Glossary of terms used in the book *In Defense of a Liberal Education* by Fareed Zakaria

About the glossary

This glossary was created with English language learners in mind, but is a resource for all students. Definitions offered are intended to help students understand the use of these words by the author in this book. Most definitions are from, or adapted from:

- Cambridge Dictionaries Online for English language learners
- Oxford Dictionaries Online
- American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. (Subscription ebook in Castleton's Credo reference collection).

*esp. = especially*

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Some terms used throughout the book:

- **humanism** = a system of thought that focuses on humans and their values, capacities, and worth
- **humanities** = those branches of knowledge, such as philosophy, literature, and art, that are concerned with human thought and culture
- **innovative** = new and different
- **liberal arts** = study directed towards a general broadening of the mind; directed towards the cultivation of the mind for its own sake...not restricted to technical or professional education
- **professions** = occupations, such as law, medicine, or engineering, that requires considerable training and specialized study.
- **trades** = occupations, esp. one requiring skilled labor; craft: e.g., the building trades
- **vocational** = relating to training in a special skill to be pursued in a trade or vocation

Chapter 1: Coming to America

**coding** = writing computer code, programming computers

**take it public** = make a company public by selling stocks in the company that can be traded in an open market
**electrical engineering** = the branch of engineering that deals with the technology of electricity, esp. the design and application of circuitry and equipment for power generation and distribution, machine control, and communications

**classic** = serving as the established model or standard

**conservatives** = those with a certain political orientation, believing in the value of established and traditional practices in politics and society

**liberals** = those with a certain political orientation favoring reform, less bound by traditional thinking, believing that government should be active in supporting social and political change

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For more of an understanding of conservatism and liberalism in the U.S, see

Basic: [Liberalism vs. Conservatism](#) from Student News Daily

Basic: [Political Ideology](#) from an online political science course


**elitist** = antidemocratic, as if a certain privileged group is more deserving

**trade school** = preparing students for occupations, esp. one requiring skilled labor; craft: e.g. the building trades

**job market** = the number of jobs that are available in a particular place or for a particular type of work

**technical training** = training for skills, esp. in the manual trades, health care, computer technology, etc. Of or relating to the practical, mechanical, or industrial arts or to the applied sciences

**scientific literacy** = basic knowledge of science

**engineering** = the application of scientific and mathematical principles to practical ends such as the design, manufacture, and operation of efficient and economical structures, machines, processes, and systems

**rhetoric** = the art or study of using language effectively and persuasively, speech

**subsidize** = to assist or support financially
private sector = part of the economy that is controlled by individuals or private organizations and is not funded by the government

manufacturing = the business of producing goods in factories

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independents = those people not belonging to a political party

irrelevance = quality of being unrelated to a topic

bipartisan = supported by members of two parties, esp. two major political parties

proponents = those in favor of something, for it

virtues = positive qualities

opponents = those opposed or against something

counterproductive = not productive, unhelpful

professions = occupations

apprenticeships = programs to learn a trade or occupation directly from someone practicing that occupation

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trades = occupations, esp. one requiring skilled labor; craft: e.g., the building trades

guilds = an association of persons of the same trade or pursuits, formed to protect mutual interests and maintain standards

per capita = per head or per person

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mystical = spiritual

Fabian = relating to cautious and gradual change, after Roman general Quintus Fabius Maximus

humanistic = focusing on humans and their values, capacities, and worth

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commerce = business

trajectory = path
**Page 24**

- **prestigious** = respected and admired, important
- **domestic** = of the home or home nation
- **legacy** = something that is a result of events in the past
- **the raj** = British rule over India, from raja, Sanskrit for king
- **receivership** = a situation in which a company (or country) is controlled by the receiver because it has no money

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- **specialize** = to spend most of your time studying one particular subject or doing one type of work
- **blitzkrieg** = in war, sudden attacks by air and land

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- **barrister** = word for lawyer in the UK and India
- **missionary** = a person who has been sent to a place, usually a foreign country, to teach a religion to the people who live there

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- **aptitude** = natural ability or talent
- **novel** = new and original; not like anything seen before

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- **apprehensive** = concerned
- **malaise** = a general feeling of bad health or lack of energy in a person, group, or society
- **boom** = a period of sudden economic growth

**Great Depression** = in the U.S, a period of decrease in wealth, industrial production, and employment from 1929 until the start of World War II


**Watergate** = a series of scandals involving the U.S. President Nixon
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decay = damage, or a state that becomes gradually worse; rot
lax = lacking care, attention, or control; weak

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imperialism = the attempt of one country to control another country, esp. by political and economic methods
hegemony = (esp. of countries) the position of being the strongest and most powerful and therefore able to control others
populist = a person or a politician who is mainly interested in the problems and needs of ordinary people
CIA = U.S. Central Intelligence Agency

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unadulterated = not spoiled or made weaker by the addition of other things
bootlegged = made illegally or copied
samizdat = government-banned literature in the former Soviet Union

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classic = having lasting significance or worth; enduring
expats = expatriates, someone who does not live in his or her own country
merit scholarships = scholarships based on demonstrated ability or achievement (rather than need)

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Western = relating to countries in the west part of the world, esp. North America and countries in the west of Europe

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gusto = eager enjoyment experienced when doing something

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Henry Kissinger = German-born American diplomat who was national security adviser (1969–1975) and U.S. secretary of state (1973–1977) under Presidents Nixon and Ford
Chapter 2: A Brief History of Liberal Education

Page 41

Homeric = relating to Homer, Ancient Greek poet, author of the Iliad and the Odyssey

sustenance = the maintaining of someone or something in life or existence; sustaining

Page 42

orator = public speaker, esp. one who is eloquent or skilled

dialectic = a way of discovering what is true by considering opposite theories

instrumental = important in causing something to happen

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rationale = set of reasons for a course of action or a particular belief

mutually exclusive = unable to exist or be true if something else exists or is true

abstract = existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical or concrete existence

courtiers = people who attend a royal court as a companion or adviser

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logic = a formal, scientific method of examining or thinking about ideas

statesmen = skilled, experienced, and respected political leaders or figures

demoted = lowered in rank or position

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Dark Ages = the period in western Europe between the fall of the Roman Empire and the high Middle Ages, around AD 500–1100, during which Germanic tribes swept through Europe and North Africa, often attacking and destroying towns and settlements

monasteries = buildings occupied by a community of monks living under religious vows

Cairo = city in Egypt

Baghdad = city in Iraq

Moorish Spain = Spain under the Muslims who invaded in the 8th century and established a civilization in Andalusia that lasted until the late 15th century

stagnation = lack of activity or growth
theology = the study of religion and religious belief, or a set of beliefs about a particular religion

autonomy = freedom from external control or influence; independence

bastion = something that keeps or defends a belief or a way of life that is disappearing or threatened

taboo = something that is avoided or forbidden for religious or social reasons

scrutiny = the careful and detailed examination of something

heretical = holding beliefs that are opposed to the official belief of a church and that the church considers wrong

speculate = to form opinions about something without having the necessary information or facts; to make guesses

clergy = religious leaders

universal = existing everywhere or involving everyone

pervasive = present or noticeable in every part of a thing or place

arts and letters = arts and literature

elocution = skill in speaking

divinity = study of religion

benefactor = person who gives money or other help to a person or cause

endowed = gave an income or property to (a person or institution)

menial = (of work) needing little skill or education

secular = non-religious

sermon = a talk on a religious or moral subject, esp. one given during a church service and based on a passage from the Bible

seminaries = colleges where people are trained to become religious leaders

imposing = noticeable because of large size, appearance, or importance
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full-fledged = completely developed

residential = with people in residence, or living there

lateral = from the side or sideways movement, from peer to peer rather than from a teacher

**Page 50**

predecessors = things or people who came before in time

colonial = relating to the 13 British colonies that became the original United States of America

divine = connected with or like God or a god

**Page 51**

antiquated = old or old-fashioned, like an antique

classical = relating to ancient Greek or Latin literature, art, or culture

resonate = to evoke a feeling of shared emotion or belief, to correspond closely

**Page 52**

rousing = waking someone or making someone more active or excited

compounded = something bad made worse

the Continent = the mainland of Europe

**Page 53**

tumultuous = excited, confused, or disorderly

calling = a strong urge toward a particular way of life or career; a vocation

**Page 54**

reform = action to improve or correct what is wrong or defective in something

spontaneous = excited, confused, or disorderly

electives = courses that are optional

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mediator = a person who tries to end a disagreement by helping the two sides to talk about and agree on a solution
imbue = filled with a quality or feeling

authenticity = the quality of being real or true

radical = affecting the fundamental nature of something

compulsory = required by law or a rule

imbue = filled with a quality or feeling

Page 56

Distinctive = clearly different from others

hierarchy = a system in which people or things are put at various levels or ranks

whim = sudden desire or idea

in sync with = working well together; in agreement

dominate = to have control over a place or a person

losing its character = losing its distinctive nature

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canon = the list of works considered to be permanently established as being of the highest quality

superseded = replaced by something newer, more effective

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receded = moved back

merits = features that deserve praise

invalidate = to make something not true, or to make something unacceptable

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Socratic tradition of inquiry = a teaching technique in which a teacher does not give information directly but instead asks a series of questions, with the result that the student comes either to the desired knowledge by answering the questions or to a deeper awareness of the limits of knowledge

moral authority = the people or texts that have the power to say what is right or wrong

unanimous = all in agreement

chronological = in the order the events happened in time
advocates = people who publicly support or recommend a particular cause or policy

proportionally = when considering an amount of something as a part of a whole

commiserate = to feel or express sympathy for someone’s suffering or unhappiness

collective = of or shared by every member of a group of people

inherent = existing as a natural and permanent quality of something or someone

cultural literacy = the idea that individuals with an awareness of the history, language, and customs that make up a dominant culture will be better able to communicate with one another.

cornucopia = an abundant supply of good things of a specified kind

allure = appeal or attraction

enraptured = filled with great pleasure or extremely pleased by something

conviction = firmly held beliefs or opinions

bureaucratic = overly concerned with procedure at the expense of efficiency or common sense

imperatives = motivation or priorities

latter = later one in the list, opposite of former which is the first in the list

trumped = beat (someone or something) by saying or doing something better

tenure = the right to keep a job permanently in the academic system

arcane = complicated or rare and therefore understood or known by only a few people

subversive = trying to undo an established order, esp. to undermine or overthrow an established government

rigor = with high standards demanding hard work

incentives = things that encourage a person to do something
pious = very religious

devolved of = lacking

relegated = moved to an inferior or obscure place, rank, category, or condition

laypeople = non-experts

polarization = the fact of people or opinions being divided into two opposing groups

gusto = enthusiasm, with energy

pervades = spreads through all parts of something

trustee = member of a board in charge of directing the funds and policy of an institution

beachhead = an area of land near the sea or a river that an attacking army has taken control of and from where it can move forward into enemy country

silo = a large structure, usually cylindrical, used for storing grain for farm animals; a very separated structure

synergy = the combined power of a group of things when they are working together that is greater than the power achieved by each working separately

ethics = the study of, or a set of beliefs about, what is morally right and wrong

cliché = an idea or expression that has been used too often and is often considered a sign of bad writing or old-fashioned thinking

mandate = authority to act in a particular way given to a government or a person, esp. as a result of a vote or ruling

Chapter 3: Learning to Think
**extol** = to praise highly

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**regurgitate** = vomit, or to repeat information without understanding it

Page 73

**apocryphal** = probably not true although it is often told and believed by some people to have happened

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**jargon** = words and phrases used by particular groups of people, esp. in their work, that are not generally understood

Page 75

**articulate** (adjective) = expressing or able to express things easily and clearly

Page 76

**analyze** = to examine methodically by separating into parts and studying their interrelations

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**parry** = to defend yourself from a weapon or an attack by pushing the weapon away or by putting something between your body and the weapon, or to manage cleverly to avoid dealing with a difficult question or some criticism

Page 78

**hypothesis** = an idea or explanation for something that is based on known facts but has not yet been proven

Page 81

**aesthetic** = relating to the enjoyment or study of beauty

**lucrative** = profitable

Page 82

**ingenuity** = the skill of thinking, performing, or using things in new ways, esp. to solve problems

Page 83

**anonymity** = a situation in which a person is not known by or spoken of by name

**eclipse** = to become more important and noticeable than something, like when one celestial body moves in front of another
amenable = willing to accept or be influenced by a suggestion
vexing = annoying, worrying, or causing problems, challenging
automate = to make something operate automatically by using machines or computers
tacitly = understood without being expressed directly

outsourcing = to get work done by making a contract with another company to do it, often in another country, rather than in your own company or doing it yourself
venture capitalist = a person or financial organization that invests in new businesses, esp. ones that involve risk

trajectory = the curved path an object follows after it is thrown or shot into the air, or of an object that is traveling through space
revenues = income, money earned
sector = an area, like an area of the economy

novel (adjective) = new, innovative
quixotic = having ideas that are admirable but not practical

speculation = the activity of guessing possible answers to a question without having enough information to be certain
anecdotal evidence = based on reports or things someone saw rather than on proven facts

proficiency = skill or ability, competence

entrepreneur = a person who attempts to make a profit by starting a company or by operating alone in the business world, esp. when it involves taking risks
**meritocracy** = a social system, society, or organization in which people have power because of their abilities, not because of their money or social position

**GDP** = gross domestic product: the total value of a country's annual output of goods and services

**dynamism** = the quality of having a lot of ideas and enthusiasm; energetic and forceful

**disparity** = a lack of equality and similarity, esp. in a way that is not fair

**delusion** = something a person believes and wants to be true, when it is actually not true

**bravado** = a show of bravery or defiance, often in order to make a false impression or mislead someone

**writ large** = if one thing is another thing writ large, it is similar to it but larger or more obvious

**correlation** = a connection between two or more things

**labor force** = all the people in a particular country who are of the right age to work

**behemoth** = something that is extremely large and often extremely powerful

**ameliorate** = improve, fix

**diffusion** = the process of spreading into a surrounding substance

**emulate** = to copy someone's behavior or try to be like someone else because you admire or respect that person

**conducive** = providing the right conditions for something to happen or exist

**grade inflation** = the assigning of grades higher than previously assigned for the same levels of achievement

**succinct** = (of writing or speech) clear and short; expressing what needs to be said without unnecessary words

**empirical** = based on what is experienced or seen rather than on theory
cerebral = relating to the brain

credibility = the fact that someone can be believed or trusted
trading commodities = speculating on the future direction of the price of certain physical goods
summa cum laude = "with the highest praise" or with high honors
implementation = the act of putting a plan into action or of starting to use something

mandarins = high-ranking officials or bureaucrats
laissez-faire = in French, "to allow to do"; loose, not controlled

Chapter 4: The Natural Aristocracy

statesman = a politician or government official who is respected and experienced
statecraft = the skill of governing a country
civically engaged = active in the local community

Yuppie= a young, successful educated person who lives in a city; short for Young Urban Professional

frugal = careful in spending money

seminar = a meeting of a small group of people with a teacher or expert for training, discussion, or study on a particular subject

degenerate = to become worse

tyranny = unlimited authority or use of power, or a government which exercises such power without any control or limits
illuminat e = to put light in on something

bulwark = something serving as a defense, like a wall or embankment

erudite = having or showing a lot of knowledge

Page 112

nonsectarian = not related to a religious sect or group

chapel = a small church or an enclosed place in a large church for worship

republic = a country that is governed by elected representatives and an elected leader

hereditary = related to the natural process by which parents pass on their children through their genes the characteristics that make them related

aristocracy = a class of people of high social rank, or a government ruled by or consisting of people of a high social class

elites = those people or organizations that are considered the best or most powerful

Page 113

libertarian = someone who believes that people should have complete freedom of thought and action

Page 115

endowment = money or property donated to an institution, individual, or group as a source of income

need-blind financial aid = a policy of promising enough financial aid to attend the school for any student who is admitted, regardless of ability to pay

Page 116

arbitrary = based on desire or idea or chance rather than reason; random

legacy = an applicant to an educational institution who is the child of an alumna or alumnus

deviation = a difference from what is usual or expected

Page 117

recruited = actively persuaded to become a new member of an organization

Page 118

nebulous = cloudy or unclear

intangible = not able to be seen or physically felt
subjective = influenced by or based on personal beliefs or feelings, rather than based on facts

Page 119

compensate = to take the place of something useful or needed with something else of similar value

irrelevant = not related to what is being discussed or considered

Page 120

onerous = causing great difficulty or trouble, a burden

jeopardize = to risk or put something in danger

marketable = easily sold

plausible = believable

Page 121

productivity = the rate at which a person, company, or country does useful work

Page 122

price insensitive = used to describe a product or service for which sales remain the same or continue to increase even if the price goes up or down by a large amount

obscure (verb) = to hide or cover up

inflation = a continuing rise in prices caused by an increase in the money supply and demand for goods

Page 125

panel = a small group of people chosen to publicly discuss their opinions

Page 126

déjà vu = the strange feeling that in some way you have already experienced what is happening now

Page 130

conveyor belt = a continuous moving strip or surface that is used for transporting objects from one place to another, used in factories

remedial = (of an activity) intended to correct or improve something, esp. skills

customized = made or changed according to the buyer's or user's needs
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`scale` = size

`inversely correlated` = when one side goes up, the other goes down, an opposite relationship

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`UNESCO` = United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization: a department of the United Nations that aims to encourage peace between countries through education, science, and culture

Page 133

`cohort` = a group of people who share a characteristic, usually age

Chapter 5: Knowledge and Power

Page 135

`Prometheus and Zeus` = gods in Greek mythology

`Mount Olympus` = the home of the gods in Greek mythology

Page 136

`Genesis` = In the Bible, the first book of the Old Testament, which tells the story of Adam and Eve

Page 137

`millennia` = plural of millennium, a thousand years

`bucolic` = relating to the countryside, peaceful

Page 140

`pithily` = in a pithy way, using few words

`posited` = suggested, proposed

Page 142

`stroke` = a sudden change in the blood supply to a part of the brain, which can result in a loss of some mental or physical abilities, or death

`antidote` = a chemical, esp. a drug, that acts against the bad effects of a poison to limit the harm it can do

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`testament` = proof of something
**the Enlightenment** = the period in the 18th century in Europe when particular thinkers began to emphasize the importance of science and reason rather than religion and tradition

**humanitarian** = involved in or connected with improving people’s lives and reducing suffering

**balk** = to be unwilling to do something or let something happen

**serfdom** = the state of being a member of a low social class of farm workers who cannot leave the land where they work and who are ruled by the owner of the land

**perverse** = contrary to what is right or good or expected

**monarchs** = kings or queens

**rapacious** = having or showing a strong wish to take things for yourself, usually using unfair methods or force

**dictatorship** = a country ruled by someone who rules with complete power, has complete control over the armed forces, and destroys any political opposition

**decolonization** = the release of one country or territory from political control by another country

**at the helm** = in control of; (the helm is the handle or wheel that controls the direction in which a ship or boat travels)

**fascism** = a political system based on a very powerful leader, state control of social and economic life, and extreme pride in country and race, with no expression of political disagreement allowed

**communism** = an economic system based on public ownership of property and control of the methods of production, and in which no person profits from the work of others

**fundamentalism** = the belief that the traditional principles of a religion or set of beliefs should be maintained

**ideology** = a theory or set of beliefs, esp. one on which a political system, party, or organization is based

**nationalism** = devotion, esp. excessive devotion, to the interests or culture of a particular nation-state

**coercion** = forcefully persuading someone to do something that he or she may not want to do
submission = the act of accepting the power or authority of someone else

arrogance = showing pride in an unpleasant way and behaving as if you are better or more important than other people

Chapter 6: In Defense of Today's Youth

automaton = a machine that operates on its own without the need for human control, or a person who acts like a machine, without thinking or feeling

millennials = the generation of young people who were born around the time of the millennium, that is, around the year 2000

crew = a sport where teams of rowers race teams in other boats

introspective = examining and considering your own ideas, thoughts, and feelings, instead of talking to other people about them

industrious = regularly working very hard

alienation = the feeling that you have no connection with the people around you

beneficent = characterized by or performing acts of kindness or charity

cynics = people whose outlook is habitually negative and who don't believe people have good motives

bourgeois = belonging to or typical of the middle class (= the social group between the rich and the poor), esp. in supporting established customs and values or in having a strong interest in money and possessions

callow = behaving in a way that shows little experience, confidence, or judgment

jeremiad = writing or speech expressing a bitter lament or a righteous prophecy of doom

Puritans = an English religious group in the 16th and 17th centuries who wanted to make church ceremonies simpler and emphasized moral behavior that forbids many pleasures

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) = U.S. writer and naturalist
plaintive = having a sad quality

reactionary = characterized by reaction, esp. opposition to progress

pillory = to severely criticize someone, esp. in a public way

tantric = based on ancient Hindu or Buddhist texts

Hegel = German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)

bigoted = having strong, unreasonable ideas, esp. about race or religion, and who thinks anyone who does not have the same beliefs is wrong

caricature (verb) = to show or describe a person in a ridiculous way

aspiration = a strong hope or wish for achievement or success

incremental = in a series of amounts

narcissism = too much interest in and admiration for your own physical appearance and/or your own abilities

entitlement = feeling that you have a right to the good things in life without necessarily having to work for them

slothfulness = being like a sloth, slow and lazy

self-abnegation = to not allow yourself to have something, esp. something you like or want; self-denial

in flux = in a state of change

disenchanted = no longer believing in the value of something, esp. after having learned of the faults that it has
dysfunctional = not behaving or working normally

NGO = nongovernmental organization

nostalgia = a feeling of pleasure and sometimes slight sadness at the same time as you think about things that happened in the past

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capitalism = an economic system based on private ownership of property and business, with the goal of making the greatest possible profits for the owners

communism = an economic system based on public ownership of property and control of the methods of production, and in which no person profits from the work of others

proxy war = war where the groups or countries at war are representing or being backed by other groups or countries

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divestment = the act of selling off a business or businesses, or of no longer investing money in something

jihadist = a Muslim who is fighting for Islam, esp. a radical (= someone with extreme views) who believes in using violence to achieve religious and political aims

partisanship = different political groups involving loyal support of their side and not working together

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to the barricades = to protest or go to war for something (a barricade is a large object or objects that are used to stop people from going where they want to go)

icon = a famous person or thing that represents something of importance

Page 166

wonk = one who studies an issue or topic thoroughly

Page 168

apartheid = a political system in South Africa that legally separated people of different races

Page 169

purple prose = overly elaborate writing or speech