

**PROPAGANDA
AND
RHETORIC IN
DEMOCRACY**



HISTORY, THEORY, ANALYSIS



EDITED BY

GAE LYN HENDERSON AND M. J. BRAUN

With a foreword by Charles Bazerman

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FOREWORD

CHARLES BAZERMAN

Propaganda and Rhetoric in Democracy: History, Theory, Analysis presents important insights into the deep role of ideas in the formation of societies and in the ways people contend for the control of those ideas. In its exposure of the history and contemporary cases of malicious manipulation of the ideas of the populace, it helps us understand how the dark arts of propaganda have evolved in the last century. In delving into these dark arts it gives a frightful picture, but actually it is a picture I find filled with hope because analysis exposes the manipulations of mind-clouding magic. The episodes reported in this volume also remind us of the larger progressive contexts within which modern propaganda grew: the increasing democracy and dependence of even authoritarian states on assent of the populace; the rapid and continuing expansion of media; and the growth of ways of reporting on, knowing, and understanding the world apart from the interests of religions, states, and corporations. These positive forces are the very reason interested organizations have to work so hard and creatively to bend public opinion. These forces fracture the hegemony of closed cultural, political, and economic systems. They bring more knowledge and more voices to bear on matters of opinion and to contest assertion. They also offer conditions for increasing sophistication in querying the ideas by which the powerful attempt to forge assent. The essays in this volume continue the struggle to contest the means by which ideologies of acquiescence are spread and democracy is undermined to serve the interests of the few.

Propagating ideas that reinforce assent to power has always required work, and that work has increased as power has extended over great distances and larger groups of people. In particular, writing has been the primary means of extending ideas that boost commitment to ruling social organizations beyond the face-to-face relations of the tribe and the assertion of power at the point of a spear. The earliest recorded epic, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, spread fame of the accomplishments, beneficence, and wisdom

of the fifth king of Uruk. Another early major text was Hammurabi's Code which is actually only one example of several written laws distributed through the ancient Middle East. While we may most remember the code for its eye-for-an-eye harshness, it was also the means of extending allegiance to a state over widespread domains through the promise of uniform laws inscribed on stele and clay tablets distributed in cities throughout the Babylonian Empire. Above the laws on one surviving stele is a bas-relief of the king providing a ruling to a compliant citizen, sending the message even to those who could not read that adherence to the reign of the king and his written law brought justice and prosperity.

The Hebrew scriptures contained the history of a people represented as preserved by the will of God, an enumeration of God's law, and promises of the prosperity to come from adhering to the law. These scriptures and attendant practices of study and regulation held the people together, even in the Diaspora. Equally, the hegemony of the Chinese Empire rested on the spread of ideology through Confucian texts, the selection of government officials for their Confucian learning, and an educational and examination system based on knowledge of the same texts that inculcated Confucian values.

So while the role of ideology in fostering support for states is nothing new, our current concern for the propagation of beliefs that serve dominant social, political, and economic powers arises within particular trends in more recent history. Part of those trends go back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the ascent of nation-states based on romantic ideologies of the unity and genius of the peoples who made up those states. This romantic nationalism was coincident with the rise of capitalism as an explicit ideology and its connection with the wealth and well-being of nations—along with its dialectical ideological opposite of state ownership. Ideas of state, people, and economy and their relation became important to maintaining allegiance at the same time as democratic movements, competing states, competing economic models, and competing ideologies became more available. The growth of a print-based public sphere, facilitated by new lower-cost paper and print technologies, as well as expanding education, provided means for these ideologies to be purveyed and contested. In the twentieth century, conflicts, saturated with ideological meanings, became global, even as now-pervasive print was supplemented by radio, movies, television, and other mass media.

As the stakes and threats increased, it became urgent for those holding economic, political, and social power to spread beliefs to maintain mass

allegiance to existing institutions and policies that brought high costs with few benefits to most citizens: misdistribution of wealth, wars, and despoiling of the planet. Yet at the same time, new resources became available to contest the official or dominant stories and ideas that reinforced current arrangements of power and privilege. The rise of sciences and social sciences provided standards of truth, methods of attaining facts, and increasingly large bodies of knowledge distinct from the interests of state, church, or financial institutions—though funding, regulation, and other forms of influence have not always kept lines of distinction clean. Nonetheless, the growth of a research culture and of research institutions has provided more and more grounds on which to contest official stories and standpoints from which to identify misrepresentations. The rise of the modern press, developing professional standards over the last century or so, has also provided some degree of independent representation of events—despite the many limits and perversions arising from the press's ties to corporate and government interests. Nor should we forget the escalation of a popular entertainment industry that seeks attention of citizen audiences by articulating its perceptions and desires in pleasurable ways. Representing previously unexposed contradictions in society, articulating skeptical attitudes toward public figures, finding satiric comedy in exposing duplicity—all have turned out to be good business for at least niche markets. Realist social problem dramas, musicals with progressive themes, idealistic stories of social visionaries and contributors to the common good, documentaries, and political comics have served to deflate propaganda and establish alternative views, even as they contribute to the wealth of interested corporations. Subversive art, as long as it is profitable, finds its sponsors.

The availability of facts, reasoning, and ideas somewhat independent of large institutions propagating their views has given rise to the modern assessment of propaganda as malicious manipulation, as there are widespread alternatives by which to compare and evaluate official stories. When official stories in the twentieth century did attempt to recover a good name for propagation of their ideas, it was often through assertion of independent truth as a fundamental value of their organization in contrast with the obfuscations of others.

Sources of somewhat independent knowledge have also been taken up by citizen groups in their pursuit of policies that favor citizens over factions of entrenched power, as with the mid-twentieth-century antinuclear testing campaigns and the nascent environmental movements. These groups

drew their membership and leadership from the increasing numbers of people with higher education, disposing them to look toward independent research and scientific knowledge to evaluate ideas in the public sphere. Finally, into this mix we must add new communicative media, including the Internet, that further add the number of voices, standpoints, and sources of knowledge that can contest official stories, even as the more complex communicative landscape becomes harder to evaluate and sort out.

Contesting propaganda requires critiques of the sources and means by which malicious manipulation is created and spread. Contesting propaganda also requires alternate representations based on more credible evidence, facts, and reasoning—appealing to more profound emotions. There is no foreseeable end to this struggle when all tricks will be exposed and without effect, for there is no foreseeable end to interests that motivate new tricks. Further, while some will find their way out of obfuscations, others will still be entranced. But through efforts such as in this volume, we can keep sweeping away the fog and clearing the field for serious democratic deliberation. We should be thankful for the peacemaking work that the rhetoricians contributing to this volume accomplish.