

Kinds of Propaganda

Citizens must be alert to propaganda. They must be able to recognize it and be aware of the various methods used by propagandists. When propaganda is presented as being factual and its sources are kept secret, it is called **concealed propaganda**. Concealed propaganda is used to fool people without letting them know its purpose is to influence them.

Sometimes concealed propaganda is relatively harmless. For example, press agents may make up interesting stories about television actors to give these actors publicity. At other times, concealed propaganda may be used to create a harmful impression. A photograph may be taken in a certain way or may be retouched to portray a political candidate in a negative light. False rumors may be spread to harm someone or to mislead people about a proposed program or policy.

Revealed propaganda is much more common in the United States and in other democracies. **Revealed propaganda** makes readers or listeners aware that someone is trying to influence them. Almost all advertising is revealed propaganda. You know when you see most advertisements that somebody wants you to buy something or to believe something.

Television and radio commercials are direct appeals to the public to buy products. In an election campaign, political parties often run commercials in an effort to get voters to support their candidates. These commercials must be clearly labeled as paid advertisements.

Propaganda Techniques

Some propaganda techniques are difficult to spot. Others can be easily recognized by people who carefully examine what they read and hear. What are some propaganda techniques?

Testimonials or Endorsements Political candidates and advertisers often seek endorsements from famous people. Advertisers know, for instance, that people admire sports heroes. Therefore, they pay famous athletes to say they use and like their products. Advertisers know that if a football hero says he drives a certain automobile, many people will believe the automobile must be good. Because these people admire the football hero, they trust his judgment. People who think for themselves, however, know that this testimonial by a famous athlete proves little. A football player may be a good quarterback, but this talent on the field does not make him an expert on automobiles.

Bandwagon People who write propaganda know that if you say something often enough and loud enough, many people will believe it. If you can win some people over to your ideas, eventually more and more people will come over to your side. This is known as the bandwagon technique. *"Everybody's doing it! Jump on the bandwagon!"* This method of propaganda appeals to people's desire to do what their friends and neighbors are doing. It takes advantage of the "peer pressure" factor.

Name-calling Another propaganda technique is name-calling, or using an unpleasant label or description to harm a person, group, or product. During an election campaign, both sides often use name-calling. For example, you may hear that some candidate favors "reckless spending" or that another is "opposed to progress." You must ask yourself, What proof is given? Are the charges supported by any facts?

Glittering Generalities Another technique used to influence people's thinking is the glittering generality. This technique uses words that sound good but have little real meaning. Many advertising slogans are glittering generalities. For example, statements such as "It contains a miracle ingredient!" or "It's new and improved to be better than ever!" tell nothing about the product or its ingredients.

Political candidates often use vague statements with which everyone can agree. These glittering generalities tell voters nothing about what a candidate really believes. This type of propaganda often uses words such as *home, country, freedom, patriotism, and American*. These words are chosen because they spark positive images with which most people in the nation identify.

Plain-folks Appeal During election campaigns, many candidates describe themselves as plain, hardworking citizens. They stress that they understand the problems of average Americans. This plain-folks appeal is designed to show people that, as one of them, the candidate can best represent the interests of the average citizen.

Card Stacking Another propaganda technique is card stacking. This technique uses facts in a way that favors a particular product, idea, or candidate. Newspapers, for example, may give front-page attention to the activities of the candidates they favor. The other political party and its candidates may be given smaller headlines or be reported only on the inside pages.