

Propaganda

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Destructive and immoral or righteous and adequate, propaganda is inescapable. It can be characterized as “information or ideas methodically spread to promote or injure a cause, movement, nation etc, and the deliberate spread of such information or ideas,” according to Webster’s College Dictionary. At its roots, it is more so a means of deception than it is persuasion.

My initial insight regarding propaganda is that it is inherently evil. It is undeniable that as humans, we remain forever accountable for our actions and thoughts. However, propaganda is deceptive in the fact that the propagandist’s true motive is disguised and replaced with manipulative techniques that weaken the freedom of those receiving the messages. There is an apparent negative connotation surrounding propaganda. It’s overarching goal is to convince the recipient that they have a choice. Rather than forcing those to comply, propaganda does a successful job at subtly compelling those to voluntarily take on the stance as if it stemmed internally (Cunningham).

Governments, elitists, and world leaders understand the powerful nature of propaganda. It is a valuable asset in wartime. This leads me to my second insight which is that propaganda has been employed throughout history as a tool to engage citizens in war. Arguably one of the most detrimental ways propaganda has been exercised throughout history is in these instances. Notorious for harmful propaganda, Adolf Hitler was able to successfully use propaganda to compel his entire country of his National Socialism ideals. Conduits of propaganda have a great understanding of Kairos. Kairos is the opportune moment. In the midst of turmoil and division, Hitler used this to his advantage to unify the country during the Great Depression by giving them a beacon of hope, in an otherwise dark world. By targeting the most ideal audience, which in Hitler’s case, was the working class, the Nazi party was able to appeal to their immediate needs

such as providing labor and food, and ultimately gained their favor. The Nazi regime's governance led to the mass genocide of Jews. This use of propaganda, rooted in Hitler's dislike of Jews, promoted anti-semitism and was a critical tool in attaining blind reinforcement from his people. The Nazi party was skilled. They took control of all forms of media such as movies, radio, book publishing, newspapers and magazines, theatre, museums, and musicals. This left little to no room for outsourcing. Hitler pictured the Jewish people to be traders as well as the cause of Germany being in the state it was in. This type of propaganda was crude and emphasizes how propaganda can shape an entire narrative.

When WWII emerged, propaganda was not just exclusive to Germany. Most countries employed some means of it. The moral use of propaganda is in question during times of war, but the common belief held is that there is a greater good to fight and the enemy must be overly demonized. The American government propelled a belligerently aggressive campaign to recruit the public in the efforts to put a halt on the war. According to David Welch, propaganda has a multitude of purposes. "In modern warfare, propaganda is required to (1) mobilize hatred against the enemy; (2) convince the justness of one's own cause; (3) enlist the active support and cooperation of neutral countries; and (4) strengthen the support of one's allies. Having sought to pin war guilt on the enemy, the next step is to make the enemy appear savage, barbaric, and inhumane." (Welch 2017, xiv)

We cannot drift too far from the fact that propaganda, in any regard for any means, is still manipulative, but there seems to be a sort of forgiveness, and it is easy to overlook tactics used by our own government to persuade our citizens into joining the war because of how grave of an issue the Holocaust was. Bill Lambrecht stated, "In war, truth is a relative commodity and propaganda a staple of battle." (Lambrecht).

It is interesting to unearth the ethics behind wartime and how critical of a role propaganda plays. The same way one country is being fed a certain narrative goes to show that another country is led to believe something entirely different. Unfortunately it appears the truth resides somewhere unknown, and we are left doing what we think is morally correct, because as we learned, propaganda is truly in the eye of the beholder. No matter what citizens are being shown, they hold the choice in their hands.

With current technologies, human beings are more connected than ever, yet there is a huge disparity in belief systems. It seems that the phenomenon of fake news has set off a disastrous chain of falsehoods that are mainly politically charged. This leaves journalism at a crossroad. An instrument that was created to shine light on what is dark is now the means of darkness.

Growing up, I had always assumed journalists were the ultimate sources of truth. Looking back, I recognize how I was completely deceived. I am not alone in this. Many people are beginning to question the news that is being fed to them. This brings up my next insight as to how great of a role technology plays in the midst of a chaotic world of fake news and a major distrust of common media outlets.

Technology plays a major part in the transparency of media. Prior to computers and phones, outsourcing information was not that simple and was much more controlled and monitored. I would argue that our right to freedom of speech has only been amplified by the emergence of technology. With the Internet and social media, news spreads like wildfire. There are also countless websites and channels to receive all different sorts of information. The surge of technology in recent years is both good and bad. It is helpful because there are more avenues to give and receive information whereas without this technology, it would be harder if not,

impossible, to do so. Sources such as YouTube, social media, and even websites give people an independent platform. It is harmful because the more means to spread news, the higher the chance it can be false.

This coincides with conspiracy theories, which is actually a perfect example of how people can fall into propaganda traps on the internet. There are a plethora of conspiracy theories from flat-earthers to QAnon. Some are more dangerous than others. QAnon believes that President Donald Trump is battling satanic pedophiles and in a secret war with the “deep state.” This originated as an online forum but has turned into a mainstream belief system for some hardcore conservatives. This is where it becomes dangerous. Those who believe the earth is flat aren’t as alarming as those who are ready to battle “satanic pedophiles.” (Olito). This is an accurate instance of the dark web and people’s freedom of speech on the internet being harmful because this type of behavior can in fact create problems because this creates hysteria and mass confusion. A key takeaway I learned is that the best way to combat fake news and misinformation is to first recognize it. Living in an era of clickbait, the dark web, and social media, it is easy to get caught in a cast of lies.

It might be a comforting thought that the media is there to serve us and its primary function is to provide us with the ultimate truth but I’m here to tell you it does quite the opposite. In our current climate of fake news and the collaboration between large media outlets, big businesses, and the federal government, the news given to us is being manufactured and drifts far from being authentic. It may not be seen by the naked eye, but there is a major monopoly on the media in America. There are essentially two to three major news channels that people watch. Everyone knows CNN is more liberal and progressive in their viewpoints whereas those who watch Fox News have more conservative beliefs. Propaganda has become a system and focuses

on the stories that fit their narrative and are convenient to their “truth.” This domination leads to whistle-blowers and smaller news outlets attempting to provide the public with the truth.

By nature, human beings are emotional. We are also creatures of habit. People prefer news that parallel their already existing beliefs. In any regard, humans normally gravitate towards likeminded people. This is seen in social settings to political party systems. Pew Research shows us how CNN is trusted by 70% of Democrats compared to only 16% of Republicans. On the other hand, Fox News is trusted by 75% of Republicans and only 12% of Democrats. This is indicative of how people, in a way, choose their propaganda. They identify with a channel, or a party, that has similar values, and they feed into that particular system (Pew Research).

This leads me to my next insight which is how we, the people, play a part in propaganda. No we are not zombies. We do not have plankton inside our brains controlling our every thought and movement. It is irresponsible to place all the blame on large media outlets and our government. Before taking this class, I never truly analyzed propaganda. In a way, I was just as susceptible to it as anyone else. I find it important to recognize the control we have because propaganda is not easily avoidable. The amount of misinformation inflaming the coronavirus pandemic alongside the confusion that encircled the 2020 presidential election just shows how much of an influence it has on citizens and how easy it is to get roped into lies. This year alone has infected people’s trust with the media on a large scale.

Last but most certainly not least, my final insight is how evil indoctrination is and even more so, how common it is. Indoctrination is not a method of learning. In fact, I resonate with Jonah Canner’s distinction between indoctrination and education. He states, “Education opens the mind, while indoctrination closes it. Education is a process-driven approach to engaging with

knowledge and ideas of the world . . . Indoctrination, on the other hand, is a results-driven approach that aims to instill in people a set of habits and beliefs that align with an ideology or political agenda.” Indoctrination is a form of propaganda because it pushes a hidden agenda. As we know, propaganda does a phenomenal job at discerning their target audience. The ideal audience always remains the most vulnerable. What minds are more malleable than children? This type of “learning” cultivates ignorance and indoctrination is insulting. The most concerning aspect of this approach to education is that most of it goes unnoticed. Parents were unaware of harmful curriculums until they opened their children’s books. This type of education should be illegal. Teachers are supposed to be trusted and schools are supposed to be places of creativity and knowledge. A place that is nothing more than a factory planting seeds inside of young minds is not what freedom stands for in any way shape or form. Unfortunately it doesn’t end there. Colleges push certain ideologies and have a hand in persuading political beliefs amongst students. There is a clear educational divide amongst universities and political attitudes. Colleges do push a progressive ideology whereas I feel no political ideologies should be pushed at all. Education and political beliefs are two separate systems and should not intertwine. Instances like this add to a deeper national divide.

We also discussed political monuments and if they hold any value being present in today’s day and age. This makes me wonder, what parts of history still have a place in textbooks. I think the given recent events, it should be noted that our textbooks perhaps aren’t indicative of what morals and values are true to all of America, not just one race that lives in America. We’ve been indoctrinated our entire lives, leaning a false history with false heroic figures. This type of propaganda is dangerous because it is the American government trying to push a certain story. The funny thing about history is that you only hear the winner’s side. The scary thing about this

world is that in each different country, that country is the winner. This is how nationalism is perpetuated by school systems and governments. America is not perfect, America just came out of many things unscathed. This is why foreigners are able to recognize propaganda in America's entertainment industry because the entertainment industry goes hand in hand with this view that America is trying so hard to upkeep. We've been taught for the entirety of our lives that America is always right. This has made us trust our government. That gives the government the power to do what they want, not what we want, all the while we blindly accept it due to years of indoctrination. It is especially harmful when the indoctrination is starting as young as first grade. Children are the first ones to have full faith in authority and the government is aware of this which is why they start a pro-American campaign that early on in our lives. It really gives me hope that indoctrination is at least being recognized. The best defense against this type of brainwashing is to take back our power as a nation and conclude that this is the sort of thing we will not stand for. I applaud people who do homeschool because they are at least free of this type of attack. This is why I argue that indoctrination is insidious and one of the most harmful forms of propaganda.

To conclude my thoughts regarding propaganda, this class has been critical in my newfound understanding of the means by which we are subliminally attacked on a daily basis. The fact of the matter is, we cannot stop propaganda. Although, what we can stop is contributing to it. Something seemingly benign is actually for more evil than I would've imagined. As an American and as a student, I find it a grave matter to be aware of how much misinformation we consume in our day to day lives. As a person who uses the internet and social media, I find it morally critical to not spread false news and to try my absolute best to recognize when I'm absorbing media that is framed in a certain light. If there is anything I can pass along from the

knowledge that I have gained, it is to not be sponge, but rather be glass. Let water hit you, let the information be splash you in the face, but do not let it become you.

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