Democratic Persuasion
ELEC-GG 2745

Description: This course begins with the controversial premise that persuasion and propaganda are a necessary part of modern politics. With this approach we reject the simple project of critique and condemnation of propaganda and set for ourselves the far more difficult task of rethinking how one might create methods of mass persuasion that build democracy instead of undermining it and facilitate political discussion instead of closing it down. We begin by exploring the history of rhetoric and persuasion, and defining what we mean by propaganda. Next, we will study classic examples of propaganda produced by advertising agencies and totalitarian states. Then, as an extended case study, we will explore how photographs, speeches, architecture, murals, guidebooks, plays, songs and even material projects of the New Deal might suggest an alternative model of propaganda. Throughout the semester, we will use what we have learned to sketch out a set of principles for democratic mass persuasion.

Requirements:
1) Attendance, diligent reading, and active participation in all class discussions.
2) Two short analytic essays--approximately 8-10 pages--over the course of the semester.
3) In depth analysis of a piece of New Deal culture or communication as propaganda, presented in class with write-up of approximately 15-20 pages

• I'm always open to suggestions on assignments. A video, poem, performance, web page, etc. in place of one of the written assignments is possible and could be very exciting. Just talk to me first.

Books:
- Plato, Gorgias
- Aristotle, Rhetoric
- Edward Bernays, Propaganda
- Anthony Badger, The New Deal
- Lizabeth Cohen, A Consumer's Republic
- Michael Denning, The Cultural Front
- Stuart Ewen, PR! A Social History of Spin
- Federal Writers' Project, The WPA Guide to New York City
- William Stott, Documentary Expression and Thirties America

Selections:
- Lizabeth Cohen “Adrift in the Great Depression” and “Workers Make a New Deal” from *Making a New Deal*
- Malcolm Willey and Stuart Rice, “The Agencies of Communication,” from *Recent Social Trends 1933*
- Adolf Hitler, from *Mein Kamph*
- Joseph Goebbels, “Freedom and Organization”
- Gudrom Streiter, “The Diary of an SA Man’s Bride”
- Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism,” *New York Review of Books*
- Michael Schudson, “Advertising as Capitalist Realism” from *Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion*
- Rexford Tugwell, Thomas Munro & Roy Stryker, “Rural Poverty,” from *American Economic Life*
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Fireside Chats: “The Banking Crisis,” “Answering the Critics,” & “Fighting Defeatism”
- Richard Steele, “A New Deal in Government Public Relations,” and “Redefining White House Press Relations” from *Propaganda in an Open Society*
- Lawrence Levine, “Photography and the History of the American People in the 1930s and 1940s,” from *Documenting America*
- Alan Trachtenberg, “From Image to Story: Reading the File,” from *Documenting America*
- William McDonald, “The Origins of the Federal Art Project” from *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts*
- Marlene Park and Gerald Markowitz, “Frontier to the Future” from *Democratic Vistas*
- Christine Bold, “New York City” from *The WPA Guides*
- Woody Guthrie, *Intro to Hard Hitting Songs* and “How to Write a Folks Song…”
- Federal Writers’ Project, “The Builders of the Timberline Lodge”

**Other Media:**
- Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will* (film)
- Pare Lorentz, *The River* (film)
- Preston Sturges, *Sullivan’s Travels* (film)
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt, *Fireside Chats* (sound recording)
- Woody Guthrie, *Bonneville Dam and Other Columbia River Songs* (sound recording)
- Farm Security Administration, assorted photos
- Works Project Administration, assorted murals
- Works Project Administration, Timberline Lodge (architecture)

**Suggested Reading:**
- George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*
- Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda*
- George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*
- William E. Leuchtenburg *Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal*
- T. H. Watkins, *The Hungry Years*
- Robert McElvaine, *The Great Depression*
- Richard W. Steele, *Propaganda in an Open Society*
- Betsy Houchin Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*
- George C Edwards III, *On Deaf Ears*
- Douglas B. Craig, *Fireside Politics*
- Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*
- Carl Fleischhauer and Beverly Brannan, *Documenting America*
- Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams*
- Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*
- Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds. *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order*

All required books can be bought at Bluestockings Books, 172 Allen Street (a block and a half below Houston in the Lower East Side). Articles are available as pdf files on Blackboard – for reference only, do not copy or download.

**Semester Schedule:**

**Sep 10**

**Course Introduction: Democratic Persuasion?**

**Sep 17**

**Rhetoric and Reason**
READ: Plato, *Gorgias* and Aristotle, *Rhetoric*
Suggested Reading: George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*

**Sep 24**

**The Structure of Modern Propaganda**
READ: Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (including the introduction)
Suggested Reading: Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda*

**Oct 1**

**The Thirties: Economics, Society and Communications**
Suggested Reading: T. H. Watkins, *The Hungry Years*; Robert McElvaine, *The Great Depression*

**Oct 8**

**Nazi Propaganda and Fascist Spectacle**
WATCH: *Triumph of the Will*
Suggested Reading: George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*

**First Assignment Handed Out**

**Oct 15**

**No Class – Fall Recess**
Oct 22  
**Selling the Facts and Advertising’s Truth**
WATCH: Progressive photography and Thirties advertising

Oct 29  
**The New Deal**
READ: Anthony Badger, *The New Deal* and Lizabeth Cohen “Workers Make a New Deal”

Nov 5  
**Speaking Reasonably and Charming the Media: Fireside Chats & the Mass Media**
LISTEN: Fireside Chats

DUE: First Assignment
Second Assignment Handed Out

Nov 12  
**Re-envisioning America: RA/FSA Photographs and WPA Murals**
READ: William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*
Lawrence Levine, “Photography and the History of the American People in the 1930s and 1940s”; Alan Trachtenberg, “From Image to Story: Reading the File”;
William McDonald, “The Origins of the Federal Art Project” and Marlene Park and Gerald Markowitz, “Frontier to the Future”
WATCH: Look at RA/FSA Photos and WPA Murals
FIELDTRIP (possible): Newell Mural at Evander Childs High School in the Bronx
Suggested Reading: Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange* and Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams*

Nov 19  
**Dramatizing a New America: New Deal Film**
READ: Michael Denning, “Labor on Review” and “The Politics of Magic” and TBA from *The Culture Front*
WATCH: Pare Lorentz, *The River* and other New Deal films
Nov 26  Writing the Landscape: The WPA Guides
READ: Federal Writers’ Project, The WPA Guide to New York City; Christine Bold, “New York City” from The WPA Guides
DUE: Second Assignment
Suggested reading: Jerre Mangione, The Dream and the Deal

Dec 3  Building the Future and Music for Progress: Timberline Lodge, Columbia River Dams and Woody Guthrie
READ: Federal Writers’ Project, “The Builders of the Timberline Lodge”; Woody Guthrie, Intro to Hard Hitting Songs and “How to Write a Folks Song...”; and continue on with Michael Denning, The Culture Front
LISTEN: Woody Guthrie, Bonneville Dam and Other Columbia River Songs
WATCH: Timberline photos

Dec 10  Capitalism’s New Deal, Hollywood’s Happy Ending and the Return of the Repressed
READ: Read: Lizabeth Cohen, A Consumer’s Republic
WATCH: The Middleton Family at the New York World’s Fair and Sullivan’s Travels and Office of War Administration WWII propaganda
Suggested Reading: Morris Dickstein, Dancing in the Dark; Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds. The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, Part II

Dec 17  No Class – Final Project Due in my office