

PHIL 109  
FIRST YEAR SEMINAR: PROPAGANDA

Winter 2021

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<b>Instructor:</b> Megan Hyska	<b>Time:</b> T/Th: 9:30-10:50
<b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:megan.hyska@northwestern.edu">megan.hyska@northwestern.edu</a>	<b>Place:</b> on Zoom

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**Office Hours:** Monday and Wednesdays 9-10 or by appointment, on zoom. Please e-mail in advance for zoom link and to verify a time.

**Course Materials:** All readings are either posted on Canvas or available at links in the body of (the digital copy of) this syllabus.

**Course Description and Objectives:**

Democracy works when people are able to make conscientious, informed decisions about the kind of society they want to live in. Thinkers from antiquity to the present have been concerned with the various ways that this ability can be undermined by propaganda, both in purported democracies and in explicitly authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, some thinkers have suggested that propaganda isn't always bad, and is perhaps a necessary component of liberatory social and political movements. In this course we will be asking three central questions: What is propaganda? How does propaganda function in the world today? And finally, how can propaganda be resisted by those who are harmed by it?

Most of all, this course is meant to help you develop your abilities to read critically, to write with clarity and technical proficiency, to reason cogently, and to express your thoughts verbally.

**Course Outline:**

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**DATE READINGS AND COURSEWORK**

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01.12 Introduction, No readings

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01.14 Gustave Le Bon, excerpt from *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*

No presentation, no response due.

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01.19 Library session, no readings, no response due.

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01.21 Cory Wimberly, excerpt from *How Propaganda Became Public Relations: Foucault and the Corporate Government of the Public*

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01.26 Victor Klemperer, excerpt from *The Language of the Third Reich*

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01.28 Hannah Arendt, excerpt from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

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02.02 Lisa Wedeen, excerpt from *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*

*Draft of Paper 1 due*

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02.04	Class cancelled, individual meetings in lieu
02.09	Haifeng Huang, <i>Signaling as Propaganda</i>
02.11	Peter Pomerantsev, <i>The Hidden Author of Putinism</i> , <a href="#">link here</a>
02.16	Jason Stanley, excerpt from <i>How Propaganda Works</i>
02.18	W.E.B. Du Bois, <i>Criteria of Negro Art</i> , and Alain Locke, <i>Art or Propaganda?</i> <i>Final Paper 1 due.</i>
02.23	José Medina, <i>Resisting Racist Propaganda: Distorted Visual Communication and Epistemic Activism</i>
02.25	Amilcar Cabral, <i>National Liberation and Culture</i>
03.02	Patricia Hill Collins, excerpt from <i>Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images</i>
03.04	Hannah Arendt, excerpt from <i>Lying in Politics</i>
03.09	Edward S Herman and Noam Chomsky, excerpt from <i>Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media</i>
03.11	Angela Nagle, excerpt from <i>Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right</i> or TBA

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**Grade breakdown:**

Paper 1 30%, paper 2 35%, participation and presentation 15%, reading responses 20%

**Deadlines:**

Paper 1 draft: February 2nd, 5pm

Paper 1 revised: February 18th, 11:59pm

Paper 2: March 15th, 11:59pm

**Assignments:**

*Papers:*

You will hand in two polished papers over the course of the quarter (due dates above). Late papers will be docked 5% for each day that they're late.

Paper 1: 1000-1250 words (approx 4-5 pages double-spaced), 2+ sources. This paper will be graded in 2 stages; first you will hand in a draft; this is mandatory. You will make an appointment to come see me to discuss revisions (most appointments will be 02.03-02.05), and then, after integrating this feedback, you will hand in a final copy. The grade will be based on the overall quality of the final paper as well as the progress made over the course of the revision process.

Paper 2: 1250-1500 words (approx 5-6 pages double-spaced), 3+ sources. There is no mandatory drafting or instructor consultation process for this paper, but you are strongly encouraged to come see your

instructor to chat through ideas and get feedback on rough drafts.

Both papers will have the form of a case analysis. A case analysis requires you to do each of the following:

1. Choose an example of propaganda. This could be a contemporary example, or one from history; it could be from the United States or elsewhere. It might be a speech, a pamphlet, an excerpt from a longer written work, a piece of visual art, a film, an advertisement, a twitter bot, a photograph, a play, or a piece in any other medium that interests you. It can be something widely agreed to be an example of propaganda or something the status of which as propaganda might be controversial. Choose something that you find interesting/ enraging/ effective (or perhaps curiously *ineffective?*)/ dangerous/ illuminating! **NB:** In order to force you to think creatively, you may *not* choose a WWII propaganda poster from either Axis or Allied Powers unless you seek special permission from me.
2. Present an argument as to why this case counts as an example of propaganda and how it works– to do this, you should provide information about the context in which it appeared, as well as alluding to some of the theorists we will talk about in class (or others). You must show that you can select sources appropriate to your citation needs (see “Working with Sources” handout, available on Canvas). You’ll also, however, be relying on your own powers of analysis and argumentation.

You should make sure to address questions like:

- Who was this piece of propaganda aimed at?
- What did the piece’s creator(s) aim to have this audience believe or do?
- Was the piece effective/ likely to be effective? Why or why not?

The most important aspects of these case analyses, on which your grade be mostly based, are clear, technically proficient writing, and tight argumentation. I want to see that you’ve anticipated possible objections to your core argument and made it stronger to defend against these objections.

Paper formatting requirements are as follows:

- Double-spaced
- All sources properly cited using a consistent citation style (it doesn’t matter to me whether you choose APA, MLA, etc., but you’ve got to pick one and stick to it). Regardless of your chosen citation style, you will have both a bibliography at the end of the paper and some sort of annotation mechanism (e.g. footnotes, endnotes, in-line parenthetical citations) in the body of the paper. See also
- Pages numbered
- I’m not picky about precise fonts or margin sizes, though do note that it is the word count, not a certain number of pages, that you need to satisfy (so large margins won’t really help you ;))

*Reading responses:*

Reading Responses are due at 8:30 am before every class meeting (01.21-03.11) and should be uploaded on Canvas. These should be approximately 200 words long. Except under special circumstances, I will not accept reading responses that are handed in late. They are not meant to be summaries of the readings, but rather a set of comments on what you found interesting or perplexing. At the end of each response, you should include one discussion question.

When grading these responses, I will be looking for clear, technically proficient writing as well as evidence that you have grappled with the reading. Responses will receive 0, 1 or 2 as their grade. If you receive less than a 2 *but did hand the assignment in on-time*, you can make up the points by correcting issues with the response and *coming to my office to discuss these changes*. Except in unusual circumstances, makeup points may not be petitioned for by Canvas or e-mail without also having an in-person meeting with me.

Note that you will not usually receive written comments on responses, but that I'm happy to give more in depth feedback if you make an appointment to come see me.

*Attendance and Participation:*

- This is a discussion-based class, not a lecture. It goes without saying that in order to participate you need to attend, but it's also vital that you come to every class prepared to discuss the readings; the fact that participation is part of your grade reflects this. The reading responses are in part designed to help make you feel prepared for this conversation, but if you're still struggling to feel comfortable speaking in class, please come chat with me so we can discuss strategies.
- Unless you make alternative arrangements with the instructor (see below), this is a synchronous class, requiring your attendance and participation 9:30-10:50 every Tuesday and Thursday.
- Unless you make alternative arrangements with the instructor, attendance requires being **online** with your **camera on** for the entirety of the class period.
- Synchronous attendance with camera off, if not pre-cleared with instructor, will count as an absence. Missed course meetings may be excused by the instructor, but generally require advance notice.
- If at any point in the quarter you want to check in on your participation grade, by all means shoot me an e-mail or make an appointment to chat about it.
- If your circumstances require an asynchronous accommodation (e.g. you are living in a timezone such that our class time would be in the middle of your night), please reach out to the instructor ASAP. If your accommodation request is approved, you will be required to agree to an alternative set of participation requirements.

*Presentation:* On each class day, starting 01.21, one student will be responsible for giving a 10-15 minute introduction to the reading in which they summarize its key arguments and conclusions. They will conclude their presentation by offering 3-5 discussion questions, and will assist in leading discussion for the rest of the class period. The presenting student will have prepared a set of slides with key terms, ideas, and questions to use during their presentation. You are still responsible for having handed in a reading response on the day of your presentation, but this shouldn't really amount to doing extra work; your introduction will in some ways be like an extended reading response (though note, you do not have to have this whole introduction written down). Your presentation counts toward your participation grade. As a discussion leader, you should make sure to have done any research necessary in order to give proper context for the reading: tell us who the author is, the historical context in which they're writing, and, if the author alludes to any concept, entity or event that may not be familiar to all students, be prepared to explain it to the class.

**Academic Integrity:** If you plagiarize on any assignment you will receive a zero on that assignment and be referred to the college's disciplinary body. Note that it is your responsibility to make sure you know what plagiarism consists of and that ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism will not be considered a legitimate excuse in the event of an infraction. If you need help figuring out how to responsibly cite something, please ask your instructor or refer to [NUWrite's list of helpful resources](#).

**Students with Disabilities:** Any student with a disability requesting accommodations should register with Services for Students with Disabilities ([ssd@northwestern.edu](mailto:ssd@northwestern.edu); 847-467-5530) and present an accommodation letter from SSD to their professor, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential.