



Mark Connelly, Jo Fox, Stefan Goebel, Ulf Schmidt, eds. *Propaganda and Conflict: War, Media and Shaping the Twentieth Century*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 368 pp. \$120.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-78831-403-9.

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Fondren on Connelly, Fox, Goebel, and Schmidt, *Propaganda and Conflict*

At a time when media scholars and historians often draw parallels between current discussions of “fake news,” disinformation campaigns, and the extent of truth in politics, this volume presents a wealth of new historical research that responds to a very old question: how are conflicts, mass media, and the efforts to mold thought or control domestic and foreign opinions interrelated? And, perhaps more critically, the editors ask, “How long is a ‘propaganda memory’” (p. 8)?

Mark Connelly, Jo Fox, Stefan Goebel, and Ulf Schmidt’s edited volume provides an important and methodologically rich addition to the study of propaganda, conflict, and persuasion from World War I to the present. The authors emphasize the intersection between factual information in liberal societies (including discussions on “post-truth”), psychological warfare, government-led campaigns, artists’ roles, the use of popular media, and the discourse of propaganda as “a historical problem” (p. 10). In the prologue, the editors define propaganda as “a complex confluence of ideas, messages and themes, emerging from formal and informal sources, designed to appeal to individual and collective belief systems” (p. 10). The editors make a compelling argument for continued schol-

arship on the relationship between persuasion and power, since “the scientific and popular study of propaganda, commencing in earnest in 1915, has never really left us: we continue to want to understand propaganda’s inner workings, and, in doing so, to control and confine its influence, reassuring ourselves that we will, in time, become immune to malicious persuasion” (pp. 2-3).

This book arose from a symposium hosted by the Centre for the History of War, Media and Society at the University of Kent. Most of the contributing authors are affiliated with British, US, and French academic institutions or research institutes, and many contributors are colleagues or intellectual disciples of David Welch, emeritus professor of modern history at the University of Kent. The large volume includes twenty contributors and leading scholars, including Welch, whose distinguished career is marked by his critical study of propaganda, and to whom this work is dedicated. Fittingly, Welch reminds us in his epilogue that in the twenty first century “we are all propagandists now” (p. 311).

This theme is further developed by the volume’s contributors, who provide vivid historical and empirical examples of how propagandists de-

veloped official and unofficial media campaigns, how media transferred or challenged political and cultural norms, and how critical responses are all part of understanding the “propaganda anxieties” that scholars have recognized since the end of the Great War (p. 1). This volume also emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of propaganda, as well as its transnationalism, one of propaganda’s most “elusive properties” (p. 6). To this end, the authors have focused on a wide range of topics, from national and international perspectives, and applied different historical methodologies. The editors succeed in weaving together the main themes of these individual studies and the introductions to each part are particularly insightful. The material is organized in a chronological way and consists of three main parts (the First World War and interwar period; the Second World War; postwar and Cold War), each of which includes a concise summary. As a valuable resource for readers, a number of illustrations, including scenes from propaganda films, art, advertisements, and press photographs are included.

Several connective threads effectively hold these chapters together. For instance, one theme is the nuanced discussion about both the memory and the timeless effects—what the editors call the afterlife—of propaganda. In his seminal work on 1930s Nazi propaganda and the construction of the concept *Volksgemeinschaft*, Welch stressed the reciprocal nature and transactions of propaganda ideas and effects. Elaborating on the perception of truth during and after wartime, Antoine Capet, for example provides new historical insight into Winston Churchill’s view of France during the Great War. Capet’s biographical piece explores the shaping of Churchill’s own memory politics and his idealized view of the French army between the two world wars. In their essay on art under dictatorship, Ulf Schmidt and Katja Schmidt-Mai illustrate the conceptual dynamics between propaganda narratives and the Nazi art trade as well as the complexity of the legal framework of postwar restitution claims of looted art. Julie Anderson’s re-

search on the documentary *The Undefeated* (1950) effectively builds on Welch’s, Chapman’s, and Fox’s research on political messages, national ideologies, and film propaganda. Anderson shows how this postwar British film—depicting disabled ex-servicemen and their struggle to reenter society—“repurposed” similar propaganda tools that information agencies had previously used in battle to sustain public morale (p. 210). These postwar propagandists, as the author illustrates, applied the institutional knowledge to build informational programs that advocated for enhanced welfare reforms.

Secondly, the volume includes a set of essays on film propaganda and British wartime cinema. Historians Richard Taylor, James Chapman, and Jeffrey Richards, respectively, offer three different perspectives on the power of film during the Second World War. In their chapters, these scholars provide new angles on British visual propaganda, the tension it created, and the role of individual directors and authors. Reading these chapters is both instructive and insightful as they demonstrate the progression of scholarship, the origins of historiographical debates, and the interdisciplinary nature of propaganda research. Fabrice d’Almeida provides an interesting look into his role as a historian—and consultant (together with Welch)—for the CBC Television series *Love, Hate and Propaganda* that introduced a popular audience to the field of propaganda criticism in the twentieth century.

A third overarching theme emerging from this volume is the relationships among diplomacy, cultural politics, and official and unofficial efforts to propagandize views. For example, Gaynor Johnson offers a new look at the British Foreign Office, the discovery of the 1943 Katyn massacre, and the policy of “non-recognition” (p. 178). Edward Corse’s chapter on the British Council and early Cold War-era Poland includes valuable empirical figures that show the reach of British cultural propaganda and activities, including books, libraries, and films in Poland during the Cold War. Exploring the intellec-

tual history of propaganda and the political information ecology in the Cold War environment, Nicholas J. Cull's chapter provides an excellent historical view of US public diplomacy, means of political persuasion camouflaged as cultural politics, and tactical counter-propaganda. McCarthyism, as Cull argues, is "a spectacular example of propaganda in the name of counter-propaganda" (p. 276).

Taken as a whole, *Propaganda and Conflict War: Media and Shaping the Twentieth Century* is a thought-provoking collection that will introduce readers to the diversity and depth of propaganda research through the twentieth century up to the present day. The chapters, all of which rely on rich primary records, can be appreciated as single essays or collectively by media scholars, political historians, and anyone studying past or present propaganda ideas. The contributors present original research to show how states and individuals have created or managed information during past conflicts. Often, of course, this meant tightening the measures of control on the infosphere or finding new ways to shape political attitudes. This collection illustrates how media messages and mass persuasion during war are interwoven with political and military history, communication technologies, social history, and public affairs. The volume also opens up interesting avenues and angles for further study, especially the question of how propaganda impacts societies beyond the nation-state level, modern attempts at disinformation, online political campaigns, and the afterlife of propaganda ideas during war and peace.

In the epilogue, Welch reflects on fake news and post-truth in the digital media environment and reminds us that "whatever definition of propaganda we choose to use or, indeed, whether we need more or less propaganda—we have been living through *the* age of propaganda" (p. 322). Using the lessons of the past may be instructive when thinking about building public awareness and understanding of how messages can be used as tools

of manipulation. "If democracy completes its journey into cyberspace," as Welch writes, "there will remain huge questions about what the nature of this democracy will be" (p. 318).

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