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COM416: Propaganda

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Leap 3: Propaganda Inquiry

COM 416 has taken me on a deep dive into propaganda, helping me understand its many forms and how it subtly influences things. From defining what propaganda is to identifying its various forms and deciphering its messages, the class has covered a wide spectrum, including topics like conspiracy theories and activism propaganda. The teaching approach not only deepened my understanding of propaganda but also clarified its complexities, revealing aspects previously unknown to me. I've gained a deeper understanding of its widespread impact on our lives. This essay discusses five key insights that were most meaningful to me: propaganda history, journalism's role in shaping narratives, the manipulation of patriotism, the connection between conspiracy theories and propaganda, and how terrorism is portrayed as a form of propaganda.

Journalism's Role in Propaganda

Before enrolling in this course, my awareness of biases in journalism was limited to the understanding that media outlets might lean towards certain perspectives. However, the revelation that journalism could play a direct role in propagating specific messages caught me off guard. The instance featuring Kellyanne Conway's use of the term "alternative facts" during a Meet the Press interview in 2017 served as a wake-up call. This showcased how language can be

manipulated to present a subjective version of reality, blurring the line between factual reporting and persuasive storytelling. I've learned that even seemingly unbiased information can carry undertones of propaganda, prompting a more critical evaluation of the information I encounter daily.

Navigating through the exploration of journalism's role in propaganda, I've come to understand that it's not just about the facts presented; it's about how those facts are presented. The selection of language, the framing of headlines, and the choice of images contribute to a narrative that goes beyond simple reporting, influencing opinions in subtle yet profound ways. This insight has transformed my approach to consuming news, making me more vigilant about recognizing the potential influence of propaganda in journalistic narratives.

History: Nazi Propaganda

Learning about Nazi propaganda revealed that its effects from the past still resonate in today's discussions and conversations. During the aftermath of World War I, economic hardships provided fertile ground for the Nazi party to exploit societal grievances. The Nazis utilized propaganda to create an illusion of heroism and present themselves as the solution to the nation's problems. Examining this historical example underscores the potency of propaganda in shaping public opinion. The Nazis' efficient use of propaganda played a pivotal role in advancing persecution and indifference, particularly towards Europe's Jews. The climate of hatred fostered by propaganda paved the way for catastrophic consequences.

Nazi propaganda isn't just looking at history; it's a lesson for how we should be careful in the present. It serves as a reminder of the manipulative potential of propaganda and the

devastating impact it can have on societies. This highlighted for me the link between propaganda and socio-economic conditions, showcasing how manipulative narratives can emerge in vulnerable environments. Moreover, studying the efficient use of propaganda by the Nazis shed light on its role in fostering a climate of hatred, particularly towards Europe's Jews, leading to catastrophic consequences. This exploration expanded my awareness of how propaganda can exploit economic challenges and contribute to widespread discrimination, providing a clear understanding of its far-reaching implications beyond historical events.

Conspiracy Theories on Public Health Concerns

Conspiracy theories, by their nature, often involve the manipulation of information to create alternative narratives. The term "conspiracy theory" itself can be viewed as a form of labeling, a tool that shapes public perceptions. The media plays a pivotal role in either perpetuating or countering these narratives, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between conspiracy theories and propaganda. This was by far my favorite thing we learned about all semester. I've consistently found conspiracy theories fascinating, and I enjoy delving into various ones. It's genuinely intriguing to explore the diverse narratives people believe in and the sometimes astonishing ideas circulating around significant topics. While some theories may prompt individuals to question and seek knowledge, others pose significant public health concerns.

A glaring example in recent times is the conspiracy theory surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine. An alarming realization is that some conspiracy theories are not merely harmless speculations but genuine public health concerns. The notion that the COVID-19 vaccine is a

sinister plot by the government has led to hesitancy and, in some cases, refusal to get vaccinated. This phenomenon, driven by wealthy financiers with ulterior motives, highlights the intersection of conspiracy theories with broader issues of health and misinformation. On the positive side, learning about conspiracy theories can enhance our critical thinking skills. By encouraging us to question information, these theories serve as a catalyst for independent research and a more informed citizenry. However, the downside is evident in instances where unfounded theories gain traction, leading to tangible consequences. The COVID-19 vaccine conspiracy, claiming it to be harmful, has fueled vaccine hesitancy and jeopardized public health efforts. This underscores the responsibility of both individuals and the media to scrutinize and counter misinformation that poses real threats to the well-being of communities.

Manipulation of Patriotism

Moving forward, the exploration of how Patriotism can be employed as a powerful tool for shaping national narratives provides valuable insights into the complexities of emotional connections to one's country. The coursework illuminated instances where Patriotism becomes a double-edged sword, used both to unite and strategically advance specific agendas. An example from an article titled "How I came to view the American flag as a threat" by David Young showcased the manipulation of patriotic symbols for propagandist purposes.

This exploration of Patriotism as a propagandist tool emphasized how symbols laden with national pride can be tactically employed to advance particular narratives and ideologies. The personal narrative shared by David Young added a real-life dimension to the understanding of this manipulation, highlighting the intersection of personal sentiments, political agendas, and

propaganda's potential to shape individual perspectives on national symbols. This insight has made me more attuned to the ways in which emotions tied to national identity can be strategically harnessed for propagandist purposes. The three types of patriotism – G-patriotism (good), B-patriotism (bad), and U-patriotism (ugly) – encapsulate the spectrum of allegiance to one's country. Good patriotism, marked by responsibility and guided by reason, manifests in collective efforts during challenging times. However, the bad and ugly forms can be manipulated to suppress dissent and fuel violence, as seen in instances of political unrest. This class opened my eyes to a whole new way of thinking about patriotism that I hadn't considered before.

Conspiracy Theories and Propaganda

The coursework's examination of conspiracy theories, with a focus on the prominent example of QAnon, revealed the symbiotic relationship between these fringe narratives and propaganda. The detailed exploration of how QAnon's elaborate and unfounded narratives gained traction, attracting a dedicated following, underscored the broader impact of conspiracy theories on public discourse and societal perceptions.

The influence of QAnon illustrated how conspiracy theories can be wielded as tools to mold public perception, tapping into existing uncertainties and fostering mistrust. The coursework emphasized that not all conspiracy theories are inherently malicious, but their potential to shape public opinion and influence social discourse cannot be ignored. This insight has heightened my awareness of the need to be cautious regarding the information I seek, especially in an era where misinformation can easily gain popularity. Understanding how

misinformation can influence public opinion has become crucial, emphasizing the importance of media literacy in navigating a landscape saturated with conspiracy theories.

Terrorism as Propaganda

The exploration of terrorism as a form of propaganda, particularly through the lens of the Paris Massacre in 2015, provided a profound understanding of how tragic events can be strategically manipulated to serve propagandist agendas. The aftermath of the Paris Massacre showcased how terrorist organizations, such as ISIS, employed propaganda to amplify the impact of their actions, instigating fear on a global scale. The use of social media platforms as potent tools for the dissemination of propaganda materials, including graphic images and videos, highlighted the interconnected nature between terrorism and media. This insight into the exploitation of tragic events underscored the importance of recognizing the potential for propaganda within the context of terrorism. It emphasized the need for a discerning society that can distinguish between genuine reporting and manipulated narratives, fostering resilience against the psychological impact of such acts.

In conclusion, this exploration of propaganda throughout the semester has transformed my understanding of the term from a distant and complex concept to a prevalent influence in our daily lives. The five key insights, ranging from journalism's role in shaping narratives to the symbiotic relationship between conspiracy theories and propaganda, have deepened my awareness of the subtle ways information is manipulated to influence public perception.

The examination of how Patriotism can be both unifying and divisive, especially with real-life examples, has highlighted the ways in which emotions tied to national identity can be tactically employed. The insights into conspiracy theories, especially using QAnon as an example, have shown me how these unusual ideas can quickly spread and affect what people believe, emphasizing the need for careful consideration of the information we seek. Examining terrorism as a form of propaganda, particularly through the lens of the Paris Massacre, has made me truly understand the profound impact tragic events can have on shaping global perceptions. Acts of terror, strategically planned to extend their reach far beyond immediate victims and geographical locations, operate not only as violent acts but as meticulously crafted narratives designed to influence public perceptions on a global scale.

As I reflect on these insights, it's crucial to remember that propaganda isn't some distant concept—it's always around us, influencing our daily lives. Moving forward, I am definitely going to be more cautious in what I believe to be true, questioning more to seek the truth. Overall I really enjoyed the course, at times I struggled but I got through it and genuinely learned so much about the different forms of propaganda.

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