

# PROPAGANDA

by Edward Bernays

## Overview

“Propaganda” is frequently given a negative connotation, evoking imagery of lies, betrayal, or other sinister intentions. Yet reality is not that black and white. Propaganda is neutral and amoral. It is simply a collection of mass persuasion skills. It is simply the effects of modern public relations specialists nudging people’s opinions. It requires deep strategic thought and exemplary execution to be effective, and few have truly mastered it to such a degree. Those who *have* mastered it are often employed to help promote new products or support social movements. Propaganda can help the arts & sciences by letting museums & colleges more effectively spread their messages. Deep down, people actually want to be led, to be told what to want. Propaganda is the process of seeing clearly what people want, providing a variation of it, and convincing people why they should prefer your variation.

*“The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits & opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society.”*

## Chapter 1. Organizing Chaos

In our modern democratic society, our habits and opinions are closely controlled by various entities. We may not recognize this since it often occurs on a subconscious level. Yet this propaganda is not necessarily negative. Perhaps a cereal company wishes to convince you that their brand is preferred, or a fashion company hopes you wear their new hats after showcasing them in the latest NYC fashion week.

Propaganda is a popularity contest, waged in the public’s collective consciousness. You can view it as a sort of invisible government, a group of men and women trying to subconsciously shape our opinions and tastes. This invisible government is dominated by those pulling the strings behind the scenes; the puppet

masters who understand mass psychology and guide the world via public relations campaigns.

Involuntarily, we have all agreed to allow this invisible government to shape our decisions. It has been ingrained in society for so long that we would likely not know how to form preferences without it.

We are hard-wired to conform in our social conduct. As we collectively have opted out of single dictators making decisions for us, we instead rely on capitalism, on the battle of corporate marketing efforts. There is a strange irony, a sort of paradox, between the desire for free competition, and the desire to be guided by the most popular corporations.

## Chapter 2. The New Propaganda

Once upon a time the lands were governed by monarchs. Yet with the days of Kings and Queens slowly ebbing away, the power has shifted into the hands of the people. Yet the elite minority (i.e. corporations) have still found a way to manipulate the majority (i.e. the people) via propaganda. Like most things, its morality depends upon its use; the concept itself is amoral, beyond good and evil. While on the surface it may seem like large corporations control society, in truth the relationship is much more symbiotic. Big business relies heavily on keeping consumers happy in order to procure profit.

*“In itself, the word propaganda has certain technical meanings which, like most things in this world, are neither good nor bad but custom makes them so.”*

Any entity wishing to impart their beliefs upon the world and sway the public is engaging in propaganda. High-level professional propagandists are experts at engineering circumstances in which people believe they formed their own opinions.

The world woke up to propagandists’ tactics after World War 1, when propaganda was heavily used. Patriotic agencies gained significant support through