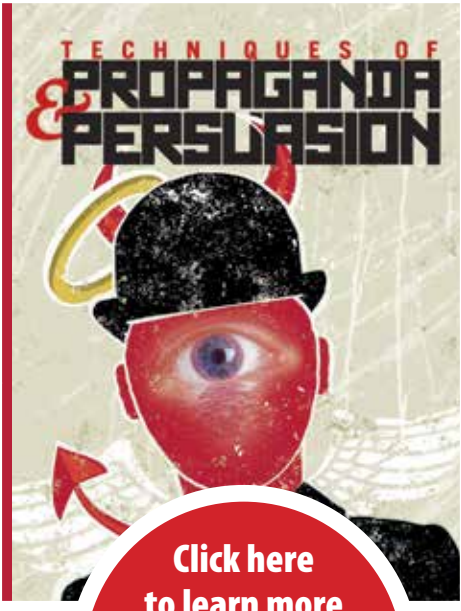




Techniques of Propaganda
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RECOGNIZING PROPAGANDA

Not all persuasive messages that target large audiences qualify as propaganda. In fact, even when such messages promote a specific agenda, they are often based on perfectly legitimate, soundly reasoned arguments. In propaganda, by contrast, logic is replaced with faulty reasoning, emotional appeals, or a combination of the two.

However compelling it may seem at first glance, true propaganda does not stand up to scrutiny. For example, take the following poster:



This World War I poster claims that *you* can save this family by contributing to the Women’s Apparel Association. It also claims that if you fail to donate, you are directly responsible for the deaths of these three individuals. However, even if we assume that your contribution to the Apparel Unit really would keep an entire family alive, and not merely clothe a few individuals, there is no way to know whom your donation is reaching. The particular family in the drawing may not even exist. Hence, it is probably impossible to fulfill the guilt-inspiring command, “Don’t let them die.” This poster is an example of propaganda that combines faulty logic with an emotional appeal.



This German World War II poster makes the assertion that “Europe’s victory is your prosperity.”

Consider an example from George Orwell’s fictional study of propaganda and mind control, *1984*. In the novel, the following three slogans of “the Party” are emblazoned on the walls of the Ministry of Truth building:

WAR IS PEACE

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

CHAPTER 3: CARD STACKING

Card stacking is a technique in which the propagandist gives an unfair advantage to one point of view, while weakening another. While arguments that use the card-stacking technique are usually honest in terms of the information shared, they may be misleading because they present information out of context or obscure important facts.



In this poster, the prospect of travel and adventure is strongly emphasized, both visually and verbally. The sacrifice required in exchange for this excitement, on the other hand, is obscured at the bottom of the page in the phrase, “Enlist to-day for 2-3 or 4 years.”

Arguments that use card stacking are convincing because they often rely on sound reasoning and facts. The problem is that, in this technique, conflicting perspectives are unfairly downplayed; that is why card stacking is often referred to as the sin of omission.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

These questions are intended as starting points for class discussions; for most, there is no right or wrong answer. However, all responses should be defended in a way that demonstrates an understanding of the principles of propaganda that have been discussed in this chapter.

1. Glittering generalities are a common part of political campaigns. Compose a list of glittering generalities you have heard in campaign slogans, in debates, or in the news media.

2. Like politicians and journalists, advertisers often use glittering generalities to promote their products. Create a list of glittering generalities that are commonly used in advertising.

3. Under what conditions are words like “freedom” and “choice” not glittering generalities? Use each word in a sentence that does not qualify as a glittering generality.

4. Create a caption to go with this image that would make this an example of lesser-of-two-evils propaganda.



CHAPTER 10: TESTIMONIALS

Testimonials are a form of propaganda that is familiar to nearly all of us. Almost everything that is advertised comes with some sort of testimonial, from music, to hair gel, to politicians. Testimonials take advantage of the fact that there are certain people we tend to trust—even if that trust is based on mere recognition rather than true credibility. The propagandist can, therefore, use testimonials to convince us of something, regardless of whether there is any logical reason for us to be convinced.

An Olympic gold medal winner claims that she eats Golden Flakes every morning.

Most testimonials—both in politics and in advertising—are made by famous people. You may read that an actor you admire supports a certain political candidate. You may see a singer you like using a certain cell phone. You may watch a commercial in which a popular athlete advises you to buy a certain pair of shoes. Every day, we are flooded with endorsements from famous people, encouraging us to buy, use, and vote for the same things they do.



Movie stars and models are often paid to give testimonials in which they attribute their beauty and success to a given product.

In times of war, the fear of death is used widely in government propaganda. Particularly when the danger seems remote, bringing the fear of death home to the citizens is important in garnering support for the war effort. During the Cold War, for example, it was important that Americans be reminded regularly that the Soviet Union could, at any moment, attack the United States and kill millions. Regular school drills prepared students for a nuclear attack, citizens were instructed on the proper disposal of radioactive fallout, and shelters were erected to make the public aware of the dire threat posed by the Soviet Union.

In a series of survival pamphlets put out by the Civil Defense Office, the US government played upon citizens' fears, even while spreading potentially helpful information. Such an "information campaign" might have been genuinely helpful in preparing citizens to face potential dangers, but it also served the secondary function of gaining support for the Cold War initiatives of the United States.



There is no escaping the fact that nuclear conflict would leave a tragic world... The experience would be terrible beyond imagination and description... There are no total answers, no easy answers, no cheap answers to the question of protection from nuclear attack. But there are answers. Some of them are in this booklet. —Fallout Protection, 1961

CHAPTER 20: PROVOKING FEAR AND HOSTILITY

As previously discussed, fear is one of the most powerful motivators—and for good reason. When we are afraid, we often respond with a fight-or-flight reaction that allows us to make split-second, life-saving decisions. The fear reaction allows us to dodge speeding cars and defend ourselves from animal attacks. However, in a panicked state of mind, we often lose much of our capacity for rational thought. While fear may be helpful in situations of physical danger, it is not the ideal state of mind for making complex decisions.

The things people are most afraid of—disease, crime, economic collapse, and other calamities—are usually complicated issues, with complex causes and solutions. Our rational minds should be operating at maximum capacity when dealing with such issues, not shutting down to let our emotions take over. But, it is easy to be overwhelmed with feelings, and propagandists depend on this emotional response when they try to evoke fear in people they want to manipulate.

Different cultures and different eras have been dominated by different fears. In twenty-first century America, for example, concerns about security are a powerful motivator. Think of all the ways in which propaganda in the modern age tells you that your security is tenuous and attack is imminent from all directions. Terrorists may be planning their next attack on innocent civilians. Someone may be stealing your identity and ruining your credit. The world's supply of oil is running out, so you may not be able to drive in the near future. The world is heating up, and the ice caps are melting, so your house may soon be under water. Your children may be abducted and murdered. Your house may be destroyed in a horrible fire, earthquake, or flood, and you may wind up homeless.

Today, all a thief needs is your name and address to take your most precious possession ... your identity.

We are bombarded by almost constant threats. The phrase “culture of fear” has been used to describe this atmosphere of unease and distrust, in which the everyday vagaries of the world seem to threaten our very lives.