

Propaganda: Mass Manipulation Through the Ages

Tuesday, January 7 to March 11, 2025 – 10am to 12 noon

On Zoom

www.learningunlimiteddetobicoke.com

Presenter: Dr. Olivier Courteaux

Course Overview: “Fake news,” “alternative realities”, “disinformation” and lies, cyberwarfare, not to mention conspiracy theories: our world appears to be, more than ever, the instigator as well as the victim of mass information and mass manipulation. Propaganda, the attempt by some to shape the thoughts and feelings of others, did not disappear with the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. Far from it! In fact, fuelled by the digital revolution and social media, propaganda is more than ever present in our lives. Propaganda is at the heart of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine as it constitutes, together with cyberwarfare, a second front. A look at the techniques of mass persuasion from ancient times to today.

Tuesday, January 7: Introduction: a Few Pre-conceived Notions About Propaganda

Propaganda is the daughter of democracy. The totalitarian regimes of the 20th century and their use of propaganda on a scale never seen before gave the word its pejorative connotation. Propaganda as an organized effort to propagate beliefs and specific ideas first emerged in Ancient Greece. If the French Revolution paved the way for modern political propaganda, the democracies at war between 1914 and 1918 invented mass propaganda. The totalitarian regimes only followed in their footsteps.

Tuesday, January 14: Influencing the Masses: The First World War and the Techniques of Mass Manipulation

The Great War gave birth to mass propaganda. Indeed, as the conflict turned into a bloody stalemate, governments at war set up the first official propaganda services in history. The British learned quickly and became experts in the art of mass manipulation. The techniques of persuasion they developed proved highly effective; so effective, in fact, that Hitler and Goebbels later claimed that a significant part of their own propaganda technique was modelled after British propaganda.

Tuesday, January 21: Public Relations, Marketing and Advertising: How to Create a Consumer Society

Modern propaganda owes a great deal to advertising and its close relatives, marketing and public relations. Advertising was born in the U.S. in the 1920's. A look at the new techniques of economic manipulation and how they became an unescapable cultural phenomenon.

Tuesday, January 28: The 20th Century: The Golden Age of Political Propaganda

In 1939, Russian émigré scientist Serge Chakhotin popularized the expression “rape of the masses”, which describes the techniques of persuasion used by political propagandists. A look at the techniques used in 1930's Germany and Soviet Union, techniques based on the study of crowd psychology: individuals react differently in group.

Propaganda: Mass Manipulation Through the Ages

Tuesday, January 7 to March 11, 2025 – 10am to 12 noon

On Zoom

www.learningunlimiteddetobicoke.com

Tuesday, February 4: The Power of Photography and Film

During the inter-war period (1919-1939), the propagandists discovered the value of the photographic image. Meanwhile films, from a mass entertainment industry revealed the extent of its propagandist potential between 1914 and 1918. A look at some of the most powerful images and films, the “best instruments of propaganda” until the U.S. “war on terror”.

Tuesday, February 11: Television: Persuasion and Disinformation

“The medium is the message” wrote Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan in 1964. For the greater part of the second half of the 20th century, television remained the main support to propaganda. Why? Because television, by associating image and comment, simplifies the messages it conveys to the public.

Tuesday, February 18: Political Propaganda and the Internet

The digital revolution has had a deep impact on the methods and techniques of propaganda, as well as mass manipulation. Today, an increasing number of people get their news from Facebook, a phenomenon that greatly contributes to the extreme polarization of our societies. A look at the digital revolution and how it is re-shaping politics.

Tuesday, February 25: Rumors, Conspiracy Theories and Propaganda

One of the most spectacular manifestations of the digital revolution is the large-scale spreading on the internet and social media of rumors and conspiracy theories, which are strongly associated with strategies of propaganda and mass manipulation.

Tuesday, March 4: Conspiracy Theories and Psychological Warfare

In May 2014, a young Senior Research Associate in the Department of Psychology at the University of Cambridge (UK) delivered what proved to be a crucial lecture in St. Petersburg, Russia. He declared: *“Your Facebook knows more about you than any other person in your life. The level of what can be predicted about you based on what you like on Facebook is higher than what your wife would say about you, what your parents or friends can say about you.”* He soon developed a revolutionary technique known as psychological microtargeting. A look at that technique and how it translated into conspiracy theories and psychological warfare on a scale unheard of.

Tuesday, March 11: Militarizing the Information: The Case of Russian Propaganda on the Internet

Information has long been a weapon. It was first viewed as such by sixth century BC Chinese military strategist and philosopher Sun Tzu in his *Art of War*. Considering the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, a look at the Russian propaganda on the internet: spreading a message while discrediting the enemy, not to mention rewriting history.

Propaganda: Mass Manipulation Through the Ages

Tuesday, January 7 to March 11, 2025 – 10am to 12 noon

On Zoom

www.learningunlimitedetobicoke.com

Biography

An accomplished lecturer, historian and author, Dr. Courteaux received his PhD in History from the University of Paris-Sorbonne and was a faculty member at Royal Military College and at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson). He is a frequent lecturer for several later life learning programs in Toronto, including those at Glendon College and TMU. He is the author of “Canada Between Vichy and Free France, 1940-1945” (2013) and “Quatre Journées qui ébranlèrent le Québec” on Charles de Gaulle's famous 1967 ‘Vive le Québec Libre’ (2017). He is currently working on his latest book, “Suez, 1869, the last triumph of the Empress Eugenie”.

Committee Contact: Jane Botsford