Information, News, & Propaganda

Geoff Nunberg
History of Information: 10/25/06
Modern "Infoganda"

2004: "Video News Releases" from the Office of National Drug Control Policy

2005: Revelation that Armstrong Williams accepted money to promote No Child Left Behind in TV and radio programs

Frank Rich, Jon Stewart speak of 'infoganda'

"Anyone who has questions about this practice needs to do some research on modern public information tools.” HHS spokesperson
"Propaganda" always a parasitic notion: tracks the development of "information" and "news"

Origins of modern propaganda with the emergence of the press & public opinion as a political force.

Cf Napoleon’s efforts to control Parisian press, continuing practice of gov’t subsidies paid to sympathetic newspapers...
1854: *Times* of London sends William Howard Russell to the Crimea to report on the Crimean War
HEIGHTS BEFORE SEBASTOPOL, OCTOBER 25 -- If the exhibition of the most brilliant valor, of the excess of courage, and of a daring which would have reflected luster on the best days of chivalry can afford full consolation for the disaster of today, we can have no reason to regret the melancholy loss which we sustained in a contest with a savage and barbarian enemy...

At 11:00 our Light Cavalry Brigade rushed to the front... The Russians opened on them with guns from the redoubts on the right, with volleys of musketery and rifles.

They swept proudly past, glittering in the morning sun in all the pride and splendor of war. We could hardly believe the evidence of our senses. Surely that handful of men were not going to charge an army in position? Alas! It was but too true -- their desperate valor knew no bounds, and far indeed was it removed from its so-called better part -- discretion.
The Charge of the Light Brigade

Half a league half a league
Half a league onward
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred: `Forward the Light Brigade
Charge for the guns' he said
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred

`Forward the Light Brigade!'
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do & die…
Alfred Tennyson, "Charge of the Light Brigade"
The Charge of the Light Brigade

"C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre." -- Marshal Bosquet
1855: Roger Fenton sent to the Crimea to photograph war, probably at the urging of Prince Albert, produces first war photographs
The Civil War

Matthew Brady, George Barnard & other photographers produce first "true" photojournalism.

Matthew Brady
A clean sheet of glass was evenly coated with collodion.

In a darkroom or a light-tight chamber, the coated plate was immersed in a silver nitrate solution, sensitizing it to light.

After it was sensitized, the wet negative was placed in a light-tight holder and inserted into the camera, which already had been positioned and focused.

The "dark slide," which protected the negative from light, and the lens cap were removed for several seconds, allowing light to expose the plate.

The "dark slide" was inserted back into the plate holder, which was then removed from the camera.

In the darkroom, the glass plate negative was removed from the plate holder and developed, washed in water, and fixed so that the image would not fade, then washed again and dried.

Usually the negatives were coated with a varnish to protect the surface.

After development, the photographs were printed on paper and mounted.
Conflicting interests of the state:

- Seeks positive publicity, which entails giving reporters access
- Avoiding negative publicity entails restricting access.

Cf Civil War conflicts between Meade & Edward Crapsey of the Phil. Inquirer

1864: Union Sec’y of War Edwin Stanton begins to “leak” his war diaries to AP, presaging practice of issuing regular war bulletins to the press

Efforts to win support of British press for each side...
"Propaganda" (OED) (More fully, Congregation or College of the Propaganda.) A committee of Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church having the care and oversight of foreign missions, founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV.

"Before 1914, 'propaganda' belonged only to literate vocabularies and possessed a reputable, dignified meaning… Two years later the word had come into the vocabulary of peasants and ditchdiggers and had begun to acquire its miasmic aura.” Will Irwin, Propaganda and the News

1922: Encyclopedia Britannica first includes propaganda as entry

States begin to take a direct role in creating & diffusing pro-government views.
The Rise & Decline of *Propaganda*

Average Annual Frequency of "Propaganda" and "Orwellian" in *The New York Times*, by Decade

![Graph showing the rise and decline of "Propaganda" and "Orwellian" mentions in The New York Times over decades.](image-url)
1914-17 The rise of “Propaganda”

WWI: Creel Committee, “4-minute men,” etc.

75,000 speakers to give short speeches & lantern-slide presentations

75 million booklets distributed, in multiple languages

“Our effort was educational and informative throughout. No other argument was needed than the simple, straightforward presentation of facts." George Creel
**Reactions to Objectivity: The rise of “Propaganda”**

Rise of publicists, press services.

“The development of the modern publicity man is a clear sign that the facts of modern life do not spontaneously take a shape in which they can be known. They must be given a shape by somebody, and since in the daily routine reporters cannot give a shape to facts... the need for some formulation is being met by the interested parties.” W. Lippman, Public Opinion, p 218

Connection between propaganda, PR, & advertising (cf other languages)

Increasing suspicion of propaganda:

1939 poll shows 40 percent of Americans blame propaganda for the US entry into the First World War.
Adoption of propaganda techniques by Roosevelt during WWII: Office of Facts and Figures --> Office of War Information

"the office is not a propaganda agency… We don't believe in this country in artificially stimulated, high-pressure, doctored nonsense.” Fiorello La Guardia

The object is “to provide the public with sugar-coated, colored, ornamental matter, otherwise known as 'bunk.” La Guardia, letter to FDR
The Eternal Jew, German Poster, 1940

Italian Posters, 1944
WWII: Playing the Race Card

OUR CARELESSNESS
Their Secret Weapon
PREVENT FOREST FIRES

TOKIO KID
Say
MUCH WASTE
OF MATERIAL
MAKE SO-COO
HAPPY!
THANK YOU

If you worked as hard and fast as a Jap
we'd SMASH Tokio a lot quick.
"The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most men's minds is to let it go in through the medium of an entertainment picture."

Elmer Davis, director of OWI

Use of cinema: Cf Capra's "Why We Fight" newsreels
Media: The Totalitarian Side

Leni Riefenstahl: Triumph of the Will, 1935
Role of broadcast media in modern political language

Father Charles Coughlin

FDR after “fireside chat”
The Rise & Decline of Propaganda

Average Annual Frequency of "Propaganda" and "Orwellian"
in *The New York Times*, by Decade
"The Shadow Cast by Language Upon Truth"

"Orwellian": 4,140,000 Google hits

>Kafkaesque, Hemingwayesque, Dickensian put together
Origins of Modern Manipulation of Public Opinion

Through the whole of this long letter of Roland, it is curious to remark how the nerve and vigor of his style, which had spoken so potently to his sovereign, is relaxed when he addresses himself to the sans-culottes… When he speaks to the populace, he can no longer be direct. The whole compass of the language is tried to find synonyms and circumlocutions for massacre and murder. Things are never called by their common names. Massacre is sometimes *agitation*, sometimes *effervescence*, sometimes *excess*, sometimes *too continued an exercise of a revolutionary power*. Edmund Burke, 1793
Origins of Complaints about Political Language

The rise of public opinion, political euphemism

Cf casualty in Crimean War
"acts of collective indiscipline," "brisk fighting" in WWI
"For quite long periods... people can remain undisturbed by obvious lies, either because they simply forget what is said from day to day or because they are under such a constant propaganda bombardment that they become anaesthetized to the whole business." Orwell, "As I Please"
The Paradox of "Orwellian"

Popularity of Orwell's ideas
- Skepticism about language: "mere semantics"
  "That depends what the meaning of 'is' is."

Obsession with Language
- Insurgents, terrorists, and "personal accounts"
- The A-word, etc.:
  - abortion, arrogant, appeasement, amnesty, adultery, and *ssh*l*…
  - zoning, Zionism…
Why Does "Orwellian" Language Work?

The transparency of euphemisms

-Ethnic cleansing, revenue enhancement, voluntary regulation, tree-density reduction, extra affirmative action

Yet we buy into them…

-Corporate buzzwords

-Euphemisms like friendly fire, headcount reduction, and senior citizen
Why Does "Orwellian" Language Work?

Orwell on elimination of unreliable elements: "Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them."

Yet euphemisms lose their force: cf final solution, ethnic cleansing, casualty
Compassionate conservatism, Clear Skies, Healthy Forests, No Child Left Behind, the Ownership Society, partial birth abortion, death tax, "cut and run" vs. social security lockbox, single-payer health care, redeployment, etc.

"This is a chronic Democratic woe: lousy bumper stickers."

— Joe Klein, *Time*
How Much Do Bumper-Stickers Matter?

Voters favor Dems on the environment, education, pensions, etc.

NES results show no major difference:

*Do you favor repeal of the death tax/estate tax?*

"private" vs "personal accounts"
How the focus on "Orwellian" language can distract us

Burke: Massacre is sometimes *agitation*, sometimes *effervescence*, sometimes *excess*, sometimes *too continued an exercise of a revolutionary power*. Familiar formula: *An X is called a "Y"*

Cf. "layoffs are called *head-count reductions*"; "The aged are described as *senior citizens*"; "Outsourcing torture is 'extraordinary rendition.'"
Signs and symbols, language, are the means of communication by which a fraternally shared experience is ushered in and sustained. But conversation has a vital import lacking in the fixed and frozen words of written speech. … Ideas which are not communicated, shared, and reborn in expression are but soliloquy… Vision is a spectator; hearing is a participator. Publication is partial and the public which results is partially informed and formed until the meanings it purveys pass from mouth to mouth. That and only that gives reality to public opinion." John Dewey, The Public and its Problems, 1927
The "final vocabulary" of politics

Conservative, liberal, choice, freedom, values, fairness, tradition, bias, elite, diversity, discrimination --
also, Newspeak, propaganda and Orwellian.
Role of broadcast media in modern political language
appeasement: "The policy of granting concessions to potential enemies to maintain peace…" (AHD)
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value: *gen. in pl.*, the principles or standards of a person or society. (OED)
**Meaning and Narrative**

**value**: *gen. in pl.*, the principles or standards of a person or society. (OED)
Lippmann: Symbols "assemble emotions after they have been detached from their ideas."

The question of a proper fare on a municipal subway is symbolized as an issue between the People and the Interests, and then the People is inserted in the symbol American, so that finally in the heat of a campaign, and eight cent fare becomes un-American. The Revolutionary fathers died to prevent it. Lincoln suffered that it might not come to pass, resistance to it was implied in the death of those who sleep in France.
On Political Symbols

Symbols as "cognitive shortcuts"
Linguistic symbols as meta-narratives; cf 'values'