Why do so many people believe such unbelievable things? How can anyone be persuaded that hundreds of people conspired to hide the Kenyan birth (and Muslim sympathies) of Barack Obama; that tens of thousands of scientists lie every day to prop up the liberal hoax of climate change; that the entire U.S. space program, including the moon landings, was faked to hide a Russian triumph; that childhood vaccinations cause autism; or that the Earth is flat.

We hear constantly about how deeply polarized our nation has become. I personally believe we're closer to 65%-35% on critical issues than the polarization pundits' imagined 50-50 split. But it's true that there are at least two major value clusters in our popular and political discourse. They explain a great deal.

**THE CONSPIRACY CULTURE
Ignorance**
Denying the value of education, while celebrating the nebulous and often inconsistent “wisdom of the common man”

**Superstition**
Looking to unseen causes to explain anomalies, mysteries that puzzle the unreflective

**Credulity**
Being easily persuaded without proper reason to believe; lacking the ability to reason from evidence; using “shotgun” argumentation (in the fallacious belief that more arguments – no matter how ridiculous each may be – somehow make a stronger case)

**Paranoia**
Fear and resentment of hostile “others” and/or “elites,” a term much more likely these days to refer to “experts” than to the “wealthy”

**The Mythos-Logos Error**Confusing humankind’s two great faculties, *mythos* and *logos* the inability to distinguish between “mytho-poetic” statements and historical/scientific arguments.

**THE REALITY-BASED CULTURE
Education**
Having the necessary information to understand a situation or an issue properly and to make deductive decisions

**Critical Thinking**
Recognizing anomalies – unexpected outcomes – as indicators of models and assumptions that need revising

**Logicality**
Drawing on healthy skepticism, considering all available evidence, and relying on logical reasoning and deductive analysis

**Social Engagement**
Respecting the intentions and opinions of others, while rationally assessing them; understanding and valuing expertise

**Mythos-Logos Clarity**
Appropriately employing the mythic and logical faculties; distinguishing between the rich content of song, story, poem, or dream and the logical structures of history or science.

*Jim Kenney*, 2020