

Armed Forces & Society

<http://afs.sagepub.com>

Psychological Propaganda: The War of Ideas on Ideas During the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Lynseyve Finch

Armed Forces & Society 2000; 26; 367

DOI: 10.1177/0095327X0002600302

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://afs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/26/3/367>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

[Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society](#)

Additional services and information for *Armed Forces & Society* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://afs.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://afs.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Psychological Propaganda: The War of Ideas on Ideas During the First Half of the Twentieth Century

LYNETTE FINCH

If a historical narrative must have a beginning, the origins of the modern story of propaganda in warfare are, at least, precise: January 1622. That month, Pope Gregory XV took stock of the religious wars in Bohemia, Alsace, and the Palatinate and decided that it was too late to calm the situation with armed force. New methods were necessary to combat the impact of the Protestant Reformation. The pontiff therefore announced his intention to create “a permanent, organized body for the peaceful propagation of the Catholic faith,” and, on June 22, the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* became an official organ of the Roman Catholic Church “with responsibility for carrying the faith to the new world, and for strengthening and reviving it in the old.” It was the first time that an official body, created to undertake a campaign of systematic dissemination of ideas designed to influence public opinion, was designated as a propaganda organization.¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary*, citing George Seldes, notes that “the term propaganda has not the sinister meaning in Europe which it has acquired in America.” This is hardly surprising, Terance Qualter points out, because one unforeseen legacy of Gregory’s plan was that, with the example set by the papacy to use the word “propaganda” to describe the campaign to promote the Catholic faith, southern Catholic lands would develop a positive attitude towards the word, while northern Protestant countries would give the term a sinister connotation.²

LYNETTE FINCH is senior lecturer in Australian Studies at the University of the Sunshine Coast in Australia. Her research interests are in war propaganda and urban history, and she has published books on the social conditions of the Australian homefront during World War II; Australian childhood; and health and living conditions in nineteenth century Australian cities. Address for correspondence: Dr. Lynette Finch, Faculty of Arts, University of the Sunshine Coast, Locked Bag 4, Maroochydore South, Qld, 4558, Australia. E-mail: lfinch@usc.edu.au.

ARMED FORCES & SOCIETY, Vol. 26, No. 3, Spring 2000, pp. 367–386.

Propaganda: What's in a Word?

From the middle of the nineteenth century until the Second World War, the major practitioners of propaganda in warfare were British and American, yet both these societies accorded the word a sinister meaning. It was not until 1927 that an American political scientist, Harold Lasswell, published a text that attempted to reverse this popular negative response among his countrymen. Lasswell's *Propaganda Technique in World War I* was to have widespread influence, partly because it captured the essence of key features of propaganda so successfully that it remains the clearest manual for modern campaigns, and also, because the Reich's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, made himself so familiar with it. Both Lasswell's text, and that of fellow American political scientist, Leonard Doob, *Propaganda: Its Psychology and Technique*, were carefully read and applied in Germany during the 1930s.³ Lasswell's text was the first major American publication to argue that the use of propaganda during warfare was neither ominous nor insidious. Propaganda was here to stay, he explained; it would now simply be a feature of modern military warfare and of the rest of modern life as well:

Propaganda has become a profession. The modern world is busy developing a corp of men who do nothing but study the ways and means of changing minds or binding minds to their convictions....It is to be expected that governments will rely increasingly upon the professional propagandists for advice and aid.⁴

He defined propaganda as being "the management of opinions and attitudes by the direct manipulation of social suggestion rather than by altering other conditions in the environment or in the organism"⁵—that is, changing the popular *perception* of the situation without altering its material conditions. Referring specifically to American conditions, Lasswell wrote that it was a "word...which has come to have an ominous clang in many minds."⁶ It would be years before either American or British governments openly claimed propaganda as a legitimate tool of modern warfare; indeed, this reclamation emerged well into the Second World War. According to British journalist Beatrice Leeds, at precisely the moment when Russia entered the war against Germany, the word "propaganda" became acceptable to Allied government officials: "It was a confusion in the mind of officialdom between the propaganda weapons and the cause in which it had previously been used which made us shy away from the use even of the word 'propaganda,' let alone use of the weapon."⁷

Within the democracies, both world wars were followed by the public dismantling of their departments of information. Just three years after the end of the Pacific war, Ralph Block wrote that once again “in the United States... ‘education’ and ‘information’ were ‘good’; propaganda was... ‘bad.’”⁸ As the tension between the Soviet Union and the United States intensified into the Cold War, it again became acceptable to discuss “propaganda” only as something conducted by the enemies of democracy. Even explaining its origins in retrospection required reference to this etymology. For example, despite the clearly documented process in which the Nazis had studied American and British WWI propaganda methodology and had carefully copied it in the Second World War, Robert E. Summers, in introducing his Cold War collection of essays, asserted that “the Nazis experimented with psychological techniques and achieved most of their goals prior to 1941 through such techniques.”⁹ Cold War President Harry Truman, a strong advocate of American propaganda, found it necessary to dichotomize, on the one hand, propaganda (“one of the most powerful weapons the Communists have in this struggle. Deceit, distortion and lies are systematically used by them as a matter of deliberate policy”) and, on the other: “truth” (“Everywhere that the propaganda of Communist totalitarianism is spread, we must meet it and overcome it with honest information about freedom and democracy”).¹⁰ The 1948 Act that established the propaganda radio network “Voice of America” to transmit pro-American, democratic influence throughout the world made no mention of propaganda; it was given the euphemistic name, *The Information and Education Exchange (Smith-Mudt) Act*.

Immediately after the First World War, the Soviet Union, Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom were the principal arenas in which intellectual debate thrived about the feasibility of influencing public opinion through the use of the relatively new social science of psychology. The interwar German state extended the possible uses of psychology beyond any previous examples so that, by the end of the decade, experimental laboratories were established in the German army, railway, postal services, commercial aviation, labor exchange, bureau of statistics, and police force. In the early 1930s, mass-psychology testing was under way in at least thirteen German universities and nine institutes of technology, each concerned with measuring behavioral and emotional response to overt propaganda messages, such as commercial advertising, and covert manipulation through such devices as revisionist historiographies or planted news stories.¹¹ The overwhelming preoccupation with how the external world was interpreted by the mind, and the attendant concern with free will, meant that it was psychologists, rather than other social scientists, who were employed in these German laboratories. The First World War had provided a great deal

of raw material for social scientists, both through analysis of individual mental processes and neuroses and through studies of mass response and crowd behavior. Working in the latter field, Walter Lippmann began publishing his influential work on public opinion theory. Pointing out that the relationship between reality and opinion is indirect has been his major ongoing legacy. Lippmann's interwar publications were devoted to showing that the pictures that people carry in their heads of any given reality will be their referent in forming an opinion about the truth or falsity or importance or irrelevance of reports about that reality. These pictures, which he labeled "stereotypes" (thus giving us the modern meaning of the term) form a "pseudo-environment": "It is the insertion between man and his environment of a pseudo-environment. To that pseudo-environment his behavior is a response."¹² Reality, Lippmann wrote, is too complex for people to interpret: "We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it." The first thing for an analyst of public opinion, and hence, the shaper or manipulator of public opinion, to recognize is "the triangular relationship between the scene of action, the human picture of that scene, and the human response to that picture working itself upon the scene of action." People will construct their own pseudo-environments, and their behavior and attitudes, emotions and opinions will be based upon that construction. So the job of the propagandist is to construct a viable pseudo-environment for them. Propaganda, or psychological warfare, is dependent upon creating a pseudo-environment that will form the conditions through which people decide how to respond to warfare. Public opinion polling commenced in the United States in the 1930s, and, by the early 1940s, university psychology departments had joined their German equivalents in using quantitative methodology to measure responses to propaganda campaigning and to war news. Early in the war, American propaganda practitioners had begun interchanging the unpopular word "propaganda" with the new labels "psy-war" or psychological warfare.

Propaganda: Why Is It Necessary?

Throughout the twentieth century, despite official reluctance to use the term, propaganda has been one of the crucial tools of warfare and has been enlisted to manipulate the ideas, attitudes, conclusions, and tolerance levels of civilians and soldiers. During the First World War allied forces dropped or mortar-fired a total of twenty-six million propaganda leaflets aimed either at enemy troops or civilian populations. By 1945, the Royal Air Force had

dropped 6000 million leaflets in Europe and the United States Tactical Air Force had dropped another 8000 million.¹³ During the First World War, the airplane was deemed by the British military forces to be “too valuable a fighting machine proper to be employed as a disseminator of leaflets” and, despite its suitability for the job, planes were replaced by balloons with slow burning wicks that would release leaflets as they drifted.¹⁴ In 1944 and 1945, two squadrons of Flying Fortresses were allotted to leaflet dropping and, in the European theater alone, Britain and the U.S. had allocated a combined personnel force of 4,600 people to the special psychological warfare division under the direct command of Supreme Headquarters. As General Eisenhower explained, the “paper bullet” had become “a special and most effective weapon of war.”¹⁵

Propaganda aimed at enemy soldiers was designed to convince them that they should either disengage philosophically from the war aims of their leaders, or that they should surrender because their military position was not viable. An early post-World War II analysis of the success of surrender leaflets included an account from Italy: “After we invaded Italy honest Italian parents told us that the best going-away gift they could give their war-bound sons was an Allied surrender pass purchased for one hundred lire on the black market. It was a lifesaving insurance premium”¹⁶ while a contemporary paper by Lt. Colonel William R. Kintner described the impact of the “I cease resistance” leaflets, dropped on Japanese soldiers in the last stages of the Pacific war:

On Biak one division reported that 75 percent of the prisoners-of-war taken appeared to have been influenced by leaflets in making up their minds to surrender. Cease resistance leaflets made their strongest appeal when the enemy was disorganized and short of food and ammunition. Many reports indicate that at least 50 percent of the Japanese were contacted by our leaflets, and that almost all surrenders were assisted, if not initiated, by ideas implanted by our leaflets.¹⁷

Propaganda aimed at enemy civilians was more effective through radio broadcasting and, typically, seeded distrust of political leaders and generally attempted to undermine resistance. In the Second World War, Japanese radio broadcasts undermined Australian civilian morale, principally because their star announcer, Tokyo Rose, seemed to have intimate local knowledge. She often named small rural townships as targets for Japanese aerial attacks and, as important strategic airstrips in inland sites neared completion, she assured residents that the facility would be bombed as soon as it was finished.¹⁸

Propaganda, Lasswell wrote, "is the war of ideas on ideas"¹⁹ and the reason that it has become so important is that winning the minds of civilians is now crucial to winning or losing a war. The distinctive feature of warfare, since the early nineteenth century, is not technology; rather, weapons of mass destruction are an effect, not a cause, of a deeper shift. The crucial variance from preceding wars lies in the fact that, during this century, wars have been between nations and not between armies.²⁰ This change meant that in the twentieth century:

the traditional armies of the mercenaries were replaced by national armies [and] the individual citizen had as never before a personal interest in the outcome of war...In the new kind of war the unprecedented consumption of munitions and other materials demanded the recruiting of the civilian population and the mobilisation of the entire economic resources of the state...With the nation at war, appeals to national pride and loyalty took on a new and deeper meaning.²¹

The fact that a fundamental shift in conceptualization had occurred, which drew the modern citizen into warfare in an unprecedented way, was clearly understood by at least some sections of the popular press. In April 1939, for example, the high-selling Australian magazine *Man* ran a concerted antiwar campaign and, pushing Australian censorship laws to the limit, published photographs of bodies of Chinese peasants killed in the Japanese invasion of Nanking. Their message was that in modern warfare, there are no civilians:

The days of professional armies are over. No longer do trained combatants take to the field against trained combatants purely because that is what they are paid to do. For wars, like everything else, have been modernised. They are bigger, and brighter, and better, and bloodier than ever before. In a 1939 war everyone would be included...everyone, including our women and children.²²

Modern wars have become, literally, wars between masses, and the propagandists' role has been adapted to match this new situation. As the nation-states of Germany and Italy underwent prewar preparation in the middle of the 1930s, pacifist Bertrand Russell, who had maintained his

opposition to the war throughout WWI and had called upon intellectuals not to engage in propaganda,²³ observed that once again the masses would be called to embrace the war as theirs, for, as he put it, “a nation cannot succeed in modern war unless most people are willing to suffer hardship and many people are willing to die. In order to produce this willingness, the rulers have to persuade their subjects that the war is about something...so important...as to be worthy of martyrdom.”²⁴ Adolf Hitler, arguably the greatest fan of British WWI propaganda, stridently believed that the British secured military victory *primarily* because of the effective propaganda campaigns the government launched on their own citizens throughout the war.²⁵ He argued that because the Germans had waged no equivalent campaigns to keep “the masses” steady, the British won the war in their heads long before they were victorious in the battlefield. Hitler could not have recalled Field Marshal Haig’s “Backs to the Wall” public statement of April 1918, which indicated very clearly that the British civilian population was far from confident of winning the war.²⁶ Hitler’s views were, however, in accordance with those already expressed by the men of the German Supreme Command. Field Marshal von Hindenburg published his memoirs in 1920, and he, too, was quick to attribute Allied victory to clever propaganda, spread in the summer of 1918, among tired German troops who had begun to long for nothing other than the end of the war.²⁷ In 1933, Eugen Hadamovsky, who was at the time one of Goebbels’ young party ideologues in the Ministry, produced a lengthy text that owed much to Harold Lasswell. In *Propaganda and National Power*, he expanded on the explanation of German deficiency in propaganda in the First World War:

The German nation lost the war against the entire world not because of inadequate weapons and the weakness of her soldiers, but because of the bureaucratic sterility of her leading statesmen. The German people were not beaten on the battlefield, but were defeated in the war of words and because their spirit was broken. The Germans were sent into this mighty battle with not so much as a single slogan while the enemy nations took up arms “against the Hun,” “for world peace,” and “for the League of Nations.”²⁸

While the *concept* of mass warfare has stripped civilian populations of choice in whether they would participate in the war, modern technology has enforced the point. Airplanes are an obvious example of this, as are long-range missiles; they deliver mass destruction even to island nations and convince all that there can be no abstention. While modern armies rely upon

training and discipline to enable soldiers to continue on in the face of terror, propaganda is used on the civilian population to achieve the same goal. For Qualter, “propaganda, and especially emotive propaganda, was therefore adopted as a substitute for discipline to carry the nation through crises and to mould it into a single organised fighting unit.”²⁹ The persuasion exercises of modern warfare are all designed to convince the population to unite behind the war—literally to own the war as their own, while simultaneously creating “the discouragement and psychological disintegration of the government and nation of the enemy.”³⁰

During the twentieth century, a further shift in warfare practices has ensured that civilians have much to lose if their state cannot resist invasion. Throughout the period of early European colonial expansion, from the fifteenth century on international law developed to govern rules of seizure of the spoils of warfare. Whereas in the ancient world the victor seized anything in the invaded land, by the eighteenth century European laws determined that invasion did not lead to confiscation of private property. Nineteenth century international jurist Emerich de Vattel wrote that from the eighteenth century, a conqueror “takes possession of the property of the State and leaves that of individuals untouched.” For citizens, the suffering is indirect, conquest “merely brings them a change of sovereign,”³¹ This principle was endorsed throughout the nineteenth century in native title claims; for example, Chief Justice Marshall of the American Supreme Court delivered a judgment in 1833 that it was “very unusual...for the conqueror to do more than displace the sovereign and assume dominion of the country...The people change their alliance; their relation to their ancient sovereign is dissolved, but...their rights of property remain undisturbed.”³² Throughout the twentieth century, however, mass exodus has accompanied modern warfare as entire populations are driven off their land and are stripped of all their material possessions by invading armies. They are then replaced by the masses of the conquering nation, who, in turn, understand very clearly that in all future wars over the territory, they will have no choice but to commit themselves totally to the struggle.

Who Owns the War?

To convince one’s own civilian population that they must identify with the aims of the war to the point of martyrdom is a necessity of modern warfare. To convince the population of the combatants, and of neutral nations, that they should *disown* the war is also highly desirable, for the negative impact it has, in the first place, upon potential recruitment, and later,

upon desertion and surrender rates. The American War of Independence provides an excellent early study of a military dispute in which an organized tactical campaign was conducted as a crucial feature of the war. Propagandists, by targeting the British army and civilian population, as well as the American colonial population, through leaflets and speaking tours, sought to rally the people into a united fighting force. Achieving international support for the American cause was also a vital component of the propaganda war. When the elderly Benjamin Franklin visited Britain's traditional enemy, France, his ability to draw and enthrall crowds in Paris scored a brilliant propaganda coup for the Americans. A contemporary observer, Francis Renaut, described the psychological impact upon the French people of Franklin's visit, as underscoring how reasonable were the American aims, and how unreasonable was the British position. At a time "when the words of Rousseau were lodged in every cultivated man, who could fail to be moved by the spectacle of a venerable old gentleman coming to defend his country, supported on the arm of one of his grandchildren"?³³

From the commencement of armed resistance, the civilian population in the colonies was subjected to an organized campaign involving speeches and widespread distribution of pamphlets, urging them to see that this was *their* war and that their unity and defiance would result in a better future. An equally determined campaign was aimed at the British troops, who were called upon to *disown* the war. Leaflets were circulated among British soldiers "many of whom already felt a reluctance to fight against their own kith and kin, contrasting the miseries of their present existence with the benefits to be found with the Americans."³⁴ The American propagandists' aim was to convince the vulnerable British mercenary army that they had enlisted in someone else's war. The class-riven conditions in the army reflected everyday life in England, making the propagandists' strategy all the easier:

Harsh discipline, the great class distinctions between British officers and men...were all exploited by the colonial propagandists. Play was also made upon the outbreak of anti-Catholicism which occurred in England at this time. In an "Address to Soldiers," a leaflet distributed in England amongst troops about to leave for America, "An Old Soldier" writes, "Gentlemen, you are about to embark for America to compel your Fellow Subjects there to submit to Popery and Slavery...your Honour, Gentlemen, as Soldiers and your Humanity as Men forbid you to be the instruments of forcing Chains upon your injured and oppressed Fellow Subjects."³⁵

In the twentieth century, in both world wars, German propagandists used the same strategy against the Americans. In the First World War, before the United States became involved, the former German Secretary of State for the Colonies, Dr. Dernburg, was sent to America on a mission to raise funds for the German war effort. Thwarted in this aim by the American government, who warned investors not to back Germany or Great Britain, he turned his attention to raising pro-German sentiment by producing news stories of the German point of view in the war. With the help of a small group of German and American journalists, he set up a news bureau. In late 1918 a senatorial inquiry investigated his methodology and found a significant feature of it to have been attempting to win German support from black Americans in the hope that, should the U.S. enter the war on the side of the Allies, black Americans would be dissuaded from fighting:

The bureau obtained...newspaper...records of every lynching in the United States, and every attack by coloured men upon a white person, or every news item which showed the alleged oppression of the coloured race. These were formed into propaganda articles, and were forwarded to the editors of established newspapers, that is, white newspapers, and also to the editors of coloured newspapers....negro leaders...I do not mean the big leaders of the negro race, but small men scattered here and there—[were paid to tell] the negroes that in Germany the blacks were equal to the whites; that in Europe they had no colour line. They exhibited statements, presumed to be authentic, to this effect, and argued with them that, if Germany won the war, the rights of the coloured people in the South would be equal to those of the whites. That was the principal argument. They played continuously upon lynchings.³⁶

During the Second World War, German propaganda again targeted black American soldiers, urging them to disown the war by reminding them of social conditions at home. In a series of leaflets, news photoagency images taken in America were featured: "One of these pictures showed a Negro being lynched. Another showed a picture of the Detroit race riots. Still another showed an ill-clad Negro family sitting in front of a hovel they called home."³⁷ The slogan was a simple question: "Is this what you're fighting for?" Similarly, Radio Japan's Pacific broadcasts repeatedly detailed the White Australian policy, urging Afro-American troops not to fight for "Anglo-Saxon racial prejudice." To assist in countering this tack, the

American Negro Press published “letters from American negro soldiers in Australia, praising highly the treatment they had met among Australians.”³⁸

The ease with which propagandists could exploit the domestic weaknesses of their enemies drew mundane, everyday activities of the homefront into the war. Writing in an American military journal during the Second World War, “psy-war” soldier Leo Margolin argued that the relationship between the everyday and military success was direct and vital: “the behavior of the American population in its everyday life, in its morals, its mores, its moral support of the soldier behind the gun is more than just an intangible factor to the soldier. It becomes a matter of living or dying.”³⁹ In 1941, in preparation for the U.S.’s entrance into the war, the Propaganda Ministry of the Reich established a special American Section that conducted a detailed social study of American society, identifying American anti-Semitism as another weak point. Later they exploited this by featuring “anti-Semitism...as an important theme in their combat leaflets against American troops on all fronts.” The widespread condemnation of national aviator hero and pro-isolationist campaigner, Charles Lindberg, who alleged in 1941 that Hollywood was dominated by biased Jewish and British populations who dictated the content of films,⁴⁰ can be contextualized within a growing realization that public evidence of American anti-Semitism assisted German propagandists.

War Guilt and Atrocity

International wars, in which the propagandist’s job is to convince the people of one country that they should enter the war in defense or support of another, require a more abstract theme than self-preservation or protection of one’s own private property. The German invasion of Belgium in 1914 could easily have left British citizens unmoved. Indeed, despite *The Times*’ anti-German, pro-war editorials, which explained on 31 July 1914, that “a German advance through Belgium to the north of France might enable Germany to acquire possession of Antwerp, Flushing and even Dunkirk and Calais, which might then become German naval bases against England,” British public opinion was heavily weighted in favor of the *Daily News*’s line of 30 July 1914: “free peoples of France, England and Italy should refuse to be drawn into the circle of this dynastic struggle.” International law was being flaunted by the Germans, *The Times* retorted.⁴¹ But international law and diplomacy were too new as concepts for the bulk of the civilian population to be worthy of fighting a war over (although, as Lasswell points out, it had, for the middle classes, just the right resonance of bourgeois morality about it). What in fact became the key theme for anti-German

propaganda and swung French, British, and, finally, American public opinion into support of the war, was the theme of uniting against the forces of barbarism. Germany became the threat to civilization in the propaganda war of 1914–1918. It might have seemed a highly abstract notion to weave into a viable propaganda story, especially when Germany led the world in technological, scientific, and intellectual endeavour, yet it sold to populations newly acquainted with widespread literacy and the modern phenomenon of the Yellow Press. Being new to reading, the tabloids' primarily working-class followers were untrained in the art of resisting the printed message, but were highly skilled in following public events through the idiosyncratic shorthand of "screaming" headlines.

As all propagandists of the twentieth century have been aware, following the example set by the tabloids, all campaigns need a "phrase," a "headline," or a "slogan"—all descriptions of the collapsing of a complex scenario into three or four words. Lasswell dates the beginning of the Allied propaganda war against Germany as the 8th of August, 1914, when the London *Evening Standard* shouted "Civilisation at Issue," and the theme reverberated ever after. "*Guerre contre les barbares*" was simultaneously declared in France, while in Germany the defense and nature of *Kultur* became a duty and privilege of all good Germans. In the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, campaigning relentlessly to urge his countrymen into the war against Germany, seized upon the theme and highlighted it in a crusade featuring emotional speeches throughout the country, along with a series of newspaper articles that were then reprinted in January 1915 in a volume entitled, *America and the World War*.⁴² As Peter Buitenhuis has shown, leading British and expatriate American *literati* were willingly drawn into the propaganda war, writing articles and novels that passionately proclaimed Germans to be barbarians and civilization to be under threat. Buitenhuis claims that Henry James, Edith Wharton, Joseph Conrad, Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Ford Madox Hueffer "genuinely believed that the cause of civilisation...was at stake."⁴³

It is essential for the war propagandist to attach culpability in starting the war to the enemy and to claim for themselves the high moral ground. Right must unequivocally be claimed by the propagandist. In the First World War, exploiting the theme of the German occupation of Belgium supplied the former, while fabrication of spectacular atrocity stories provided the copy for the latter. Belgian refugees streamed into England with stories of German atrocities against the civilian population, and with detailed accounts of rape, babies being bayoneted, hands and breasts being severed, and people being burned alive. In December 1914, the British government established the

Committee to Investigate Alleged German Outrages, chaired by Lord Bryce, a highly respected historian and former ambassador to the United States. The Committee's report was published early in 1915, finding that the stories were largely true. Due to Bryce's high standing in the United States, the report was accepted without demur by leading newspapers, exerting a powerful influence upon American opinion and playing a vital role in swinging public support behind military support of the Allies. And yet Bryce actually lent his personal integrity to the cause of propaganda—his report is “now generally acknowledged, [to have been]...largely a tissue of invention.” German appeals to American journalists in Belgium to clarify that such atrocities were not occurring had earlier resulted in four well-known journalists sending a wire to Associated Press denying the stories.⁴⁴ This independent dispatch could not outweigh the enormous propaganda impact of the Bryce report. The widespread publication of its findings saddened the committed pacifist Bertrand Russell, who did not believe the accounts and, in any case, believed that the graphic depiction of violence and destruction signaled the return to barbarism on the part of both the eager readership and the newspapers who delighted in supplying the detail. “As a lover of truth, the national propaganda of all the belligerent nations sickened me,” he wrote in his autobiography. “As a lover of civilisation, the return to barbarism appalled me.”⁴⁵ It did not, however, appall Adolf Hitler, who was deeply impressed with the lesson that a graphic, powerful message could so overwhelm the truth. “The war propaganda of the English and Americans was psychologically sound,” he concluded. “By representing the Germans...as barbarians and Huns, they prepared the individual soldier for the terrors of war,” while simultaneously, “the most terrible weapon that was used against him seemed only to confirm what his propagandists had told him; it likewise reinforced his faith in the truth of his government's assertions, while on the other hand it increased his rage and hatred against the vile enemy.”⁴⁶ Hadamovsky, too, deeply admired British and American expertise in the art of manipulating public opinion, especially the skill with which they exploited stage-managed atrocity stories:

There was the slogan of the Hun and the Boche, the bloody handshake—“the Hun's market” which for four long years screamed from thousands of posters pasted on the walls of the cities of the enemy. There were the horrifying atrocity stories circulated by the Belgians, the insidious war-time lies of the utilisation of bodies of combat victims for the production of fats...Small wonder, then, that the feelings of the enemy masses were lashed into a frenzy of resistance and the will to win.⁴⁷

In fact, the Nazis gave Allied propaganda campaigns of the First World War far more credit than their propagandists gave themselves. In the inter-war years, as propaganda techniques were being tried and measured in the newly established German psychology laboratories, the American and British practitioners who had provided the prototype campaigns were in pessimistic retreat, convinced that they had created long-term, entrenched cynicism among their own people. American propaganda theorist and WWII psychological warfare specialist, Ralph Block, maintained a long career in propaganda. In the late 1940s, when he had become Special Assistant to the Director in the Office of International Information, he caricatured the American post-WWI response to the realization that they had been the victims of a propaganda campaign as being like a child's reaction to a fairy tale. For most Americans, he postulated, propaganda was comparable with a wizard who "creeps up on your blind side saying one thing and meaning another; clothed in friendliness and good intentions...it seduces you into taking a bite from the beautiful poisoned apple."⁴⁸ Reflection upon the propaganda campaigns of the first world war seemed to have saddened and bemused Americans, who had not realized, during the war, that they were being subjected to a campaign of official misinformation conducted by their own government. While Block wrote of similarities with children's stories, Lasswell compared the interwar American distrust of propaganda with that of a cheated gambler. Americans were "puzzled, uneasy, or vexed at the unknown cunning which seems to have duped and degraded them," and demanded explanations: "These people probe the mysteries of propaganda with that compound of admiration and chagrin with which the victims of a new gambling trick demand to have the thing explained."⁴⁹

In this intellectual environment, Walter Lippmann's theories were taking shape, primarily through analysis of widespread rage and bewilderment. As the pseudo-environment of the Bryce report was overlain with a revisionist version, in which the German soldiers in Belgium had generally behaved in accordance with agreed international conventions of warfare, there was for the American public, he explained, a "noticeable break in the texture of the fictitious world."⁵⁰ Later, the Nazis, who had only limited appreciation of the impact of this American crisis in public confidence, sought to deal with it by reducing the possibility that a break in their fictitious world would occur through the use of strict censorship of the press. What they and all of the totalitarian regimes this century attempted was the creation of a pseudo-environment, which could not be contradicted by images from another. At his trial, Hitler's Minister for Armaments, Albert Speer, described the process through which Hitler attempted to use technology to create a propaganda world so closed to outside images or ideas that thinking beyond that world was not possible. "Hitler's dictatorship," he said,

“was the first...which made complete use of all technical means for the domination of its own country. Through technical devices like the radio and the loud-speaker, eighty million people were deprived of independent thought. It was thereby possible to subject them to the will of one man.”⁵¹

The postwar analysis of the propagandist campaigns of 1914–1918 represented a significant shift in the intellectual climate, especially of the United States, but also of other Allied nations. Within the academic sector, a clear shift to revisionism accompanied the general interwar pessimism, as if the very notion of continuity had snapped in the intellectual mind and the soothing idea that history is an unfolding drama would be forever lost. “The Great War was perhaps the last to be conceived as taking place within a seamless, purposeful ‘history’ involving a coherent stream of time running from past through present to future,” writes Paul Fussell, illustrating his point by reference to the famous “What did *you* do in the Great War, Daddy?” recruitment poster. The poster relies upon an underlying sense of an assured future, identical with the past, which would be returned to once the disruption of the war had passed. “Today, when each day’s experience seems notably *ad hoc*,” Fussell explains, “no such appeal would shame the most stupid to the recruiting office. But the Great War took place in what was, compared with ours, a static world, where the values appeared stable and where the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable.”⁵²

Within the democracies, the interwar period was characterized by uncertainty, distrust, and the realization that fabrication is the very business of media messages. The creation of organizations designed to teach civilians how to withstand media messages and how to question evidence provided by seemingly trustworthy authorities was the popular equivalent of the intellectual retreat into revisionism. In the early 1920s, consumer organizations were established, spreading the consumer rights message, urging distrust of advertising, and insisting on a direct chain of responsibility from manufacturer to consumer. Private organizations were established to train the audiences of the new mass media of radio and film to identify and resist the techniques of psychological propaganda, used in both commercial advertising and in political didacticism. In 1937, the American Institute for Propaganda Analysis, the first of these organizations in the United States, began publishing the results of research made possible by a \$10,000 grant from the Goodwill Fund of Edward A. Felene and by private subscriptions. The next year the original grant was increased, and new grants were received from the American Jewish Committee and the Whitney Foundation. Its subscribers received a monthly bulletin, written by journalists and some academics (including the prominent political scientist, Leonard Doob), which analyzed a chosen contemporary propaganda campaign, and pointed out the devices

used to manipulate the mind of the reader. It organized public courses on propaganda analysis and supplied secondary school teachers with a manual outlining the foundation's method of analyzing propaganda.⁵³ Their project was quickly emulated. *The Nation*, a periodical targeting liberal middle-class readers, and *The Saturday Evening Post*, a mass circulation magazine, and several of the Hearst and Scripps-Howard newspaper groups began carrying regular columns training readers in propaganda analysis techniques. The Rockefeller Foundation financed a "listening and analysis center" at Princeton University. A Senate Foreign Affairs Committee was established to investigate propaganda techniques in the United States.⁵⁴

It was widespread anger at the fabrication of spectacular atrocity stories in general, and their alleged illustration through the use of constructed photomontages, in particular, that had enraged postwar audiences, who then craved the training to recognize propaganda devices. A major deleterious legacy for psy-war soldiers of the next international war was that these civilian populations, trained to resist media messages in the interwar period, were unwilling to believe official broadcasts in the Second World War. "No one can calculate the number of Jews who died in the Second War because of the ridicule during the twenties and thirties of Allied propaganda about Belgian nuns violated and children sadistically used," Fussell has written.⁵⁵ Bernard Wasserstein elaborates, showing in detail how this tragic legacy of the First World War aided the Nazis in WWII. Long after western populations were presented with detailed reports about the "final solution," they were generally reluctant to accept them as truthful. There was, Wasserstein notes, "a general feeling that atrocity propaganda during the First World War had been shown to be greatly exaggerated and [there was] a widespread aversion from falling into the same error again."⁵⁶ Ernest Bramsted, in a major study of Goebbels' propaganda methods, has shown how consciously the Reich propaganda minister made use of this "boomerang of atrocity stories," to convince the German people, including his own staff, that the reports coming from concentration camps were fabrications, merely a repetition of the devices employed by the Allies in WWI. Hans Fritzsche, a former journalist who became a high official in Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda, was able to convince his accusers at his trial in Nuremberg that the murder of Jews by the SS had been hidden from the German public and from him. He explained how he constantly reminded himself of the Bryce report and its grueling fabrications of German atrocities: "I thought always of it when news of the alleged atrocities was spread by the enemy and referred to in public."⁵⁷ When the Australian Department of Information ran a two-week anti-Japanese campaign in the autumn of 1942, which included radio broadcasts detailing brutal treatment of Australian prisoners of war in

Japanese hands, they were flooded with protests from an Australian people who typically warned that Australians would not believe the type of stories that had turned out to be lies in WWI:

May I enter a strong protest against the crude statements constantly coming over our wireless programs as to cruelties alleged to be perpetrated against the prisoners taken by the Japanese. In view of the complete unmasking of similar statements made against our enemies in 1914, one might expect that, should it be necessary to expose any cruelties our men have met with, the statements would only be broadcast when the name of some responsible officer, who could vouch for them, be announced.⁵⁸

While the key features of psychological warfare were employed before the twentieth century, the scale of its use and the central place it came to occupy in national strategy, first during World War One and then, at a greatly increased level, in the Second World War, locate psy-war as one of the defining features of the century. From Pope Gregory, through the American War of Independence and the atrocity fabrications of the First World War, to the totalitarian pseudo-environments of the Second World War—through these campaigns, the modern story of propaganda in warfare has emerged. The social sciences, developing throughout the nineteenth century, are crucial to the story of propaganda because questions about the human mind, about how groups will behave, and about how people will react to messages are the questions shared by social science and propagandists alike. Explaining why propaganda has become such a crucial feature of modern warfare has been the subject of this article. The necessity of enlisting the entire civilian population, and the quest to have that population react to the pseudo-environment of a propaganda war, has similarly been outlined. The aims of propaganda, as outlined by Harold Lasswell in 1927, continue to shape modern warfare. In contemporary wars, the propaganda war, which is the only one that civilian populations can know, now completely dominates war reporting. We learn now, not of war tactics and loss of military equipment and life, but of outrages against civilians. We are instructed to decide who was responsible, who carried out the atrocity, who organized the bodies just so for the photographers, and whether the bombs accidentally or deliberately fell there. Modern war accounts sound very much like childish arguments over cheating at play, but they are driven by the deadly earnest business of modern propaganda warfare.

Notes

This article is drawn from research made possible by an Australian Research Council grant. Dr. Maree Reid was a wonderful, overqualified research assistant on that project and I would like to thank her. My thanks also go to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Sunshine Coast, for research leave and to the History Program, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, for a stimulating and friendly environment in which to write.

1. Terence H. Qualter, *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare* (New York: Random House, 1962), 3–4.
2. *Ibid.*, 4.
3. Arthur Upham Pope, "German Psychological Warfare," in *German Psychological Warfare*, ed. Ladislav Farago (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1942), x.
4. Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1971), 34.
5. *Ibid.*, 9.
6. *Ibid.*, 2.
7. Beatrice Leeds, "How Firm is the Atlantic Handclasp," *Horizon* 26 (February 1942): 88.
8. Ralph Block, "Propaganda and the Free Society," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12 (Winter 1948–1949): 676–86.
9. Robert E. Summers, *America's Weapons of Psychological Warfare* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 11.
10. Harry S. Truman, "Fight False Propaganda with Truth," The American Society of Newspaper Editors, Washington, D.C., April 20, 1950. In *Vital Speeches of the Day* 16 (May 1950): 40–44.
11. Farago, *German Psychological Warfare*, 15–16.
12. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 10–11. I refer here to the meaning supplied by the *O.E.D.* of "a preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc. an attitude based on such a preconception."
13. Peter Wood, "The War of Words on the Wind," *Soldier* (March 1962): 14.
14. Major C. J. C. Street, "Propaganda Behind the Lines," *Cornhill Magazine* 47, 3rd Series 47 (1919): 488–499.
15. Wood, "The War of Words on the Wind," 14.
16. Leo Margolin, "A Paper Bullet is no Spitball," *Infantry Journal* (February 1947): 47.
17. William R. Kintner, "The Effectiveness of Psychological Warfare," *Marine Corps Gazette* (January 1948): 48–49.

18. Libby Connors, Lynette Finch, Kay Saunders, and Helen Taylor, *Australia's Frontline. Remembering the 1939–45 War* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992), 22.
19. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*, 12.
20. For more details on the shift to total warfare, see Michael Howard. "Total War in the Twentieth Century: Participation and Consensus in the Second World War," *War and Society. A Yearbook of Military History 1* (1975): 216–226.
21. Qualter. *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare*, 54.
22. Anon, "Women and children first," *Man* (April 1939): 10.
23. Bertrand Russell, *Justice in War-Time* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1916), 23–24.
24. Bertrand Russell, *Power: A New Social Analysis* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938), 135.
25. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943), 181–186.
26. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 16–18.
27. Ernest K. Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda: 1925–1945* (Michigan: The Cresset Press, 1965), xxii.
28. Eugen Hadamovsky, *Propaganda and National Power*, trans. Alice Mavrogordato and Ilse de Witt (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 8–9.
29. Qualter, *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare*, 54–55.
30. Wladimir Eliasberg, "German Philosophy and German Psychological Warfare," *The Journal of Psychology 14* (1942): 197.
31. Quoted in Henry Reynolds, *The Law of the Land*, 2nd ed. (Ringwood: Penguin, 1992), 38.
32. *Ibid.*, 38.
33. Quoted in Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*, 158.
34. A. C. Ashworth, "The Enduring Weapon," *British Army Review 7* (September 1958): 66–67.
35. *Ibid.*, 66–67.
36. 1919, Senate Document. 62 (Brewing and Liquor Interests, etc.) p. 1785, quoted in Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*, 148–150.
37. Margolin "A Paper Bullet is No Spitball," 49.
38. Homer Smith, representative of American Negro Press in the U.S.S.R, 25th February 1943, AA-ACT. Series: A433/1. Item: 43/2/2842.
39. Margolin, "A Paper Bullet is No Spitball," 49.

40. Alan McCracken, "Propaganda de Luxe," *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* (October, 1948): 1235–1245.
41. Newspaper articles quoted in Lasswell, 67–68
42. Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: British, American, and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction 1914–1933* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 57.
43. *Ibid.*, 8.
44. *Ibid.*, 12.
45. Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, 1914–1944, Vol. II* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), 18.
46. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 181.
47. Hadamovsky, *Propaganda and National Power*, 24–25.
48. Ralph Block, "Propaganda and the Free Society," 676–686.
49. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*, 9
50. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 10.
51. Albert Speer, Reich Minister for Armaments, quoted in Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), 48–49.
52. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 21.
53. Leonard W. Doob, *Public Opinion and Propaganda*, 2nd ed. (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), 285.
54. AA-ACT, SP112/1/1. Item 429/1/1. A detailed report, stamped "secret," titled "Propaganda Analysis," is preceded by a memo from the secretary to the editor of the Broadcasting Division of the Department of Information, noting that "The attached is copy of a document forwarded to this Department by the Department of External Affairs. There is nothing to show its origins, but its contents will doubtless be of interest to you." It summarized the contents of the first six monthly bulletins following Britain's entry into the war.
55. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 316.
56. Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939–1945* (London: Clarendon Press, 1979), 166
57. Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*, xxxvi.
58. Letter from St. Agnes' Vicarage from Geo. A Kitchen, Vicar, St. Agnes' Church of England, Back Rock, to ABC, 7 April 1942, AA (NSW) SP 109/16. Box 97. Item: Anti-Dep Propaganda. For more on this campaign see, Lynette Finch, "Knowing the Enemy: Australian Psychological Warfare and the Business of Influencing Minds in the Second World War," *War & Society* 16 (October 1998): 71–91 and Kay Saunders, "Propaganda in Australia During the Second World War," *War and Society* 15 (October 1997):75–90.