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Milton Lodge and Charles S. Taber  
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## The Rationalizing Voter

Human beings are consummate rationalizers, but rarely are we rational. Controlled deliberation is a bobbing cork on the currents of unconscious information processing, but we have always the illusion of standing at the helm. This book presents a theory of the architecture and mechanisms that determine when, how, and why unconscious thoughts, the coloration of feelings, the plausibility of goals, and the force of behavioral dispositions change moment by moment in response to “priming” events that spontaneously link changes in the environment to changes in beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. Far from the consciously directed decision making assumed by conventional models, political behavior is the result of innumerable unnoticed forces, with conscious deliberation little more than a rationalization of the outputs of automatic feelings and inclinations.

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**MILTON LODGE**

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**CHARLES S. TABER**

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## Preface

This is a book about unconscious political thinking and the subterranean forces that determine how citizens evaluate political leaders, groups, and issues. It is the culmination of a twenty-year collaboration to chart the stream of information processing, which constructs political deliberation and behavior, and the impact of early, unnoticed feelings. This is a book about why the first 100 milliseconds of thought matters. It is about rationalizing, rather than rational, citizens.

This book was a long time in the making, in part because of teaching and administrative obligations, but more because of the explosion of research on unconscious thinking and on implicit attitudes and measures (see reviews in Gawronski and Payne, 2010; Petty, Fazio, and Brinol, 2009). In just the first quarter of 2011, five large volumes were published that apply implicit measures to a broad range of social phenomena: social conflict and aggression (Forgas et al., 2011); moral emotions (Giner-Sorolla, 2011); social identity and intergroup relations (Kramer et al., 2011); social judgment and decision making (Krueger, 2011); and, perhaps most importantly, the summing up and theoretical reconceptualization of a Nobel-winning research program on judgmental heuristics (Kahneman, 2011). While all of this is to the good, the sad fact is that it has become nearly impossible to keep up!

Virtually all the research reported here was carried out in Stony Brook's Laboratory for Experimental Research in Political Behavior, supported by grants from the National Science Foundation (SES-0550629, SES-0241282, SES-0300419, SES-0201650, SES-9975063, SES-9310351, SES-9102901, SES-9010666, and SES-9106311). We of course absolve NSF for any and all errors and thank our Stony Brook students and colleagues for saving us from even more grievous mistakes and miscalculations. Over the years Stony Brook's departmental "wine and cheese" seminar series has been especially helpful,

and we would like to extend our deepest gratitude to our colleagues, Stanley Feldman, Leonie Huddy, and Howie Lavine, who forced us to confront our penchant as motivated reasoners to skim over and sidestep weaknesses in theory, experimental design, and analyses. We are also deeply indebted to former colleagues and seminar members Ruth Hamill, Bob Huckfeldt, Kathleen McGraw, and Marco Steenbergen. Our research program survived more blunders than we would like to admit because of the unwillingness of these past and present colleagues to tolerate slipshod thinking and magical assumptions. We have also benefited from the pointed criticisms of numerous fellow political psychologists, chief among them Rick Lau, George Marcus, Dave Redlawsk, and the Cambridge University Press editors Dennis Chong and Jim Kuklinski.

Much of the work reported herein was conducted in collaboration with our many bright, hard-working graduate students, to whom we owe our deepest debt. Chapter 4 developed as an extension of our most basic *hot cognition* hypothesis to political and social group identifications and contains research we did with Inna Burdein, some of which became the basis of her dissertation on racial attitudes and political principles. Brad Verhultz worked with us on the *affect transfer* studies reported in Chapter 5 and was an invaluable sounding board on experimental design for other studies conducted while he was a student at Stony Brook. Chapter 6, testing our critical *affective contagion* hypothesis, is based on a collaboration with Cengiz Erisen, and some of these studies are reported in his dissertation on the same topic. One of the *motivated reasoning* studies in Chapter 7 began as a group project in Taber's Political Psychology Foundation class and was completed with Damon Cann and Simona Kucsova. Finally, the computational model described in Chapter 8, which is a working, comprehensive, formal model of our theory of motivated political reasoning, *John Q. Public (JQP)*, and which we apply empirically to the 2000 U.S. presidential election campaign and to experimental data collected by David Redlawsk and Rick Lau, was conducted with Sung-youn Kim. This last work was a massive effort and was the centerpiece of Sung-youn's dissertation. More generally, a number of other graduate students commented on research contained in this book, and we are especially grateful to those who worked with us in the Laboratory for Experimental Research in Political Behavior, which we codirect: Dan Cassino, Katie Donovan, Chris Johnston, Mary Kate Lizotte, David Martin, Ben Newman, Dave Perkins, Martijn Schoonvelde, Eser Sekercioglu, Nick Seltzer, Marco Steenbergen, April Strickland, Patrick Stroh, Chris Weber, Ben Woodson, Julie Wronski, Sanser Yener, and Everett Young. April Strickland and Alexa Bankert assisted in preparation of the references and index.

Much of this research has appeared in previous articles or chapters, including in the *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Political Psychology*, and *Political Behavior*, and we are grateful to reviewers

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*Preface*

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and editors for helpful advice and direction. This work is acknowledged by citation where appropriate in text.

Despite all this help we are fully aware of the soft underbelly of our theory and gaps in our empirical tests. Wish we could have done better.

Stony Brook, NY