Interrogating “Propaganda” in U.S. History
FYSEM-UA 686
Spring 2018
Wednesdays 3:30-6:00pm

Instructor: Dylan Yeats, Ph. D.
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 1pm-3pm at 19 University Pl. B 07.

This course traces longstanding debates over what constitutes “propaganda,” and who, if anyone, can and should decide what is “true” in American society? How should the “people” limit or encourage the free expression of controversial or divisive topics? Should the government, media, or the academy do this, and how? What are, or should be, the relationship between the state and institutions of civil society in regards to what is true or good in politics and culture? How can, or are, these institutions made accountable to the people? Most importantly, how can we, as consumers and producers of knowledge, position ourselves in relationship to these issues and navigate them successfully?

We will investigate subtle and not so subtle ways in which political parties and other vested have long battled each other for the hearts, minds, votes, and pocketbooks of the populace. By tracing efforts to silence some forms of speech, and encourage others, we will analyze the relationship between power and knowledge in U.S. history. In doing so, we will develop historical background and skills to attribute and authenticate sources of information, assess the political and intellectual agendas of what we read, and learn strategies for approaching and comparing information in a rapidly changing economy of information.

This course is designed to push you to rigorously analyze an “artifact” of “propaganda” of your choosing. In a series of short papers, you will: 1) describe what the artifact is trying to argue to you, and how it is trying to argue it; 2) theorize the argument your artifact is trying to make by connecting it to some of our class readings and discussions; 3) contextualize your artifact by researching who made your artifact, when they made it, and why; and 4) historicize your artifact by connecting the creation of your artifact to a larger historical conflict that we have read about or discussed in class. You will then combine the arguments and evidence from these papers, as well as feedback about them from your instructor and peers, to make a final presentation and paper that analyzes your artifact.

Class participation, which requires attendance 15%
Presentation 1: Describe and theorize your artifact (3 min) 10%
Presentation 2: Analyze your artifact (5 min) 15%
Paper 1: Describe your artifact (2-3 pgs) 10%
Paper 2: Theorize your artifact (2-3 pgs) 10%
Paper 3: Contextualize your artifact (2-3 pgs) 10%
Paper 4: Historicize your artifact (2-3 pgs) 10%
Paper 5: Analyze your artifact (8-12 pgs) 20%
All readings will be posted to the Classes website. I will bring in additional primary source examples to analyze collectively in class.

Class 1: January 24th

What is propaganda?

Class 2: January 31st

Readings: The Politics of Knowledge


Class 3: February 7th

Readings: Situating Knowledge


Class 4: February 14th

(come to class with an artifact that interests you and ready to talk about it)

Readings: Categories of Analysis


**Class 5: February 21st**

(Paper 1 due in class: describe your artifact. 2-3 pgs)

Readings: The Politics of “Sedition”


**Class 6: February 28th**

(Presentation 1 in class: describe and theorize your artifact. 3 min each)

Readings: Antislavery and Racial Science


**Class 7: March 7th**

(Paper 2 due in class: theorize your artifact. 2-3 pgs)

Readings: America’s Unfinished Revolution


(Spring Break March 12th – March 16th)
Class 8: March 21st

Readings: Race and Capitalism


Class 9: March 28th

(Paper 2 due in class: contextualize your artifact)

Readings: Gender and Imperialism


Class 10: April 4th

Readings: Americanization


Class 11: April 11th

(Paper 3 due in class: historicize your artifact)

Readings: “Culture” Wars, Hot and Cold


Class 12: April 18th

Readings: Selling Free Enterprise


Class 13: April 25th

(Bring draft of final paper to class for peer editing session.)

Class 14: May 2nd

(Final Presentations: analyze your artifact. 5 min each.)

Final Papers due Wednesday May 9th at 6pm