

Information, Propaganda, and Objectivity



History of Information 103
Geoff Nunberg

April 8, 2014



Where We Are



year

2010
1980
1950
1900
1800
1700
1600
1200
600
400
300
5000
30,000
50,000

week

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

10

11

12

13

14

15

week





Where We Are

Photography and Information

Photography influences the conception of information:

Directly: Seems to present the world "as it is," independent of human interpretation or intervention.

Indirectly: Provides a model or metaphor for "objective" representation of all sorts.

year

2010

1980

1950

1900

a communications war?

battling empires:

Russian

Ottoman

British

French



war again

Zimmerman telegram

PLUT AMMERS CONGRESS

We intend to begin ... and submarine warfare. We shall keep the United States neutral. Party Spirit Engaged in this war. Following basis: make war together, generous financial understanding on our part. PATRIOTIC ZEAL TO BACK WILSON.

received, Mexico, Jan 17, 1917. President's House of War, published March 1.

GERMAN PLOT TO LINK JAPAN AND MEXICO IN ALLIANCE OF WAR AGAINST AMERICA.

Crimea: The First Photographed War



Roger Fenton

1854-55: Wm. Howard Russell reports for Times from Crimea on incompetence of general staff, suffering of troops.

1855: At urging of Prince Albert, Roger Fenton sent to Crimea to take photos to counter Russell's Times reports.



Wm. Russell





Where We Are

The Caucus
The Politics and Government Blog of The Times

October 24, 2012, 1:04 PM

Total Cost of Election Could Be \$6 Billion

By NICHOLAS CONFORTI

The total cost of the 2012 election could reach \$6 billion, according to estimates from a leading research organization, which would obliterate the previous record by more than \$700 million.

why advertising?

a competitive relationship?
informing "critical authority or staged display"

The 2012 Presidential Election Cost \$7 Billion

By J.K. Butler
February 1, 2013 4:18 PM

Year year-long slog from the GOP primary to Election Day

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

How Much Are Super PACs Spending?

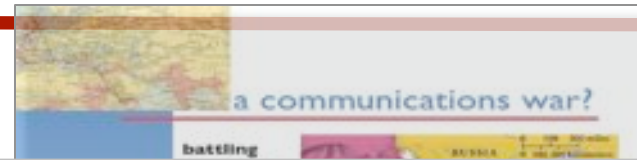
As of Nov. 20, 2012

\$567,498,628

Outside Spending in Congressional Races

Bar chart showing spending in millions of dollars for various congressional races. The chart includes categories for Disproportionate Campaigns, Independent Expenditures by Parties, and Independent Expenditures by PACs, Groups and Individuals.

| Race | Disproportionate Campaigns | Independent Expenditures by Parties | Independent Expenditures by PACs, Groups and Individuals |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| House of Representatives | ~\$100M | ~\$100M | ~\$100M |
| Senate | ~\$100M | ~\$100M | ~\$100M |
| Presidential | ~\$100M | ~\$100M | ~\$100M |



The radical press

North Star (Douglas), 1847; The Liberator (Garrison), 1831

Frederick Douglass

Wm. Lloyd Garrison

THE NORTH STAR

THE LIBERATOR





Where We Are



Preachers, Politics & Propaganda



Father Charles Coughlin, the "radio priest"



Billy Sunday



FDR after "fireside chat"



Harvest of Shame



1950: "See It Now" debuts on CBS, w/Edward R. Murrow, edited by Fred Friendly

1952: Murrow presents "Christmas in Korea" from front lines

1956: Murrow's program on Sen. Joseph McCarthy

1960: Murrow and Friendly produce "Harvest of Shame" for CBS Reports



Geoff Nunberg

History of Information

IS 103 March 11, 2014



The Dawn of ~~the~~ Another Information Age

19th century:

The emergence of "literacy," "news,"
"information," "objectivity"—and "propaganda"—
as value-laden social categories...



Agenda: 4/8

Rise of the mass press

Separated at birth: objectivity and propaganda

- The creation of objectivity

- The rise of propaganda

Informing the public

Is objectivity possible?



The features of information (19th. C)

Information is "objective" – in theory:

- presents same aspect to everyone/context-independent

- has same significance to every observer

- Is framed in perspective-free way ("aperspectival" objectivity; "the view from nowhere")

- Distinct from statements of "values"

- "Information" is increasingly associated with institutional/scientific/bureaucratic/journalistic contexts.

Your search - "the information that i love you" OR "the information that he loves me" OR "the information that you love her" OR "the information that he loves her" - did not match any documents.



The objectivity (?) of information

"objective information"

About 4,430,000 results (0.27 seconds)

"subjective information"

About 303,000 results (0.31 seconds)

"objective information" cleveland guitar

Page 9 of about 414 results (0.25 seconds)

"subjective information" cleveland guitar

Page 3 of 129 results (0.21 seconds)

rainbow

About 1,710,000,000 results (0.29 seconds)

rainbow OR clouds

About 766,000,000 results (0.23 seconds)

Objective vs. Subjective Information

Objective information is:

observable: able to be seen, heard or touched, smelled, tasted
factual
able to be counted
able to be described
able to be imitated
the same from multiple reporters
as close to truth as we can get

Objective Language:

I saw...
I counted...
I observed...

Subjective information is:

opinion
judgment
assumption
belief
rumor
suspicion
varies: person-to-person, day-to-day
destructive in decision making

Subjective language

S/he did not want to...
S/he does not like...
S/he thought...
S/he feels...
S/he thinks

“Information” is (presumably) transferable, “interpreter-neutral”; retains meaning/significance from one context to the next.
Cf news as “Les infos,” etc.

Objectivity a precondition for the metaphysical autonomy of information

[YCharts - Information, Not Opinion - Headline Grabs Archive - Forbes](http://blogs.forbes.com/ycharts/headline-grabs/)
blogs.forbes.com/ycharts/headline-grabs/
About Me: YCharts.com covers over 5000 U.S. companies and manages over 40 million investor trends in real-time. Fundamental research and empirical data ...

[News is information, not opinion. | Hector Hugo](http://hectorhugo.wordpress.com/2011/.../news-is-information-not-opinion...)
hectorhugo.wordpress.com/2011/.../news-is-information-not-opinion...
Mar 31, 2011 – News is **information**, not **opinion**. The news should inform; don't be fed another's opinion. Mainstream media is only good to see which ...

[Information, Not Opinion, Leads Twitter | Advertising Agency Blog](http://www.advertisingagencyblog.com/.../information-not-opinion-leads-t...)
www.advertisingagencyblog.com/.../information-not-opinion-leads-t...
Nov 17, 2009 – Marketers monitoring Twitter for mentions of their brand may have noticed that microbloggers are more likely to give or seek information than to ...

[INFORMATION, NOT OPINION - Tags: LETTERS to the editor...](http://connection.ebscohost.com/cletters/.../information-not-opinion)
connection.ebscohost.com/cletters/.../information-not-opinion
EBSCOhost serves thousands of libraries with premium essays, articles and other content including **INFORMATION, NOT OPINION**. Get access to over 12 ...

[Plinky | "News is information, not opinion." by Hector Hugo](http://www.plinky.com/answers/140795)
www.plinky.com/answers/140795
Mar 31, 2011 – News is **information**, not **opinion**. The news should inform; don't be fed another's opinion. Mainstream media is only good to see which ...



"The First Information Revolution"

Growth of common schools:

1800-1825: proportion of children in schools from 37 to 60%

Creation of the modern census

Modern postal service

Urbanization

Increased literacy -- a “nation of readers”

The democratization of business and politics

New technologies of printing, communicating, reproduction...



"The First Information Revolution"

Penny newspapers, circulating libraries, "dime novels"...

"the tawdry novels which flare in the bookshelves of our railway stations, and which seem designed... for people with low standards of life." Matthew Arnold, 1880





Rise of the Penny Newspaper



James Gordon
Bennett

"Causes" of the revolution:

Technological developments

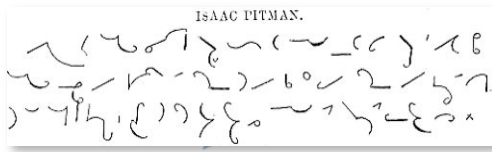
Increased literacy -- a "nation of readers"

The democratization of business and politics



NY Herald, 1842





Pitman Shorthand 1837

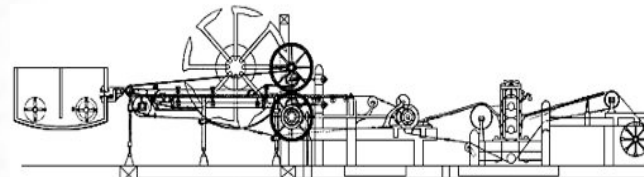
Rise of the Penny Newspaper

technological advances:

steam press,
paper-making machines
stereotypes (Firmin Didot)
rotary press:

invented by Richard Hoe, 1844; capable of 20k impressions/hr

Railroad, telegraph (from 1840's)



Foudrinier Machine, 1811





Rise of the mass press

The *World*, the *Journal-American*; the birth of "yellow journalism"



Davis

Rise of the mass press



Richard Harding Davis



Increasing political influence...

"You supply the pictures and I'll supply the war" W. R. Hearst to Frederick Remington (attrib.)



**Does Our Flag Protect Women?
Indignities Practiced by Spanish
Officials on Board American Vessels.
Refined Young Women Stripped and
Searched by Brutal Spaniards While
Under Our Flag**

NY Journal, 2/12/1897





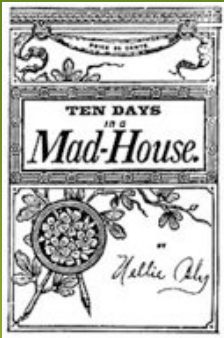
"Muckraking"



Nellie Bly
(Elizabeth Cochran)



Ida Tarbell



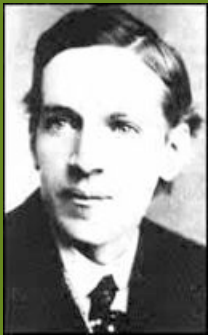
You may recall the description of the Man with the Muck-rake, the man who could look now way but downward, with the muck-rake in his hands; who was offered a celestial crown for his muck-rake, but who would neither look up nor regard the crown he was offered, but continued to rake himself the filth of the floor.

Theodore Roosevelt



Lincoln Steffens





Upton Sinclair



"Muckraking"

All art is propaganda. It is universally and inescapably propaganda; sometimes unconsciously, but often deliberately, propaganda.

It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.

Upton Sinclair





"Muckraking"

"these narrow ways diverging to the right and left, and reeking everywhere with dirt and filth. Such lives as are led here, bear the same fruit as elsewhere. The coarse and bloated faces at the doors have counterparts at home and all the world over."

Charles Dickens,
American Notes 1842



Jacob Riis:
How the Other Half Lives, 1890

"La moitié du monde ne sait pas comment l'autre vit" Rabelais



The "higher journalism"



1896: Adolph Ochs takes over the NY Times

Stresses “decency,” reform; giving the news ‘impartially, without fear or favor, regardless of any party, sect or interest involved

Publisher as a "vendor of information"

Circulation goes from 9000 to 350,000 in 1920



Growth of magazines:

from 180 in 1879 (2d class postage introduced) to 1800 in 1900.



Defining the "News"



Defining "the News":



Range of Content

Stories about developments in politics, world affairs, business, sports, natural disasters, accidents, crime, arts, science...

AND...

Reviews, weather, columns, announcements,
A "natural hierarchy" of importance?



Prioritizing "the News"

But cf other features that make stories
"newsworthy":

plane crashes > winter furnace breakdowns

crimes of rich criminals > incomes of poor criminals

breakthroughs in science > breakthroughs in auto repair

business news > labor news

(from Herbert Gans, *Deciding What's News*)



Localizing the news

“To my readers, an attic fire in the Latin Quarter is more important than a revolution in Madrid.

Hippolyte de Villemessant, founder of Le Figaro

“One Englishman is a story. Ten Frenchmen is a story. One hundred Germans is a story. And nothing ever happens in Chile.” (Apocryphal?) Posting in a London newsroom.

“A local man bit a dog yesterday.”



Le Figaro, 1856



Villemessant



The emergence of "objectivity"



19th c. forces leading to rise of journalistic objectivity

Rise of Science

Influence of photography

Weakening of partisanship.

Reform movement, civil services, beginnings of progressivism

Enlarged markets for mass-circulation press/increasing dependence on advertising

Professionalization of journalism -- creation of journalism courses & schools



Growth of wire services

Its [The AP's] members [i.e. subscribers] are scattered from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Canada to the Gulf, and represent every possible shade of political belief, religious faith, and economic sympathy. It is obvious that the Associated Press can have no partisan nor factional bias, no religious affiliation, no capitalistic nor pro-labor trend. Its function is simply to furnish its members with a truthful, clean, comprehensive, non-partisan...report of the news in the world...

Frank B. Noyes, president of the Associated Press, 1913



What makes for "objectivity"?



"Facticity"

My business is merely to communicate facts. My instructions do not allow me to make any comments on the facts I communicate. ... My despatches are merely dry matters of facts and detail. AP Washington bureau chief, 1866
privileges "information" over "story"



What makes for "objectivity"?

Balance:

Objective reporting takes pains to represent fairly each leading side in a political controversy.

Neutrality/nonpartisanship:

"If people knew how I felt on an issue, I had failed in my mission" Walter Cronkite



The Objective Voice

Detachment:

Creation of the “degree zero” voice

Reporters were to report the news as it happened, like machines, without prejudice, color, and without style; all alike. Humor or any sign of personality in our reports was caught, rebuked, and suppressed.

Lincoln Steffens on his years on the *Post*



Edwin Stanton

Features of Objectivity

The inverted pyramid

This evening at about 9:30 p.m. at Ford's Theatre, the President, while sitting in his private box with Mrs. Lincoln, Mrs. Harris and Major Rathburn, was shot by an assassin, who suddenly entered the box and approached behind the President.

The assassin then leaped upon the stage, brandishing a large dagger or knife, and made his escape in the rear of the theatre.

The pistol ball entered the back of the President's head and penetrated nearly through the head. The wound is mortal.

The President has been insensible ever since it was inflicted, and is now dying.

About the same hour an assassin, whether the same or not, entered Mr. Seward's apartment and under pretense of having a prescription was shown to the Secretary's sick chamber...

NY Herald, 4/15/1865

The Lead: Who, what, where, when,
why & how?

The most important info goes first.

BODY

Develop your "news peg" with
supporting info, interviews,
overviews or references.

As the story goes
on, your details
should become
less & less
important.

NEGROES LYNCHED BY A MOB

THREE SHOT TO DEATH AT MEMPHIS, TENN.

RINGLEADERS OF A PARTY WHICH AMBUSHED AND SHOT FOUR DEPUTY SHERIFFS — THE WATCHMAN WAS BOUND AND THE JAILER SLRPT.

MEMPHIS, Tenn., March 9.—At dawn this morning the dead bodies of three negroes riddled with bullets and partly covered with brush were found in a lot about one and a half miles from the heart of the city. The bodies as they lay outstretched told of the terrible work of masked men at 3 o'clock this morning.

The negroes, whose bodies were literally shot to pieces by this mob, were Calvin McDowell, William Stuart, and Theodore Moss.

The crime for which this summary vengeance was wreaked upon them was the ambushing and shooting down on Saturday night last of four Deputy Sheriffs in a negro locality known as the Curve while the officers were fulfilling their duty in looking for a negro for whose arrest they had a warrant.

About 3 o'clock this morning seventy-five men, all wearing masks, appeared in Front Street, near the jail. Whence they came no one hazards a guess. No one saw them assemble; no officer of the law noticed their passage through any streets, nor did any person intercept them in their quick and quiet march to the Shelby County Jail. At this time Watchman O'Donnell sat in the jail office having a chat with a friend named Seat. Suddenly

The price of "impartiality"

ern circles that the British committee was moved to action upon the ex parte statements of a mulatto refugee, who was a refugee because she had imputed unchastity to the victims of negro outrages in the South. Upon the whole, we

"It is a peculiar fact that the crime for which Negroes have frequently been lynched, and occasionally been put to death with frightful tortures, is a crime to which negroes are particularly prone." NY Times editorial, 1894, decrying mob violence

"Nobody in this section of the country believes the old threadbare lie that Negro men rape white women."



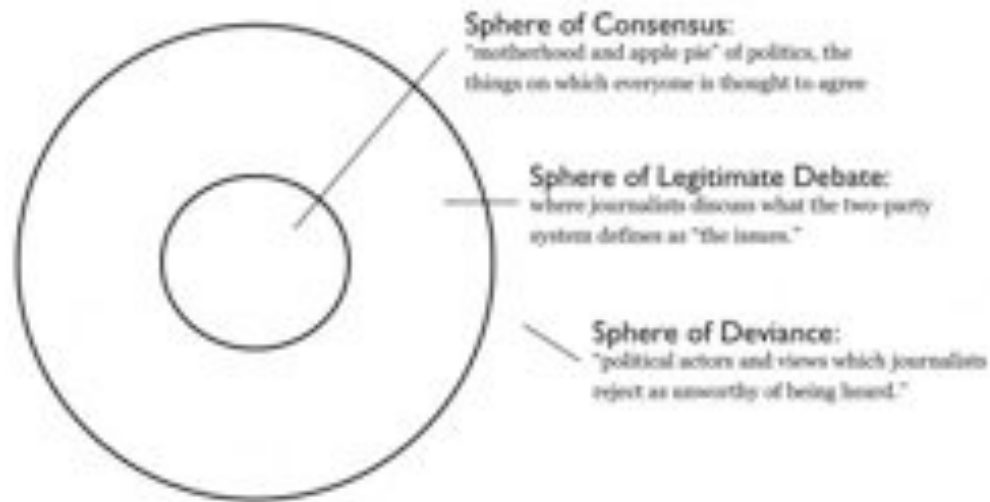
Ida B. Wells



What calls for objectivity – and what doesn't?

Balance etc. presume a common perspective

Cf. Hallin on “spheres” of public discourse



Shifting status: slavery, votes for women, gay marriage. Also global warming, vaccination...



Propaganda



Propaganda before "propaganda"



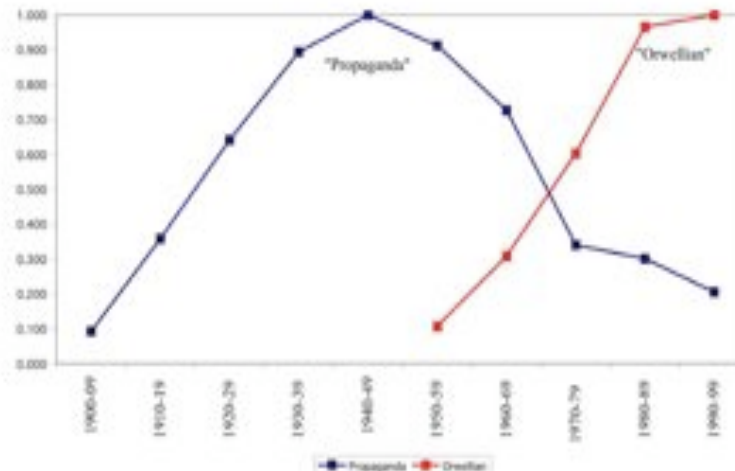


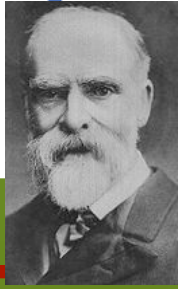
The Rise of “Propaganda”

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*

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





Vicount James Bryce,
chairman of the
German Outrages
Inquiry Committee

WWI British Propaganda

May, 1915: The Bryce Report "substantiates" allegations of German atrocities during invasion of Belgium.



UN CRIME

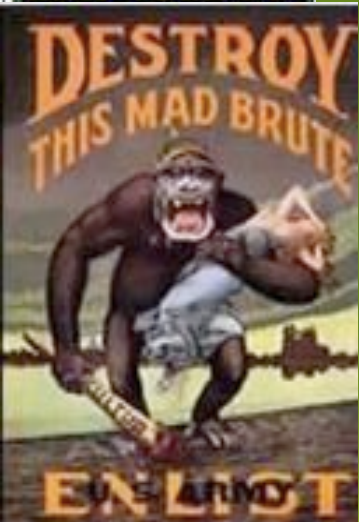
C'est non loin des rives de l'Yser, Les Allemands, furieux de leur défaite, cruellement, sans aucune espèce de pitié, la fille d'un fermier belge, âgée de 14 ans, n'avoir fourni des renseignements aux officiers français. La pauvre fillette a été fusillée impitoyablement sous les yeux de ses parents. En se retirant, après ce lâche assassinat, les Allemands ont mis le feu à la ferme.



Lithograph by George Bellows, 1918



The rise of propaganda: 1914-1917



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

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

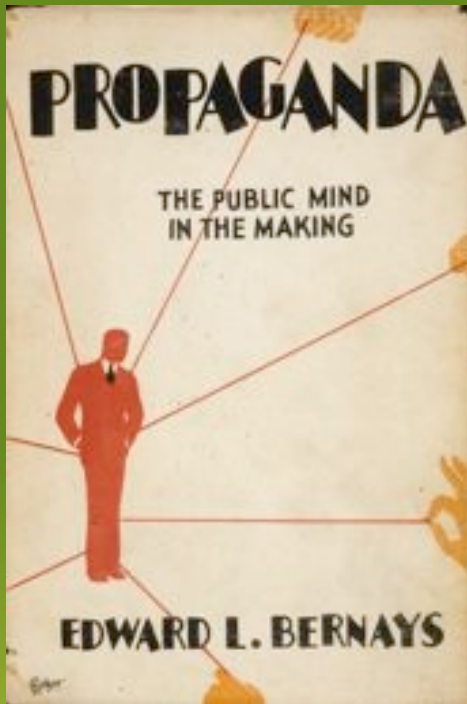
“We did not call it propaganda, for that word, in German hands, had come to be associated with deceit and corruption. Our effort was educational and informative throughout. No other argument was needed than the simple, straightforward presentation of facts.”
George Creel



The Rise of “Propaganda”



After WWI: The birth of the press agent



Edward Bernays

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. ...since in the daily routine reporters cannot give a shape to facts... the need for some formulation is being met by the interested parties.” Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion*, 1923

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. .

Edward Bernays, 1928



Propaganda in WWII



Frank Capra and
George C. Marshall

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." NYC Mayor 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 Propaganda Film



Leni Riefenstahl,
Triumph of the Will,
1935



Frank Capra, Why We Fight



The Propaganda Film



Leni Riefenstahl,
Triumph of the Will,
1935

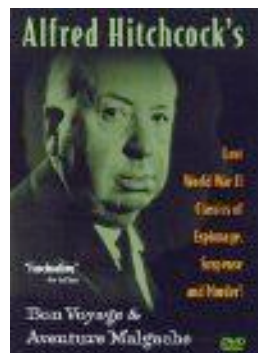


Frank Capra, Why We Fight



The Propaganda Film

"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 the Office of War Information





Assignment 4/8

Watch the segments from Frank Capra's "Why We Fight" films and Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* linked to on the syllabus page. Capra's film was one of a series he made for the US Army Signal Corps for showing to American troops in World War II. Riefenstahl made her film at Hitler's request as a record of the 1934 Nazi party rally in Nuremberg. Read as well Marlin's discussion of German and British propaganda in WWI. Both of these films have been described as propaganda. Here are two definitions of propaganda:

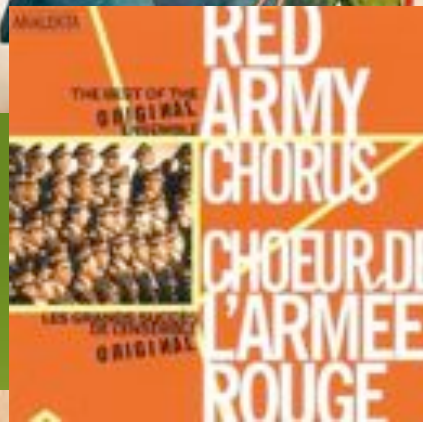
"In its true sense propaganda is a perfectly legitimate form of human activity. Any society, whether it be social, religious or political, which is possessed of certain beliefs, and sets out to make them known, either by the spoken or written words, is practicing propaganda." Scientific American, quoted by Bernays p.21.

Propaganda is "the attempt to affect the personalities and to control the behavior of individuals toward towards ends considered unscientific or or of doubtful value in a society at a particular time." Leonard Doob

Pick ONE of these definitions and use that definition to indicate whether it is adequate to distinguish these two films (a) from each other and (b) from films like a documentary or a newsreel. Is propaganda in the eye of the beholder — a purely subjective judgment?

Postwar Propaganda

By the 1950's, "propaganda" suggests crude or blatant efforts at persuasion.





Can we distinguish propaganda from journalism?

Putin's pet journalist is banned in new EU sanctions

March 21, 2014 by Norman Lebrecht 3 Comments

We hear that the Russian journalist named in the [new list](#) of the west's unwanted is Dmitry Kiselev, head of the Russia Today media group, mouthpiece for Vladimir Putin. Earlier this week Kiselev said on Russian television that Russia was 'the world's only country that is ready to turn the USA into radioactive ash'.





Informing the public



Is informed public deliberation possible?

The press as medium? (OED: "A person or thing which acts as an intermediary")

We have the physical tools of communication as never before. The thoughts and aspirations congruous with them are not communicated, and hence are not common. Without such communication the public will remain shadowy and formless... Communication alone can create a great community. Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*



The "informed citizen": The Lippmann-Dewey Debate



1922: In *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippman argues that the functions of modern democracy cannot rest on the idea of an "informed public"

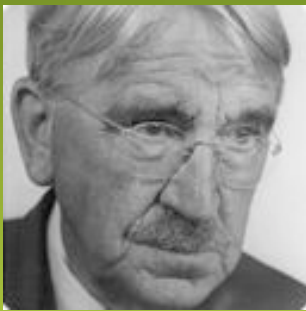
The diffusion of information impeded by structural barriers:

"artificial censorships, the limitations of social contact, the comparatively meagre time available in each day for paying attention to public affairs, the distortion arising because events have to be compressed into very short messages, the difficulty of making a small vocabulary express a complicated world..."

And by psychological barriers:

"[humans] are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it."

"The facts far exceed our curiosity"



The "informed citizen": The Lippmann-Dewey Debate

Lippmann on the role of symbols:

The making of one general will out of a multitude of general wishes is an art [that] consists essentially in the use of symbols which detach emotions after they have been detached from their ideas.

Democracy is essentially plebicitary: the public can only say "yes" or "no."

Dewey: Democracy is both a means and an end:

Democracy is not an alternative to the other principles of associative life. It is the idea of community life itself. (*The Public and its Problems*, 1927)





Is "objectivity" possible?



Reactions to Objectivity

Emergence of the daily columnist

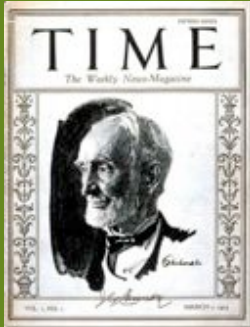
Attacks on “objectivity” from the left

Arguments that objectivity is unattainable; the inevitability of subjectivity

The question is not whether the news shall be unprejudiced but whose prejudices shall color the news. Morris Ernst, 1937



Reactions to Objectivity



The rise of “interpretive journalism”

Birth of *Time* magazine, 1923; offers “intelligent criticism, representation, and evaluation of the men who hold offices of public trust.” Henry Luce

“Show me a man who thinks he’s objective, and I’ll show you a man who’s deceiving himself.” Henry Luce



“a language in which nobody could tell the truth” --
Marshall McLuhan on *Time*-style





The Shifting Meaning of "Bias"



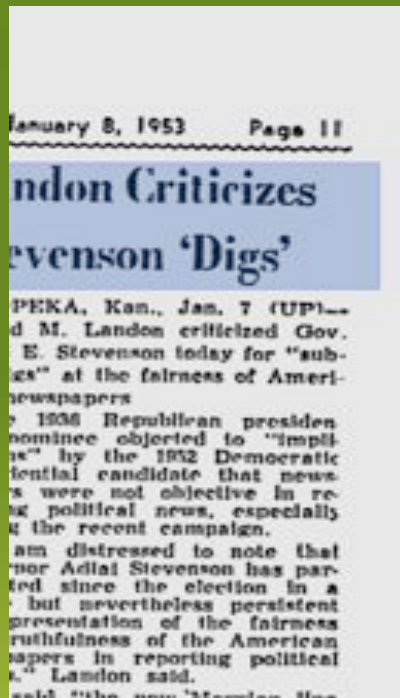
Cf Harold Ickes on press bias in early 1940's:

"The American press is not free.... because of its own financial and economic tie-ups [instead of] what it should be, a free servant of a free democracy."

Cites absence of newspaper reports on dep't store elevator accidents, Gannett's opposition to public ownership of utilities, etc.



The Shifting Meaning of "Bias"



"I am distressed to note that Governor Adlai Stevenson has participated since the election in a subtle but nevertheless persistent misrepresentation of the fairness and truthfulness of the American newspapers in reporting public events. .. The new Marxian line of propaganda no longer is centering on Wall Streeters but the American press... [undermining] public confidence in the newspapers." Alf Landon, Jan 8, 1953



The Shifting Meaning of "Bias"

1969 VWSJ discounts Agnew's charge of media conspiracy to discredit Nixon administration; cites "unconscious slant" introduced by the "prevailing liberal tendencies of the national media."

Cf Albert H. Hastorf and Hadley Cantrill on 1951 Princeton-Dartmouth game: "They Saw a Game," 1954; selective perception

Changing meanings of "bias,"
"prejudice," etc. (not in OED)

| TABLE 2 DATA FROM SECOND QUESTIONNAIRE CHECKED WHILE SEEING FILM | | | | | |
|--|----|---|-----|-------------------|-----|
| GROUP | N | TOTAL NUMBER OF IN- FRACTIONS CHECKED AGAINST | | | |
| | | DARTMOUTH TEAM | | PRINCETON TEAM | |
| | | MEAN | SD | MEAN | SD |
| Dartmouth students | 48 | 4.3* | 2.7 | 4.4 | 2.8 |
| Princeton students | 49 | 9.8* | 5.7 | 4.2 | 3.5 |

* Significant at the .01 level.



Recent Attacks on Objectivity

Bias is inescapable

[M]embers of the media argued that their opinions do not matter because as professional journalists, they report what they observe without letting their opinions affect their judgment. But being a journalist is not like being a surveillance camera at an ATM, faithfully recording every scene for future playback. Journalists make subjective decisions every minute of their professional lives. They choose what to cover and what not to cover, which sources are credible and which are not, which quotes to use in a story and which to toss out.

Brent Bozell, Media Research Center

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There Is No Such Thing As 'Objective' Journalism — Get Over It

by Andrew Kirell | 12:48 pm, November 5th, 2012 107 comments

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You read that correctly. There is no such thing as objectivity in journalism.

And it's time to get over it.

Every journalist has a political point-of-view and they don't magically check that at the door the minute they land a job. Many pretend to pursue some noble cause of pure "objectivity," but it is truly in vain. Every good journalist is informed about what the subjects they cover and it would be near-impossible to be informed and not have an opinion.

Aside from outright disclosing a political bent (or as we do here at Mediaite, labeling an article a "column"), there are plenty of ways "objective" journalists can unwittingly reveal their biases.

Let's say a conservative commentator spends a whole minute speaking with passion about some issue. Journalists can show their bias by writing it up in two generally different ways:

Jeff Jarvis: When It Comes To New Journalism, 'Transparency Is The New Objectivity'

5 Comments

Monday, May 23rd, 2011



Is "Objectivity" an Illusion?

"I think we're coming to the end of the era of "objectivity" that has dominated journalism over this time. We need to define a new ethic that lends legitimacy to opinion, honestly disclosed and disciplined by some sense of propriety." Robert Bartley, WSJ

"Anyone listening to Rush Limbaugh knows that what he is saying is his own opinion. But people who listen to the news on ABC, CBS, or NBC may imagine that they are getting the facts, not just those facts which fit the ideology of the media, with the media's spin." Thomas Sowell.



Readings for 4/10

Butler, B., Joyce, E., and Pike, J. “Don’t Look Now, But We’ve Created a Bureaucracy: The Nature and Roles of Policies and Rules in Wikipedia.” In Proceedings of the 2008 ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing (CHI 2008).

Geiger, R.S. “The Work of Sustaining Order in Wikipedia.” In Proceedings of the 2010 ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW 2010).

Halfaker, A., Geiger, R.S., and Treveen, L. “Snuggle: Designing for efficient socialization and ideological critique.” In Proceedings of the 2014 ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing (CHI 2014).

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