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ON THE CENTRALITY OF PROPAGANDA

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Imagine a world without media, and then ask yourself: would propaganda still be possible? How would governments convey their truest, even if most malign, intentions? How would corporate executives give shape to products still unfamiliar to their consumers? How would platforms sustain public engagement? How would local municipalities keep people safe and informed in times of natural disaster or war? How would children learn?

Now imagine a world without propaganda and ask yourself: would the media still work? Most of us who still believe in functioning media might readily argue they would do just fine. We hang onto the media for a slew of reasons related to our ability to come together as collectives. This is so particularly in democracies, where our expectations of the media align with their potential for sustaining a healthy public. Even when they don't do as well as we might hope, our expectations linger. We expect the media to socialize us into preferred ways of thinking, ensure we have the needed information to go about our day, and keep us entertained. Nowhere in this picture is propaganda seen as a necessary component of the mediated environment.

The different valences here should be clear, and they give rise to an additional question: why do most of us gravitate immediately to recognition of the media's centrality for propaganda but push back on propaganda's importance for the media? Recognizing that the intersection linking the media and propaganda is more granular and counterintuitive than we might assume at first glance, this volume wrestles with the tensions created by imagining the media and propaganda as necessary inhabitants of the

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same neighborhood. What does it mean that we admit the media into that neighborhood far more easily than we do propaganda?

Let's start with a report grabbed from the headlines. In September 2021, one news story making headlines in the United States was a warning to parents and teachers about the so-called Slap a Teacher TikTok Challenge.[2] First reported by a local television channel in Florida, it alerted viewers to the dangers of a supposed challenge that was becoming viral on TikTok. According to the report, teenagers were being urged to slap or punch a teacher at school, record the assault, and post it on TikTok, where it would yield engagement in the form of likes and comments. In the story, school officials told reporters that they would press charges for any students who slapped or punched their teachers and promised these cases would be prosecuted to the "full extent of the law."[3]

At a point in time when TikTok had been behind other challenges like ripping out soap dispensers or removing toilets from stalls on school premises, the "Slap a Teacher Challenge" was in some sense predictable. Yet it differed by promoting physical assault in schools at a time when violence against teachers was already rising. Within days, similar cases were being discussed, reported, imagined, or anticipated across the United States. The list of impacted locations spanned the country: California, South Carolina, Louisiana, Texas, Missouri, New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, among others.[4] "It's criminal behavior," a South Carolina district school official weighed in.[5] By late October, local TV and print outlets in a wide variety of locations, including West Virginia, Missouri, Georgia, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Carolina, Iowa, Hawaii, and California, had run stories attributing student assaults to the "Slap a Teacher Challenge," and op-eds and letters to the editor criticizing TikTok were not far behind.[6]

It wasn't long before labor unions and the US legal system weighed in. The California Teachers Association declared "Educators beware!" on Facebook, adding in a statement on its website that "Slapping an educator, regardless of whether it results in injury, is assault and battery, and is completely unacceptable," while the National Education Association appealed to executives at Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok to "prioritize the safety of people over profits." The Connecticut Attorney General accused TikTok of failing "to control the spread of dangerous content" and urged its executives "to come to CT to meet with educators and parents and commit to reforms that stop this reckless content." Shortly thereafter, US Attorney General Merrick Garland ordered the FBI to address the spike in teacher harassment.[7] By then, both national and international news outlets – in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Spain, Mexico, Chile, and New Zealand – had picked up the story.[8]

If few of the reporters given bylines or news outlets running their stories on the "Slap a Teacher Challenge" rang familiar, it was not an accident. It was by design. For this could have been any other news story about school fads, social media, and public safety, except for one thing. The "Slap a Teacher TikTok Challenge" never existed. Instead, it was the brainchild of a propaganda campaign developed by Targeted Victory, one of the most prominent (Republican) communication consulting companies in the United States. Although TikTok executives protested that "we have not found related content on our platform, and most people appear to be learning about the offline dare from sources other than TikTok," the pushback went mostly unheard. Even as Snopes, Gimlet Media, VICE, and others shared early on that they could not yet find evidence to support the claims against TikTok, the campaign continued to gain steam.[9]

In fact, the design and roll-out of the "Slap a Teacher Challenge" had very little to do with teachers, students, education, or the school system. Though not clear at first, six months later it was called out as an act of pushback between competing social media platforms, with one – Meta – discrediting another – TikTok – in the public eye. As later disclosed by the *Washington Post*, Meta had funded the news item on the "Slap a Teacher Challenge" because it intended to start an anti-TikTok movement by targeting small news outlets with few resources. Such outlets tend to lack resources as a direct consequence of bigger tech platforms having disrupted journalism's traditional business model by offering cheaper ways to reach consumers.[10] In other words, Meta was taking advantage of the fragile newsrooms in small local outlets that were unable to disseminate stories capable of disrupting Meta's campaign to undermine competitors. At best, the "Slap a Teacher Challenge" was a case of corporate greed.

The timing was not accidental. According to the *Washington Post*, with this campaign, Meta aimed to create the perception that TikTok was dangerous for children and teenagers at a time when Meta subsidiary Facebook was being criticized for not only failing to counter fake news but also benefiting from its circulation on its own platform. Facebook was also losing young social media users to TikTok, and teens were spending twice as much time on TikTok as on Meta's other subsidiary, Instagram. In one internal memo, Meta executives explained that their dream was to have newspapers and television channels share "stories with headlines like 'From dances to danger: how TikTok has become the most harmful social media space for kids'."[11] In another, a Targeted Victory director asked for details on local political reporters who could act as a "back channel" for anti-TikTok messages, explaining the campaign "would definitely want it to be hands off."[12] The strategy had an immediate impact. As one unknowingly compliant expert weighed in after an incident in South Carolina,

"TikTok does not have any parental control functions, and they do not have a kid algorithm versus an adult algorithm."[13]

It took almost a year for the story to be more thoroughly vetted. By the time that the *Washington Post*, followed by *VICE*, *Business Insider,* and other news outlets, began looking more closely into the claims against TikTok, staffers at Harvard University's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy were carefully tracking what they saw as a strong case of media manipulation.[14] Largely through their work, the "Slap a Teacher Challenge" revealed its truer side – a campaign to convince news outlets to spread negative stories about TikTok.

Back to the nexus connecting the media and propaganda. This story demonstrates how problematic our persistent, if not blind, belief in the media is, raising questions about which media we believe in and whether our belief has any bearing on the desire and ability to create and disseminate propagandistic messages. But it also shows how complex are the ways in which propaganda makes itself visible. Even when we think we know what propaganda looks like, we often let slide a set of assumptions about who engages in it, against whom, and for which purposes. Propaganda being used to advance purely commercial aims? Most of us would assent to its probability, but for only a few would it surface as the main impulse underlying the forceful drive to propagandize.

This is worth noting at the outset because propaganda is more omnipresent in contemporary societies than we tend to recognize, at the same time that the media perform less in line with our expectations than we assume. Propaganda not only occupies a central stage in the more obvious venues related to war or elections but also influences every dimension of how the public perceives reality and the different solutions being offered to solve collective problems. Much has changed since it was first perceived as a top-down phenomenon controlled by the state.

Today, propaganda unfolds energetically through not only vertical but also horizontal networks, designing and customizing its messages in ways that increase and vary impact on different demographics. While it uses an unprecedented number of media, platforms, and networks – analogue and digital – to assert its influence over both domestic and international audiences, its many techniques ensure that falsehoods – instantly shared by bots but also by individuals who find them entertaining and worth disseminating – circulate at high speed.

For most, propaganda remains at heart a poisoned word, especially in democracies. Long associated with manipulation, falsehoods, and brainwashing, today it is so much more. Current forms of propaganda align themselves with the underside of what we expect information relays – about public events, new products, identity formations, even travel plans – to do

for us. Political actors reject having their persuasion campaigns labeled propagandistic and instead reserve the word to characterize the communication practices of their opponents. Commercial actors – favoring vanilla terms like advertising, influence, or public relations – are quick to emphasize they are only putting public desires into action. Educational actors insist they offer unformed minds the capacity to develop and mature.

In each area, propaganda is so prevalent that it is difficult to imagine its absence. Today's political campaigns may be among the most vicious and slanderous of any in recent memory. Platforms – as we saw earlier – are eager to diminish market competition and establish monopolies, hiding behind corporate strategies so their objectives remain obscure. Books, curricula, and entire subject areas are being banned with an aggressive and unprecedented frenzy in schools.

But the concept of propaganda itself is mostly absent from current debates on the information environment. In fact, as we have discussed elsewhere, the word "propaganda" has been mostly relegated to invisibility by communication and media scholars. This has occurred for multiple reasons, including the negative connotation it acquired after 1945 and the field's never-ending quest for the new.[15] Though not all scholars have supported propaganda's early retirement – see, for instance, a special 2021 issue of the *Harvard Kennedy School HKS Misinformation Review* on propaganda, where its absence is explained as both an intellectual blindness to theory and a structural blindness to corporate media structure[16] – the concept's suppression in current debates about how people are being exposed to false information is itself an illustration of how propaganda works and how semantics plays a central role in shaping public perception. As Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* brilliantly illustrates, controlling the words used to describe events and reality is central to controlling how people think about such events and shapes their understanding of the options ahead.[17]

By avoiding the concept of propaganda to describe cases like the "Slap a Teacher Challenge" and using terms like misinformation, disinformation, fake news, or media manipulation instead, we risk embracing the narrative created by techno capitalism. This narrative claims that the norms, values, and concepts used to regulate and understand how societies work no longer apply in the digital era.[18] The assumption creates a quandary because it suggests that refusing to call digital propaganda by name increases the possibility that we will end up stuck in a quest for new concepts and theoretical constructs to explain it. It also suggests that in turn we may unknowingly curtail our capacity to explain what is at stake when political, corporate, and other actors resort to propaganda to advance their agendas.

We see this in discussions of the "Slap a Teacher Challenge," where Meta used one of the most traditional propaganda techniques to discredit

TikTok: planting a story. The technique involves finding a third-party source with some credibility who can be the first to disseminate a false story and wait for it to be picked up by different media outlets. Planting a story makes it appear as if the story, quickly reaching large audiences in different countries, was produced by a source with no connection to the propagandist. Widely used during the two world wars and the Cold War, when government officials in charge of propaganda – or "information," as many countries called it – took the lead in publishing "news" stories aimed at presenting the enemy as immoral and capable of the most horrendous atrocities, the technique of planting a story has become one of the most prevalent mechanisms for creating and disseminating false stories without being held responsible for their content.

Planting a story can only work when journalists are knowingly or unknowingly complicit. As governments in autocratic and democratic countries have had little problem deceiving those in newsrooms, leading them to publish false stories or biased information with the intention of increasing the public impact of their propaganda, journalists surface time and again as one of propaganda's main targets.

The technique of planting a story thus draws from a long-standing reliance among propagandists on news outlets as venues for its circulation. Helped along by mechanisms and practices designed to cede information control to those in power, propaganda has made its way into the news through mechanisms as wide-ranging as the subterranean cable connecting Europe with America during World War I or the faked eyewitness accounts in the early 1990s of Kuwaiti babies being killed by Iraqi soldiers. Both seemingly transparent settings depended on strategic action in the background to facilitate propaganda being effectively embraced as news – the British cutting the cable that linked Germany with the United States to ensure only news from Britain would cross the Atlantic or the Kuwaitis hiding the identity of the eyewitness to murder during the Iraqi invasion, who happened to be the daughter of the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States. As fake stories are being planted regularly in newsrooms, they turn journalists inadvertently into active players in the dissemination of lies. And when no journalists are available to start circulation, they too can easily be made up.

Today, examples of planting a story amidst fakery abound. Consider the claim, appearing in an obscure French website courtesy of Russia, that Ukraine's first lady, Olena Zelensky, had bought an expensive sports car with military funds from abroad, or the claim, appearing in an obscure Texan website again courtesy of Russia, that the FBI was bugging Donald Trump's Florida estate. Both examples, according to the BBC, are part of a larger network of websites used to circulate planted stories under

names parroting either defunct or imaginary but plausible news outlets. In the United States, they currently include websites like the Boston Times, Houston Post, Chicago Crier, DC Weekly, and more, where stories are attributed to fake journalists with fabricated names and unrelated pictures pulled from the Internet.[19]

Why do such practices continue today? What is it about social media and digitization that leads political and corporate actors to continue to invest in deceiving through newsrooms? Even though social media and AI constitute central parts of the contemporary information landscape, journalism continues to play an important role due to the credibility it potentially brings to the stories it reports. As tech companies are displacing traditional journalism in the attention economy, on the one hand, they continue to see it as a central institution for guiding public opinion and impacting perceptions of reality, on the other.

All this suggests that reinstating propaganda as a theoretical construct is a necessary pivot to fight efforts that are widespread, sophisticated, and growing. Critical for analyzing the contemporary information ecosystem, propaganda's inclusion in discussions of information disorder could foster a deeper understanding of how different techniques used for deception are transformed and evolve through time, assuming multiple forms and making use of new technologies for production and dissemination. It could enable scholars to problematize the continuities and disruptions in the strategies and techniques used to propagate messages, persuade, and manipulate people. More importantly, it could clarify how the media, alongside politics and corporations, cannot exist without propaganda. We live immersed in a propagandistic culture where politics, corporations, social activists, and government officials are among those who use various technologies and a plethora of media to influence people's decisions: how they vote, which social media platform they use, which causes they support, and which measures and behaviors they are willing to adopt to improve their health and well-being.

So what are we to make of the fact that most academics still neglect calling propaganda by name? In the academy, disinvestment in the concept of propaganda came together with an investment in concepts such as disinformation, misinformation, fake news, and post-truth, all of which have occupied a central stage in discussions about contemporary information disorder. This book argues that such concepts need to be understood as part of a longer legacy linked to propaganda and not as new phenomena that have emerged in the context of the digital environment. Only by understanding the continuities and disruptions of propagandistic forms and strategies over time can we more fully understand how public opinion is being molded today by those who resort to deception and falsehood to

gain or keep hold of power. By creating a divide between what we perceived as propaganda in the analogue world and what propaganda looks like in the digital era, we are not only limiting our ability to understand how its techniques of the past continue today to foster uncertainty, hate, and fear. We are also constraining our ability to comprehend what is really new about propaganda's current forms.

Indeed, the quest for reinstating propaganda as a valid theoretical construct to make sense of contemporary information ecosystems has deep roots. In his seminal work, Jacques Ellul was well aware of how much the word "propaganda" was despised, especially in democracies. For this reason, he opened his book by calling it "modern propaganda," describing it as a "modern technique" based "on one or more branches of science," sharing their successes and bearing "witness to their failures."[20] Acknowledging the challenges that arose when using the term, he stressed its ability to reinvent itself through both changing forms of technology and evolving scientific knowledge. Not only does he point us toward the relativity inherent in the differences between traditional media and the digital media of today, but he suggests also that the point of origin across knowledge formations inevitably shifts understanding of how it works. While Ellul was possibly thinking of how propaganda acquires new facets through knowledge produced in sociology, psychology, communication, and media studies, today the picture has changed yet again. Now, engineering, computer science, and marketing are among the fields whose most recent developments are being closely and carefully followed by those who aim to deceive.

If we return to the story of the "Slap a Teacher Challenge" one more time, we see that its unfolding followed a pattern that repeats itself too often across the information environment. Meta's PR agency planted a false story in small news outlets without the resources to check the veracity of what they were reporting. The story swelled across similar markets until it took on first national and then international recognition. By the time that academics, misinformation and disinformation researchers, journalists at *VICE*, *Business Insider,* and other news outlets got around to studying the story enough to declare it patently false, it was too late to halt its spread.

The goal ahead of us, then, is twofold. It's up to researchers to think more cogently about the links between current information disorder and propaganda. But it's also up to political and corporate actors, media practitioners, journalists, and the public to pay greater heed to what academics say. With academe working on timelines that complicate its ability to keep up with the fast and ongoing tempo of information disorder, figuring out how to accommodate its pacing seems like a small challenge when

seen against the larger problems arising from our misunderstood and ever-changing information environment.

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Media and Propaganda in an Age of Disinformation assembles a collection of chapters that look specifically at the intersection of media and propaganda by adopting broad parameters to be used in reflecting on it from anew. By positioning each chapter within a context designed to challenge limits on how we think about the topic, the book aims to jumpstart inquiry in ways that hopefully can yield generative insights about its placement and centrality.

First, the book looks at media and propaganda through the lens of different disciplines, ranging across communication and media studies, journalism studies, psychology, neuroscience, sociology, history, gender studies, information and library science, literature, and platform studies. Recognizing that disciplinary prisms offer alternative insights for thinking about any topic, the book situates media and propaganda at the center of multiple disciplinary conversations.

Second, the book underscores how central propaganda is for understanding contemporary public communication across the Global North and Global South. It offers both capacious surveys of its parameters in Europe, North Asia, and Africa, as well as targeted discussions of China and the United States. Providing a broad examination of the traits and permutations that make today's information disorder into one of the most critical current problems on a global scale, it forces to the foreground questions about how the intersection of media and propaganda differs widely across place and geography.

Third, the events this book revisits are vast: the Great War, the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the Cold War, electoral violence in Kenya and other East African countries, the Rwandan genocide, the invasion of Ukraine, and the Israel-Gaza war. It alights on settings that range from functioning or cobbled democracies to autocratic regimes, from commercial platforms to political activism. And it probes topics like enmity, free speech and academic freedom, commercial ethics, misogyny and sexual violence, stereotypes and images, the mechanisms and strategies of propaganda, and the evolution of propaganda's conceptualization.

Media and Propaganda in an Age of Disinformation is organized across three sections: Laying the Groundwork for Thinking About Media and Propaganda; Alternative Spaces for Thinking About Media and Propaganda; and Current Challenges for Thinking About Media and Propaganda.

Laying the Groundwork for Thinking About Media and Propaganda

Media and Propaganda in an Age of Disinformation leads off by considering how we have learned to think about media and propaganda over time. Focusing on how the two entities have been linked, who has defined the link, and what has become of the link today, the three chapters in this section consider the nomenclature, phraseology, and mechanisms of propaganda that make it recognizable in earlier and current mediated environments.

The section opens with the chapter "Is Propaganda by Any Other Name Still Propaganda?" by Barbie Zelizer. She lays out the setting for considering the global entrenchment of propagandistic logics and practices in today's information environments. Giving an overview of how the concept of propaganda has developed over time, the chapter discusses why this entrenchment is happening without the critical attention it deserves, especially in democratic regimes that avoid using the word "propaganda" to describe practices of obfuscation like disinformation, misinformation, fakery, and lying. Instead, in the so-called post-truth environments where information resides, there is a tendency to appraise such practices as a direct outgrowth of digital technology and to see them as the obvious result of stridently polarized political climates. Zelizer discusses how this poses a risk, especially for democracies that are stuck in a Cold War mindset and thus refuse to recognize propaganda in their midst.

In "Know Your Enemy: Propaganda and Stereotypes of the 'Other' from World War I to the Present," David Welch argues that one of the most striking means by which the media have influenced social attitudes – both changing and reinforcing opinions – has been through the use of stereotypes. Welch demonstrates how this aspect of propaganda is full of confrontations between order and chaos, good and evil, and he argues that in each case the contrast serves to force the individual into desired and firmly established commitments. In this ultimate purpose, propaganda is aided by man's psychological need for value judgments in simple black-and-white terms, particularly useful in the context of crisis or war. The chapter analyzes how different regimes have used stereotypes in their propaganda to justify war and employs a number of case studies – ranging from World War I to the current conflict in Ukraine – to demonstrate the power of the "image of the enemy" in wartime propaganda.

The third chapter, "Manufacturing Public Perception: Big Lies, Alternative Facts and Controlled Language" by Nelson Ribeiro, centers on the need to revive propaganda as a theoretical construct if we are to understand today's information ecosystems. It argues that the propaganda

techniques of the 20th century, such as the production of "big lies" and "alternative facts," remain central in contemporary attempts to persuade people to believe in falsehoods. Likewise, pre-propaganda, the control of language and the rewriting of history, which Jacques Ellul and George Orwell described in their seminal works, continue to be at the forefront of propagandistic strategies, particularly from those aiming to promote war and sustain their own power. Using examples that range from the Spanish Civil War to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ribeiro discusses how contemporary propaganda can be understood through the lens of concepts that have shed light on earlier regimes and leaders, who used propaganda to lead people to support war and authoritarian regimes. The chapter also discusses citizens' agency in countering propaganda and how subversive media consumption practices can help circumvent the control imposed by dictators on people's access to information.

Alternative Spaces for Thinking About Media and Propaganda

Media and Propaganda in an Age of Disinformation then pivots toward the alternative spaces where media and propaganda intersect, asking us to reconsider what we think we know. Spanning across three separate regions of the world, the three chapters in this section probe the situated logics that merit attention when thinking about media and propaganda.

The first chapter in this section, "Chinese Journalism and State Propaganda: Changes and Continuities From the 1990s to the 2020s" by Francis L.F. Lee, analyzes how the news media constitute a core part of authoritarian propaganda machines. He demonstrates that this is far from a linear process. Instead, the relationship between journalism and state propaganda changes over time. In addition to maintaining power, authoritarian states also devise ways to ensure proper governance and facilitate desirable social and economic developments. Therefore, depending on the current social, economic, and political conditions, the state may impose different degrees of media control and ideological propaganda. The chapter reviews the relationship between journalism and state propaganda in China from the 1990s to the 2020s, illustrating both the continuities and changes in the journalism-propaganda nexus and highlighting the varying impact of media commercialism under different social and political conditions. It also discusses possible limitations of the power of media propaganda in authoritarian states.

This section's second chapter, "Vladimir Putin's Russia: Living in George Orwell" by Nina Khrushcheva, discusses the development of the propaganda formulas deployed by Putin's Kremlin over the last two decades.

It argues that since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2024, while the propaganda narratives have gotten more direct and militaristic, many Russians have found creative ways to confront them. Because severe restrictions on free speech make protesting in public and en masse impossible, some people have expressed their opposition to the Ukrainian war and Putin's rule by employing images and quotes from George Orwell. Not only has his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* become the most sold-out book in Russia in recent years, but Russian literature, too, has provided a source of optimism and hope. Lessons from previous periods of oppression in Russian history – described by Soviet classics such as those authored by Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Eugenia Ginsburg – suggest that dictatorships invariably fail and that the Putin rule will be no exception.

The last chapter in this section, "Media and Propaganda in Africa: Cracks, Crevices and Continuities" by Admire Mare, delves into the complex relationship between media and propaganda in Africa. Drawing on case studies from select African countries, Mare traces the development of the media as a civilizing and evangelizing force and shows how propaganda was implicated in processes of modernization and colonization. Foregrounding what he calls the cracks, crevices, and continuities associated with the deployment of propaganda in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Africa, he argues that some post-colonial African governments have appropriated state-owned media for propaganda purposes in ways that reproduce and reincarnate colonial logics. The chapter highlights how the human being has been implicated as a social infrastructure in propagandistic logics and ultimately argues that the increasing platformization, datafication, and digitization of African societies have contributed to the sustenance of new modes of propaganda production, distribution, consumption, and measurement.

Challenges for Thinking About Media and Propaganda

Media and Propaganda in an Age of Disinformation wraps up with a glimpse of some of the most serious challenges facing media and propaganda today. Drawing across sexual violence, the consequences of exposure to disinformation, and the moral panic driving book bans, it demonstrates how contemporary propaganda is connected to nationalistic discourses, pre-existing attitudes, and misogyny. These new forms in a hyperconnected world amplify the voices of those who promote hate and fear. The section also discusses the limits of what we know about propaganda's impact on different populations.

The first chapter of this section, "'Destroy this Mad Brute': Propaganda and Sexual Violence" by Sarah Banet-Weiser, explores a specific subset of

propaganda that uses sexual violence as a key logic in the transmission of its message. Although sexual violence can take many forms, this chapter examines how the *threat* of sexual violence is used as a propaganda tool. Employed as an instrument of propaganda to create one actor as a victim and another as an enemy, sexual violence is strategically positioned to promote particular ideologies and identity constructions, those that are typically white, masculine, and nationalist. Banet-Weiser discusses the way that sexual violence is exploited during times of war, whether in on-the-ground military combat or as part of a digital cultural war, to justify continued violence. Through multiple forms of media, including digital social media, sexual violence propaganda depends on a doubling down on binary understandings of gender that are fueled by other elements of the war context, including authoritarianism and a nostalgic melancholy manifest in nationalism and patriarchy.

The second chapter in this section, "From Fake News to False Memories: Tracing the Consequences of Exposure to Misinformation" by Ciara Greene, argues that while much ink has been spilled on the topic of "fake news" over the last decade with oft-expressed concerns about the impacts of online misinformation, there has been comparatively little empirical assessment of its effects. This chapter considers the consequences of misinformation exposure for cognition and behavior. It discusses research showing how people easily come to believe in, and even form false memories for, false information, especially if it aligns with their political beliefs or social identity. It also describes a series of experiments that have tried to measure the behavioral effects of fake news exposure, specifically the effects of vaccine misinformation on vaccination behaviors and intentions. The chapter argues that even though propaganda, usually presented under the names of misinformation or disinformation, has an impact on how individuals perceive reality, our beliefs and actions are heavily influenced by pre-existing attitudes and social norms. This makes it urgent to develop an in-depth understanding of how pre-existing conditions can be used to limit the impact of propaganda that spreads falsehoods and hate.

In the final chapter of this section and the book, "Beyond the Shelves: Investigating Propaganda in the Library" by Miranda Clinton, Ellen Perleberg, and Francesca B. Tripodi examines book bans as an example of political propaganda – a systematic and deliberate attempt to disseminate information designed to unify people around a common idea, brand, or agenda. Historically, book challenges in the United States were rare, involving decisions by individual parents. Recent trends suggest a more collective effort, with a particular focus on BIPOC and LGBTQ+ content and authors. The chapter explores how contemporary book challenges are not isolated acts of concern but part of a broader movement tied to "parental

rights politics." Drawing on three data sources – the ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom database, BookLooks' rating guides, and Moms for Liberty's "Book of Books" – the authors analyze the delicate balance between protecting children and preserving the right to access diverse ideas and perspectives.

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Media and Propaganda in an Age of Disinformation aims to make clear how the intersection of media and propaganda is far more complex than we credit it with being. If we return to the thought exercise of the first few paragraphs of this chapter, it should be obvious that we need to reconsider the different valences we lend media and propaganda. It's time to imagine a world where media and propaganda are treated as equally dependent and equally necessary variables that combine in good and bad ways to force change in opinions, sentiments, beliefs, and norms. Without recognizing their mutual interactions and reliance, our ability to engage critically with information disorder is severely compromised.

This book arrives at a moment that is engulfed with anxiety, indecision, fear, and uncertainty about the future in most places across the globe. We no longer have the liberty of neglecting to clarify propaganda's fullest parameters, as it works most decisively through the media when attention is turned elsewhere. The book aims to help us pivot toward a fuller understanding of what the intersection of media and propaganda looks like in all its evolving forms.

Notes

1 This volume draws from keynotes delivered at the convening of the 3rd Lisbon Winter School for the Study of Communication, which took place on 4–7 January 2022. A joint venture between the Universidade Católica Portuguesa and the Center for Media at Risk at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication, the Winter School brings together noted experts and early career scholars to discuss topics of evolving public importance. See https://www.lisbonwinterschool.com and https://www.ascmediarisk.org/.
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