**Propaganda**

Propaganda is the term for a variety of communication phenomena developed in the twentieth century. As such, its meaning has changed over time from a largely neutral description of public relations and political communication towards an account of systematically distorted communication. The earliest major American proponent of the term, Edward Bernays (1891-1995), claimed that the ‘conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society’ (Bernays 1). Bernays believed that ‘propaganda’, for him, a political variation on public relations work, was a tool used by political organizations and eventually businesses to organize and manipulate the desires, actions and will of the masses. After World War I and World War II, researchers like Harold Lasswell (1902-1978) and Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) would reconfigure propaganda as a largely negative tool. Lasswell claims that ‘Most of that which formerly could be done by violence and intimidation must now be done by argument and persuasion, and therein lies propaganda’ (‘The Theory of Political Propaganda’ 631). Theodor Adorno at the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Frankfurt Institute for Social Research) would seek to analyze fascist propaganda using Freudian methodologies. In both cases, these perspectives reflected propaganda’s role in distorting democratic deliberation in the public sphere, as described by Jürgen Habermas, rather than streamlining it, as Bernays imagined.

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**References and further reading**

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