the test in Part 2
- [ ] Look over one of your child's history lessons or reading assignments with the test in mind
- [ ] Notice when a corporate training or a social media feed frames American power as harmful by nature
- [ ] Run the test on your own side at least as often as on the other

Pass on the honest story

- [ ] Tell the whole record, crimes and achievements together, to your children and the people you know
- [ ] Skip the whitewashed version too; it fails the test from the other direction
- [ ] Ask the older people in your family for their stories, and write them down

Show up

- [ ] Vote in school board elections
- [ ] Go to city council meetings when curriculum is on the agenda
- [ ] Join a group that still passes the story on: a veterans' organization, a religious community, a civic association, a trade organization

Read the documentation

- [ ] Start with the appendix at the back of the book
- [ ] Check one claim from the book against its source. The argument either holds up or it does not

My notes and next steps:

Part 6: Discussion Questions

For a book club, a classroom, or a family dinner table. Use the test from Part 2 on your own answers.

Introduction and Chapter 1

1. The book says every nation runs on a story that has to hold together. What is the story you were taught about America, and who taught it to you?
2. What is the difference between a resident and a citizen, as the book uses the words?

Part One: The Targets

3. The founding, the military, religion, capitalism, the symbols, the land. Which of these targets did you hear criticized most growing up? Was it reckoning or a verdict?

Part Two: The Internal Architects

4. The book calls this a convergence, not a conspiracy. Why does that distinction matter?
5. Many teachers and journalists carry the framing without believing the verdict. How would you ask one of them to put the rest of the record beside the failures?

Part Three: The External Accelerators

6. Why would Russia and China amplify a story they did not build? How would you spot it in your own feed?

Part Four: The Cost

7. The book names other causes of falling pride and trust: the wars, the crash, the phone, the shrinking prospects of men without degrees. How much weight would you give the story among them?

Part Five: The Honest Record

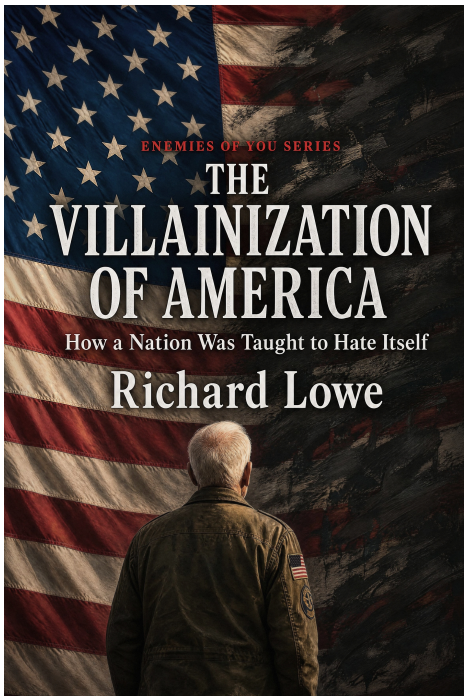
8. Which of the wrongs in Chapter 19 did you know least about? Why do you think that is?
9. Chapter 20 argues the atomic bomb was the hard correct choice. Make the strongest case against that conclusion, then answer it.

Part Six: The Counter-Narrative

10. Chapter 26 runs the test on the right and on the book itself. Why does that make the argument stronger or weaker?
11. What would a story about America look like that holds the whole record and still concludes the project is worth continuing? Try telling it in five sentences.

The Whole Story

This guide gives you the test. The Villainization of America gives you the whole record: who built the villain story and why, what it has cost, where America was truly wrong, and how a country that prints its own crimes answers for them.



The Villainization of America:
How a Nation Was Taught to Hate Itself
Enemies of You

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