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Manipulating the Masses

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The term "propaganda" originally had no unsavory connotation. It derives from 17th-century Italy, where the Catholic Church was trying to counteract some of the inflammatory charges leveled against it by figures leading the Protestant Reformation. Pope Gregory XV created the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith). It was initiated not only to counteract disinformation from heresiarchs in northern Europe, but also to create materials for spreading the faith to indigenous peoples in the New World.

It wasn't until the 1920s that the term fell into public disfavor, since it was associated with disinformation campaigns from WWI. After the adrenaline of combat subsided and hostilities gave way to rational assessment, people started discovering the many ways their own governments had misled them in the lead-up to the war. They learned, for instance, about the first British Ministry of Propaganda. Lord Beaverbrook (a participant of the internationalist Milner Group) had tapped bestselling author Arnold Bennett to manage propaganda campaigns and recruit many of his friends (such as socialist author H.G. Wells) to come up with fabrications designed to manipulate the emotions of undiscriminating readers.

As historian Jo Fox writes in her article *Atrocity Propaganda*, "The power of atrocity stories derived in part from their ability to stand either alone, as singular acts of barbarism and moral depravity, or as a series of pre-meditated collective behaviours that condemned a nation. These shocking stories allowed propagandists to justify the war, encourage men to enlist, raise funds for war loans schemes, and shake the United States from its neutrality. The impact of such propaganda was enduring, lasting well into 1918 and beyond."

It was only after the Armistice that the public discovered that the Germans had not in fact been using babies for bayonet-practice, or crucifying Belgians, or rolling out giant wooden rape machines to mortify Christian maidenhood in the Low Countries.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the Committee for Public Information was formed as a sort of sister organization to the British Ministry of Propaganda. One former propagandist who had worked for it during the war was Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Walter Lippmann, who later disclosed many of the fabrications that he had personally been involved with in his celebrated book *Public Opinion* (1922).

In it, he frankly discussed the techniques used to trick the public. One of these methodologies was the use of "stereotypes," a term he coined. A stereotype was a vivid mental picture of a thing that the propagandist confabulated and disseminated among the population to prime them to mentally see certain "screen realities." Lippmann wrote, "For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the

form stereotyped for us by our culture."

One of the "stereotypes" that the Committee for Public Information was tasked with creating was that of the "bloodthirsty Teutonic barbarian," "the Hun," as he was branded (with the intent of creating associations with Atilla). Countless magazine images, newspaper illustrations, posters, and movies were generated to consolidate this stereotype.

Lippmann adds, "Without some form of censorship, propaganda in the strict sense of the word is impossible. In order to conduct a propaganda there must be some barrier between the public and the event. Access to the real environment must be limited, before anyone can create a pseudo-environment that he thinks wise or desirable."

Germanophobia: Anti-German sentiment reached new heights in the United States during WWI, with propaganda posters such as these depicting Germans as ape-like brutes intent on crossing the Atlantic and ravaging America.

To make the propaganda effective, to generate the virtual-reality landscape of the "pseudo-environment," as Lippmann called it, the media would have to become a filter, interposing itself between the public and the real environment. In collaboration, the government would ramp up censorship efforts to silence anyone calling attention to the pseudo-environment. And this is just what President Woodrow Wilson did, when he appointed George Creel to preside over America's first official censorship board. Mail, telegrams, pamphlets, books, newspapers, plays, photographs, and even the conversations of average citizens were all subject to restrictions. According to Asbury Park Press staff writer Erik Larsen in his article *100 Years Ago: Americans Debated Whether to Censor the Press*, "In 1917, the Espionage Act was passed which made it a crime to interfere with military recruitment and the operations of American armed forces. The following year, the so-called Sedition Act was added to the Espionage Act that limited free speech during the war."

Congress repealed these sweeping wartime laws on December 13, 1920, declaring them unconstitutional. With the cessation of censorship and repression, the truth of wartime propaganda began to seep into the public domain, with large segments of the population declaring their outrage upon reading works such as those of Walter Lippmann or his colleague and fellow propagandist Edward Bernays. Bernays was the nephew of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. It was Bernays who, seeing that the term "propaganda" had fallen into disfavor after the war, coined the term "public relations" as a

substitute. It was also Bernays who conceptualized using propaganda (which had hitherto been a weapon of psychological warfare) not on enemy nations, but on domestic populations with the intent of selling not war, but products.

He was soon sought after by most of America's largest corporations, who were impressed by the success he had in marketing cigarettes to women (thus doubling the profits of the tobacco industry). He did this by capitalizing on what psychology calls associative conditioning, telling females that cigarettes were really "torches of freedom," symbolizing independence and resistance to "the patriarchy."

It was Bernays who envisioned running society not as a republic, but as a technocracy. In his book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923), he crowed that mass media made a new form of social control possible. For the first time since Aristotle wrote about the classical forms of government 2,500 years ago, a new form of government had emerged — one in which the power structure could use the technology of communication to shape public opinion, and thus set policy.

"The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society," wrote Bernays. "Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country."

Groupthink

In the late 19th century, French social scientist Gabriel Tarde was distressed by a phenomenon he was observing whereby people no longer shared their own personal experiences as small talk, but rather began retailing events that they read about in the media.

"Newspapers have transformed … unified in space and diversified in time the conversations of individuals," he wrote, adding that "even those who do not read papers but who, talking to those who do, are forced to follow the groove of their borrowed thoughts. One pen suffices to set off a million tongues."

The power of the press became monumental. A single journalist could generate a slogan or catchphrase and see it proliferate across the culture, with people uttering it as if it were their own original thought.

One of Tarde's colleagues was Gustave LeBon, who published the first book on mass psychology, *The Crowd*, in 1895. It was LeBon who first documented how, when people were part of a mob, their own sense of responsibility went into abeyance. Their individual personalities receded and they became atoms in a larger organism. Things that an individual would never have done on his own, he will participate in when subsumed within a crowd — for instance, a lynch mob. LeBon remarked, "The crowd does not have a brain; it merely has a spinal column."

One of Edward Bernays' most penetrating insights in the early 20th century was that one could take advantage of these breakthroughs in psychology and leverage them for the use of propaganda. For instance, in his book *Propaganda*, Bernays expresses the importance of recognizing human beings' nature as herd animals. If the propagandist could generate the false impression that "the crowd" was doing a particular thing, then it would create a powerful magnetic pull for the individual to conform to it. Before Bernays, politicians engaged in rhetoric designed to appeal to the individual. Bernays, by contrast, bypassed the solitary citizen altogether and went straight to the "reptilian brain" by addressing not individuals, but crowds. It was Bernays who conceptualized using "influencers" to shepherd the rest of the public into a form of "group consensus."

We still see these methodologies. Climate change, for instance, is promoted by saying "97 percent of scientists agree" or "It's the scientific consensus."

Likewise, we turn on the TV and see surrogates from political parties promoting pre-scripted talking points, specifically designed to have the public repeat them as if they were their own original thoughts. The Clinton impeachment of the 1990s provides an example of this phenomenon, whereby "influencers" went on TV and mouthed the phrase, "What the president did was wrong, but it does not rise to the level of an impeachment." This phrase was parroted endlessly by a succession of think-tank spokesmen and political surrogates until the puzzled bystander went to work on Monday and overheard chatter at the water cooler, where a co-worker would wrinkle his brow pensively and share the insight that "what the president did was wrong, but it does not rise to the level of an impeachment."

Master of propaganda: Edward Bernays, nephew of Sigmund Freud, produced several influential books on the methods of propaganda, as well as coining the term "public relations."

As Gabriel Tarde noted more than a century before, the average person would utter the talking point word-for-word, unaware that it wasn't his own thought.

"The press unifies and invigorates conversations," wrote Tarde. "Every morning the papers give their publics the conversations of the day.… This increasing similarity of simultaneous conversations in an ever more vast geographic domain is one of the most important characteristics of our time."

Tarde wasn't the only one in the 19th century who was alarmed by the effects of technology and mass media on the populace. Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, writing in his work *The Present Age*, coined the term "the phantom public" in denouncing politicians or propagandists who claimed to speak on behalf of this manufactured "public."

He wrote,

> In order for leveling really to occur, first it is necessary to bring a phantom into existence, a spirit of leveling, a huge abstraction, an all-embracing something that is nothing, an illusion — the phantom of the public.
>
> The public is an idea, which would never have occurred to people in ancient times, for the people themselves en masse in corpora took steps in any active situation, and bore

> responsibility for each individual among them, and each individual had to personally, without fail, present himself and submit his decision immediately to approval or disapproval. When first a clever society makes concrete reality into nothing, then the Media creates that abstraction, "the public," which is filled with unreal individuals, who are never united nor can they ever unite simultaneously in a single situation or organization, yet still stick together as a whole. The public is a body, more numerous than the people which compose it, but this body can never be shown, indeed it can never have only a single representation, because it is an abstraction. Yet this public becomes larger, the more the times become passionless and reflective and destroy concrete reality.

This destruction of "concrete reality" is in essence the job of the propagandist, as Walter Lippmann alluded to in his conception of "creating pseudo-environments" whereby the media acts as a filter through which people behold a distorted virtual-reality world around them. And it is essential, as Lippmann adds, to keep them away from the real environment, lest the illusion be challenged by intractable reality.

If, for instance, a person watching television consciously thought about the laugh-track that was cued up to prime his laughter during a sitcom, he might realize that such recordings were done in the 1940s of audiences who are long since dead. But, since he pays it no attention (with neurophysiologists explaining that the frontal lobe, which controls critical thought, is shut off within sixty seconds of watching TV), he, on an emotional level, is encouraged to participate in a "pseudo-reality" of an imaginary crowd who is laughing along with him.

Once again, we see the technique at work of encouraging him not to engage as an individual, but as a member of a crowd — even if only an imaginary crowd.

In the world of politics, polling is used in much the same fashion. It can be deployed not to reflect "public opinion," but, on the contrary, to create the impression of a fake consensus where one does not in fact exist. Stuart Ewen, in his book *P.R.: A Social History of Spin*, says, "Can there be democracy when public opinion is reduced to the published results of opinion surveys [which are] statistical applause tracks?"

Like the man sitting on the couch, watching a sitcom and imagining that he's part of a large audience, the potential voter can be manipulated into believing that hordes of people hold a particular opinion (that they don't) by the clever usage of weighted samples in fraudulent surveys.

The hope of the propagandist is that the prospective voter can be channeled into a particular avenue if the impression is fostered that he's part of a larger (phantom) crowd. Dr. Robert Cialdini, author of the book *Influence: Science and Practice*, calls this phenomenon "social proof." It's the concept that an individual can be massaged into doing something if he thinks "everybody else is doing it, too." The person has a deep-seated need to belong.

The Modern Techniques of Mass Persuasion

Edward Bernays, who had the keen insight to bypass the seat of reason (the frontal lobe) for "the reptilian brain," manipulated the atavistic herd-instinct in Man. He understood that, if you can market a new behavior as "the thing to do," a surprising number of people would fall into line and obey the "New

Normal" that the media was handing to them.

As previously mentioned, he did this with marketing cigarettes to women. He made sure to roll out his propaganda campaign during a parade (i.e., a crowd), and he paid flappers to brandish prop cigarettes that he had given them beforehand. As Adam Curtis, in his BBC documentary *The Century of the Self*, said, "Every year, New York held an Easter day parade to which thousands came. Bernays decided to stage an event there. He persuaded a group of rich debutantes to hide cigarettes under their clothes. Then they should join the parade and at a given signal from him they were to light up the cigarettes dramatically. Bernays then informed the press that he had heard that a group of suffragettes were preparing to protest by lighting up what they called torches of freedom."

Pat Jackson, a public-relations advisor and former colleague of Bernays, commented, "He knew this would be an outcry, and he knew that all of the photographers would be there to capture this moment so he was ready with a phrase which was 'torches of freedom.' So here you have a symbol, women … *young* women … debutantes, smoking a cigarette in public with a phrase that means anybody who believes in this kind of equality pretty much has to support them in the ensuing debate about this, because I mean torches of freedom. What's our American point? It's Liberty. She's holding up the torch, you see, and so all this there together, there's emotion there's memory and there's a rational phrase, all of this is in there together. So the next day this was not just in all the New York papers it was across the United States and around the world. And from that point forward the sale of cigarettes to women began to rise. He had made them socially acceptable with a single symbolic ad."

The adept student of sociology will note how the young women all had a prop (the cigarette) to assert their membership in the crowd.

In the modern era, the prop might be said to be a face mask, and the "New Normal" being promoted is human medical experimentation and the sale of exotic, untested biomedical products.

The media functioned to upload the new social "software update" and to convince people that, by wearing a mask, they were part of a "community" that cared about others, that was united in the fight against a dread virus, that placed "the common good" before all else.

Though no legitimate scientific study ever demonstrated the efficacy of cloth masks to immunize one against a virus, the media (and other institutions) promoted the usage of the prop as a method to consolidate group cohesion.

It was pure Bernays.

Mass Formation Psychosis

The *New England Journal of Medicine* admitted in a May 21, 2020 article, "It is also clear that masks serve symbolic roles. Masks are not only tools, they are talismans that may help increase health care workers' perceived sense of safety, well-being and trust in their hospitals."

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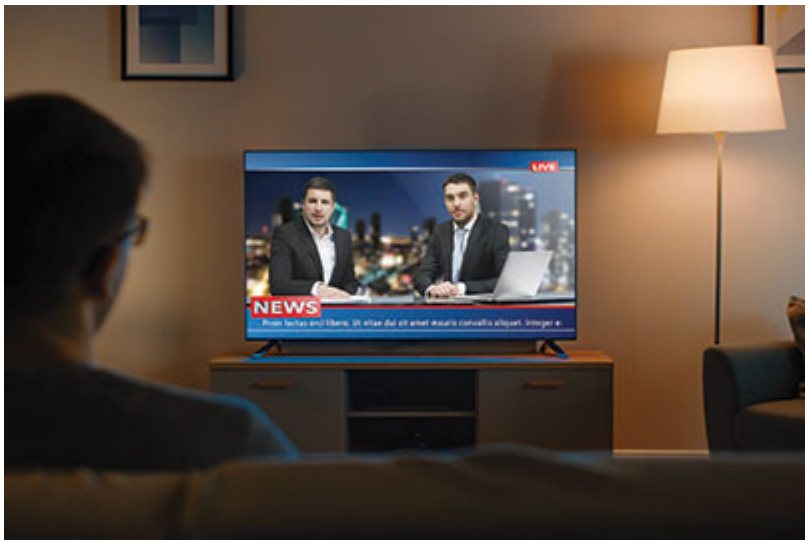

Idiot box: In 1969, Dr. Herbert Krugman published a study that demonstrated that, within 60 seconds of watching TV, blood to the brain's frontal lobe was restricted and the brain was placed into an alpha-wave state (similar to hypnosis).

Professor of clinical psychology Dr. Mattias Desmet wrote a book entitled *The Psychology of Totalitarianism*. In an interview, he addressed the subject of what is called "mass formation psychosis." He explained that people are more suggestible when they're disconnected from their society, deprived of any meaning in life. People, he said, are social animals and yearn to connect to something. This, of course, makes them vulnerable to propaganda campaigns. He said, "A mass is a group that is not formed because there are strong connections between individuals. It's a group that is formed because there's a strong connection of every individual separately with the Collective. So people in a mask feel a tremendous solidarity, a citizenship. But it's not a solidarity of one individual to another individual. It's a solidarity from one individual to the collective group."

And this is what Bernays meant by saying that, for the first time since Aristotle described the classical forms of government, there's a new governance model based on social control — and whose principal tool is propaganda.

The people, cut off from any meaningful connection to each other, are all separately connected to the hive mind — the media. To repeat Bernays, "The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country."

Of course, the people, being neither insects nor robots, possess the ability to think for themselves, and they can be freed from the hive mind no matter how hopelessly ensnared they may seem to be. The ability to see through the fog of manipulation can be restored, but it will not happen instantly. Though people can go mad in herds, they return to their senses one at a time.

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