## Contents

Thanks | vii Reading guide | viii **Preface: Why now** | ix Dedication | xvii

- 1. Accidental citizens: Solidarity won't come from homogeneity but from respect for diversity | 1
- 2. Justice and equality: There's more to handling race and religion than avoiding riots | 8
- 3. The power of symbols: The 2017 Presidential Election was a missed opportunity for nation building | 15
- 4. **391 Orchard Road:** In a xenophobic climate, a commercial address became an unlikely object of national pride | 22
- 5. Morality police: Conservative values have a place, but they shouldn't restrict consenting adults' cultural choices | 29
- 6. Infamous Amos: Amos Yee's extreme provocation was wrong, but that doesn't make the law right | 36
- 7. **Demophobic society:** Singapore's allergic reaction to the D-word gets in the way of strengthening its system | 43
- 8. From 2011 to 2015: The Workers' Party woke up a sleeping giant, to its cost | 50
- 9. Winter is here: Since the 2011 general election, a chill has descended on political debate | 57
- **10. Freak elections:** Elites consistently underestimate the sophistication of the Singapore electorate | 64
- **11. Open government:** People are overpoliticising the Presidency for want of democratic institutions | 71
- **12. 6.9 million:** The government's Population White Paper was a worrying symptom of a lack of internal debate | 78

- **13. The fog of fear:** If we're not pretending to be a liberal democracy, let's be upfront about political limits | 85
- **14. Elite cohesion:** The Lee family feud was an exception that proved the rule of extraordinary establishment unity | 92
- **15. Disturbing the peace:** Many Singaporeans have peculiarly low tolerance for perceived troublemakers | 99
- **16. Political sweet spot:** Singapore's lack of protest activity is the result of an extraordinary balancing act | 106
- **17. Calibrated coercion:** The government's strategic restraint in the use of violence is one of its most under-rated skills | 113
- **18. Freedom of speech:** There's a happy medium between dictatorship and anarchy, and we're not there yet | 120
- **19. Dreaded defamation:** It's time to rethink the use of Singapore's most chilling speech law | 127
- **20. Holding the press:** The national news media are free to earn profits, but not the people's affection | 134
- **21. The digital gap:** Anti-government memes don't make up for the lack of independent online journalism | 141
- **22. Academic interests:** Our universities have arrived on the global stage but left the local behind | 148
- **23. Reputational risk:** At NTU, I got an unwanted lesson in how the Singapore system deals with perceived opponents | 155
- **24.** Active citizens: Civil society activism includes voices of conscience that Singapore should not silence | 162
- **25. The Lee legacy:** Lee Kuan Yew made some blunders, but he's not to blame for Singapore's inability to let go of him | 169
- **26. A PAP wishlist:** I can imagine becoming a fan of the People's Action Party if its leaders can imagine certain reforms | 176
- **27. Reforming the PAP:** A fifth generation leadership will need to make changes that their predecessors have resisted | 183
- **28. Accidental losers:** Singapore's intolerance of political differences is rooted in a distorted picture of the past | 190