Propaganda
Building an Immunity

By Michael Gordon

Three years have passed since Americans marched down Pennsylvania Avenue toward the US Capitol to protest what they perceived as a stolen election. After storming the Capitol and sending members of Congress running for the exits, many prominent Republicans, including Mitch McConnell, swiftly condemned the violence and rejected the false claims of a stolen election. Today, those voices have grown quieter or been silenced in the party. In the meantime, the former president has been indicted in four criminal cases involving 91 charges and found liable for defamation, sexual battery, and financial fraud. Yet, a recent FiveThirtyEight national poll showed him as the odds-on favorite to regain the presidency in 2024.

Trump's uncanny resilience with a large part of the American electorate underscores the power and influence of sustained propagandist messaging. Pushing that envelope, last November, the former president started demonizing his political opponents as "vermin" and, in March, started selling bibles lined with the Declaration of Independence, Pledge of Allegiance, the Constitution, and the lyrics to God Bless the USA. These tactics serve a potent and effective propagandist function.

Since 2018, The Propwatch Project, a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit, whose mission is to raise public awareness about the prevalence of propaganda and disinformation, has been at the forefront of raising public awareness about propaganda and disinformation in mass media and social media. It aims to build immunity to the manipulative tactics at the core of propaganda and disinformation. Employing a strategy called logic-based inoculation, the project develops content designed specifically to strengthen an individual's ability to recognize faulty logic, disinformation, or rhetorical techniques which are indicators of propaganda. The project also conducts and publishes academic research on innovative inoculation approaches using both authentic and AI-generated content. Using this content, visitors to the propwatch.org website can not only practice identifying propaganda techniques, but also learn how and why these techniques work.

At the heart of the project are in-depth analyses of current national and statewide debates, interviews, and speeches to identify the use of propaganda techniques. They generate thousands of authentic examples for website visitors to assimilate and learn from. The project also features discussions and insights from leading scholars, researchers, and authors in the field, discussing critical issues, such as breaking the cycle of toxic polarization, effectively rebutting science denial, understanding the mechanics of rage farming, and examining how intuition fuels conspiracy theories.

As the nation approaches a pivotal election in November, the consequences of propagandist messaging have become ever more present. The escalating polarization and gradual shift towards radicalization underscore the urgent need to combat propagandist messaging at its core. *The Propwatch Project remains steadfast in its mission to expose these tactics and provide the critical tools and knowledge necessary to recognize and resist them.*

Michael Gordon is the founder and senior editor of The Propwatch Project and a Professor with the College of Computer and Information Technology at St. Petersburg College.

YOU ARE NOT IMMUNE TO **propaganda**
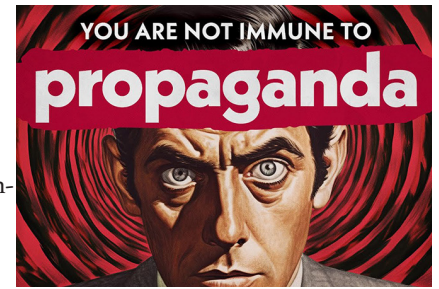
graphic: MR

Propwatch develops content designed to strengthen one's ability to recognize faulty logic, disinformation, or rhetorical techniques which are indicators of propaganda.

Critical Media Literacy in Action

By Shealeigh Voitl, Kate Horgan, and Reagan Haynie

Digital natives, who grew up in the "digital age" or post-1980, are constantly learning how influencers on apps like TikTok and Instagram use their platforms to deceive their followers for profit or power.

Assessing the credibility and authenticity of claims made on these apps is a core feature of modern critical media literacy. Still, fact-checking is just the tip of the iceberg when navigating content online.

Project Censored's Critical Media Literacy in Action (CMLA), a social media series that unpacks common establishment media talking points and social media trends, empowers users to become more discerning judges of information integrity.

The series was created by three digital natives, who were each noticing troubling patterns across their respective feeds. In CMLA's first episode, Project Censored's Kate Horgan, one of the series' creators, discusses how the New York Times often obscured and, at times, wholly removed Israel's responsibility in its brutal attack on Gaza and its citizens by using what Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) refers to as "linguistic gymnastics." In another episode, *MintPress News'* Alan MacLeod discusses certain corporate news outlets' use of passive voice in their reporting on Gaza, which, among other things, absolves Israel of accountability and sanitizes its violence.

The CMLA series encourages users to better understand tactics by the establishment press, such as linguistic gymnastics, and how they are employed to misinform an audience. Ultimately, CMLA's creators want users to be able to fully embrace technology by learning how social media algorithms work, investigating, for example, content moderation practices unique to each platform and what kind of content most often gets blocked and why.

By harnessing this knowledge, social media users can develop a general toolkit applicable across various platforms to recognize and challenge misinformation (and misdirection) effectively. Find the Critical Media Literacy in Action series on Project Censored's TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube channels.

Shealeigh Voitl is Project Censored's Digital and Print Editor. Her writing has been featured in Truthout, The Progressive, *and* Ms. Magazine. *Kate Horgan is Project Censored's Website Design and Media Assistant, and a coauthor of* The Media and Me. *Reagan Haynie is Project Censored's Social Media Manager. Her work has been featured in the Project's* State of The Free Press.

Hyperlinks for these articles at https://bit.ly/47cSMA0