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HOW ABUSERS IN POWER
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RUTH COLKER

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How Abusers in Power Undermine Civil Rights Reform
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"A must-read that exposes the hidden effect of insults on national policy. Attacks on BLM, #MeToo, LGBT, immigration, and abortion rights have deflected, created headwind, and posed deadweight for reform. Ruth Colker powerfully shows how these insults can and must be countered in the future."—Suja A. Thomas, author of *The Missing American Jury*

"A tour de force. Colker masterfully reframes debates about public insults and hate speech into a transformative playbook, arming civil rights and civil liberties proponents with insightful new approaches for understanding and addressing public insults as tools of power bullies. She brilliantly makes the case that incrementalist, neoliberal approaches do not provide for systemic change. I couldn't put the book down."—Michele Goodwin, author of *Policing The Womb: Invisible Women and the Criminalization of Motherhood*

"Colker's insights shift our attention to a new civil rights battleground: *public insults*. Essential reading for anyone looking to better understand partisan political efforts to undermine civil rights and democratic governance."—Jasmine E. Harris, Professor of Law, University of Pennsylvania Carey School of Law

"Colker brilliantly documents how power bullies use insults to perpetuate the subordination of people with disabilities, immigrants, women, LGBTQ+ people, and people of color. Those of us who value free speech must acknowledge these grievous harms and develop strategies to counter the pernicious effects of public insults."—Daniel P. Tokaji, Professor of Law, University of Wisconsin Law School

When they go low, we learn: an examination of mudslinging in contemporary American politics—and how the left can find its footing to achieve structural reform in this mess.

The rules of the public discourse game have changed, and *The Public Insult Playbook* argues that the political left needs to account for the power of vitriol in crafting their theories for social and political change. With this book, noted constitutional law expert and disability rights advocate Ruth Colker offers insights into how public insults have come to infect contemporary public discourse—a technique not invented by but certainly refined by Donald Trump—and, importantly, highlights lessons learned and tools for fighting back.

Public insults act as a headwind and dead weight to structural reform. By showcasing the power of insults across a number of civil rights battlegrounds, *The Public Insult Playbook* uncovers the structural nature of personal attacks, and offers a blueprint for a legal and political strategy that anticipates the profound but poorly understood damage they can inflict to whole movements. Illustrating how completely the tactic has been adopted and embraced by the American right wing, the book catalogues how public insults have been used against people with disabilities, immigrants, people seeking abortions, individuals who are sexually harassed, members of the LGBTQ community, and, of course, Black Americans. These examples demonstrate both the pervasiveness of the deployment of insults by the political right and the ways in which the left has been caught flat-footed by this tactic. She then uses the Black Lives Matter movement as a case study to consider how to effectively counter these insults and maintain an emphasis on structural reform.

Ruth Colker is Distinguished University Professor and Heck Faust Memorial Chair in Constitutional Law at the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law. She is one of the leading scholars in the country in the areas of constitutional law and disability discrimination, and her work has been cited by the United States Supreme Court.



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