



# Propaganda and Persuasion

2nd Edition

Garth S. Jowett  
Victoria O'Donnell

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# **Propaganda and Persuasion** 2nd Edition

To Ada and May, who lived through two World Wars  
and who, in another time and place, took me to the  
movies.

*Garth S. Jowett*

My portion of this book is dedicated to Helen A.  
O'Donnell in memory of a special woman who loved  
life, people, pets, movies, and me.

*Victoria O'Donnell*

# Preface to the First Edition

This book grew out of the discovery that both the authors were interested in the study of propaganda; however, we come to this interest from the perspectives of different academic disciplines: Professor Jowett from that of communication history and Professor O'Donnell from persuasion and rhetoric. To any discerning reader, this will make the primary authorship of the individual chapters obvious, but to keep the record straight Professor Jowett wrote Chapters 2, 3, and 5; Professor O'Donnell was responsible for Chapters 1, 4, and 6. Chapters 7 and 8 are the result of the joint exchange of ideas.

We were both intrigued with how poorly propaganda had fared in recent years as part of general communication studies, and further informal investigations revealed that few students were being given the opportunity or encouragement to examine this subject in a systematic manner. When we questioned our colleagues, we were assured that propaganda as a topic within the communications curriculum still held great interest, but because the subject was so vast in scope, it was difficult to cover it in anything but the most cursory way. This problem was compounded by the lack of suitable classroom materials designed to allow a systematic treatment, without forcing the student to consult a wide array of disparate sources. This book was written with a view to solving some of these problems by presenting an overview of the history of propaganda as well as a review of the social scientific research on its effects and an examination of its applications. We have tried to restrict the narrative so that

it will serve as a guide to further reading on specific issues rather than be encyclopedic in scope.

In the past seventy years there have been many hundreds of books dealing with various aspects of propaganda. There have also been almost an equal number of books and journal articles dealing with persuasion, and very often these two subjects have come to be regarded as synonymous. With the growth in the study of persuasion in the last two decades, propaganda has received scant attention as a subject in its own right within the spectrum of communication studies. With the advent of a whole range of new communication technologies, and the imminent promise of a myriad of channels for disseminating information, the opportunities for increased propaganda activities are obvious. For this reason we believe that the time has come to revive the study of propaganda as a separate topic, and of great significance at this particular point in time.

This book is offered as a modest treatment of a very old subject, and we trust that the reader will be sympathetic to the fact that we could not include a detailed history of propaganda nor a lengthy review of all of the research ever done to evaluate its effectiveness in specific campaigns. Our aim was to provide the reader with a challenge to become involved in the fascinating world of propaganda in the hope that it would stimulate further research and discussion. We both owe an intellectual debt to T. H. Qualter (1962), whose excellent slim volume *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare* was all that was available for a long time, and whose recent detailed monograph *Opinion Control in Democracies* (1985) is a landmark study, but that unfortunately was only received after this volume had been sent to the printer. Other than Qualter and the important work by David L. Altheide and John M. Johnson (1980) *Bureaucratic Propaganda*, the three-volume compilation of important articles by Harold D. Laswell, Daneil Lerner, and Hans Speir, *Propaganda and Communication in World History* (1979), and Richard A. Nelson's (1986) forthcoming detailed bibliography on the subject, there have been very few systematic examinations of propaganda in recent years, and it is our intention that this book fill some of the gaps in the current literature.

What may appear to the readers to be a relatively short book is, in fact, the result of several years of reviewing a vast literature, which is unfortunately reflected only in a minor way in the bibliography. We chose to present in this book both a digest of important and classic ideas on the subject and our original ideas. It has been our goal to produce a work that, we hope, will enable students of modern-day propaganda to recognize, analyze, and evaluate propaganda in

their midst while giving them an appreciation of its history and development. Although respectful of the work of Jacques Ellul, we could not incorporate many of his ideas within the text of this book. We aimed to clarify and distinguish propaganda as a form of communication, but found that we could not do so with Ellul's view of the pervasiveness of propaganda. Also, advertising, although presented as the most prevalent form of propaganda in the United States, does not receive extensive treatment. We felt that advertising as propaganda is such a complex and extensive subject that it required an entire series of studies in itself and that such a treatment was beyond the scope of this book.

Writing a book should always be a learning experience, and this book taught us that we all have a great deal to learn about the role and practice of propaganda in our everyday society. We have also learned that in order not to fear propaganda, we must first understand it.

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*Denton, Texas*



# Preface to the Second Edition

In the six years since the first edition of this book appeared, we have been gratified by the increased interest in the field of propaganda studies. Though it would be premature to declare that the study of propaganda is now an accepted part of all communication studies or political science programs, there are, nevertheless, indications that more and more such courses are appearing. As time separates the study of propaganda from the political ideologies that hovered over academe in the Cold War period, there is a clear revival of interest in the important role of propaganda in many aspects of modern life, not necessarily related to international intrigue or military campaigns.

The publication of the first edition of this book proved to be an important development in both of our academic careers. We presented joint workshops on teaching propaganda studies as part of the communication curriculum for the Speech Communication Association, which were well attended by enthusiastic participants and from whom we learned as much as we taught. Several things were made very clear in these workshops as well as from correspondence with others: First, it is very difficult to get anyone to agree on an exact definition of propaganda, although the definition offered in this book is now (thankfully) widely cited; second, it is a formidable task to get instructors and students to view propaganda as a “neutral” technique, which only in its specific application becomes either “positive” or “negative”; and third, that this is a subject that is guaranteed to raise emotions in the classroom, no matter how it is taught. Also, we have discovered that in the classroom it is only with

a determined effort that discussions of propaganda can be removed from an association with war (and even more specifically, Nazi propaganda activities). This is a testament to the specifically negative connotation that the term *propaganda* has acquired in our society, and also to the persistent and somewhat troublesome strength of Nazi mythology and imagery. (This last fact is a topic that requires its own full-length treatment.) It is one of our stated intentions that the approach outlined in this book, which provides a wider and more systematic examination of propaganda throughout history and in the modern world, will help to enlarge the dimension of the propaganda discourse beyond these limiting subjects.

In the last six years, though the number of books dealing with propaganda in a systematic manner has not been as large as we would have liked to have seen, several publications deserve special mention. Ted Smith, III edited a splendid collection of original essays, *Propaganda: A Pluralistic Perspective* (1989), that contributes to opening up the discussion of what encompasses the discourse of propagandistic activities. A recent book by Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson, *Age of Propaganda: The Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (1991) is admirable in its sociopsychological examination of many aspects of propaganda in contemporary society. Also, the work of Michael Sproule in a series of articles on the history of propaganda analysis in the United States has significantly reshaped our understanding of this topic. Several books that have contributed to the reevaluation of propaganda are Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (1985); Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (1984); Richard W. Steele, *Propaganda in an Open Society: The Roosevelt Administration and the Media, 1933-1941* (1985); Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Captive Public: How Mass Opinion Promotes State Power* (1986); Shearon Lowery and Melvin DeFleur, *Milestones in Mass Communication Research*, 2d ed. (1988); Philip G. Zimbardo and Michael Leippe, *The Psychology of Attitude Change and Social Influence* (1991), and Holly Cowan Shulman's, *The Voice of America: Propaganda and Democracy, 1941-1945* (1990). These and other specialized studies are collectively helping to give shape to the role and dimensions of propaganda in American society.

We have welcomed the opportunity to write a second edition of this book, as much for the chance to enlarge on certain topics as to try and keep up with current events. The few short years since the first edition have been witness to several important historical events that have contributed to the appreciation of propaganda in modern

society. Perhaps the decade will be best remembered for the sudden demise of Communism in Eastern Europe. The first edition was written during a period when the USSR was still "the Evil Empire" described by Ronald Reagan. It was a strange experience in this edition to have to rewrite all of the descriptions of Soviet propaganda activities in the past tense. Even as this book is going to press we still do not know what types of propaganda may emerge from this region. (Today's newspapers, January 3, 1992, are full of stories about the dismantling and replacement of previous Soviet propaganda symbols, such as the giant statues of Lenin and Marx). The fact is we just have no clear idea what type of propaganda will now dominate the international scene. We can only be sure that there will be a continued battle for the "hearts and minds" of the world's population, and the decade of the nineties might see the emergence of an international polarization more along economic than political lines. The differences between the "have" and the "have not" nations will become more obvious, and this will generate its own type of propaganda battle.

This book has been greatly enlarged in certain areas. There is much additional historical material, including a case study of the Crusades, the demagoguery of Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin, and the specific propaganda activities of the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. The Gulf War, while somewhat anticlimactic in the end, was a textbook example of both the positive and negative uses of propaganda, as well as providing a useful new case study for this edition. The section in Chapter 1 that defines propaganda has been greatly expanded based upon our classroom experience with the first edition and has two new models that conceptualize disinformation. The sections on the theoretical aspects of propaganda have been updated to include the latest research that pertains to persuasion and mass media effects and cultural studies. Only one of the original case studies, that involving the tobacco industry, has been retained, but an historical study about the U.S. government and women's work in World War II has been added, and there have been revisions and expansions in every chapter. (Victoria O'Donnell is making a documentary film about the Vanport City, Oregon, case study. It will be available for education uses.)

In the Preface to the first edition we noted that writing this book had been a learning experience for us. This learning experience has not stopped, for the more that we attempt to understand the subject of propaganda the more we discover what remains yet to be learned. In particular the past six years have witnessed the increasing use of

professional "manipulators" of public opinion, especially in the political arena. Unchecked, this trend threatens, at worst, to subvert the very foundations of our democratic society, and, at best, to make the public even more suspicious about politics and the mass media. We need to be continuously vigilant about giving over our democratic rights to these highly skilled operators. It has been our experience that students who have studied propaganda are extremely adept at spotting, and even hostile to, such professional manipulation of public opinion. It is our fervent wish that all who use this book will acquire such skills because the future of democracy and the free expression of ideas depend upon it.

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# Acknowledgments

When we wrote the first edition of *Propaganda and Persuasion*, we were separated by 400 miles, but we were able to work together at intervals. For this edition, almost 2000 miles lay between our respective universities in Texas and Montana, thus we did everything by telephone, mail, computers, and the fax machine. The new technologies that impact the nature of propaganda also affected the writing of the second edition. We were fortunate to also temporarily reside in New York and London and respectively gathered valuable materials in those cities. To the film archivist at the Imperial War Museum who not only showed films in a private screening but who also made tea as well, a special thanks.

We wish to thank our publishers, especially our editor Ann West, for their infinite patience and enormous support of this new, enlarged edition. Also, the many reviewers of the first edition who reminded us of what we omitted and who lifted our spirits by liking what we included. A special thanks goes to Robert W. Smith of Alma College who made so many helpful suggestions. Our many students who took our propaganda courses and some who wrote theses on the subject gave us treasured insights and special information. As always, we probably learned more from them than they did from us.

Many of the illustrations in this edition are in the public domain. We have indicated permission statements where required, but were unable to track down the copyright, if any, of many others. The authors would welcome correspondence with those who feel that they have a legitimate copyright claim to any material in this book.

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# 1 What Is Propaganda and How Does It Differ From Persuasion?

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Propaganda is a form of communication that is different from persuasion because it attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist. Persuasion is transactive and attempts to satisfy the needs of both persuader and persuadee. A model of propaganda depicts how elements of informative and persuasive communication may be incorporated in propagandistic communication. References are made to past theories of rhetoric that indicate that propaganda has had few systematic theoretical treatments prior to the twentieth century. Public opinion and behavior change can be affected by propaganda.

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Propaganda has been studied as history, political science, sociology, and psychology as well as from an interdisciplinary perspective. To study propaganda as history is to examine the practices of propagandists as events and the subsequent events as possible effects of propaganda. To examine propaganda in light of political science is to analyze the ideologies of the practitioners and the dissemination and impact of public opinion. To approach propaganda as sociology is to look at social movements and the counterpropaganda that emerges in opposition. To investigate propaganda as psychology is to determine its effects on individuals. Propaganda is also viewed by some scholars as inherent thought and practice in mass culture. A recent trend that draws on most of these allied fields is the study of propaganda as a purveyor of ideology and, to this end, is largely a study of how dominant ideological meanings are constructed within the mass media (Burnett, 1989). Ethnographic research is one way to determine whether the people on the receiving end accept or resist dominant ideological meanings.



This book approaches the study of propaganda as communication. Persuasion, another category of communication, is also examined. The two terms *propaganda* and *persuasion* have been used interchangeably in the literature on propaganda as well as in common usage. There is a certain amount of overlap, but the two terms can be differentiated. A communication approach to the study of propaganda enables us to isolate its communicative variables, to determine the relationship of message to context, to examine intentionality, to examine the responses and responsibilities of the audience, and to trace the development of propagandistic communication as a process.

We believe that there is a need to evaluate propaganda in a contemporary context free from value-laden definitions. Our objectives are to (a) provide a concise examination of propaganda and persuasion, (b) examine the role of propaganda as an aspect of communication studies, and (c) analyze propaganda as part of social, religious, and political systems throughout history and contemporary times.

### Propaganda Defined

*Propaganda*, in the most neutral sense, means to disseminate or promote particular ideas. In Latin, it meant "to propagate" or "to sow." In 1622, the Vatican established the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, meaning "the sacred congregation for propagating the faith of the Roman Catholic church." Because the propaganda of the Roman Catholic church had as its intent spreading the faith to the New World as well as opposing Protestantism, the word *propaganda* lost its neutrality, and subsequent usage has rendered the term pejorative. To identify a message as propaganda is to suggest something negative and dishonest. Words frequently used as synonyms for propaganda are *lies*, *distortion*, *deceit*, *manipulation*, *psychological warfare*, and *brainwashing*. Many of these synonyms are suggestive of techniques of message production rather than purpose or process.

When usage emphasizes purpose, propaganda is associated with control and is regarded as a deliberate attempt to alter or maintain a balance of power that is advantageous to the propagandist. Deliberate attempt is linked with a clear institutional ideology and objective. In fact, the purpose of propaganda is to send out an ideology to an audience with a related objective. Whether it is a government agency attempting to instill a massive wave of patriotism in a national audience to support a war effort, a military leader attempting to frighten the enemy by exaggerating his or her strength, or a corporation