Propaganda

Propaganda is a specific type of message presentation directly aimed at influencing the opinions of people, rather than impartially providing information.

1 Quotes

- Manipulations of opinion, insofar as they are inspired by well-defined interests, have limited goals; their effect, however, if they happen to touch upon an issue of authentic concern, is no longer subject to their control and may easily produce consequences they never foresaw or intended.
  
  
  - 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.
  
  - Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (1928)

- Propaganda is the executive arm of the invisible government.
  
  - Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (1928)

- The engineering of consent is the very essence of the democratic process, the freedom to persuade and suggest.
  

- Goebbels [...] was using my book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* as a basis for his destructive campaign against the Jews of Germany. This shocked me.
  

- [In] Democratic societies … the state can’t control behavior by force. It can to some extent, but it’s much more limited in its capacity to control by force. Therefore, it has to control what you think. … One of the ways you control what people think is by creating the illusion that there’s a debate going on, but making sure that that debate stays within very narrow margins. Namely, you have to make sure that both sides in the debate accept certain assumptions, and those assumptions turn out to be the propaganda system. As long as everyone accepts the propaganda system, then you can have a debate.

  - Noam Chomsky, *Chronicls of Dissent; Propaganda in the US vs in the USSR* (24 October 1986)

- The media want to maintain their intimate relation to state power. They want to get leaks, they want to get invited to the press conferences. They want to rub shoulders with the Secretary of State, all that kind of business. To do that, you’ve got to play the game, and playing the game means telling their lies, serving as their disinformation apparatus.

  - Chomsky, Noam, *Chronicls of Dissent; Non-Conspiracy Analysis of Propaganda System* (24 October 1986)

- There remains the problem of Goebbels’ reputation. He wore the title of Big Liar (bestowed by Anglo-Saxon propaganda) and yet he never stopped battling for propaganda to be as accurate as possible. He preferred being cynical and brutal to being caught in a lie. He used to say: “Everybody must know what the situation is.” He was always the first to announce disastrous events or difficult situations, without hiding anything. The result was a general belief between 1939 and 1942 that German communiqués not only were more concise, clearer and less cluttered, but were more truthful than Allied communiqués (American and neutral opinion) -- and, furthermore, that the Germans published all the news two or three days before the Allies. All this is so true that pinning the title of Big Liar on Goebbels must be considered quite a propaganda success.


- But it remained for the Jews, with their unqualified capacity for falsehood, and their fighting comrades,
the Marxists… By placing responsibility for the loss of the world war on the shoulders of Ludendorff they took away the weapon of moral right from the only adversary dangerous enough to be likely to succeed in bringing the betrayers of the Fatherland to Justice. All this was inspired by the principle - which is quite true in itself - that in the big lie there is always a certain force of credibility; because the broad masses of a nation are always more easily corrupted in the deeper strata of their emotional nature than consciously or voluntarily; and thus in the primitive simplicity of their minds they more readily fall victims to the big lie than the small lie, since they themselves often tell small lies in little matters but would be ashamed to resort to large-scale falsehoods. It would never come into their heads to fabricate colossal untruths, and they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously.

- Adolf Hitler, in Mein Kampf (1925)

No matter what an amount of talent employed in the organization of propaganda, it will have no result if due account is not taken of these fundamental principles. Propaganda must be limited to a few simple themes and these must be represented again and again. Here, as in innumerable other cases, perseverance is the first and most important condition of success.

- Variant: No amount of genius spent on the creation of propaganda will lead to success if a fundamental principle is not forever kept in mind. Propaganda must confine itself to very few points, and repeat them endlessly. Here, as with so many things in this world, persistence is the first and foremost condition of success.

- Adolf Hitler, in Mein Kampf (1925); translated to English by James Murphy (February 1939)

We tend today to exaggerate the effectiveness of persuasion as a means of inculcating opinion and shaping behavior. Actually the fabulous effects ascribed to propaganda have no greater foundation in fact than the fall of the walls of Jericho ascribed to the blast of Joshua’s trumpets.

- Eric Hoffer, The True Believer (1951) Ch.14 Unifying Agents, §83

All war propaganda consists, in the last resort, in substituting diabolical abstractions for human beings. Similarly, those who defend war have invented a pleasant sounding vocabulary of abstractions in which to describe the process of mass murder.

- Aldous Huxley, in “Pacifism and Philosophy” (1936)

The propagandist’s purpose is to make one set of people forget that certain other sets of people are human.


The “Conqueror from Berlin,” as he has named himself, has completely conquered Germany. And not only that. Unfortunately, many, all too many Germans living abroad, also have fallen for the cunning propaganda.

- Friedrich Kellner, My Opposition (14 October 1939)

Frankly, Wonder Woman is psychological propaganda for the new type of woman who, I believe, should rule the world.


When people decry civilian deaths caused by the U.S government, they’re aiding propaganda efforts. In sharp contrast, when civilian deaths are caused by bombers who hate America, the perpetrators are evil and those deaths are tragedies. When they put bombs in cars and kill people, they’re uncivilized killers. When we put bombs on missiles and kill people, we’re upholding civilized values. When they kill, they’re terrorists. When we kill, we’re striking against terror.


Propaganda is not French, it is not civilized to want other people to believe what you believe because the essence of being civilized is to possess yourself as you are, and if you possess yourself as you are you of course cannot possess any one else, it is not your business.

- Gertrude Stein, in Paris France (1940), p. 56

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