

1-22-2016

Technologies of Truth: Propaganda, Ideology, and the Modern State

Seton Hall University, Department of History

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Recommended Citation

Seton Hall University, Department of History, "Technologies of Truth: Propaganda, Ideology, and the Modern State" (2016).
Symposium in Comparative History. 1.
<https://scholarship.shu.edu/history-symposium/1>

Seton Hall University Department of History

Technologies of Truth: Propaganda, Ideology, and the Modern State

An Interdisciplinary Symposium

January 22, 2016



The rise of industrialized mass-societies predicated on notions of popular sovereignty transformed relationships between state power, ideology and the population. Modern propaganda is a product of this transformation. Under the old regime, the population was expected to acquiesce, obey, and fulfill its obligations. Belief was an attribute of the spiritual realm, embodied in religious institutions, whose representatives policed the boundaries of acceptable thought.

The doctrine of popular sovereignty undermined this division of labor and engendered a new set of imperatives. Rather than suppressing harmful ideas, it became necessary to propagate a positive set of beliefs that would resonate with the interests of power and ensure not only passive compliance, but active support. New modes of communication, such as the mass-circulation newspaper, public events, graphic arts, radio, film and eventually television, played a central role as tools in shaping mass consciousness.

In times of peace, varying interests competed to deploy these tools to advance programs ranging from the promotion of commercial products to campaigns for public health, moral reform, and political dominance. At moments of war and crisis, the state mobilized the tools of persuasive communication to inculcate a uniform worldview. Totalitarian parties and regimes, arising in the 1920s and 30s, extended this wartime mobilization of media and ideas into ordinary life, thus exposing populations to a continual torrent of information designed to inculcate a cohesive regime of truth.

This symposium will explore the processes and technologies underlying the phenomenon of modern propaganda, and provide a comparative view of the ways in which both state and non-state actors have strived to shape the popular mindset through the manipulation of ideas, images and emotions.

Program:

9:00-9:30 Coffee and Introduction

9:30-11:00 **Panel 1: Evolution of Propaganda: USA/USSR**

Allan Winkler, Miami University, *Propaganda Then and Now: The American Experience: Before During, & After World War II*

Stephen Norris, Miami University, *Wielding the Weapon of Laughter: Boris Efimov and Soviet Political Propaganda, 1922-1991*

Chair: Nathaniel Knight

11:00-11:15 Coffee Break

11:15-12:45 **Panel 2: Transformations in the U.S. WW II Visual Narrative**

Thomas Doherty, Brandeis University, *The Moguls vs. The Senators: The Committee on Interstate Commerce Investigation of Propaganda in Motion Pictures, 1941*

James J. Kimble, Seton Hall University, *Spectral Soldiers: Domestic Propaganda, Visual Culture, and Images of Death on the World War II Home Front*

Chair: Larry Greene

12:45-1:30 Lunch Break

1:30-3:00 **Panel 3: British Anti-Communism in Iraq; Soviet Anti-Racism at Home & in USA**

Elizabeth Bishop, Texas State University, *Law 51 (and other Technologies of Truth) in Hashemite Iraq*

Meredith Roman, State University of New York at Brockport, *Soviet Attacks on U.S. Racial Apartheid and the Creation of the New Anti-Racist Man and Woman*

Chair: Murat Cem Mengüç

3:00-3:15 Coffee Break

3:15-4:45 **Panel 4: Mass Nationalism and Mass Marketing at Home and Abroad**

Maria Snegovaya, Columbia University, *Assessing Russia's Propaganda Abroad*

James P. Woodard, Montclair State University, *Creating Big Brazil: Business, Marketing, Mass Nationalism under Military Rule, 1969-1974*

Chair: Maxim Matusevich

4:45-5:00 Coffee Break

5:00-5:30 Closing Remarks and Roundtable Discussion

Chair: Mark Molesky

6:30 Dinner: Location TBA

Center of Excellence Organizing Committee:

Larry A. Greene, Professor of History: Civil War, World War II, African-American History

Nathaniel Knight, Associate Professor & Department Chair: Russian History

Maxim Matusevich, Associate Professor: Global & Transnational History, Cold War

Murat Cem Mengüç, Assistant Professor & Director of Middle Eastern Studies Program: Middle Eastern, Global and Transnational History

Mark Molesky, Associate Professor: European Intellectual History, German History, Portuguese History, WW I

The History Department would like to thank the Office of the Provost and the College of Arts and Sciences for their generous support.

Location:

Faculty Lounge, University Center, Floor 2

ABSTRACTS

Allan M. Winkler, University Distinguished Professor of History
(Emeritus), Miami University of Ohio

winkleam@muohio.edu

*Propaganda Then and Now: The American Experience Before, During,
and After World War II*

Propaganda has played an important part in the story of 20th century American conflict. Originally considered a distasteful form of manipulation, particularly in the early days of the advertising industry, propaganda came of age during the Great War - World War I - thanks to the efforts of George Creel, head of the Committee on Public Information (CPI). Propaganda proved effective, but fears about its power led to an altogether different experience during World War II. The Office of War Information (OWI) operated with far greater limitations than the CPI, but at the same time established propaganda as a legitimate endeavor. That acceptance persisted during a half-century of Cold War, but during the course of that conflict, policy makers began to discover how effectively they could - or could not - operate within the same framework. During the Korean War, they had a hard time marshalling opinion on behalf of a limited war. During the war in Vietnam, they paid scant attention to official pronouncements, as reporters jumped on helicopters to write about whatever they saw. Fifty years after I first began work in this area, I would like to use my time to examine what changes have occurred in how we view propaganda and how we use propaganda, and to ask what shifts in the public policy of persuasion have occurred in the past 50 years.

Stephen M. Norris, Professor of History, Miami University

norris1@miamioh.edu

*Wielding the Weapon of Laughter: Boris Efimov and Soviet
Political Propaganda, 1922-1991*

This paper analyzes the remarkable career of Boris Efimov, the most important Soviet political caricaturist, and how his work illustrates important aspects of Soviet propaganda. Efimov, who was born in 1900, first began working for the Bolsheviks in Civil War Ukraine. In 1922, the year the Soviet Union was founded, he moved to Moscow and was named principal political caricaturist for *Izvestiia*. He would also help to found *Krokodil* (*Crocodile*), the Soviet satirical journal, that same year. Efimov would work for both publications (as well as others) until the system collapsed, making him the longest-serving propagandist in Soviet history and making his work an essential expression, perhaps *the* essential expression, of Soviet visual satire. Critics and viewers often referred to Soviet satire as a "weapon of laughter," and no one wielded this weapon more consistently than Boris Efimov. My paper will examine several themes that ran throughout Efimov's work and that can therefore be identified as key components of Soviet propaganda from beginning to end.

Thomas Doherty, Professor of American Studies, Brandeis University
doherty@brandeis.edu

The Moguls vs. the Senators: the Committee on Interstate Commerce Investigation to Propaganda in Motion Pictures, 1941.

In September 1939, upon the outbreak of the war in Europe, and no longer needing to placate the German market, a cycle of explicitly anti-Nazi and implicitly pro-interventionist films moved Hollywood into territory avoided since the rise of Nazism in 1933, indeed since the birth of the studio system. The films were too tightly wrapped in red, white, and blue to be labeled Communist subversion, but they could be called what they were: interventionist in outlook, pro-defense in policy, and anti-Nazi in spirit. Hollywood's lurch into foreign policy was so aberrant, and so against the grain of the isolationist strain in the nation and in Congress, that the U.S. Senate sought to rein in the motion picture activism. Unlike the Dies Committee, which suspected Hollywood of Communism, the new criticism from Capitol Hill accused Hollywood of marshalling screen entertainment to sucker Americans into the European maelstrom. Over six days in September 1941, a subcommittee of Sen. D. Worth Clark (R-MO) chaired the committee, but he was a stalking horse for two like-minded colleagues, Sen. Burton Wheeler (R-MT) and Sen. Gerald P. Nye (R-ND)

James J. Kimble, Associate Professor of Communications, Seton Hall University
james.kimble@shu.edu

Spectral Soldiers: Domestic Propaganda, Visual Culture, and Images of Death on the World War II Home Front

This essay argues against the prevailing historical conception that George Strock's graphic photograph of three lifeless Marines — published by Life magazine on September 20, 1943 — was the definitive point when domestic U.S. propaganda began to portray increasingly grisly images of dead American soldiers. After considering how the visual culture of the home front made the photo's publication a dubious prospect for the government, I examine a series of predecessor images that arguably helped construct a rhetorical space in which such graphic depictions could gradually gain public acceptance and that, ultimately, ushered in a transformation of the home front's visual culture.

Elizabeth Bishop, Associate Professor of History, Texas State University
eb26@txstate.edu

Law 51 (and other Technologies of Truth) in Hashemite Iraq

During World War II, differing "technologies of truth" from the UK and USSR struggled within the space of Iraq's nation. Like the UK, India, and Jordan, Iraq's Hashemite monarchy's legal structure harbored antipathy to communism at its very heart. The original text of article 51 (1938 Iraqi penal code) specified seven years' imprisonment (or a fine) for propagation of communism, anarchism, or immorality. Published news indicates that this law was enforced; the passport law also prevented individuals suspected of communism from leaving the country. Moscow libraries hold ephemera, such as small-format printings of Communist classics in Arabic. During these years, British Embassies around the world disseminated anti-communist materials through the BBC's foreign language services, embassy bulletins, films, photographs for the press and window displays, posters, lectures, and verbal propaganda by means of 'calls;' in the Middle East, propaganda policies targeted educated elites. Until the opening of a Second Front, however, the U.K. suspended anti-communist enforcement in specific jurisdictions. Until the end of World War II, the U.S.S.R. was free to disseminate communist information in the space of Hashemite Iraq. Unlike British propaganda targeted to educated elites, the Soviet Embassy in Baghdad disseminated communist materials that reached a variety of demographics. During these years, the Iraqi Communist Party's illegal publishing house, Dar al-Hikma, printed newspapers and other publications. An important source was literature in English printed in the Soviet Union, translated into Arabic; among these was Engels' *Origin of the Family*. This presentation addresses the "cessation in hostilities" that World War II brought about, when wartime alliances forced the U.K. to drop its antipathy to global communism.

Meredith Roman, Associate Professor of History, State University of New York at Brockport
mroman@brockport.edu

Soviet attacks on U.S. Racial Apartheid and the Creation of the New Anti-Racist Man and Woman

At a time when biological racism was ascendant throughout the world, Soviet leaders identified U.S. racism as a tool for transforming Soviet men and women into anti-racist, enlightened citizens. Authorities in Moscow commissioned the publication (and translation) of novels and children's stories by and about African Americans; encouraged the production of films that exposed the horrors of U.S. racial apartheid; organized political education campaigns, court proceedings, and rallies to protest U.S. racial mores; and condemned U.S. racism routinely in the central press via photographs, cartoons, and articles. This propaganda was especially intense in volume and scope from the late 1920s through the early 1930s driven by both domestic and international developments. U.S. racism was an easy target; Soviet propagandists did not have to exaggerate the reality of U.S. racial violence and African Americans in the USSR actively provided them with ample material. The focus on U.S. racism helped to satisfy Soviet citizens' interest in U.S. society while encouraging them to recognize that they had the power (and responsibility) to advance the moral superiority of the U.S.S.R. by practicing the anti-racist speech and behavior that was modeled for them in Soviet propaganda. Notwithstanding the propagandistic value that Soviet leaders derived from indicting U.S. racism, this paper also contemplates the direct and indirect consequences that Soviet antiracist propaganda had on the experiences of American Blacks in the Soviet Union as it pertained to their "re-humanization," and to judicial developments in the United States as manifested in the Scottsboro trial of nine African American teenagers in the 1930s and the 1972 acquittal of Angela Davis.

Maria Snegovaya, Department of Political Science, Columbia University

ms4391@columbia.edu

Assessing Russia's Propaganda Abroad

Over the last years Russia has been implementing a new type of “soft power” in attempt to achieve its political objectives abroad: namely an active use of propaganda techniques through various media channels (such as Russia Today, Sputnik, Russia Beyond the Headlines etc). Russian information approach also constitutes a part of Russia’s method of conducting hybrid warfare (in Syria, Ukraine and the west more broadly), which consists of a deliberate disinformation campaign supported by actions of the intelligence organs designed to confuse the enemy and achieve strategic advantage at minimal cost. The nature of hybrid operations makes it very difficult to detect or even determine ex post facto when they begin, since confusing the enemy and neutral observers is one of its core components. Despite the raising concerns regarding the threats of Russia’s propaganda, recent surveys and evidence reveal that outside of Russia alone its influence is over-exaggerated, and is mostly reliant on particular domestic conditions the targeted countries.

James P. Woodard, Associate Professor of History, Montclair State University

woodardj@mail.montclair.edu

Creating Big Brazil: Business, Marketing, and Mass Nationalism under Military Rule, 1969-1974

This paper reexamines the emergence and diffusion of what has been called the “ideology of *Brasil Grande*” – of “Greater Brazil,” “Great Brazil,” or simply “Big Brazil,” identified primarily with pro-regime propaganda during the most repressive and most economically exuberant years of the country’s long period of military rule (1964-1985). Between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, as Brazilian GDP growth averaged 10 percent per year, pharaonic public works were summoned out of thin air, and the nexus of state enterprise, national capital, and multinational corporations grew ever tighter and more profitable, the constituent elements of “*Brasil Grande*” ideas were assembled and rehearsed before larger and larger national audiences. But these ideas were not without precedent, drawing as they did on preexisting tropes of Brazilian greatness and economic über-patriotism that had emerged during earlier periods of dictatorial and relatively democratic governance. Furthermore, whereas the existing scholarship has emphasized the official nature of *Brasil Grande* propaganda and its producerist elements, this paper traces the role of private business – domestic and foreign – in the development and diffusion of these ideas, as well as the connections between such ideas and interests and the emergence of Brazilian consumerism (*consumismo*).