

# PROPAGANDA AND MASS PERSUASION

A Historical Encyclopedia,  
1500 to the Present

Nicholas J. Cull  
David Culbert  
David Welch

A B C  C L I O

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# CONTENTS

*Preface*, Nicholas J. Cull, David Culbert, and David Welch, xiii  
*Introduction: Propaganda in Historical Perspective*, David Welch, xv

## PROPAGANDA AND MASS PERSUASION

A Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present

- A**  
Abolitionism/Antislavery Movement, 1  
Abortion, 3  
ADL (Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith), 5  
Advertising, 5  
Africa, 7  
*All Quiet on the Western Front (Im Westen Nichts Neues)* (1928/1930), 11  
Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), 12  
Anti-Semitism, 13  
Arab World, 15  
Architecture, 20  
Art, 21  
Atrocity Propaganda, 23  
Australia, 26  
Austrian Empire, 28
- B**  
Balkans, 33  
*Battleship Potemkin* (1926), 37  
BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), 37  
Beaverbrook, Max (1879–1964), 38  
The Big Lie, 39  
*The Birth of a Nation* (1915), 40  
BIS (British Information Services), 41  
Black Propaganda, 41  
Blair, Tony (1953– ), 43  
Bosnian Crisis and War (1992–1995), 44  
Bracken, Brendan (1910–1958), 46  
Brainwashing, 46  
Britain, 48  
Britain (Eighteenth Century), 52  
British Empire, 55  
Bryce Report (1915), 56
- C**  
Canada, 59  
Capa, Robert (1913–1954), 62  
Capra, Frank (1897–1991), 63  
Caribbean, 63  
Cartoons, 66  
*Casablanca* (1942), 68  
Castro, Fidel (1926– ), 68  
Censorship, 70  
China, 73  
Chomsky, Noam (1928– ), 77  
Churchill, Winston (1874–1965), 78  
CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), 80  
Civil Defense, 81  
Civil Rights Movement (1955–1968), 82  
Civil War, English (1642–1649), 84  
Civil War, Spanish (1936–1939), 86  
Civil War, United States (1861–1865), 88  
Clinton, William Jefferson (1947– ), 89  
CNN (Cable News Network), 91  
Coins, 91  
Cold War (1945–1989), 92  
Cold War in the Middle East (1946–1960), 94  
Comintern (1919–1943), 96  
*The Communist Manifesto* (1848), 96  
Counterinsurgency, 97  
CPI (Committee on Public Information), 99  
Creel, George (1876–1953), 99  
Crimean War (1853–1856), 99  
Crossman, Richard (1907–1974), 100  
Cultural Propaganda, 101
- D**  
David, Jacques-Louis (1748–1825), 103  
Defoe, Daniel (1660–1731), 103

## x Contents

- Disinformation, 104  
Drugs, 106
- E**  
Eisenstein, Sergei (1898–1948), 109  
Elections, 109  
Elections (Britain), 110  
Elections (Israel), 112  
Elections (United States), 113  
Elizabeth I (1533–1603), 115  
Engels, Friedrich (1820–1895), 115  
Environmentalism, 116  
Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 118
- F**  
Fakes, 123  
Falklands/Malvinas War (1982), 124  
Fascism, Italian (1922–1943), 125  
Film (Documentary), 127  
Film (Feature), 129  
Film (Nazi Germany), 130  
Film (Newsreels), 132  
Flagg, James Montgomery (1877–1960), 134  
France, 134  
Freedom Train (1947–1949), 138  
Friedan, Betty (1921– ), 138  
Funerals, 139
- G**  
Gandhi, Mohandas K. (1869–1948), 143  
Garrison, William Lloyd (1805–1879), 143  
Garvey, Marcus (1887–1940), 144  
Germany, 145  
Goebbels, Joseph (1897–1945), 149  
Goya (Francisco de Goya y Lucientes) (1746–1828), 151  
Gray Propaganda, 151  
Greece, 153  
*The Green Berets* (1968), 155  
Grierson, John (1898–1972), 155  
*Guernica* (1937), 156  
Gulf War (1991), 157  
Gulf War (2003), 159
- H**  
Health, 163  
Hearst, William Randolph (1863–1951), 164  
Herzl, Theodor (1860–1904), 165  
Hitler, Adolf (1889–1945), 166  
Holocaust Denial, 167  
Horst Wessel Lied (1929), 169  
Hussein, Saddam (1937– ), 170
- I**  
Ignatius of Loyola, Saint (1491–1556), 173  
Indian Subcontinent, 173  
Indonesia, 177  
Intelligence, 179  
International (Communist and Socialist), 180  
“The Internationale” (1871–1888), 181  
Internet, 182  
Iran, 183  
IRD (Information Research Department), 186  
Ireland, 187  
Israel, 191  
Italy, 195
- J**  
“J’Accuse” (“I Accuse”) (1898), 201  
Japan, 201  
John Bull, 204  
*Jud Süss* (1940), 205
- K**  
Kennedy, John F. (1917–1963), 207  
KGB (Committee of State Security, Soviet Union), 209  
King, Martin Luther, Jr. (1929–1968), 209  
Korea, 211  
Korean War (1950–1953), 213  
Kosovo Crisis and War (1999), 216
- L**  
Labor/Antilabor, 219  
Laden, Osama bin (1957– ), 221  
Latin America, 223  
Leaflet, 226
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich (Ulyanov) (1870–1924), 228  
Lincoln, Abraham (1809–1865), 230  
Livingston, William (1723–1790), 231  
*London Can Take It* (1940), 232  
Long, Huey (1893–1935), 232  
Lord Haw-Haw, 233  
Luther, Martin (1483–1546), 234
- M**  
Malcolm X (1925–1965), 235  
Mao Zedong (1893–1976), 236  
“La Marseillaise” (1792), 237  
Marshall Plan (1947–1951), 238  
Marx, Karl (1818–1883), 241  
McCarthy, Joseph R. (1909–1957), 242  
*Mein Kampf* (1925), 243  
Memorials and Monuments, 244  
Mexico, 246  
Milton, John (1608–1674), 250  
*Mission to Moscow* (1943), 250  
MoI (Ministry of Information), 251  
Morale, 252  
Murdoch, Rupert (1931– ), 253  
Murray, Edward R. (1908–1965), 253  
Music, 254  
Mussolini, Benito (1883–1945), 256
- N**  
NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), 259  
Napoleon (1769–1821), 260  
*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, written by himself* (1845), 261  
Nast, Thomas (1840–1902), 262  
Neo-Militia Groups, 263  
Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, 264  
New Zealand, 267  
Nixon, Richard (1913–1994), 271  
Northcliffe, Lord (1865–1922), 272  
Novel, 272

- Oates, Titus (1649–1705), 275  
 Okhrana, 275  
 Olympics (1896– ), 276  
 Opinion Polls, 278  
 Orwell, George (1903–1950), 279  
 Ottoman Empire/Turkey, 280  
 OWI (Office of War Information), 283
- P  
 Pacific/Oceania, 285  
 Paine, Thomas (1737–1809), 287  
 Peace and Antiwar Movements (1500–1945), 289  
 Peace and Antiwar Movements (1945– ), 291  
 Perón, Juan Domingo (1895–1974) and Eva Duarte (1919–1952), 294  
 Philippines, 294  
 Photography, 297  
*The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936), 299  
 Poetry, 300  
 Poland, 302  
 Portraiture, 305  
 Portugal, 307  
 Postage Stamps, 311  
 Posters, 313  
*Pravda* (Truth), 315  
 Prisoners of War, 315  
 Propaganda, Definitions of, 317  
*Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1903), 323  
 Psychological Warfare, 323  
 Public Diplomacy, 327  
 PWE (Political Warfare Executive), 328
- Q  
*Quotations from Chairman Mao* (translated 1966), 329
- R  
 Radio (Domestic), 331  
 Radio (International), 332  
 Raemakers, Louis (1869–1956), 334  
 Reagan, Ronald (1911– ), 334  
 Reeducation, 336  
*Reefer Madness* (1936), 337  
 Reformation and Counter-Reformation, 337  
 Reith, Lord John (1889–1971), 341  
 Religion, 342  
 Revolution, American, and War of Independence (1764–1783), 344  
 Revolution, French (1789–1799), 347  
 Revolution, Russian (1917–1921), 349  
 RFE/RL (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty), 351  
 Riefenstahl, Leni (1902– ), 352  
 Riis, Jacob (1849–1914), 353  
 RMVP (Reichministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda), 353  
 Rockwell, Norman (1894–1978), 355  
 Roosevelt, Franklin D. (1882–1945), 355  
 Rumor, 358  
 Russia, 359
- S  
 Satellite Communications, 365  
 Scandinavia, 366  
 Shakespeare, William (1564–1616), 369  
*Silent Spring* (1962), 370  
 Southeast Asia, 371  
 Spain, 373  
 Spanish-American War (1898), 378  
 Sport, 379  
 Stalin, Joseph (1879–1953), 381  
 Suez Crisis (1956), 383  
 Sukarno (1901–1970), 385  
 Switzerland, 385
- T  
 Television, 389  
 Television (News), 391  
 Temperance, 393  
 Terrorism, 393  
 Terrorism, War on (2001– ), 396
- Thatcher, Margaret (1925– ), 398  
 Theater, 399  
 Tokyo Rose, 400  
*Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*) (1935), 401  
 Trotsky, Leon (1879–1940), 402
- U  
 Uncle Sam, 403  
*Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), 405  
 United Nations, 405  
 United States, 407  
 United States (1930s), 411  
 United States (Progressive Era), 412  
 USIA (United States Information Agency) (1953–1999), 413
- V  
 Vietnam, 417  
 Vietnam War (1954–1975), 420  
 VOA (Voice of America), 423
- W  
*The War Game* (1965), 425  
 White Propaganda, 425  
 Why We Fight (1942–1945), 426  
 Wick, Charles Z. (1917– ), 426  
 Wilkes, John (1727–1797), 428  
 Women's Movement: European (1860– ), 429  
 Women's Movement: Precursors (1404–1848), 431  
 Women's Movement: First Wave/Suffrage (1848–1928), 432  
 Women's Movement: Second Wave/Feminism (1963– ), 435  
 World War I (1914–1918), 437  
 World War II (Britain), 440  
 World War II (Germany), 441  
 World War II (Japan), 444  
 World War II (Russia), 445  
 World War II (United States), 447
- Z  
 Zimmermann Telegram (1917), 453  
 Zinoviev Letter (1924), 453  
 Zionism, 454

just become pregnant and does not know what to do.

David Culbert

**See also** Elections (United States); Friedan, Betty; Religion

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### ADL (Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith)

American-based civil rights organization dedicated to fighting anti-Semitic propaganda. The Anti-Defamation League was founded in 1913 by Chicago lawyer Sigmund Livingston (1872–1946) under the auspices the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith. Livingston defined its mission as follows: “To stop, by appeals to reason and conscience, and if necessary, by appeals to law, the defamation of the Jewish people . . . to secure justice and fair treatment to all citizens alike . . . put an end forever to unjust and unfair discrimination against and ridicule of any sect or body of citizens.” Early campaigns included a mass mailing to all American newspaper editors urging them not to use anti-Semitic language. Livingston himself wrote pamphlets denouncing the notorious anti-Semitic forgery *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The ADL was involved in general antiracist and civil rights work and played an important role in the 1950s and 1960s. On occasion the ADL has been involved in propaganda within the United States relating to international issues affecting Jews. In the late 1960s the ADL sought to combat anti-Israeli/pro-Arab propaganda with a radio program called “Dateline Israel” to present ordinary life in the country. In the 1980s the ADL championed the cause of the so-called Refuseniks—Jewish Russians unable to leave the Soviet Union; this became one of the most visible anti-Soviet propa-

ganda campaigns on the “home front” in Ronald Reagan’s so called Second Cold War. The ADL’s current campaigns include ensuring the continued separation of church and state and contesting Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism at the extremes of both black and white American politics. The ADL has been particularly effective at exposing anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet.

Nicholas J. Cull

**See also** Anti-Semitism; Civil Rights Movement; Holocaust Denial; *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*; United States (Progressive Era)

**References:** Cohen, Oscar, and Stanley Wexler, eds. “*Not the Work of a Day*”: *Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith Oral Memoirs*. New York: [Anti-Defamation] League, 1987; Moore, Deborah Dash. *B'nai B'rith and the Challenge of Ethnic Leadership*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1981; Snyder, Jill Donnie, and Eric K. Goodman. *Friend of the Court, 1947–1982: The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith*. New York: [Anti-Defamation] League, 1983.

### Advertising

Modern advertising is a product of the late nineteenth century and reflects the changes that took place in the economy and the revolutionary transformations that occurred in the communications field. In response to the Industrial Revolution, advertising’s early development was linked to that of the mass-circulation newspapers. American and European newspapers prior to the nineteenth century had published short, factual, paid advertisements that occasionally contained a persuasive element. In the main, however, they tended to be what we would now term “classified” advertising intended to inform potential customers of the availability of goods and services.

In the final two decades of the nineteenth century the situation changed as a result of the emergence of mass-circulation newspapers and magazines, both of which depended upon advertising revenue. The small factual notices were replaced by larger advertisements intended to stand out from the printed page. This fundamental change in the physical



## 6 Advertising

appearance of advertisements—large print, pictures, and even some color—reflected a substantial shift in intention: the main purpose of advertising was now to persuade the purchaser to buy goods and services rather than simply to provide information.

In the 1880s brand names were first used as a means of distinguishing products that were more or less identical. Brand-name advertising tried to persuade the public to associate a particular brand with quality and other desirable attributes. Slogans and catchphrases became ubiquitous. Perhaps the most famous early example of an advertising slogan that created a popular awareness of a product was “Good Morning! Have you used Pears’ Soap?” The slogan became part of everyday language in Britain and served to distinguish Pears soap from its competitors.

The period 1890–1914 witnessed the development of fully fledged advertising agencies. Large-scale advertising campaigns were launched that coordinated newspaper and magazine advertisements with outdoor poster advertisements and shopfront displays. With mass production came mass consumption and the need for mass persuasion. For example, the total annual volume of advertising in the United States expanded rapidly from \$682 million in 1914 to \$1.409 billion in 1919 and \$2.987 billion in 1929.

World War I marked another watershed in the development of modern advertising. Following the experiences of wartime propaganda and the imperative need to manipulate public opinion in the first total war, “psychological advertising” was introduced in the interwar period, heavily influenced by the new field of behavioral psychology, which claimed that consumers were best reached through emotional appeals rather than reason. It is no coincidence that during the interwar period fascist states also based their propaganda along these lines. Both Hitler and Mussolini saw propaganda as a vehicle of political salesmanship in a mass market. The masses were viewed as malleable and corrupt, swayed not by their brains but by their emotions. Accord-

ingly, propaganda for the masses had to be simple, focusing on as few points as possible, which then had to be repeated many times, concentrating on such emotional elements as love and hatred. One of the ramifications of mass society and psychological advertising—especially in the United States—was that advertisements moved away from the product and increasingly focused more on the consumer in an attempt to convince the masses that conspicuous consumption was essential for their well-being.

Although American advertisers continued to exploit the printed word, beginning in the late 1920s they were able to exploit the new medium of radio, which had gained nationwide coverage with the creation of broadcasting networks. In 1928 the American Tobacco Company illustrated the power of this new medium when it increased sales of Lucky Strike cigarettes by 47 percent in two months after embarking on a concerted radio advertising campaign. By the 1930s, as its audience expanded, radio advertising became more sophisticated, with radio “personalities” emerging as both entertainers and salespeople. Women in particular were targeted since they tended to be at home most of the day; radio advertisements combined an emphasis on progress with appeals to traditional values of domesticity. As advertising revenue increased, radio networks now interwove advertisements into the entertainment schedules. By 1930 advertising provided almost 100 percent of the revenue for radio programs in the United States. (This would later be the case for television.) Whereas American advertising in the 1920s and 1930s (in contrast to European advertising) appealed to middle-class values, even outside the United States advertisers gradually began to identify the masses as “consumers” rather than “citizens.”

American advertisers lent their talents to national propaganda by cooperating with the Office of War Information during World War II. After the war, advertisers formed the Advertising Council, which sponsored a

number of patriotic propaganda campaigns, the most famous being the “Freedom Train” exhibition, which traveled throughout the United States between 1947 and 1950, and the “People’s Capitalism” exhibition, which toured the world under the auspices of the United States Information Agency (USIA) during the mid-1950s. Senior advertising executives who subsequently moved into state propaganda included William Benton (1900–1973), founder of Benton and Bowles, who pioneered U.S. postwar propaganda overseas in his capacity as assistant secretary of state for public affairs from 1945 to 1947.

After World War II assumptions about the power of advertising were informed by a new liberal critique of society. Particularly influential in the 1950s and 1960s were the economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1908– ) and the historian David M. Potter (1910–1971), both of whom questioned the immense influence that advertising wielded in American society. Liberal critics argued that not only did advertising raise the price of products (since manufacturers passed on the cost of advertising to the consumer) but it also operated against rational consumer choice and the efficient use of resources. The manipulative influence of advertisements created false needs by persuading consumers to buy products that they did not need. In the 1960s Marxist writers like Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) also made a distinction between real and false needs and condemned the burgeoning advertising industry for instilling illusory attractions of consumerism as a capitalist mechanism for controlling the working class. In the late 1960s and 1970s these liberal and Marxist critiques were themselves questioned by scholars, who argued that advertising was not as powerful as was previously assumed. Such conclusions, replacing earlier assumptions about the all-powerful impact of the media on mass attitudes and values, are confirmed by recent scholarship devoted to the history of the mass media. A newer, more sophisticated

model emphasizes the complexity of this relationship and the need to understand advertising—and media influence in general—as a product of the interaction with broader cultural factors.

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**See also** Freedom Train; Thatcher, Margaret; United States; USIA; World War I; World War II (United States)

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## Africa

The African continent has witnessed the following uses of propaganda: spread religion; support imperialism; rally support for world wars and the Cold War; support white minority regimes; and support decolonization and nation building. Today propaganda is routinely used to bolster the one-party rule that characterizes many states in the region, the most notorious contemporary exponent being President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe (1912– ).

The African continent can be divided into two distinct regions: North Africa, with its Arabic-speaking Islamic heritage, and sub-Saharan Africa. Islam has also played an important role in much of West Africa. The entire continent was profoundly affected by imperialism. Only Liberia and Ethiopia survived the nineteenth century unconquered. Colonialism remains a major issue in African propaganda as an explanation of African poverty. Southern Africa retains a substantial white presence, especially in South Africa.

Propaganda about Africa began in ancient times with legends about the savage lands beyond civilization. Europeans of the twelfth century imagined a lost Christian kingdom beyond the realm of Islam ruled by Prester John. Such ideas conditioned European reactions to