

Information and Propaganda



History of Information 103
Geoff Nunberg

April 21, 2009



Riefenstahl vs Capra

Both of the videos can be considered to be propaganda. They are both advertising for a specific purpose, both hyperbolizing the subject, and neither presenting the whole story. In “Why We Fight”, the Germans are compared as treacherous gangsters who have thrown away all their morals for sake of efficiency, while in “Triumph” the government is portrayed as having tremendous support of the people and is tremendously supporting of the people and their nationality. Yiding



Riefenstahl vs Capra

The Capra film is more effective to me personally than the “Triumph of the Will”. I think that this is a result of being an American and having twelve years of American History behind me in all levels of my education. Capra’s film is more successful in portraying the enemy as evil, power-hungry, and backstabbing while the German film only makes Hitler into a hero loved by the people and does not specify an enemy. - Sarah W.



Riefenstahl vs Capra

While Capra's use of evidence presentation of facts attempts to blur the line between journalism and propaganda, the selective inclusion of details like pictures of the first killed American soldier and the general theme of Nazis betrayal makes the film as one-sided as it tries not to be. Hitler descending from the clouds into Nuremberg's Romanesque pomp is so incredibly celebratory of Nazi Germany's "rebirth" that there is little denying the power of Riefenstahl's work. Despite having grown up taught to despise everything that Nazi Germany was, I cannot help but sympathize with the intense emotional response that Germans had to the romanticism and grandeur of the Nazi rally. In that way I feel that Riefenstahl is more successful...
William B.



Riefenstahl vs Capra

This film is effective in the way it evokes the emotions of its people. In the beginning of the film, it talks of the 16-year suffering that the Germans have been facing up to that point. It's very patriotic in its imagery, showing aerial views of Germany as well as a grand entrance from Hitler in an airplane and large crowds smiling attentively. The music is triumphant and extravagant. This film does a better job of evoking an emotional response from the people and possibly gathering their support because of these details. This film touches the people in a much more personal level than the other, therefore making it more effective. -Katrina.



Puzzlers

What is the historical significance of the translation of the German word *Kadaver*?





Puzzlers

Who said "repetition ends by transforming into faith a simple tendency without the individual being aware of this work"?



Puzzlers

Who said "repetition ends by transforming into faith a simple tendency without the individual being aware of this work"?



Joseph Goebbels



Itinerary: 4/21

Propaganda, information, and the news

The history of propaganda

The origins of "objectivity"

The 20th century: propaganda comes of age

Propaganda and the "informed public"



The Case of "Infoganda"



2004: "Video News Releases" (VNR's) from the Office of National Drug Control Policy promote prescription drug program, w/ interviews of HHS sec. Tommy Thompson



2005: Revelation that Armstrong Williams accepted money to promote No Child Left Behind in his TV and radio programs

Frank Rich, Jon Stewart speak of 'infoganda'





The case of "Infoganda"

"It's propaganda no matter how you cut it." Bob Priddy, chairman of the Radio-Television News Directors Association

"Anyone who has questions about this practice needs to do some research on modern public information tools." HHS spokesperson



VNR from Leiner Health Products



WCBS (NYC) Newscast, 3/22/06



The Long History of "Infoganda"



Persuasion in the age of the press & public opinion as a political force: propaganda tracks the development of "news"

"Government is nothing unless supported by opinion"
– Napoleon

Cf Napoleon's efforts to control the Parisian press,
18th c. practice of paying subsidies to sympathetic
newspapers...



Propaganda and the Modern State



Burke



Roland

The origins of indirection & euphemism:

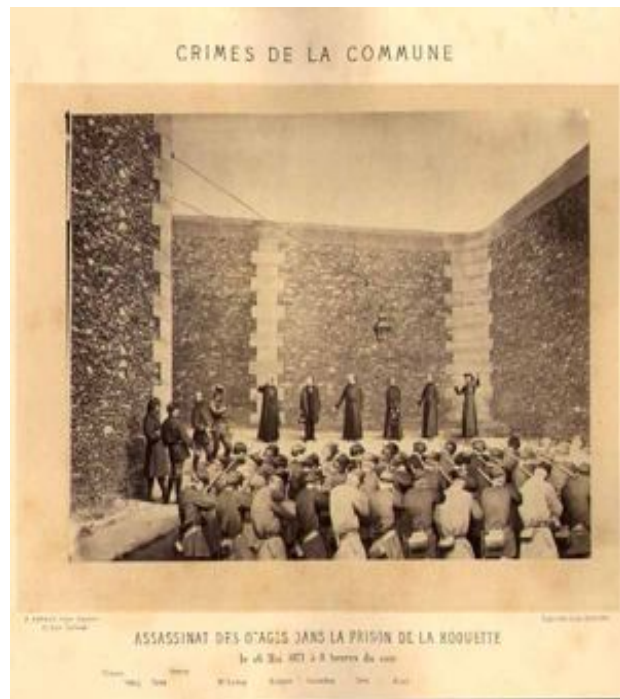
Through the whole of this long letter of Roland, it is curious to remark how the nerve and vigor of his style, which had spoken so potently to his sovereign, is relaxed when he addresses himself to the sans-culottes... When he speaks to the populace, he can no longer be direct. The whole compass of the language is tried to find synonymes and circumlocutions for massacre and murder. Things are never called by their common names. Massacre is sometimes *agitation*, sometimes *effervescence*, sometimes *excess*, sometimes *too continued an exercise of a revolutionary power*. Edmund Burke, 1793

Cf “casualty” in Crimean War; “Acts of collective indiscipline” in WWI





Propaganda and the truth of the photo



Paris
Commune,
1871

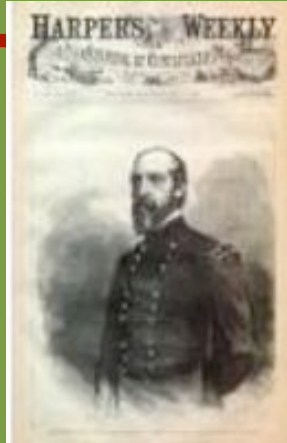


Roger Fenton, Crimea, 1855





Civil War: The army vs the press



Conflicting interests of the state:

Seeks positive publicity, which entails giving reporters access

Avoiding negative publicity entails restricting access.

Cf Civil War conflicts between Meade & Edward Crapsey of the Phil. Inquirer

1864: Union Sec'y of War Edwin Stanton begins to "leak" his war diaries to AP, presaging practice of issuing regular war bulletins to the press

Efforts to win support of British press for each side...



Aside: The Rise of Objectivity



19th c. forces leading to rise of "objectivity"

Weakening of partisanship.

1860 -- Gov't Printing Office established

Reform movement, civil services, beginnings of progressivism

Enlarged markets for mass-circulation press/increasing dependence on advertising

Professionalization of journalism -- creation of journalism courses & schools

The cult of science



Growth of wire services

[The AP's] members [i.e. subscribers] are scattered from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Canada to the Gulf, and represent every possible shade of political belief, religious faith, and economic sympathy. It is obvious that the Associated Press can have no partisan nor factional bias, no religious affiliation, no capitalistic nor pro-labor trend. Its function is simply to furnish its members with a truthful, clean, comprehensive, non-partisan...report of the news in the world as expeditiously as is compatible with accuracy...

Frank B. Noyes, president of the Associated Press, 1913



The Rise of Objectivity

Objectivity as a conscious norm

Objective reporting is supposed to be cool, rather than emotional, in tone.

Detachment: privileges "information" over "story"

My business is merely to communicate facts. My instructions do not allow me to make any comments on the facts I communicate. ..AP Washington bureau chief, 1866

Balance: report "each side"

Neutrality/nonpartisanship

Impersonal

Reporters were to report the news as it happened, like machines, without prejudice, color, and without style; all alike. Humor or any sign of personality in our reports was caught, rebuked, and suppressed. Lincoln Steffens on his years on the *Post*



The Rise of “Propaganda”

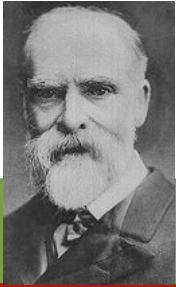


The Rise of "Propaganda"

Propaganda (OED) (More fully, Congregation or College of the Propaganda.) A committee of Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church having the care and oversight of foreign missions, founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV.

"Before 1914, 'propaganda' belonged only to literate vocabularies and possessed a reputable, dignified meaning... Two years later the word had come into the vocabulary of peasants and ditchdiggers and had begun to acquire its miasmatic aura." Will Irwin, *Propaganda and the News*

1922: Encyclopedia Britannica first includes *propaganda* as entry
States begin to take a direct role in creating & diffusing pro-government views.



Vicount James Bryce, chairman of the German Outrages Inquiry Committee

WWI British Propaganda

May, 1915: The Bryce Report "substantiates" allegations of German atrocities during invasion of Belgium.



Lithograph by George Bellows, 1918

America embraces propaganda: 1917



WWI: Creel Committee, "4-minute men," etc.

75,000 speakers to give short speeches & lantern-slide presentations

75 million booklets distributed, in multiple languages

"We did not call it propaganda, for that word, in German hands, had come to be associated with deceit and corruption. Our effort was educational and informative throughout. No other argument was needed than the simple, straightforward presentation of facts." George Creel



After the War: The birth of the press agent

Rise of publicists, press services.

“The development of the modern publicity man is a clear sign that the facts of modern life do not spontaneously take a shape in which they can be known. They must be given a shape by somebody, and since in the daily routine reporters cannot give a shape to facts... the need for some formulation is being met by the interested parties.” Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion*, 1922

Connection between propaganda, PR, & advertising.



Publicity and propaganda



Rise of publicists, press services.

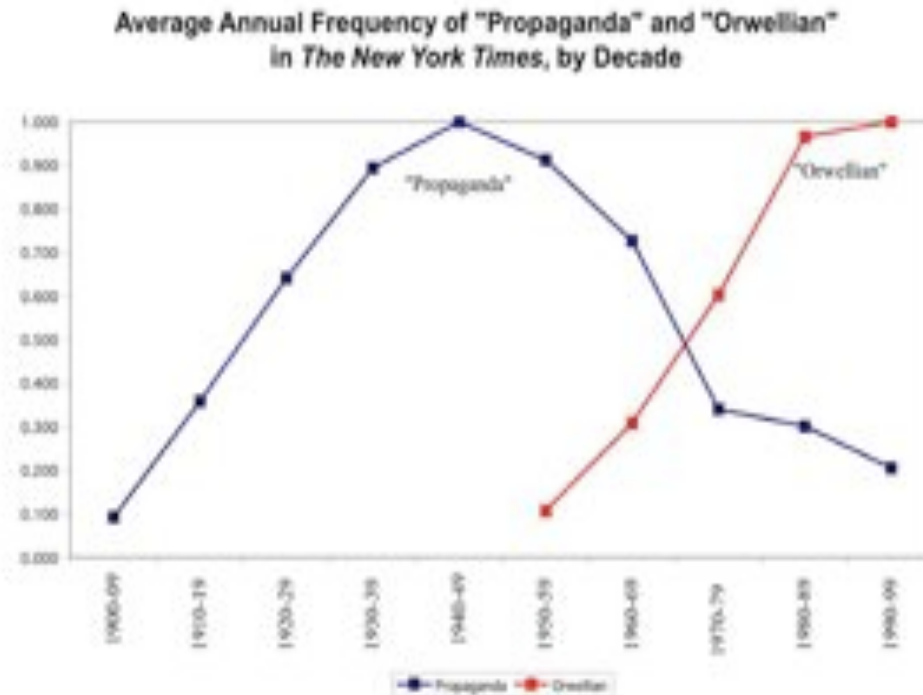
The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. ...We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society.

Edward Bernays, 1928

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The Rise of "Propaganda"





The post-WWI Obsession with Propaganda

After WWI, wariness of "propaganda" spills over to wide mistrust of media.

There is scarcely a field of human activity in which propaganda organizations have not arisen. The United States has the greatest propaganda density of any country in the world" Harwood Childs, 1940

Increasing suspicion of propaganda:

1939 poll shows 40 percent of Americans blame propaganda for the US entry into the First World War



Propaganda in WWII



Frank Capra and
George C. Marshall

Adoption of propaganda techniques by Roosevelt during WWII:
"Office of Facts and Figures" --> Office of War Information

"the office is not a propaganda agency... We don't believe in this country in artificially stimulated, high-pressure, doctored nonsense." NYC Mayor Fiorello La Guardia

The object is "to provide the public with sugar-coated, colored, ornamental matter, otherwise known as 'bunk.'" La Guardia, letter to FDR

"The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most men's minds is to let it go in through the medium of an entertainment picture." Elmer Davis, director of OWI



Playing the Race Card: Axis...



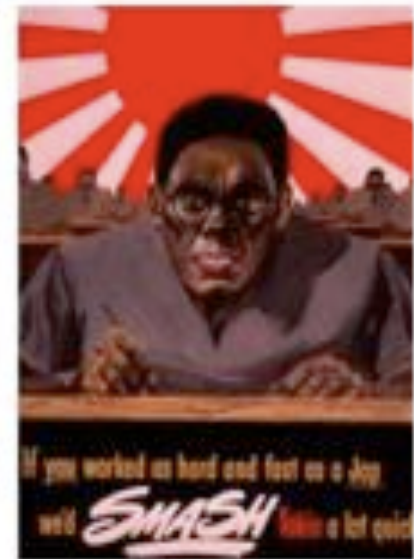
The Eternal Jew, German Poster, 1940



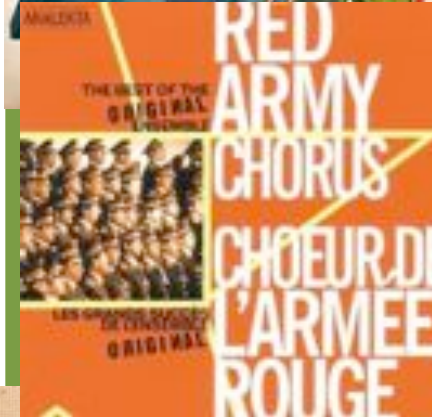
Italian Posters, 1944



Playing the Race Card: the Allies



Postwar Propaganda





The Orwell Cult

"Orwellian": 2,510,000 Google hits

> *Kafkaesque*, *Hemingwayesque*, *Dickensian*
put together

> *Machiavellian* (1.4 m)





Informing the Public

The political importance of transparency

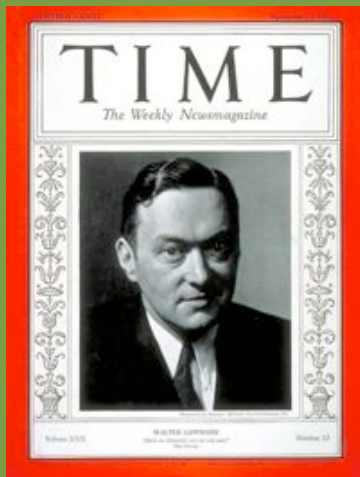
No democratic society worthy of the name can govern itself without transparency and information. Onthecommons.org

We must use all available technologies and methods to open up the federal government, creating a new level of transparency to change the way business is conducted in Washington and giving Americans the chance to participate in government deliberations and decision-making in ways that were not possible only a few years ago.

www.barackobama.org



The "informed citizen": The Lippmann-Dewey Debate



1922: In *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippman argues that the functions of modern democracy cannot rest on the idea of an "informed public"

The diffusion of information impeded by structural barriers:

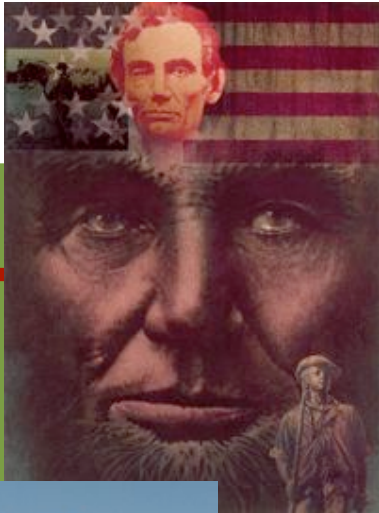
"artificial censorships, the limitations of social contact, the comparatively meagre time available in each day for paying attention to public affairs, the distortion arising because events have to be compressed into very short messages, the difficulty of making a small vocabulary express a complicated world..."

And by psychological barriers:

"[humans] are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it."

"The facts far exceed our curiosity"

The "informed citizen": The Lippmann-Dewey Debate



Lippmann on the role of symbols:

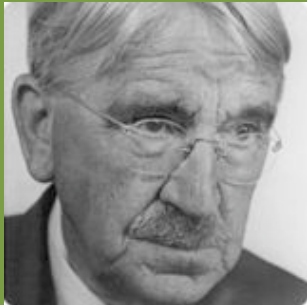
The making of one general will out of a multitude of general wishes is an art well known to leaders, politicians, and steering committees. It consists essentially in the use of symbols which detach emotions after they have been detached from their ideas.

The question of a proper fare on a municipal subway is symbolized as an issue between the People and the Interests, and then the People is inserted in the symbol American, so that finally in the heat of a campaign, an eight cent fare becomes un-American. The Revolutionary fathers died to prevent it. Lincoln suffered that it might not come to pass, resistance to it was implied in the death of those who sleep in France. The Phantom Public

Democracy is essentially plebicitary: the public can only say "yes" or "no." Policy decisions must be left to experts.



Dewey's Response to Lippmann



John Dewey

Democracy is both a means and an end:

Democracy is not an alternative to the other principles of associative life. It is the idea of community life itself. (*The Public and its Problems*, 1927)

Great Society is to become a Great Community; a society in which the ever-expanding and intricately ramifying consequences of associated activities shall be known in the full sense of that word, so that an organized, articulate Public comes into being.... Government exists to serve its community, and this purpose cannot be achieved unless the community itself shares in selecting its governors and determining their policies.

Democracy as participatory, not simply plebicitary.



Lippmann vs Dewey: Modern Symbolic Politics, 1

value: *gen. in pl.*, the principles or standards of a person or society. (OED)





Modern Symbolic Politics, 2



*Lincoln Tax Freedom
Tea Party
4.11.09*



Symbols as "Cognitive Shortcuts"

Political symbols as “just another form of information cost-saving.” (Samuel Popkin)

Shortcuts in daily life: brands, endorsements, personal appearance (cf. Nelson Algren’s three rules for a happy life)

Ideologies as a shortcut, “verbal image of the good society.”

If voters were fully informed about government and could assess how their own benefits would be affected by a party’s platform... they would pay no attention to ideology... Ideology is not a mark of sophistication, but of uncertainty. Popkin

Demography as a shortcut (Identity politics)

Inferring competence & moral values