

Hitler's Most Lasting Gift to America

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The Nazi war machine was an extremely efficient and inventive producer of new tools for destroying people, places and ideas. Unfortunately, many of these “gifts” remain with us and have gestated new and improved means of wreaking havoc and destroying humanity. Nazi chemists blessed us with *Tablun*, *Sarin*, *Soman* and *Cyclosarin* nerve gases. The *StG-44 Sturm-gewehr* (storming rifle) of 1943 was the world’s first assault rifle. It was compact, provided automatic fire and used a cartridge more powerful than a pistol but smaller and lighter than that of a rifle. The *StG-44* served as the design model for the Soviet AK-47, our own M-16 rifle and the service rifles of virtually all modern armies. The *V-1 buzz-bomb* that terrorized London was a flying bomb powered by an air-breathing pulse jet. It was the prototype for today’s cruise missile. The second wave of the London Blitz used the *V-2 rocket*, a liquid-fueled missile that begat today’s terrifying ICBMs. Messerschmitt launched the first operational jet fighter, the *ME 262*, while Arado sent their *AR 234* jet bomber to plague Britain. The *Ho229 Horton Bomber* was a jet-powered flying wing deployed against England. Its stealthy design was a harbinger of Northrop’s B-2 stealth bomber. The far larger *Horton H.XVIII* was one of several *Amerika* bombers proposed to deliver a nuclear weapon to our shores. While these Nazi gifts have adversely affected today’s world, the 21st century is more damaged by a subtler weapon.

In 1622 Pope Gregory XV formed a committee of Roman Catholic Church cardinals and made them responsible to spread Catholicism across Europe, Asia, Africa and the New World before German-rooted Reformation Protestants could effectively proselytize there. This *congregatio de propaganda fide* (congregation for propagation of the faith) may well have been history’s first advertising and public relations agency. It became a major publisher and distributor of the printed word, producing catechisms in a wide range of languages. The congregatio formed a university to train and indoctrinate those priests who would travel to remote places and spread its truth and wisdom. In addition to spreading their specific Christian doctrine, the congregatio gave the world a new word: propaganda. The root of this word caught me by surprise; I had always presumed ‘propaganda’ was the invention of a modern government. But then, I guess it was.

Propaganda has always been a part of

politicking and war making. These are, of course, those human undertakings with the greatest need for mind control, misdirection and deception. The ancient Indian *Artha-shastra* (loosely translated: the science of politics) was composed in Sanskrit during the second and third centuries. It is one of the earliest written guides to running a nation-state, and it includes detailed instructions for the creation and dissemination of both factual and contrived information to achieve desired political and military aims.

It may well have been the first “potentate’s guide to propaganda” and was published 1,500 years before Karl Marx published *Das Kapital* and coauthored the *Communist Manifesto* with Frederick Engels. Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (1870-1924), better known as Lenin began to exert influence in Russia in the same era; all three fully understood and disseminated the principals and methods of propaganda generation and distribution. World War II saw propaganda and its methods honed to a fine art by all warring participants, but nowhere more effectively than within Germany’s *National-sozialismus* (Nazi party).

Chapter 6 of Hitler’s 1925 autobiographic *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) expressed his respect for Britain’s WWI propaganda campaign; its (translated) first paragraph reads: “In 1915, the enemy started his propaganda among our soldiers. From 1916 onward, it steadily became more intensive, and at the beginning of 1918, it had swollen into a storm flood. One could now judge the effects of this proselytizing movement step by step. Gradually our soldiers began to think just in the way the enemy wished them to think. On the German side, there was no counter-propaganda.” When he became chancellor (under elected President Hindenburg) in 1933, he corrected this. One of his first acts was to appoint Dr. Joseph Goebbels as *Minister of Propaganda and National Enlightenment*. Following Hindenburg’s death in 1934, Hitler was declared *Führer und Reichskanzler* (leader and chancellor of the Reich). Goebbels was well on his way to assuring that no one within Germany could hear or read views opposing the Nazi party, and that the world outside of Germany heard a never-ending barrage of Third Reich success stories.

Goebbels used all of the communication tools of his age to accomplish his foul goal. Newspapers and magazines under Nazi control quickly fell into line and printed only the “party line” under the bylines of the nation’s reigning intellectuals. German radio, a

very new means of disseminating news and independent information rapidly collapsed into a political outlet for Nazi thought and rhetoric. German cinema moved from being a source of unbiased news and entertainment to providing carefully orchestrated and lavishly produced stories of German superiority and goodness. Children were slowly weaned from their mothers to suck on the teat of Third Reich kindness in the Hitler Youth. University curricula were severely modified and restricted to “proper” subjects, and new Reich-favored fields of study such as eugenics were instituted. German architecture began to play heavily on the Arian superiority theme as new and massive buildings and stadiums were built. Being German was great; Deutschland under *der Führer* was new and growing and strong and exciting. Nazi life was exemplary, and Goebbels and his disciples made everyone know and understand that. His efforts to this end persisted until the Reich’s final collapse. He, wife Magda and their six children (age 4 to 11) died in the *Führerbunker* the day after Hitler’s suicide. In accordance with Hitler’s will, Goebbels succeeded him as chancellor of Germany; he served one day in this post. Goebbels had SS dentist Helmut Kunz inject his six children with morphine so that they would be unconscious when glass ampoules of cyanide were crushed in their mouths. Magda attended to this, assisted by the *Führer’s* personal physician, *SS Obersturmbannführer*, Dr. Ludwig Stumpfegger. Then the loving couple exited to the garden of the chancellery, where they committed suicide.

The concept and implementation of propaganda has changed dramatically since WWII. At that time it was possible to obscure and control reporting on issues and events as did both Germany and Japan until rationing, soldiers being returned in boxes and falling bombs attested to the reality of their situation. Today, with event videos broadcast from phones online in real time, hearings, statements and interviews immediately accessible in the raw, propaganda has entered a new stage. The propagandist now has to shape and interpret events in a believable fashion (at least for a segment of the population) to fit a preferred narrative. It is not at all unusual to read two diametrically opposed views of any public hearing; one favorable to a specific person or position and the other unalterably opposed. Often one or both use incendiary words to assure their reader/viewership that their side is absolutely correct, the other side a bunch

of ignorant rubes or worse.

Propaganda and partisan politics have all but destroyed honest reporting in the United States. The days of deeming the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* or the *Chicago Tribune* or any other of the “great” American newspapers as unimpeachable sources of truth and wisdom are gone. Broadcast journalists can no longer be trusted to present unbiased and truthful radio or television news summaries. The era of trusted father figures like Edward R. Murrow, Walter Cronkite, Mike Wallace or David Brinkley at the microphone is long gone, replaced by strong, vocal advocates

of one partisan side or the other. Integrity has exited the newsroom and it has been replaced by thinly veiled political advocacy. The news, comedy and anything in between have become vehicles to deliver biased and often hateful political messages. The propagandist’s mantra of repeating a lie until it becomes the accepted truth is practiced every day.

Make no mistake, propaganda is a dangerous and evil weapon of the foulest sort. It destroys things and people of worth and merit. It does so by appealing to the crudest instincts of people who want to believe one side of a position to the exclusion of all else.

It courts fools and those unaccustomed and/or unwilling to analyze the world around them and the facts it presents. Propaganda is an ideal tool to control unaware masses and populations of mentally lazy people. Television, the Internet and commonly carried personal communication devices have multiplied the dangers of bias and propaganda exponentially beyond those presented during WWII. We live in the “information age,” but it often seems we are swimming through a fetid sea of disinformation! **SV**

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