

COMM 438: Propaganda

Spring 2019

Dr. Mercieca

Office: 202G Bolton Hall

Office Hours: T/TH 10:00-11:00 and by appointment.

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Course Description:

We will examine issues relevant to the public sphere, citizenship, and democracy by examining propaganda in American political discourse. Our readings and discussions will focus on four topics: 1) understanding how propaganda works; 2) propaganda message creation and analysis; 3) propaganda circulation and amplification; and, 4) whether or not it is possible to debunk propaganda. Our course readings, class discussions, and written work will examine the importance of propaganda in American political discourse.

This course may contain disturbing content, although I've tried to limit it as much as possible. Propaganda often relies on fear appeals and its effects can be gruesome. I have tried to select historical and current examples from all sides of the political spectrum because propaganda is used everywhere and by everyone (even by you).

Course Objectives:

Through discussing the course readings and participating in class activities students will learn how propaganda shapes American political discourse, including how to analyze and debunk political propaganda.

Learning Outcomes:

- **Critical Thinking Skills** - to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information
- **Communication Skills** - to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication
- **Social Responsibility**: to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities

Required Readings & Materials:

1. There is one required book in this course: Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, Princeton University Press, 2015.
2. All other course reading materials are available as pdf files on ecampus (<http://ecampus.tamu.edu/>) you are also required to watch videos online. Find the links on your course calendar.
3. You may also need a Composition Book (or similar), if you choose to handwrite your Commonplace Book.
4. You will need to submit your in class assignments via turnitin on ecampus.

Attendance

Attendance is REQUIRED. You are expected to attend and participate in in-class assignments and activities every single class period. Whether your absence is excused or not, you must make up all missed in class assignments or lose the points for that assignment.

How absences are excused: Please refer to <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07> for a listing of excused absence scenarios. Please note that I may verify any documentation for excused absence requests.

You have two days after your absence to fill out the university-excused absence form and attach the necessary documentation so that you can make up an assignment past the in class due date.

Evaluation:

Your final grade will be based on the following assignments, due at the end of each class period:

Assignments & Grading:

1. Propaganda Show & Tell (5 points) **SIGN UP FOR DATE**

Short in-class presentation in which you lead the class in a discussion of some piece of propaganda (either current or historical). Create a presentation in which you describe the propaganda. Who has produced it? What messaging techniques do you see being used? How does it circulate? How is it amplified? Can it be debunked? You may not repeat anyone else's propaganda!

2. Daily Commonplace (23 points, 1 point **daily** when there is a reading/watching assignment. See calendar below.)

Bring your Commonplace Book (see Appendix A) to class each day and be prepared to read your Commonplace entries for each assigned reading/video to the class. Be prepared to explain why you thought that quotation was interesting/thought provoking/confusing and how it might relate to your Propaganda Analysis Paper.

3. Propaganda Analysis Paper: Topic Declaration/Statement of the Research Problem (5 points) **DUE: January 29**

You will turn in a typed Topic Declaration and Statement of the Research Problem for your end of the semester Propaganda Analysis Paper. In this short paper (less than 1 double spaced page) you will describe what propaganda you will study and what your initial research question will be. This will allow me to give you feedback on your project at its inception, which will help you to think about your research strategies. Turn your paper in via the turnitin link on eCampus by the end of class.

4. Propaganda Analysis Paper: Previous Research (5 points) **DUE: February 19**

You will turn in a typed review of the previous research on your topic, minimum **5 academic sources (retrieved from the library)**, 3-5 double spaced pages, annotated bibliography style. The previous research may come from Communication scholars, sociology, history, economics, psychology or any other related field. This paper will give you the opportunity to learn what other scholars have written about your propaganda, which will both help you to better understand the propaganda and to formulate your own argument. Turn your paper in via the turnitin link on eCampus by the end of class.

5. Propaganda Analysis Paper: Research Method Description & Plan (5 points) **DUE: March 19**

Turn in a 1-2 page typed double spaced paper in which you answer the following questions:

1. What texts will you study?
2. Where are these texts located, do you have access to them?
3. What kind of analysis will you perform?
4. How will your research strategy help you to answer your research question?

This paper will help you to develop the structure necessary to effectively complete your research paper. Turn your paper in via the turnitin link on eCampus by the end of class.

6. Propaganda Analysis Paper: Analysis (5 points) **DUE: April 9**

Turn in a 3-5 page typed, double spaced propaganda analysis. Apply the research strategies that you developed in your Research Method Paper and report your results and conclusions. You should describe the propaganda (message, circulation, amplification, debunking), analyze that propaganda, and judge the effectiveness or appropriateness of the propaganda for achieving the propagandist's goals. This paper will help you to develop your argument about the propaganda and will help you to answer your research question. Turn in via turnitin link on eCampus.

7. Propaganda Analysis Final Paper (20 points) **DUE: May 7 3:00pm**

Your final paper will draw from the previous papers, but IS NOT merely cutting and pasting the old papers together into a new paper. Your paper should have a section for each of the previous papers (statement of the problem/research question, previous research, method/texts, and analysis) in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. Your paper will be 8-10 double spaced pages in length, free from punctuation and spelling errors, and will clearly identify your research question and make an argument based upon previous scholarly

research and your own analysis. Turn your paper in via the turnitin link on eCampus by 3pm.

8. Four Minute paper presentation: (2 points) **DUE: April 23 & 25 (sign up for date)**

You will present your work to your fellow students via a four minute presentation including a discussion of the research question, method, analysis, and your conclusions.

Good citizenship:

1. You are in class on time every day
2. You are ready to discuss readings
3. You are prepared for classwork.

Points will be assigned as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------|----|
| Propaganda Show & Tell | 5 |
| Commonplace Book | 23 |
| Topic Declaration Paper | 5 |
| Previous Research Paper | 5 |
| Research Method Paper | 5 |
| Analysis Paper | 5 |
| Propaganda Analysis Final | 50 |
| Four Minute Presentation | 2 |

Total possible points=100

Grading Scale:

90-100: A; 80-89: B; 70-79: C; 60-69: D; 59 and below: F

Special Accommodations:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at the Student Services at White Creek complex on west campus or call 979-845-1637. For additional information visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.

Academic Integrity Statement:

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal or tolerate those who do.” All syllabi must contain a section that states the Aggie Honor Code (as stated above) and refers the student to the Honor Council Rules and Procedures on the web: <http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor>.

Daily Reading/Watching Calendar

| DATE | READ/WATCH | DUE | PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL |
|--------|---|---|------------------------|
| Jan 15 | <p>Commonplace book discussion and creation (bring your Commonplace book to class daily)</p> <p>Read: Jacobs, "'Commonplace Books': The Tumblers of an Earlier Era," (1 page)</p> | <p>See discussion of "commonplacing" in Appendix A below and begin your Commonplace book. Choose a form (paper or electronic), style, categories.</p> | NONE |
| Jan 17 | <p>Resources for studying propaganda (archives, techniques)</p> <p>Read: browse the resources folder to see what kinds of propaganda sources are available to study or find your own project elsewhere.</p> | <p>Examine the resources available in your ecampus folder (or, anywhere else), what interests you? Find two possible projects and bring your ideas to class to discuss.</p> | NONE |
| Jan 22 | <p>Overview 1: We are all Propagandists Now</p> <p>Read: 1) Mercieca, "Preaching Civility Won't Save American Democracy," 1-6. 2) Umberto Eco, "Ur Fascism," 1-10.</p> <p>Watch: Jason Stanley, "If you're not scared about fascism in the U.S., you should be." NYT. (5:02)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> | |
| Jan 24 | <p>Overview 2: Propaganda for Propaganda</p> <p>Read: Edward Bernays, <i>Propaganda</i>, 19-31.</p> <p>Watch: Edward Bernays, "Torches of Freedom." (6:30)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> | |

| DATE | READ/WATCH | DUE | PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL |
|--------|---|--|------------------------|
| Jan 29 | <p>How Propaganda Works 1: Defining Propaganda.</p> <p>Read: Jason Stanley, <i>How Propaganda Works</i>, 39-59.</p> <p>Watch: "George Creel, The Salesman" (1:37) and "Frank Capra's 'Why We Fight' Propaganda Films" (4:39)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> <p>Topic Declaration DUE</p> | |
| Jan 31 | <p>How Propaganda Works 2: Defining Propaganda (continued)</p> <p>Read: Jason Stanley, <i>How Propaganda Works</i>, 60-80</p> <p>Watch: "Duck and Cover" (9:14)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> | |
| Feb 5 | <p>How Propaganda Works 3: Language as a Mechanism of Control</p> <p>Read: Jason Stanley, <i>How Propaganda Works</i>, 125-151</p> <p>Watch: "Communism" (10:41)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> | |
| Feb 7 | <p>How Propaganda Works 4: Language as a Mechanism of Control (continued)</p> <p>Read: Jason Stanley, <i>How Propaganda Works</i>, 52-177</p> <p>Watch: "Japanese Relocation" (9:50)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> <p>Come to class with one question to submit to Dr. Stanley</p> | |
| Feb 12 | <p>Skype with Dr. Jason Stanley, Professor of Philosophy, Yale University.</p> | NONE | NONE |

| DATE | READ/WATCH | DUE | PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL |
|--------|--|--|------------------------|
| Feb 14 | <p>Message Creation 1: Hitler's Rhetorical Strategies</p> <p>Read: 1) Excerpts from Hitler, <i>Mein Kampf</i>, 1-4. 2) Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle," 1-14.</p> <p>Watch: "Don't be a Sucker," (17:25)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> | |
| Feb 19 | <p>Message Creation 2: On Framing & the "Overton Window."</p> <p>Read: 1) Russell, "An Introduction to the Overton Window of Political Possibilities," 1-6. 2) Lakoff and Duran, "Trump has turned words into weapons. And he's winning the linguistic war." 1-10.</p> <p>Watch: Vox, "How Trump makes extreme things look normal." (7:24)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> <p>Previous Research Paper DUE</p> | |
| Feb 21 | <p>Message Creation 3: Hypnosis and Wizardry</p> <p>Read: 1) Cavna, "Donald Trump will win in a landslide. The mind behind 'Dilbert' explains why." <i>Washington Post</i>, 1-9. 2) Antsand, "How To Be A Wizard - Lessons From Master Persuader Scott Adams," 1-12.</p> <p>Watch: "Dilbert Creator Scott Adams on Trump's 'linguistic kill shots'." (7:49)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> | |

| DATE | READ/WATCH | DUE | PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL |
|---------|---|---|------------------------|
| Feb 26 | <p>Message Creation 4: Trump's Rhetorical Techniques</p> <p>Read: 1) Tilove, "Six Rhetorical Devices that have served Trump well," 1-7. 2) Mercieca, "The Rhetorical brilliance of Trump the demagogue," 1-6.</p> <p>Watch: "7 Public Speaking Tips We Can All Learn From Donald Trump" (6:51)</p> | Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class. | |
| Feb 28 | <p>Message Circulation 1: Rallies & Meetings</p> <p>Read: 1) Bytwerk, "The Rhetorical Aspects of a Nazi Meeting," 307-318. 2) Bosmajian, "The Nazi Speaker's Rhetoric," 365-371.</p> <p>Watch: "A Night at the Garden" (7:04)</p> | Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class. | |
| March 5 | <p>Message Circulation 2: Radio, TV & Film</p> <p>Read: Chomsky, "Media Control," 5-58.</p> <p>Watch: "The 5 Filters of the Mass Media Machine," (4:46)</p> | Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class. | |
| March 7 | <p>Message Circulation 3: New Media spaces</p> <p>Read: Farkas and Neumayor "Disguised Propaganda from Digital to Social Media," 1-25.</p> <p>Watch: "Fake News Stories Thriving on Social Media" (3:05) and "Here's How Fake News Works" (2:49)</p> | Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class. | |

| DATE | READ/WATCH | DUE | PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL |
|----------|---|--|------------------------|
| March 12 | SPRING BREAK | NONE | NONE |
| March 14 | SPRING BREAK | NONE | NONE |
| March 19 | <p>Message Circulation 4: Education</p> <p>Read: Giroux, "Educational Leadership and the Crisis of Democratic Government," 4-11.</p> <p>Watch: "How Southern socialites rewrote Civil War history" (6:55)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> <p>Research Plan DUE</p> | |
| March 21 | <p>Message Circulation 5: Images/Memes</p> <p>Read: 1) Giese, "It's Time to Embrace Memetic Warfare," 1-8. 2) Boyd, "Truth is a Virus: Meme Warfare and the Billionaires for Bush (or Gore)," 1-8.</p> <p>Watch: "Tracing a Meme from the Internet's Fringe to a Republican Slogan," (interactive)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> | |
| March 26 | <p>Message Circulation 6: Secret Spaces</p> <p>Read: 1) Neudert, "Future elections may be swayed by intelligent, weaponized chatbots," 1-9. 2) Menegus, "How a Video Game Chat Client Became the Web's New Cesspool of Abuse," 1-7. 3) Tufekci, "YouTube, the Great Radicalizer," 1-4.</p> <p>Watch: "How Russian Trolls Collected Americans Personal Information," (5:39)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> | |

| DATE | READ/WATCH | DUE | PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL |
|----------|---|---|---------------------------|
| March 28 | <p>Message Amplification 1: The War for Your Attention</p> <p>Read: Rose-Stockwell, "This is how your fear and outrage are being sold for profit," 1-31.</p> <p>Watch: Tristan Harris, "Social Media's Dark Side" (9:20)</p> | Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class. | |
| April 2 | <p>Message Amplification 2: Russian Trolls</p> <p>Read: 1) Thompson and Lapowsky, "How Russian Trolls Used Meme Warfare To Divide America," 1-14. 2) Chen, "The Agency," 1-16.</p> <p>Watch: "How Russian Bots Invade our Elections" (5:03) and "A Former Russian Troll Explains how to Spread Fake News" (5:49)</p> | Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class. | |
| April 4 | <p>Message Amplification 3: Domestic Trolls</p> <p>Read: 1) Timberg, "As a conservative Twitter user sleeps, his account is hard at work," 1-10. 2) Schwartz, "The Trolls Among Us," 1-11.</p> <p>Watch: "Hannity: The fake news media have a new target" (13:36)</p> | Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class. | |

| DATE | READ/WATCH | DUE | PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL |
|----------|--|---|---------------------------|
| April 9 | <p>Message Amplification 4: Conspiracy</p> <p>Read:</p> <p>1) Fairleigh Dickinson, "90 Percent of Trump and Clinton Supporters Believe in Conspiracies that Smear the Candidate They Oppose," 1-8.</p> <p>2) Nyhan, "Why More Democrats Are Now Embracing Conspiracy Theories," 1-3.</p> <p>3) Muirhead and Rosenblum, "The New Conspiracists," 1-9.</p> <p>Watch: "What's Really Behind Conspiracy Theories?" (7:58)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> <p>Propaganda Analysis DUE.</p> | |
| April 11 | <p>Message Debunking 1: Recognition.</p> <p>Read:</p> <p>1) Institute for Propaganda Analysis, "How to Detect Propaganda," 49-55.</p> <p>2) WSFA, "Recognizing Propaganda Techniques and Errors of Faulty Logic," 1-5.</p> <p>Watch: "The Worldwide War on Truth" (17:27)</p> | <p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> | |

| DATE | READ/WATCH | DUE | PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL |
|----------|---|---|------------------------|
| April 16 | <p>Message Debunking 2: Is it actually possible to debunk propaganda?</p> <p>Read:</p> <p>1) Nyhan, "Political Knowledge Does Not Guard Against Belief In Conspiracy Theories," 1-5.</p> <p>2) MIT, "On Twitter, False News Travels Faster than True Stories," 1-4.</p> <p>3) Frankovic, "Russia's impact on the election seen through partisan eyes," 1-4.</p> <p>4) Dale, "Donald Trump voters: We like the president's lies," 1-6.</p> <p>5) Heffernan, "Social Media Makes Us Soldiers in the War Against Ourselves," 1-4.</p> <p>Watch: "Motivated Reasoning in Politics," (3:07)</p> | Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class. | |
| April 18 | <p>Summary: Propaganda is a Form of Weaponized Communication</p> <p>Read:</p> <p>Mercieca, "Dangerous Demagogues and Weaponized Communication," 1-26.</p> <p>Watch: "Did you know Democrats met to censor conservatives and that Alex Jones crashed the event?" (10: 14)</p> | Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class. | |
| April 23 | NONE | Four-Minute Research Presentations | |
| April 25 | NONE | Four-Minute Research Presentations | |

| DATE | READ/WATCH | DUE | PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL |
|----------------------------------|------------|--|------------------------|
| May 7 1:00-3:00 pm Final Exam | NONE | Final Paper DUE 3pm (submit via ecampus) | NONE |

Appendix A: On Commonplacing

You must come to class with TWO new entries in your Commonplace Book for each day's assigned "reading" and "watching." You will be asked to share at least one of your entries with the class (read out loud) and tell us why you chose to commonplace that quotation each day as well as submit your daily commonplaces on ecampus.

According to historian Joseph Adelman, "commonplacing was a common practice during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in both the North American colonies and England in which an individual would create a book of quotations that they found meaningful in their reading. Creators of such books used them to copy down (by hand, of course) passages that they found enlightening, enriching, and occasionally confounding. Commonplacers then typically offered their own commentary about what they had read, reacting to texts, creating a conversation, or explaining why they had chosen it. Commonplace books frequently also included indexes so that their creators could easily locate quotations relating to common themes or issues."

What to commonplace? Copy passages that are interesting to you for some reason: they make a clear claim, state the author's central thesis, use evocative language, state an eternal truth, or even state something confusing or something with which you disagree.

You may choose how to make your Commonplace Book. You may choose to handwrite it or to keep an electronic version – that is up to you. You may also choose your categories of quotations or themes. Since this is your book, I want it to be useful to you. Your final assignment asks you to use your Commonplace Book to analyze some piece of propaganda, so this book will be most useful to you if you focus your entries on things that could possibly related to your research project. In other words, your Commonplace Book will be a collection of quotations that you will use in your Final Paper.