

Propaganda

Definitions and ideas compiled by Dr. Nancy Snow

found at: Mickey Huff's Blog for Critical Thinking in History
<http://homepage.mac.com/mickeyhuff/iblog/index.html>

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Truth is not the absence of propaganda; propaganda thrives in presenting different kinds of truth, including half truths, incomplete truths, limited truths, out of context truths. Modern propaganda is most effective when it presents information as accurately as possible. The Big Lie or Tall Tale is the most ineffective propaganda.

Propaganda is not so much designed to change opinions so much as reinforce existing opinions, prejudices, attitudes. The most successful propaganda will lead people to action or inaction through reinforcement of what people already believe to be true.

Education is not necessarily the best protection against propaganda. Intellectuals and "the educated" are the most vulnerable to propaganda campaigns because they (1) tend to absorb the most information (including secondhand information, hearsay, rumors, and unverifiable information); (2) are compelled to have an opinion on matters of the day and thus expose themselves more to others' opinions and propaganda campaigns; and (3) consider themselves above the influence of propaganda, thereby making themselves more susceptible to propaganda.

What makes the study of propaganda so problematic is that it is generally regarded as the study of the darker side of our nature; the study of their evil versus our good. Those whom we consider evil thrive in propaganda, while we spread only the truth. The best way to study propaganda is to separate one's ethical judgments from the phenomenon itself. Propaganda thrives and exists, for ethical and unethical purposes.

Propaganda seeks to modify public opinion, particularly to make people conform to the point of view of the propagandist. In this respect, any propaganda is a form of manipulation, to adapt an individual to a particular activity.

Modern forms of communication, including mass media, are instruments of propaganda. Without the monopoly concentration of mass media, there can be no modern propaganda. For propaganda to thrive, the media must remain concentrated, news agencies and services must be limited, the press must be under central command, and radio, film, and television monopolies must pervade.

One must become aware of propaganda, its limitations, its strengths, its influence, and its persuasive qualities, if one is to master it. To say that one is free of the influence of propaganda is a sure sign of its pervasive existence in society.

Modern propaganda began in the United States in the early 20th Century. During World War I, the mass media were integrated with public relations and advertising methods to advocate and maintain support for war. The Creel Committee established the first American publicity campaign to spread and disseminate the gospel of the American way to all corners of the globe.

In the United States, private commercial propaganda is as important to notions of democracy as governmental propaganda. Commercial appeals to the people through advertising, which plays on irrational fantasies and impulses, are some of the most pervasive forms of propaganda in existence today.

Propaganda in a democracy establishes truth in the sense that it creates "true believers" who are as ideologically committed to the democratic progress as others are ideologically committed to its control. The perpetuation of democratic ideals and beliefs in the face of concentrated power in propaganda institutions (media, political institutions) is a triumph of propaganda in modern American society.