

# The Century of the Self Reader

## Part 1:

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# The Engineering of Consent

By EDWARD L. BERNAYS

FREEDOM of speech and its democratic corollary, a free press, have tacitly expanded our Bill of Rights to include the right of persuasion. This development was an inevitable result of the expansion of the media of free speech and persuasion, defined in other articles in this volume. All these media provide open doors to the public mind. Any one of us through these media may influence the attitudes and actions of our fellow citizens.

The tremendous expansion of communications in the United States has given this Nation the world's most penetrating and effective apparatus for the transmission of ideas. Every resident is constantly exposed to the impact of our vast network of communications which reach every corner of the country, no matter how remote or isolated. Words hammer continually at the eyes and ears of America. The United States has become a small room in which a single whisper is magnified thousands of times.

Knowledge of how to use this enormous amplifying system becomes a matter of primary concern to those who are interested in socially constructive action.

There are two main divisions of this communications system which maintain social cohesion. On the first level there are the commercial media. Almost 1,800 daily newspapers in the United States have a combined circulation of around 44,000,000. There are approximately 10,000 weekly newspapers and almost 6,000 magazines. Approximately 2,000 radio stations of various types broadcast to the Nation's 60,000,000 receiving sets. Approximately 16,500 motion picture houses have a capacity of almost 10,500,000. A deluge of books and

pamphlets is published annually. The country is blanketed with billboards, handbills, throwaways, and direct mail advertising. Round tables, panels and forums, classrooms and legislative assemblies, and public platforms—any and all media, day after day, spread the word, someone's word.

On the second level there are the specialized media owned and operated by the many organized groups in this country. Almost all such groups (and many of their subdivisions) have their own communications systems. They disseminate ideas not only by means of the formal written word in labor papers, house organs, special bulletins, and the like, but also through lectures, meetings, discussions, and rank-and-file conversations.

## LEADERSHIP THROUGH COMMUNICATION

This web of communications, sometimes duplicating, crisscrossing, and overlapping, is a condition of fact, not theory. We must recognize the significance of modern communications not only as a highly organized mechanical web but as a potent force for social good or possible evil. We can determine whether this network shall be employed to its greatest extent for sound social ends.

For only by mastering the techniques of communication can leadership be exercised fruitfully in the vast complex that is modern democracy in the United States. In an earlier age, in a society that was small geographically and with a more homogeneous population, a leader was usually known to his followers personally; there was a visual relationship between them. Communication was accomplished principally by personal announcement to an audience

or through a relatively primitive printing press. Books, pamphlets, and newspapers reached a very small literate segment of the public.

We are tired of hearing repeated the threadbare cliché "The world has grown smaller"; but this so-called truism is not actually true, by any means. The world has grown both smaller and very much larger. Its physical frontiers have been expanded. Today's leaders have become more remote physically from the public; yet, at the same time, the public has much greater familiarity with these leaders through the system of modern communications. Leaders are just as potent today as ever.

In turn, by use of this system, which has constantly expanded as a result of technological improvement, leaders have been able to overcome the problems of geographical distance and social stratification to reach their publics. Underlying much of this expansion, and largely the reason for its existence in its present form, has been widespread and enormously rapid diffusion of literacy.

Leaders may be the spokesmen for many different points of view. They may direct the activities of major organized groups such as industry, labor, or units of government. They may compete with one another in battles for public good will; or they may, representing divisions within the larger units, compete among themselves. Such leaders, with the aid of technicians in the field who have specialized in utilizing the channels of communication, have been able to accomplish purposefully and scientifically what we have termed "the engineering of consent."

#### THE ENGINEERING APPROACH

This phrase quite simply means the use of an engineering approach—that is, action based only on thorough knowl-

edge of the situation and on the application of scientific principles and tried practices to the task of getting people to support ideas and programs. Any person or organization depends ultimately on public approval, and is therefore faced with the problem of engineering the public's *consent* to a program or goal. We expect our elected government officials to try to engineer our consent—through the network of communications open to them—for the measures they propose. We reject government authoritarianism or regimentation, but we are willing to take action suggested to us by the written or spoken word. The engineering of consent is the very essence of the democratic process, the freedom to persuade and suggest. The freedoms of speech, press, petition, and assembly, the freedoms which make the engineering of consent possible, are among the most cherished guarantees of the Constitution of the United States.

The engineering of consent should be based theoretically and practically on the complete understanding of those whom it attempts to win over. But it is sometimes impossible to reach joint decisions based on an understanding of facts by all the people. The average American adult has only six years of schooling behind him. With pressing crises and decisions to be faced, a leader frequently cannot wait for the people to arrive at even general understanding. In certain cases, democratic leaders must play their part in leading the public through the engineering of consent to socially constructive goals and values. This role naturally imposes upon them the obligation to use the educational processes, as well as other available techniques, to bring about as complete an understanding as possible.

Under no circumstances should the engineering of consent supersede or displace the functions of the educational

system, either formal or informal, in bringing about understanding by the people as a basis for their action. The engineering of consent often does supplement the educational process. If higher general educational standards were to prevail in this country and the general level of public knowledge and understanding were raised as a result, this approach would still retain its value.

Even in a society of a perfectionist educational standard, equal progress would not be achieved in every field. There would always be time lags, blind spots, and points of weakness; and the engineering of consent would still be essential. The engineering of consent will always be needed as an adjunct to, or a partner of, the educational process.

#### IMPORTANCE OF ENGINEERING CONSENT

Today it is impossible to overestimate the importance of engineering consent; it affects almost every aspect of our daily lives. When used for social purposes, it is among our most valuable contributions to the efficient functioning of modern society. The techniques can be subverted; demagogues can utilize the techniques for antidemocratic purposes with as much success as can those who employ them for socially desirable ends. The responsible leader, to accomplish social objectives, must therefore be constantly aware of the possibilities of subversion. He must apply his energies to mastering the operational know-how of consent engineering, and to out-maneuvering his opponents in the public interest.

It is clear that a leader in a democracy need not always possess the personal qualities of a Daniel Webster or a Henry Clay. He need not be visible or even audible to his audiences. He may lead indirectly, simply by effectively using today's means of making contact with the eyes and ears of those

audiences. Even the direct, or what might be called the old-fashioned, method of speaking to an audience is for the most part once removed; for usually public speech is transmitted, mechanically, through the mass media of radio, motion pictures, and television.

During World War I, the famous Committee on Public Information, organized by George Creel, dramatized in the public's consciousness the effectiveness of the war of words. The Committee helped to build the morale of our own people, to win over the neutrals, and to disrupt the enemy. It helped to win that war. But by comparison with the enormous scope of word warfare in World War II, the Committee on Public Information used primitive tools to do an important job. The Office of War Information alone probably broadcast more words over its short-wave facilities during the war than were written by all of George Creel's staff.

As this approach came to be recognized as the key factor in influencing public thought, thousands of experts in many related fields came to the fore—such specialists as editors, publishers, advertising men, heads of pressure groups and political parties, educators, and publicists. During World War I and the immediate postwar years a new profession developed in response to the demand for trained, skilled specialists to advise others on the technique of engineering public consent, a profession providing counsel on public relations.

#### THE PROFESSIONAL VIEWPOINT

In 1923 I defined this profession in my book, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, and in the same year, at New York University, gave the first course on the subject. In the almost quarter-century that has elapsed since then, the profession has become a recognized one in this country and has spread to other

democratic countries where free communication and competition of ideas in the market place are permitted. The profession has its literature, its training courses, an increasing number of practitioners, and a growing recognition of social responsibility.

In the United States, the profession deals specifically with the problems of relationship between a group and its public. Its chief function is to analyze objectively and realistically the position of its client vis-à-vis a public and to advise as to the necessary corrections in its client's attitudes toward and approaches to that public. It is thus an instrument for achieving adjustment if any maladjustment in relationships exists. It must be remembered of course that good will, the basis of lasting adjustment, can be preserved in the long run only by those whose actions warrant it. But this does not prevent those who do not deserve good will from winning it and holding onto it long enough to do a lot of damage.

The public relations counsel has a professional responsibility to push only those ideas he can respect, and not to promote causes or accept assignments for clients he considers antisocial.

#### PLANNING A CAMPAIGN

Just as the civil engineer must analyze every element of the situation before he builds a bridge, so the engineer of consent, in order to achieve a worthwhile social objective, must operate from a foundation of soundly planned action. Let us assume that he is engaged in a specific task. His plans must be based on four prerequisites:

1. Calculation of resources, both human and physical; i.e., the manpower, the money, and the time available for the purpose;
2. As thorough knowledge of the subject as possible;
3. Determination of objectives, sub-

ject to possible change after research; specifically, what is to be accomplished, with whom and through whom;

4. Research of the public to learn why and how it acts, both individually and as a group.

Only after this preliminary groundwork has been firmly laid is it possible to know whether the objectives are realistically attainable. Only then can the engineer of consent utilize his resources of manpower, money, and time, and the media available. Strategy, organization, and activities will be geared to the realities of the situation.

The task must first be related to the budget available for manpower and mechanics. In terms of human assets, the consent engineer has certain talents—creative, administrative, executive—and he must know what these are. He should also have a clear knowledge of his limitations. The human assets need to be implemented by work space and office equipment. All material needs must be provided by budget.

Above all else, once the budget has been established, and before a first step is taken, the field of knowledge dealing with the subject should be thoroughly explored. This is primarily a matter of collecting and codifying a store of information so that it will be available for practical, efficient use. This preliminary work may be tedious and exacting, but it cannot be by-passed; for the engineer of consent should be powerfully equipped with facts, with truths, with evidence, before he begins to show himself before a public.

The consent engineer should provide himself with the standard reference books on public relations, publicity, public opinion: *N. W. Ayer & Son's Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals*, the *Editor and Publisher Year Book*, the *Radio Daily Annual*, the *Congressional Directory*, the *Chicago Daily News Almanac*, the *World Al-*

*manac*—and, of course, the telephone book. (The *World Almanac*, for example, contains lists of many of the thousands of associations in the United States—a cross section of the country.) These and other volumes provide a basic library necessary to effective planning.

At this point in the preparatory work, the engineer of consent should consider the objectives of his activity. He should have clearly in mind at all times precisely where he is going and what he wishes to accomplish. He may intensify already existing favorable attitudes; he may induce those holding favorable attitudes to take constructive action; he may convert disbelievers; he may disrupt certain antagonistic points of view.

Goals should be defined exactly. In a Red Cross drive, for example, a time limit and the amount of money to be raised are set from the start. Much better results are obtained in a relief drive when the appeal is made for aid to the people of a specific country or locality rather than of a general area such as Europe or Asia.

#### STUDYING THE PUBLIC

The objective must at all times be related to the public whose consent is to be obtained. That public is people, but what do they know? What are their present attitudes toward the situation with which the consent engineer is concerned? What are the impulses which govern these attitudes? What ideas are the people ready to absorb? What are they ready to do, given an effective stimulant? Do they get their ideas from bartenders, letter carriers, waitresses, Little Orphan Annie, or the editorial page of the *New York Times*? What group leaders or opinion molders effectively influence the thought process of what followers? What is the flow of

ideas—from whom to whom? To what extent do authority, factual evidence, precision, reason, tradition, and emotion play a part in the acceptance of these ideas?

The public's attitudes, assumptions, ideas, or prejudices result from definite influences. One must try to find out what they are in any situation in which one is working.

If the engineer of consent is to plan effectively, he must also know the group formations with which he is to deal, for democratic society is actually only a loose aggregate of constituent groups. Certain individuals with common social and/or professional interests form voluntary groups. These include such great professional organizations as those of doctors, lawyers, nurses, and the like; the trade associations; the farm associations and labor unions; the women's clubs; the religious groups; and the thousands of clubs and fraternal associations. Formal groups, such as political units, may range from organized minorities to the large amorphous political bodies that are our two major parties. There is today even another category of the public group which must be kept in mind by the engineer of consent. The readers of the *New Republic* or the listeners to Raymond Swing's program are as much voluntary groups, although unorganized, as are the members of a trade union or a Rotary Club.

To function well, almost all organized groups elect or select leaders who usually remain in a controlling position for stated intervals of time. These leaders reflect their followers' wishes and work to promote their interests. In a democratic society, they can only lead them as far as, and in the direction in which, they want to go. To influence the public, the engineer of consent works with and through group leaders and opinion molders on every level.

## VALUE AND TECHNIQUES OF RESEARCH

To achieve accurate working knowledge of the receptivity of the public mind to an idea or ideas, it is necessary to engage in painstaking research. Such research should aim to establish a common denominator between the researcher and the public. It should disclose the realities of the objective situation in which the engineer of consent has to work. Completed, it provides a blueprint of action and clarifies the question of who does what, where, when, and why. It will indicate the over-all strategy to be employed, the themes to be stressed, the organization needed, the use of media, and the day-to-day tactics. It should further indicate how long it will take to win the public and what are the short- and long-term trends of public thinking. It will disclose subconscious and conscious motivations in public thought, and the actions, words, and pictures that effect these motivations. It will reveal public awareness, the low or high visibility of ideas in the public mind.

Research may indicate the necessity to modify original objectives, to enlarge or contract the planned goal, or to change actions and methods. In short, it furnishes the equivalent of the mariner's chart, the architect's blueprint, the traveler's road map.

Public opinion research may be conducted by questionnaires, by personal interviews, or by polls. Contact can be made with business leaders, heads of trade associations, trade union officials, and educational leaders, all of whom may be willing to aid the engineer of consent. The heads of professional groups in the communities—the medical association, the architects, the engineers—all should be queried. So should social service executives, officials of women's clubs, and religious leaders. Editors, publishers, and radio station

and motion picture people can be persuaded to discuss with the consent engineer his objectives and the appeals and angles that affect these leaders and their audiences. The local unions or associations of barbers, railwaymen, clothing workers, and taxicab drivers may be willing to co-operate in the undertaking. Grass-roots leaders are important.

Such a survey has a double-barreled effect. The engineer of consent learns what group leaders know and do not know, the extent to which they will co-operate with him, the media that reach them, appeals that may be valid, and the prejudices, the legends, or the facts by which they live. He is able simultaneously to determine whether or not they will conduct informational campaigns in their own right, and thus supplement his activities.

## THEMES, STRATEGY, AND ORGANIZATION

Now that the preliminary work has been done, it will be possible to proceed to actual planning. From the survey of opinion will emerge the major themes of strategy. These themes contain the ideas to be conveyed; they channel the lines of approach to the public; and they must be expressed through whatever media are used. The themes are ever present but intangible—comparable to what in fiction is called the "story line."

To be successful, the themes must appeal to the motives of the public. Motives are the activation of both conscious and subconscious pressures created by the force of desires. Psychologists have isolated a number of compelling appeals, the validity of which has been repeatedly proved in practical application.

Once the themes are established, in what kind of a campaign are they to be used? The situation may call for a blitzkrieg or a continuing battle, a com-

bination of both, or some other strategy. It may be necessary to develop a plan of action for an election that will be over in a few weeks or months, or for a campaign that may take years, such as the effort to cut down the tuberculosis death rate. Planning for mass persuasion is governed by many factors that call upon all one's powers of training, experience, skill, and judgment. Planning should be flexible and provide for changed conditions.

When the plans have been perfected, organization of resources follows, and it must be undertaken in advance to provide the necessary manpower, money, and physical equipment. Organization also correlates the activities of any specialists who may be called upon from time to time, such as opinion researchers, fund raisers, publicity men, radio and motion picture experts, specialists for women's clubs and foreign language groups, and the like.

#### THE TACTICS

At this point it will be possible to plan the tactics of the program, i.e., to decide how the themes are to be disseminated over the idea carriers, the networks of communication.

Do not think of tactics in terms of segmental approaches. The problem is not to get articles into a newspaper or obtain radio time or arrange a motion picture newsreel; it is rather to set in motion a broad activity, the success of which depends on interlocking all phases and elements of the proposed strategy, implemented by tactics that are timed to the moment of maximum effectiveness. An action held over but one day may fall completely flat. Skilled and imaginative timing has determined the success of many mass movements and campaigns, the familiar phenomena so typical of the American people's behavior pattern.

Emphasis of the consent engineer's

activities will be on the written and spoken word, geared to the media and designed for the audiences he is addressing. He must be sure that his material fits his public. He must prepare copy written in simple language and sixteen-word sentences for the average school-age public. Some copy will be aimed at the understanding of people who have had seventeen years of schooling. He must familiarize himself with all media and know how to supply them with material suitable in quantity and quality.

Primarily, however, the engineer of consent must create news. News is not an inanimate thing. It is the overt act that makes news, and news in turn shapes the attitudes and actions of people. A good criterion as to whether something is or is not news is whether the event juts out of the pattern of routine. The developing of events and circumstances that are not routine is one of the basic functions of the engineer of consent. Events so planned can be projected over the communication systems to infinitely more people than those actually participating, and such events vividly dramatize ideas for those who do not witness the events.

The imaginatively managed event can compete successfully with other events for attention. Newsworthy events, involving people, usually do not happen by accident. They are planned deliberately to accomplish a purpose, to influence our ideas and actions.

Events may also be set up in chain reaction. By harnessing the energies of group leaders, the engineer of consent can stimulate them to set in motion activities of their own. They will organize additional, specialized, subsidiary events, all of which will further dramatize the basic theme.

#### CONCLUSION

Communication is the key to engi-



neering consent for social action. But it is not enough to get out leaflets and bulletins on the mimeograph machines, to place releases in the newspapers, or to fill the air waves with radio talks. Words, sounds, and pictures accomplish little unless they are the tools of a soundly thought-out plan and carefully organized methods. If the plans are well formulated and the proper use is made of them, the ideas conveyed by the words will become part and parcel of the people themselves.

When the public is convinced of the soundness of an idea, it will proceed to action. People translate an idea into action suggested by the idea itself, whether it is ideological, political, or social. They may adopt a philosophy that stresses racial and religious tolerance; they may vote a New Deal into office; or they may organize a consumers' buying strike. But such results do not just happen. In a democracy they can be accomplished principally by the engineering of consent.

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# PUBLIC OPINION

BY WALTER LIPPMANN

Wading River, Long Island. 1921.

## PART VI

### THE IMAGE OF DEMOCRACY

"I confess that in America I saw more than America;  
I sought the image of democracy itself."

Alexis de Tocqueville.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE SELF-CENTERED MAN

SINCE Public Opinion is supposed to be the prime mover in democracies, one might reasonably expect to find a vast literature. One does not find it. There are excellent books on government and parties, that is, on the machinery which in theory registers public opinions after they are formed. But on the sources from which these public opinions arise, on the processes by which they are derived, there is relatively little. The existence of a force called Public Opinion is in the main taken for granted, and American political writers have been most interested either in finding out how to make government express the common will, or in how to prevent the common will from subverting the purposes for which they believe the government exists. According to their traditions they have wished either to tame opinion or to obey it. Thus the editor of a notable series of text-books writes that "the most difficult and the most momentous question of government (is) how to transmit the force of individual opinion into public action."

[Footnote: Albert Bushnell Hart in the Introductory note to A.  
Lawrence Lowell's *Public Opinion and Popular Government*.]

But surely there is a still more momentous question, the question of how to validate our private versions of the political scene. There is, as I shall try to indicate further on, the prospect of radical improvement by the development of principles already in operation. But

this development will depend on how well we learn to use knowledge of the way opinions are put together to watch over our own opinions when they are being put together. For casual opinion, being the product of partial contact, of tradition, and personal interests, cannot in the nature of things take kindly to a method of political thought which is based on exact record, measurement, analysis and comparison. Just those qualities of the mind which determine what shall seem interesting, important, familiar, personal, and dramatic, are the qualities which in the first instance realistic opinion frustrates. Therefore, unless there is in the community at large a growing conviction that prejudice and intuition are not enough, the working out of realistic opinion, which takes time, money, labor, conscious effort, patience, and equanimity, will not find enough support. That conviction grows as self-criticism increases, and makes us conscious of buncombe, contemptuous of ourselves when we employ it, and on guard to detect it. Without an ingrained habit of analyzing opinion when we read, talk, and decide, most of us would hardly suspect the need of better ideas, nor be interested in them when they appear, nor be able to prevent the new technic of political intelligence from being manipulated.

Yet democracies, if we are to judge by the oldest and most powerful of them, have made a mystery out of public opinion. There have been skilled organizers of opinion who understood the mystery well enough to create majorities on election day. But these organizers have been regarded by political science as low fellows or as "problems," not as possessors of the most effective knowledge there was on how to create and operate public opinion. The tendency of the people who have voiced the ideas of democracy, even when they have not managed its action, the tendency of students, orators, editors, has been to look upon Public Opinion as men in other societies looked upon the uncanny forces to which they ascribed the last word in the direction of events.

For in almost every political theory there is an inscrutable element which in the heyday of that theory goes unexamined. Behind the appearances there is a Fate, there are Guardian Spirits, or Mandates to a Chosen People, a Divine Monarchy, a Vice-Regent of Heaven, or a Class of the Better Born. The more obvious angels, demons, and kings are gone out of democratic thinking, but the need for believing that there are reserve powers of guidance persists. It persisted for those thinkers of the Eighteenth Century who designed the matrix of democracy. They had a pale god, but warm hearts, and in the doctrine of popular sovereignty they found the answer to their need of an infallible origin for the new social order. There was the mystery, and only enemies of the people touched it with profane and curious hands.

They did not remove the veil because they were practical politicians in a bitter and uncertain struggle. They had themselves felt the aspiration of democracy, which is ever so much deeper, more intimate and more important than any theory of government. They were engaged, as against the prejudice of ages, in the assertion of human dignity. What possessed them was not whether John Smith had sound views on any public question, but that John Smith, scion of a stock that had always been considered inferior, would now bend his knee to no other man. It was this spectacle that made it bliss "in that dawn to be alive." But every analyst seems to degrade that dignity, to deny that all men are reasonable all the time, or educated, or informed, to note that people are fooled, that they do not always know their own interests, and that all men are not equally fitted to govern.

The critics were about as welcome as a small boy with a drum. Every one of these observations on the fallibility of man was being exploited ad nauseam. Had democrats admitted there was truth in any of the aristocratic arguments they would have opened a breach in the defenses. And so just as Aristotle had to insist that the slave was a slave by nature, the democrats had to insist that the free man was a legislator and administrator by nature. They could not stop to explain that a human soul might not yet have, or indeed might never have, this technical equipment, and that nevertheless it had an inalienable right not to be used as the unwilling instrument of other men. The superior people were still too strong and too unscrupulous to have refrained from capitalizing so candid a statement.

So the early democrats insisted that a reasoned righteousness welled up spontaneously out of the mass of men. All of them hoped that it would, many of them believed that it did, although the cleverest, like Thomas Jefferson, had all sorts of private reservations. But one thing was certain: if public opinion did not come forth spontaneously, nobody in that age believed it would come forth at all. For in one fundamental respect the political science on which democracy was based was the same science that Aristotle formulated. It was the same science for democrat and aristocrat, royalist and republican, in that its major premise assumed the art of government to be a natural endowment. Men differed radically when they tried to name the men so endowed; but they agreed in thinking that the greatest question of all was to find those in whom political wisdom was innate. Royalists were sure that kings were born to govern. Alexander Hamilton thought that while "there are strong minds in every walk of life... the representative body, with too few exceptions to have any influence on

the spirit of the government, will be composed of landholders, merchants, and men of the learned professions."

[Footnote: *The Federalist*, Nos. 35, 36. *Cf.* comment by Henry Jones Ford in his *Rise and Growth of American Politics*. Ch. V.]

Jefferson thought the political faculties were deposited by God in farmers and planters, and sometimes spoke as if they were found in all the people.

[Footnote: See below p. 268.] The main premise was the same: to govern was an instinct that appeared, according to your social preferences, in one man or a chosen few, in all males, or only in males who were white and twenty-one, perhaps even in all men and all women.

In deciding who was most fit to govern, knowledge of the world was taken for granted. The aristocrat believed that those who dealt with large affairs possessed the instinct, the democrats asserted that all men possessed the instinct and could therefore deal with large affairs. It was no part of political science in either case to think out how knowledge of the world could be brought to the ruler. If you were for the people you did not try to work out the question of how to keep the voter informed. By the age of twenty-one he had his political faculties. What counted was a good heart, a reasoning mind, a balanced judgment. These would ripen with age, but it was not necessary to consider how to inform the heart and feed the reason. Men took in their facts as they took in their breath.

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But the facts men could come to possess in this effortless way were limited. They could know the customs and more obvious character of the place where they lived and worked. But the outer world they had to conceive, and they did not conceive it instinctively, nor absorb trustworthy knowledge of it just by living. Therefore, the only environment in which spontaneous politics were possible was one confined within the range of the ruler's direct and certain knowledge. There is no escaping this conclusion, wherever you found government on the natural range of men's faculties. "If," as Aristotle said, "the citizens of a state are to judge and distribute offices according to merit, then they must know each other's characters; where they do not possess this knowledge, both the election to offices and the decision of law suits will go wrong."

[Footnote: *Politics*, Bk. VII, Ch. 4.]

Obviously this maxim was binding upon every school of political thought. But it presented peculiar difficulties to the democrats.

Those who believed in class government could fairly claim that in the court of the king, or in the country houses of the gentry, men did know each other's characters, and as long as the rest of mankind was passive, the only characters one needed to know were the characters of men in the ruling class. But the democrats, who wanted to raise the dignity of all men, were immediately involved by the immense size and confusion of their ruling class--the male electorate. Their science told them that politics was an instinct, and that the instinct worked in a limited environment. Their hopes bade them insist that all men in a very large environment could govern. In this deadly conflict between their ideals and their science, the only way out was to assume without much discussion that the voice of the people was the voice of God.

The paradox was too great, the stakes too big, their ideal too precious for critical examination. They could not show how a citizen of Boston was to stay in Boston and conceive the views of a Virginian, how a Virginian in Virginia could have real opinions about the government at Washington, how Congressmen in Washington could have opinions about China or Mexico. For in that day it was not possible for many men to have an unseen environment brought into the field of their judgment. There had been some advances, to be sure, since Aristotle. There were a few newspapers, and there were books, better roads perhaps, and better ships. But there was no great advance, and the political assumptions of the Eighteenth Century had essentially to be those that had prevailed in political science for two thousand years. The pioneer democrats did not possess the material for resolving the conflict between the known range of man's attention and their illimitable faith in his dignity.

Their assumptions antedated not only the modern newspaper, the world-wide press services, photography and moving pictures, but, what is really more significant, they antedated measurement and record, quantitative and comparative analysis, the canons of evidence, and the ability of psychological analysis to correct and discount the prejudices of the witness. I do not mean to say that our records are satisfactory, our analysis unbiased, our measurements sound. I do mean to say that the key inventions have been made for bringing the unseen world into the field of judgment. They had not been made in the time of Aristotle, and they were not yet important enough to be visible for political theory in the age of Rousseau, Montesquieu, or Thomas Jefferson. In a later chapter I think we shall see that even in the latest theory of human reconstruction, that of the English Guild Socialists, all the deeper premises have been taken over from this older system of political thought.

That system, whenever it was competent and honest, had to assume that

no man could have more than a very partial experience of public affairs. In the sense that he can give only a little time to them, that assumption is still true, and of the utmost consequence. But ancient theory was compelled to assume, not only that men could give little attention to public questions, but that the attention available would have to be confined to matters close at hand. It would have been visionary to suppose that a time would come when distant and complicated events could conceivably be reported, analyzed, and presented in such a form that a really valuable choice could be made by an amateur. That time is now in sight. There is no longer any doubt that the continuous reporting of an unseen environment is feasible. It is often done badly, but the fact that it is done at all shows that it can be done, and the fact that we begin to know how badly it is often done, shows that it can be done better. With varying degrees of skill and honesty distant complexities are reported every day by engineers and accountants for business men, by secretaries and civil servants for officials, by intelligence officers for the General Staff, by some journalists for some readers. These are crude beginnings but radical, far more radical in the literal meaning of that word than the repetition of wars, revolutions, abdications and restorations; as radical as the change in the scale of human life which has made it possible for Mr. Lloyd George to discuss Welsh coal mining after breakfast in London, and the fate of the Arabs before dinner in Paris.

For the possibility of bringing any aspect of human affairs within the range of judgment breaks the spell which has lain upon political ideas. There have, of course, been plenty of men who did not realize that the range of attention was the main premise of political science. They have built on sand. They have demonstrated in their own persons the effects of a very limited and self-centered knowledge of the world. But for the political thinkers who have counted, from Plato and Aristotle through Machiavelli and Hobbes to the democratic theorists, speculation has revolved around the self-centered man who had to see the whole world by means of a few pictures in his head.

# Media Control

## The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda

by Noam Chomsky

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(Abridged)

The role of the media in contemporary politics forces us to ask what kind of a world and what kind of a society we want to live in, and in particular in what sense of democracy do we want this to be a democratic society? Let me begin by counter-posing two different conceptions of democracy. One conception of democracy has it that a democratic society is one in which the public has the means to participate in some meaningful way in the management of their own affairs and the means of information are open and free. If you look up democracy in the dictionary you'll get a definition something like that.

An alternative conception of democracy is that the public must be barred from managing of their own affairs and the means of information must be kept narrowly and rigidly controlled. That may sound like an odd conception of democracy, but it's important to understand that it is the prevailing conception. In fact, it has long been, not just in operation, but even in theory. There's a long history that goes back to the earliest modern democratic revolutions in seventeenth century England which largely expresses this point of view. I'm just going to keep to the modern period and say a few words about how that notion of democracy develops and why and how the problem of media and disinformation enters within that context.

### EARLY HISTORY OF PROPAGANDA

Let's begin with the first modern government propaganda operation. That was under the Woodrow Wilson Administration. Woodrow Wilson was elected President in 1916 on the platform "Peace Without Victory." That was right in the middle of the World War I. The population was extremely pacifistic and saw no reason to become involved in a European war. The Wilson administration was actually committed to war and had to do something about it. They established a government propaganda commission, called the Creel Commission which succeeded, within six months, in turning a pacifist population into a hysterical, war-mongering population which wanted to destroy everything German, tear the Germans limb from limb, go to war and save the world. That was a major achievement, and it led to a further achievement. Right at that time and after the war the same techniques were used to whip up a hysterical Red Scare, as it was called, which succeeded pretty much in destroying unions and eliminating such dangerous problems as



freedom of the press and freedom of political thought. There was very strong support from the media, from the business establishment, which in fact organized, pushed much of this work, and it was, in general, a great success. Among those who participated actively and enthusiastically in Wilson's war were the progressive intellectuals, people of the John Dewey circle, who took great pride, as you can see from their own writings at the time, in having shown that what they called the "more intelligent members of the community," namely, themselves, were able to drive a reluctant population into a war by terrifying them and eliciting jingoist fanaticism. The means that were used were extensive. For example, there was a good deal of fabrication of atrocities by the Huns, Belgian babies with their arms torn off, all sorts of awful things that you still read in history books. Much of it was invented by the British propaganda ministry, whose own commitment at the time, as they put it in their secret deliberations, was "to direct the thought of most of the world." But more crucially they wanted to control the thought of the more intelligent members of the community in the United States, who would then disseminate the propaganda that they were concocting and convert the pacifistic country to wartime hysteria. That worked. It worked very well. And it taught a lesson: State propaganda, when supported by the educated classes and when no deviation is permitted from it, can have a big effect. It was a lesson learned by Hitler and many others, and it has been pursued to this day.

## SPECTATOR DEMOCRACY

Another group that was impressed by these successes was liberal democratic theorists and leading media figures, like, for example, Walter Lippmann, who was the dean of American journalists, a major foreign and domestic policy critic and also a major theorist of liberal democracy. If you take a look at his collected essays, you'll see that they're subtitled something like "A Progressive Theory of Liberal Democratic Thought." Lippmann was involved in these propaganda commissions and recognized their achievements. He argued that what he called a "revolution in the art of democracy," could be used to "manufacture consent," that is, to bring about agreement on the part of the public for things that they didn't want by the new techniques of propaganda. He also thought that this was a good idea, in fact, necessary. It was necessary because, as he put it, "the common interests elude public opinion entirely" and can only be understood and managed by a "specialized class" of "responsible men" who are smart enough to figure things out. This theory asserts that only a small elite, the intellectual community that the Deweyites were talking about, can understand the common interests, what all of us care about, and that these things "elude the general public." This is a view that goes back hundreds of years. It's also a typical Leninist view. In fact, it has very close resemblance to the Leninist conception that a vanguard of revolutionary intellectuals take state power, using popular revolutions as the force that brings them to state power, and then drive the stupid masses toward a future that they're too

dumb and incompetent to envision for themselves. The liberal democratic theory and Marxism-Leninism are very close in their common ideological assumptions.

I think that's one reason why people have found it so easy over the years to drift from one position to another without any particular sense of change. It's just a matter of assessing where power is. Maybe there will be a popular revolution, and that will put us into state power; or maybe there won't be, in which case we'll just work for the people with real power: the business community. But we'll do the same thing. We'll drive the stupid masses toward a world that they're too dumb to understand for themselves.

Lippmann backed this up by a pretty elaborated theory of progressive democracy. He argued that in a properly functioning democracy there are classes of citizens. There is first of all the class of citizens who have to take some active role in running general affairs. That's the specialized class.

They are the people who analyze, execute, make decisions, and run things in the political, economic, and ideological systems. That's a small percentage of the population. Naturally, anyone who puts these ideas forth is always part of that small group, and they're talking about what to do about those others.

Those others, who are out of the small group, the big majority of the population, they are what Lippmann called "the bewildered herd." We have to protect ourselves from "the trampling and roar of a bewildered herd". Now there are two "functions" in a democracy: The specialized class, the responsible men, carry out the executive function, which means they do the thinking and planning and understand the common interests. Then, there is the bewildered herd, and they have a function in democracy too.

Their function in a democracy, he said, is to be "spectators," not participants in action. But they have more of a function than that, because it's a democracy.

Occasionally they are allowed to lend their weight to one or another member of the specialized class. In other words, they're allowed to say, "We want you to be our leader" or "We want you to be our leader." That's because it's a democracy and not a totalitarian state. That's called an election. But once they've lent their weight to one or another member of the specialized class they're supposed to sink back and become spectators of action, but not participants. That's in a properly functioning democracy.

And there's a logic behind it. There's even a kind of compelling moral principle behind it. The compelling moral principle is that the mass of the public are just too stupid to be able to understand things. If they try to participate in managing their own affairs, they're just going to cause trouble. Therefore, it would be immoral and improper to permit them to do this. We have to tame the bewildered herd, not allow the bewildered herd to rage and trample and destroy things. It's pretty much the same logic that says that it would be improper to let a three-year-old run across the street.

You don't give a three-year-old that kind of freedom because the three-year-old doesn't know how to handle that freedom. Correspondingly, you don't allow the bewildered herd to become participants in action. They'll just cause trouble.

So we need something to tame the bewildered herd,

and that something is this new revolution in the art of democracy: the manufacture of consent. The media, the schools, and popular culture have to be divided. For the political class and the decision makers they have to provide them some tolerable sense of reality, although they also have to instill the proper beliefs. Just remember, there is an unstated premise here. The unstated premise — and even the responsible men have to disguise this from themselves — has to do with the question of how they get into the position where they have the authority to make decisions. The way they do that, of course, is by serving people with real power. The people with real power are the ones who own the society, which is a pretty narrow group. If the specialized class can come along and say, I can serve your interests, then they'll be part of the executive group. You've got to keep that quiet.

That means they have to have instilled in them the beliefs and doctrines that will serve the interests of private power. Unless they can master that skill, they're not part of the specialized class. So we have one kind of educational system directed to the responsible men, the specialized class. They have to be deeply indoctrinated in the values and interests of private power and the state-corporate nexus that represents it. If they can achieve that, then they can be part of the specialized class. The rest of the bewildered herd basically just have to be distracted. Turn their attention to something else. Keep them out of trouble. Make sure that they remain at most spectators of action, occasionally lending their weight to one or another of the real leaders, who they may select among.

This point of view has been developed by lots of other people. In fact, it's pretty conventional. For example, the leading theologian and foreign policy critic Reinhold Niebuhr, sometimes called "the theologian of the establishment," the guru of George Kennan and the Kennedy intellectuals, put it that rationality is a very narrowly restricted skill. Only a small number of people have it. Most people are guided by just emotion and impulse. Those of us who have rationality have to create "necessary illusions" and emotionally potent "oversimplifications" to keep the naive simpletons more or less on course. This became a substantial part of contemporary political science. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Harold Lasswell, the founder of the modern field of communications and one of the leading American political scientists, explained that we should not succumb to "democratic dogmatism about men being the best judges of their own interests." Because they're not. We're the best judges of the public interests. Therefore, just out of ordinary morality, we have to make sure that they don't have an opportunity to act on the basis of their misjudgments. In what is nowadays called a totalitarian state, or a military state, it's easy. You just hold a bludgeon over their heads, and if they get out of line you smash them over the head. But as society has become more free and democratic, you lose that capacity. Therefore you have to turn to the techniques of propaganda. The logic is clear. Propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state.

That's wise and good because, again, the common interests elude the bewildered herd. They can't figure them out.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS

The United States pioneered the public relations industry. Its commitment was "to control the public mind" as its leaders put it. They learned a lot from the successes of the Creel Commission and the successes in creating the Red Scare and its aftermath. The public relations industry underwent a huge expansion at that time. It succeeded for some time in creating almost total subordination of the public to business rule through the 1920s. This was so extreme that Congressional committees began to investigate it as we moved into the 1930s. That's where a lot of our information about it comes from.

Public relations is a huge industry. They're spending by now something on the order of a billion dollars a year. All along its commitment was to controlling the public mind.

In the 1930s, big problems arose again, as they had during the First World War. There was a huge depression and substantial labor organizing. In fact, in 1935 labor won its first major legislative victory, namely, the right to organize, with the Wagner Act. That raised two serious problems. For one thing, democracy was malfunctioning. The bewildered herd was actually winning legislative victories, and it's not supposed to work that way. The other problem was that it was becoming possible for people to organize.

People have to be atomized and segregated and alone. They're not supposed to organize, because then they might be something beyond spectators of action.

They might actually be participants if many people with limited resources could get together to enter the political arena. That's really threatening.

A major response was taken on the part of business to ensure that this would be the last legislative victory for labor and that it would be the beginning of the end of this democratic deviation of popular organization. It worked. That was the last legislative victory for labor.

From that point on — although the number of people in the unions increased for a while during the World War II, after which it started dropping — the capacity to act through the unions began to steadily drop. It wasn't by accident.

We're now talking about the business community, which spends lots and lots of money, attention, and thought into how to deal with these problems through the public relations industry and other organizations, like the National Association of Manufacturers and the Business Roundtable, and so on. They immediately set to work to try to find a way to counter these democratic deviations.

The first trial was one year later, in 1937.

There was a major strike, the Steel strike in western Pennsylvania at Johnstown.

Business tried out a new technique of labor destruction, which worked very well. Not through goon squads and breaking knees.

That wasn't working very well any more, but through the more subtle and effective means of propaganda. The idea was to figure out ways to turn the public against the strikers, to present the strikers as disruptive,

harmful to the public and against the common interests. The common interests are those of "us," the businessman, the worker, the housewife. That's all "us." We want to be together and have things like harmony and Americanism and working together. Then there's those bad strikers out there who are disruptive and causing trouble and breaking harmony and violating Americanism. We've got to stop them so we can all live together. The corporate executive and the guy who cleans the floors all have the same interests. We can all work together and work for Americanism in harmony, liking each other.

That was essentially the message. A huge amount of effort was put into presenting it. This is, after all, the business community, so they control the media and have massive resources. And it worked, very effectively.

It was later called the "Mohawk Valley formula"

and applied over and over again to break

strikes. They were called "scientific methods

of strike-breaking," and worked very effectively by mobilizing community opinion in favor of vapid, empty concepts like Americanism. Who can be against that? Or harmony.

Who can be against that? Or, as in the Persian

Gulf War, "Support our troops." Who can be against that? Or yellow ribbons. Who can be against that? Anything that's totally vacuous .

In fact, what does it mean if somebody asks you, Do you support the people in Iowa?

Can you say, Yes, I support them, or No, I don't support them? It's not even a question. It doesn't mean anything. That's the point. The point of public relations slogans like "Support

our troops" is that they don't mean anything. They mean as much as whether you support the people in Iowa. Of course, there was an issue. The issue was, Do you support our policy?

But you don't want people to think about that issue.

That's the whole point of good propaganda.

You want to create a slogan that nobody's going to be against, and everybody's going to be for. Nobody knows what it means, because it doesn't mean anything. Its crucial value is

that it diverts your attention from a question

that does mean something: Do you support our policy?

That's the one you're not allowed to talk about. So you have people arguing about support for the troops? "Of course I don't not support them." Then you've won.

That's like Americanism and harmony. We're all

together, empty slogans, let's join in, let's make sure we don't have these bad people around to disrupt our harmony with their talk about class struggle, rights and that sort of business.

That's all very effective. It runs right up to today. And of course it is carefully thought out.

The people in the public relations industry aren't there for the fun of it.

They're doing work. They're trying to instill the right values.

In fact, they have a conception of what democracy ought to be:

It ought to be a system in which the specialized class is trained to work

in the service of the masters, the people who own the society. The rest of the population

ought to be deprived of any form of organization, because organization just causes trouble.

They ought to be sitting alone in front of the TV and having drilled into their heads the message, which says, the only value in life is to have more commodities or live like that rich middle class family you're watching and to have nice values like harmony and Americanism. That's all there is in life. You may think in your own head that there's got to be something more in life than this, but since you're watching the tube alone you assume, I must be crazy, because that's all that's going on over there. And since there is no organization permitted—that's absolutely crucial—you never have a way of finding out whether you are crazy, and you just assume it, because it's the natural thing to assume. So that's the ideal. Great efforts are made in trying to achieve that ideal. Obviously, there is a certain conception behind it. The conception of democracy is the one that I mentioned. The bewildered herd is a problem. We've got to prevent their roar and trampling. We've got to distract them. They should be watching the Superbowl or sitcoms or violent movies. Every once in a while you call on them to chant meaningless slogans like "Support our troops." You've got to keep them pretty scared, because unless they're properly scared and frightened of all kinds of devils that are going to destroy them from outside or inside or somewhere, they may start to think, which is very dangerous, because they're not competent to think. Therefore it's important to distract them and marginalize them. That's one conception of democracy. In fact, going back to the business community, the last legal victory for labor really was 1935, the Wagner Act. After the war came, the unions declined as did a very rich working class culture that was associated with the unions. That was destroyed. We moved to a business-run society at a remarkable level. This is the only state-capitalist industrial society which doesn't have even the normal social contract that you find in comparable societies. Outside of South Africa, I guess, this is the only industrial society that doesn't have national health care. There's no general commitment to even minimal standards of survival for the parts of the population who can't follow those rules and gain things for themselves individually. Unions are virtually nonexistent. Other forms of popular structure are virtually nonexistent. There are no political parties or organizations. It's a long way toward the ideal, at least structurally. The media are a corporate monopoly. They have the same point of view. The two parties are two factions of the business party. Most of the population doesn't even bother voting because it looks meaningless. They're marginalized and properly distracted. At least that's the goal. The leading figure in the public relations industry, Edward Bernays, actually came out of the Creel Commission. He was part of it, learned his lessons there and went on to develop what he called the "engineering of consent," which he described as "the essence of democracy." The people who are able to engineer consent are the ones who have the resources and the power to do it — the business community — and that's who you work for.

## ENGINEERING OPINION

It is also necessary to whip up the population in support of foreign adventures. Usually the population is pacifist, just like they were during the First World War. The public sees no reason to get involved in foreign adventures, killing, and torture. So you have to whip them up. And to whip them up you have to frighten them. Bernays himself had an important achievement in this respect. He was the person who ran the public relations campaign for the United Fruit Company in 1954, when the United States moved in to overthrow the capitalist-democratic government of Guatemala and installed a murderous death-squad society, which remains that way to the present day with constant infusions of U.S. aid to prevent in more than empty form democratic deviations. It's necessary to constantly ram through domestic programs which the public is opposed to, because there is no reason for the public to be in favor of domestic programs that are harmful to them. This, too, takes extensive propaganda. We've seen a lot of this in the last ten years. The Reagan programs were overwhelmingly unpopular. Voters in the 1984 "Reagan landslide," by about three to two, hoped that his policies would not be enacted. If you take particular programs, like armaments, cutting back on social spending, etc., almost every one of them was overwhelmingly opposed by the public. But as long as people are marginalized and distracted and have no way to organize or articulate their sentiments, or even know that others have these sentiments, people who said that they prefer social spending to military spending, who gave that answer on polls, as people overwhelmingly did, assumed that they were the only people with that crazy idea in their heads. They never heard it from anywhere else. Nobody's supposed to think that. Therefore, if you do think it and you answer it in a poll, you just assume that you're sort of weird. Since there's no way to get together with other people who share or reinforce that view and help you articulate it, you feel like an oddity, an oddball. So you just stay on the side and you don't pay any attention to what's going on. You look at something else, like the Superbowl. To a certain extent, then, that ideal was achieved, but never completely. There are institutions which it has as yet been impossible to destroy. The churches, for example, still exist. A large part of the dissident activity in the United States comes out of the churches, for the simple reason that they're there. So when you go to a European country and give a political talk, it may very likely be in the union hall. Here that won't happen, because unions first of all barely exist, and if they do exist they're not political organizations. But the churches do exist, and therefore you often give a talk in a church. Central American solidarity work mostly grew out of the churches, mainly because they exist. The bewildered herd never gets properly tamed, so this is a constant battle. In the 1930s they arose again and were put down. In the 1960s there was another wave of dissidence.

There was a name for that. It was called by the specialized class "the crisis of democracy." Democracy was regarded as entering into a crisis in the 1960s.

The crisis was that large segments of the population were becoming organized and active and trying to participate in the political arena. Here we come back to these two conceptions of democracy.

By the dictionary definition, that's an advance in democracy. By the prevailing conception that's a problem, a crisis that has to be overcome.

The population has to be driven back to the apathy, obedience and passivity that is their proper state.

We therefore have to do something to overcome the crisis. Efforts were made to achieve that. It hasn't worked. The crisis of democracy is still alive and well, fortunately, but not very effective in changing policy. But it is effective in changing opinion, contrary to what a lot of people believe. Great efforts were made after the 1960s to try to reverse and overcome this malady.

One aspect of the malady actually got a technical name.

It was called the "Vietnam Syndrome." The Vietnam Syndrome, a term that began to come up around 1970, has actually been defined on occasion.

The Reaganite intellectual Norman Podhoretz defined it as "the sickly inhibitions against the use of military force."

There were these sickly inhibitions against violence on the part of a large part of the public. People just didn't understand why we should go around torturing people and killing people and carpet bombing them.

It's very dangerous for a population to be overcome by these sickly inhibitions, as Goebbels understood, because then there's a limit on foreign adventures.

It's necessary, as the Washington Post put it rather proudly during the Gulf War hysteria, to instill in people respect for "martial value." That's important.

If you want to have a violent society that uses force around the world to achieve the ends of its own domestic elite, it's necessary to have a proper appreciation of the martial virtues and none of these sickly inhibitions about using violence.

So that's the Vietnam Syndrome. It's necessary to overcome that one.

## REPRESENTATION AS REALITY

It's also necessary to completely falsify history.

That's another way to overcome these sickly inhibitions, to make it look as if when we attack and destroy somebody we're really protecting and defending ourselves against major aggressors and monsters and so on.

There has been a huge effort since the Vietnam war to reconstruct the history of that. Too many people began to understand what was really going on.

Including plenty of soldiers and a lot of young people who were involved with the peace movement and others. That was bad. It was necessary to rearrange those bad thoughts and to restore some form of sanity, namely, a recognition that whatever we do is noble and right.

If we're bombing South Vietnam, that's because we're defending South Vietnam against somebody, namely, the South Vietnamese, since nobody else was there.



It's what the Kennedy intellectuals called defense against "internal aggression" in South Vietnam. That was the phrase used by Adlai Stevenson and others. It was necessary to make that the official and well understood picture. That's worked pretty well.

When you have total control over the media and the educational system and scholarship is conformist, you can get that across. One indication of it was revealed in a study done at the University of Massachusetts on attitudes toward the current Gulf crisis — a study of beliefs and attitudes in television watching.

One of the questions asked in that study was:

How many Vietnamese casualties would you estimate that there were during the Vietnam war?

The average response on the part of Americans today is about 100,000.

The official figure is about two million. The actual figure is probably three to four million. The people who conducted the study raised an appropriate question:

What would we think about German political culture if, when you asked people today how many Jews died in the Holocaust, they estimated about 300,000?

What would that tell us about German political culture?

They leave the question unanswered, but you can pursue it.

What does it tell us about our culture? It tells us quite a bit.

It is necessary to overcome the sickly inhibitions against the use of military force and other democratic deviations. In this particular case it worked. This is true on every topic.

Pick the topic you like: the Middle East, international terrorism, Central America, whatever it is — the picture of the world that's presented to the public has only the remotest relation to reality.

The truth of the matter is buried under edifice after edifice of lies upon lies.

It's all been a marvelous success from the point of view in deterring the threat of democracy, achieved under conditions of freedom, which is extremely interesting.

It's not like a totalitarian state, where it's done by force.

These achievements are under conditions of freedom.

If we want to understand our own society, we'll have to think about these facts.

They are important facts, important for those who care about what kind of society they live in.

## DISSIDENT CULTURE

Despite all of this, the dissident culture survived. It's grown quite a lot since the 1960s.

In the 1960s the dissident culture first of all was extremely slow in developing.

There was no protest against the Indochina war until years after the United States had started bombing South Vietnam.

When it did grow it was a very narrow dissident movement, mostly students and young people. By the 1970s that had

changed considerably. Major popular movements had developed: the environmental movement, the feminist movement, the anti-nuclear movement, and others. In the 1980s there was an even greater expansion to the solidarity movements, which is something very new and important in the history of at least American, and maybe even world dissidence.

These were movements that not only protested but actually involved themselves, often intimately, in the lives of suffering people elsewhere.

They learned a great deal from it and had quite a civilizing effect on mainstream America. All of this has made a very large difference.

Anyone who has been involved in this kind of activity for many years must be aware of this. I know myself that the kind of talks I give today in the most reactionary parts of the country — central Georgia, rural Kentucky, etc. — are talks of the kind that I couldn't have given at the peak of the peace movement to the most active peace movement audience. Now you can give them anywhere. People may agree or not agree, but at least they understand what you're talking about and there's some sort of common ground that you can pursue.

These are all signs of the civilizing effect, despite all the propaganda, despite all the efforts to control thought and manufacture consent. Nevertheless, people are acquiring an ability and a willingness to think things through. Skepticism about power has grown, and attitudes have changed on many, many issues. It's kind of slow, maybe even glacial, but perceptible and important. Whether it's fast enough to make a significant difference in what happens in the world is another question.

Just to take one familiar example of it: The famous gender gap.

In the 1960s attitudes of men and women were approximately the same on such matters as the "martial virtues" and the sickly inhibitions against the use of military force. Nobody, neither men nor women, were suffering from those sickly inhibitions in the early 1960s. The responses were the same.

Everybody thought that the use of violence to suppress people out there was just right. Over the years it's changed. The sickly inhibitions have increased all across the board. But meanwhile a gap has been growing, and by now it's a very substantial gap.

According to polls, it's something like twenty-five percent. What has happened?

What has happened is that there is some form of at least semi-organized popular movement that women are involved in — the feminist movement. Organization has its effects.

It means that you discover that you're not alone.

Others have the same thoughts that you do.

You can reinforce your thoughts and learn more about what you think and believe.

These are very informal movements, not like a membership organizations, just a mood that involves interactions among people.

It has a very noticeable effect. That's the danger of democracy:

If organizations can develop, if people are no longer just glued to the tube, you may have all these funny thoughts arising in their heads, like sickly inhibitions against the use of military force.

That has to be overcome, but it hasn't been overcome.

## PARADE OF ENEMIES

Instead of talking about the last war, let me talk about the next war, because sometimes it's useful to be prepared instead of just reacting. There is a very characteristic development going on in the United States now. It's not the first country in the world that's done this. There are growing domestic social and economic problems, in fact, maybe catastrophes. Nobody in power has any intention of doing anything about them. If you look at the domestic programs of the administrations of the past ten years — I include here the Democratic opposition — there's really no serious proposal about what to do about the severe problems of health, education, homelessness, joblessness, crime, soaring criminal populations, jails, deterioration in the inner cities — the whole raft of problems. You all know about them, and they're all getting worse. Just in the two years that George Bush has been in office three million more children crossed the poverty line, the debt is zooming, educational standards are declining, real wages are now back to the level of about the late 1950s for much of the population, and nobody's doing anything about it. In such circumstances you've got to divert the bewildered herd, because if they start noticing this they may not like it, since they're the ones suffering from it. Just having them watch the Superbowl and the sitcoms may not be enough. You have to whip them up into fear of enemies. In the 1930s Hitler whipped them into fear of the Jews and gypsies. You had to crush them to defend yourselves. We have our ways, too. Over the last ten years, every year or two, some major monster is constructed that we have to defend ourselves against. There used to be one that was always readily available: The Russians. You could always defend yourself against the Russians. But they're losing their attractiveness as an enemy, and it's getting harder and harder to use that one, so some new ones have to be conjured up. In fact, people have quite unfairly criticized George Bush for being unable to express or articulate what's really driving us now. That's very unfair. Prior to about the mid-1980s, when you were asleep you would just play the record: the Russians are coming. But he lost that one and he's got to make up new ones, just like the Reaganite public relations apparatus did in the 1980s. So it was international terrorists and narco-traffickers and crazed Arabs and Saddam Hussein, the new Hitler, was going to conquer the world. They've got to keep coming up one after another. You frighten the population, terrorize them, intimidate them so that they're too afraid to travel and cower in fear. Then you have a magnificent victory over Grenada, Panama, or some other defenseless third-world army that you can pulverize before you

ever bother to look at them — which is just what happened. That gives relief.

We were saved at the last minute.

That's one of the ways in which you can keep the bewildered herd from paying attention to what's really going on around them, keep them diverted and controlled. The next one that's coming along, most likely, will be Cuba. That's going to require a continuation of the illegal economic warfare, possibly a revival of the extraordinary international terrorism.

The most major international terrorism organized yet has been the Kennedy administration's Operation Mongoose, then the things that followed along, against Cuba. There's been nothing remotely comparable to it except perhaps the war against Nicaragua, if you call that terrorism.

The World Court classified it as something more like aggression.

There's always an ideological offensive that builds up a chimerical monster, then campaigns to have it crushed.

You can't go in if they can fight back. That's much too dangerous.

But if you are sure that they will be crushed, maybe we'll knock that one off and heave another sigh of relief.

## SELECTIVE PERCEPTION

This has been going on for quite a while.

In May 1986, the memoirs of the released Cuban prisoner, Armando Valladares, came out. They quickly became a media sensation. I'll give you a couple of quotes.

The media described his revelations as

"the definitive account of the vast system of torture and prison by which Castro punishes and obliterates political opposition."

It was "an inspiring and unforgettable account" of the "bestial prisons,"

inhuman torture, [and] record of state violence [under] yet

another of this century's mass murderers, who we learn, at last, from this book

"has created a new despotism that has institutionalized torture as a mechanism of social control" in "the hell that was the Cuba that [Valladares] lived in."

That's the Washington Post and New York Times in repeated reviews.

Castro was described as "a dictatorial goon."

His atrocities were revealed in this book so conclusively that

"only the most light-headed and cold-blooded Western intellectual will come to the tyrant's defense," said the Washington Post.

Remember, this is the account of what happened to one man.

Let's say it's all true. Let's raise no questions about what happened to the one man who says he was tortured. At a White House ceremony marking Human Rights Day, he was singled out by Ronald Reagan for his courage in enduring the horrors and sadism of this bloody Cuban tyrant.

He was then appointed the U.S. representative at the U.N. Human Rights Commission, where he has been able to perform signal services defending the Salvadoran and Guatemalan governments against charges that they conduct atrocities so massive that they make anything he suffered look pretty minor.

That's the way things stand. That was May 1986.

It was interesting, and it tells you something about the manufacture of consent.

The same month, the surviving members of the Human Rights Group of El Salvador — the leaders had been killed — were arrested and tortured, including Herbert Anaya, who was the director. They were sent to a prison — La Esperanza (hope) Prison.

While they were in prison they continued their human rights work.

They were lawyers, they continued taking affidavits.

There were 432 prisoners in that prison. They got signed affidavits from 430

of them in which they described, under oath, the torture that they had received:

electrical torture and other atrocities, including, in one case,

torture by a North American U.S. major in uniform, who is described in some detail.

This is an unusually explicit and comprehensive testimony,

probably unique in its detail about what's going on in a torture chamber.

This 160-page report of the prisoners' sworn testimony was sneaked out of prison,

along with a videotape which was taken showing people testifying in prison about their torture. It was distributed by the Marin County Interfaith Task Force.

The national press refused to cover it.

The TV stations refused to run it.

There was an article in the local Marin County newspaper,

the San Francisco Examiner, and I think that's all. No one else would touch it.

This was a time when there was more than a few "light-headed and cold-blooded Western intellectuals" who were singing the praises of Jose Napoleon Duarte and of Ronald Reagan.

Anaya was not the subject of any tributes. He didn't get on Human Rights Day.

He wasn't appointed to anything. He was released in a prisoner exchange

and then assassinated, apparently by the U.S.-backed security forces.

Very little information about that ever appeared.

The media never asked whether exposure of the atrocities —

instead of sitting on them and silencing them —

might have saved his life.

This tells you something about the way a well-functioning system of consent manufacturing works. I

n comparison with the revelations of Herbert Anaya in El Salvador,

Valladares's memoirs are not even a pea next to the mountain.

But you've got your job to do.

That takes us toward the next war.

I expect, we're going to hear more and more of this, until the next operation takes place.

A few remarks about the last one.

Let's turn finally to that.

Let me begin with this University of Massachusetts study that I mentioned before.

It has some interesting conclusions.

In the study people were asked whether they thought that the United States

should intervene with force to reverse illegal occupation or serious human rights abuses.

By about two to one, people in the United States thought we should.

We should use force in the case of illegal occupation of land and severe human rights abuses.

If the United States was to follow that advice,

we would bomb El Salvador, Guatemala, Indonesia, Damascus, Tel Aviv, Capetown, Turkey, Washington, and a whole list of other states.

These are all cases of illegal occupation and aggression and severe human rights abuses.

If you know the facts about that range of examples,

you'll know very well that Saddam Hussein's aggression and atrocities fall well within the range. They're not the most extreme. Why doesn't anybody come to that conclusion?

The reason is that nobody knows.

In a well-functioning propaganda system,

nobody would know what I'm talking about when I list that range of examples.

If you bother to look, you find that those examples are quite appropriate.

Take one that was ominously close to being perceived during the Gulf War.

In February, right in the middle of the bombing campaign,

the government of Lebanon requested Israel to observe U.N. Security Council Resolution 425, which called on it to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from Lebanon.

That resolution dates from March 1978.

There have since been two subsequent resolutions calling

for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon.

Of course it doesn't observe them because the United States backs it in maintaining that occupation. Meanwhile southern Lebanon is terrorized.

There are big torture-chambers with horrifying things going on.

It's used as a base for attacking other parts of Lebanon. Since 1978,

Lebanon was invaded, the city of Beirut was bombed, about 20,000 people were killed, about 80 percent of them civilians, hospitals were destroyed,

and more terror, looting, and robbery was inflicted.

All fine, the United States backed it. That's just one case.

You didn't see anything in the media about it or any discussion about whether Israel

and the United States should observe U.N. Security Council Resolution 425

or any of the other resolutions, nor did anyone call for the bombing of Tel Aviv,

although by the principles upheld by two-thirds of the population, we should.

After all, that's illegal occupation and severe human rights abuses.

That's just one case. There are much worse ones.

The Indonesian invasion of East Timor knocked off about 200,000 people.

They all look minor by that one.

That was strongly backed by the United States and is still going on

with major United States diplomatic and military support.

We can go on and on.

## **Building a Nation of Know-Nothings**

By [TIMOTHY EGAN](#)

*NY Times, August 25, 2010, 8:30 pm*

Having shed much of his dignity, core convictions and reputation for straight talk, Senator John McCain won his primary on Tuesday against the flat-earth wing of his party. Now McCain can go search for his lost character, which was last on display late in his 2008 campaign for president.

Remember the moment: a woman with matted hair and a shaky voice rose to express her doubts about Barack Obama. “I have read about him,” she said, “and he’s not — he’s an Arab.”

McCain was quick to knock down the lie. “No, ma’am,” he said, “he’s a decent family man, a citizen.”

That ill-informed woman — her head stuffed with fabrications that could be disproved by a pre-schooler — now makes up a representative third or more of the Republican party. It’s not just that 47 percent of Republicans believe the lie that Obama is a Muslim, or that 27 percent in the party doubt that the president of the United States is a citizen. But fully half of them believe falsely that the big bailout of banks and insurance companies under TARP was enacted by Obama, and not by President Bush.

Take a look at Tuesday night’s box score in the baseball game between New York and Toronto. The Yankees won, 11-5. Now look at the weather summary, showing a high of 71 for New York. The score and temperature are not subject to debate.

Yet a president’s birthday or whether he was even in the White House on the day TARP was passed are apparently open questions. A growing segment of the party poised to take control of Congress has bought into denial of the basic truths of Barack Obama’s life. What’s more, this astonishing level of willful ignorance has come about largely by design, and has been aided by a press afraid to call out the primary architects of the lies.

The Democrats may deserve to lose in November. They have been terrible at trying to explain who they stand for and the larger goal of their governance. But if they lose, it should be because their policies are unpopular or ill-conceived — not because millions of people believe a lie.

In the much-discussed [Pew poll reporting the spike in ignorance](#), those who believe Obama to be Muslim say they got their information from the media. But no reputable news agency — that is, fact-based, one that corrects its errors quickly — has spread such inaccuracies.

Stephen Lovekin/Getty Images Rush Limbaugh

So where is this “media?” Two sources, and they are — no surprise here — the usual suspects. The first, of course, is Rush Limbaugh, who claims the largest radio audience in the land among the microphone demagogues, and his word is Biblical among Republicans. A few quick examples of the Limbaugh method:

“Tomorrow is Obama’s birthday — not that we’ve seen any proof of that,” he said on Aug. 3. “They tell us Aug. 4 is the birthday; we haven’t seen any proof of that.”

Of course, there is proof as clear as that baseball box score. Look here, [www.factcheck.org](http://www.factcheck.org), for starters, one of many places posting Obama’s Hawaiian birth certificate.

On the Muslim deception, Limbaugh has sprinkled lie dust all over the place. “Obama says he’s a Christian, but where’s the evidence?” he said on Aug. 19. He has repeatedly called the president “imam Obama,” and said, “I’m just throwing things out there, folks, because people are questioning his

Christianity.”

You see how he works. He drops in suggestions, hints, notes that “people are questioning” things. The design is to make Obama un-American. Then he says it’s a tweak, a provocation. He says this as a preemptive way to keep the press from calling him out. And it works; long profiles of Limbaugh have largely gone easy on him.

Once Limbaugh has planted a lie, a prominent politician can pick it up, with little nuance. So, over the weekend, Kim Lehman, one of Iowa’s two Republican National Committee members, went public with doubts on Obama’s Christianity. Of course, she was not condemned by party leaders.

It’s curious, also, that any felon, drug addict, or recovering hedonist can loudly proclaim a sudden embrace of Jesus and be welcomed without doubt by leaders of the religious right. But a thoughtful Christian like Obama is still distrusted.

“I am a devout Christian,” Obama told Christianity Today in 2008. “I believe in the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” That’s not enough, apparently, for Rev. Franklin Graham, the partisan son of the great evangelical leader, who said last week that Obama was “born a Muslim because of the religious seed passed on from his father.”

Actually, he was born from two non-practicing parents, and his Kenyan father was absent for all of his upbringing. Obama came to his Christianity like millions of people, through searching and questioning.

Finally, there is Fox News, whose parent company has given \$1 million to Republican causes this year but still masquerades as a legitimate source of news. Their chat and opinion programs spread innuendo daily. The founder of [Politifact](#), another nonpartisan referee to the daily rumble, said two of the site’s five most popular items on its Truth-o-meter are corrections of Glenn Beck.

Beck tosses off enough half-truths in a month to keep Politifact working overtime. Of late, he has gone after Michelle Obama, whose vacation in Spain was “just for her and approximately 40 of her friends.” Limbaugh had a similar line, saying the First Lady “is taking 40 of her best friends and leasing 60 rooms at a five-star hotel — paid for by you.”

The White House said Michelle Obama and her daughter Sasha were accompanied by just a few friends — and they paid their own costs. But, wink, wink, the damage is done. He’s Muslim and foreign. She’s living the luxe life on your dime. They don’t even have to mention race. The code words do it for them.

Climate-change denial is a special category all its own. Once on the fringe, dismissal of scientific consensus is now an article of faith among leading Republicans, again taking their cue from Limbaugh and Fox.

It would be nice to dismiss the stupid things that Americans believe as harmless, the price of having such a large, messy democracy. Plenty of hate-filled partisans swore that Abraham Lincoln was a Catholic and Franklin Roosevelt was a Jew. So what if one-in-five believe the sun revolves around the earth, or aren’t sure from which country the United States gained its independence?

But false belief in weapons of mass-destruction led the United States to a trillion-dollar war. And trust in rising home value as a truism as reliable as a sunrise was a major contributor to the catastrophic collapse of the economy. At its worst extreme, a culture of misinformation can produce something like Iran, which is run by a Holocaust denier.

It’s one thing to forget the past, with predictable consequences, as the favorite aphorism goes. But what about those who refuse to comprehend the present?



# Deluded Individualism

By FIRMIN DEBRABANDER

August 18, 2012, 2:30 pm

There is a curious passage early in Freud's "Ego and the Id" where he remarks that the id behaves "as if" it were unconscious. The phrase is puzzling, but the meaning is clear: the id is the secret driver of our desires, the desires that animate our conscious life, but the ego does not recognize it as such. The ego - what we take to be our conscious, autonomous self - is ignorant to the agency of the id, and sees itself in the driver seat instead. Freud offers the following metaphor: the ego is like a man on horseback, struggling to contain the powerful beast beneath; to the extent that the ego succeeds in guiding this beast, it's only by "transforming the id's will into action *as if* it were its own."

By Freud's account, conscious autonomy is a charade. "We are lived," as he puts it, and yet we don't see it as such. Indeed, Freud suggests that to be human is to rebel against that vision - the truth. We tend to see ourselves as self-determining, self-conscious agents in all that we decide and do, and we cling to that image. But why? Why do we resist the truth? Why do we wish - strain, strive, against the grain of reality - to be autonomous individuals, and see ourselves as such?

Perhaps Freud is too cynical regarding conscious autonomy, but he is right to question our presumption to it. He is right to suggest that we typically - wrongly - ignore the extent to which we are determined by unknown forces, and overestimate our self-control. The path to happiness for Freud, or some semblance of it in his stormy account of the psyche, involves accepting our basic condition. But why do we presume individual agency in the first place? Why do we insist on it stubbornly, irrationally, often recklessly?

I was reminded of Freud's paradox by a poignant article in The Times a few months back, which described a Republican leaning district in Minnesota, and its constituents' conflicted desire to be self-reliant ("Even Critics of the Safety Net Increasingly Depend on It," Feb. 11). The article cited a study from Dartmouth political science professor Dean Lacy, which revealed that, though Republicans call for deep cuts to the safety net, their districts rely more on government support than their Democratic counterparts.

In Chisago County, Minn., The Times's reporters spoke with residents who supported the Tea Party and its proposed cuts to federal spending, even while they admitted they could not get by without government support. Tea Party aficionados, and many on the extreme right of the Republican party for that matter, are typically characterized as self-sufficient middle class folk, angry about sustaining the idle poor with their tax dollars. Chisago County revealed a different aspect of this anger: economically struggling Americans professing a robust individualism and self-determination, frustrated with their failures to achieve that ideal.

Why the stubborn insistence on self-determination, in spite of the facts? One might say there is something profoundly American in this. It's our fierce individualism shining through. Residents of Chisago County are clinging to notions of past self-reliance before the recession, before the welfare state. It's admirable in a way. Alternately, it evokes the delusional autonomy of Freud's poor ego.

These people, like many across the nation, rely on government assistance, but pretend they don't. They even resent the government for their reliance. If they looked closely though, they'd see that we are all thoroughly saturated with government assistance in this country: farm subsidies that lower food prices

for us all, mortgage interest deductions that disproportionately favor the rich, federal mortgage guarantees that keep interest rates low, a bloated Department of Defense that sustains entire sectors of the economy and puts hundreds of thousands of people to work. We can hardly fathom the depth of our dependence on government, and pretend we are bold individualists instead.

As we are in an election year, the persistence of this delusion has manifested itself politically, particularly as a foundation in the Republican Party ideology - from Ron Paul's insistence during the primaries that the government shouldn't intervene to help the uninsured even when they are deathly ill, to Rick Santorum's maligning of public schools, to Mitt Romney's selection of Paul Ryan as a running mate. There is no doubt that radical individualism will remain a central selling point of their campaign. Ryan's signature work, his proposal for the federal budget, calls for drastic cuts to Medicaid, Medicare, Pell grants and job training programs, among others. To no surprise, as *The New Yorker* revealed in a recent profile of Ryan, the home district that supports him is boosted by considerable government largesse.

Of course the professed individualists have an easy time cutting services for the poor. But this is misguided. There are many counties across the nation that, like Chisago County, might feel insulated from the trials of the destitute. Perhaps this is because they are able to ignore the poverty in their midst, or because they are rather homogeneous and geographically removed from concentrations of poverty, like urban ghettos. But the fate of the middle class counties and urban ghettos is entwined. When the poor are left to rot in their misery, the misery does not stay contained. It harms us all. The crime radiates, the misery offends, it debases the whole. Individuals, much less communities, cannot be insulated from it.

Thanks to a decades-long safety net, we have forgotten the trials of living without it. This is why, the historian Tony Judt argued, it's easy for some to speak fondly of a world without government: we can't fully imagine or recall what it's like. We can't really appreciate the horrors Upton Sinclair witnessed in the Chicago slaughterhouses before regulation, or the burden of living without Social Security and Medicare to look forward to. Thus, we can entertain nostalgia for a time when everyone pulled his own weight, bore his own risk, and was the master of his destiny. That time was a myth. But the notion of self-reliance is also a fallacy.

Spinoza greatly influenced Freud, and he adds a compelling insight we would do well to reckon with. Spinoza also questioned the human pretense to autonomy. Men believe themselves free, he said, merely because they are conscious of their volitions and appetites, but they are wholly determined. In fact, Spinoza claimed - to the horror of his contemporaries - that we are all just modes of one substance, "God or Nature" he called it, which is really the same thing. Individual actions are no such thing at all; they are expressions of another entity altogether, which acts through us unwittingly. To be human, according to Spinoza, is to be party to a confounding existential illusion - that human individuals are independent agents - which exacts a heavy emotional and political toll on us. It is the source of anxiety, envy, anger - all the passions that torment our psyche - and the violence that ensues. If we should come to see our nature as it truly is, if we should see that no "individuals" properly speaking exist at all, Spinoza maintained, it would greatly benefit humankind.

There is no such thing as a discrete individual, Spinoza points out. This is a fiction. The boundaries of 'me' are fluid and blurred. We are all profoundly linked in countless ways we can hardly perceive. My decisions, choices, actions are inspired and motivated by others to no small extent. The passions, Spinoza argued, derive from seeing people as autonomous individuals responsible for all the objectionable actions that issue from them. Understanding the interrelated nature of everyone and everything is the key to diminishing the passions and the havoc they wreak.

In this, Spinoza and President Obama seem to concur: we're all in this together. We are not the sole

authors of our destiny, each of us; our destinies are entangled - messily, unpredictably. Our cultural demands of individualism are too extreme. They are constitutionally irrational, Spinoza and Freud tell us, and their potential consequences are disastrous. Thanks to our safety net, we live in a society that affirms the dependence and interdependence of all. To that extent, it affirms a basic truth of our nature. We forsake it at our own peril.

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