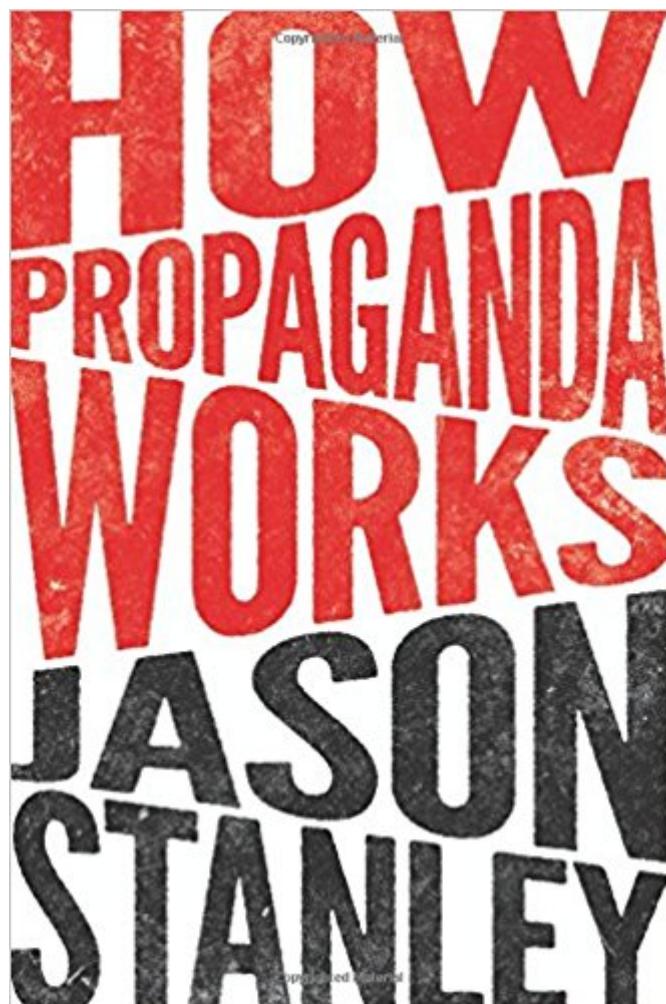


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# How Propaganda Works



## Synopsis

Our democracy today is fraught with political campaigns, lobbyists, liberal media, and Fox News commentators, all using language to influence the way we think and reason about public issues. Even so, many of us believe that propaganda and manipulation aren't problems for us—*not* in the way they were for the totalitarian societies of the mid-twentieth century. In *How Propaganda Works*, Jason Stanley demonstrates that more attention needs to be paid. He examines how propaganda operates subtly, how it undermines democracy—particularly the ideals of democratic deliberation and equality—and how it has damaged democracies of the past. Focusing on the shortcomings of liberal democratic states, Stanley provides a historically grounded introduction to democratic political theory as a window into the misuse of democratic vocabulary for propaganda's selfish purposes. He lays out historical examples, such as the restructuring of the US public school system at the turn of the twentieth century, to explore how the language of democracy is sometimes used to mask an undemocratic reality. Drawing from a range of sources, including feminist theory, critical race theory, epistemology, formal semantics, educational theory, and social and cognitive psychology, he explains how the manipulative and hypocritical declaration of flawed beliefs and ideologies arises from and perpetuates inequalities in society, such as the racial injustices that commonly occur in the United States. *How Propaganda Works* shows that an understanding of propaganda and its mechanisms is essential for the preservation and protection of liberal democracies everywhere.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Winner of the 2016 PROSE Award in Philosophy, Association of American Publishers "Provides valuable insights into an important and timely subject."--Michiko Kakutani, *New York Times Book Review*"[T]he book crackles with brilliant insights and erudition, while also managing to explain the arcane preoccupations of analytic philosophy in a way that's accessible to a wider audience."---*Bookforum*"How Propaganda Works deserves huge praise and should be read by anyone who cares about politics and language. Its trove of tools and insights is impossible to completely summarise here."--*The National*"As with other books that expose hidden patterns in American political life from a great height (those that come to mind are Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* and Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*), the lofty perspective of *How Propaganda Works* challenges researchers to fill in gaps with more detailed, particular explanations of how and why."--Stephen Siff, *Journalism & Mass Communications Quarterly*"Rich and thoughtful. . . . The best way to fight propaganda is to become savvier about how it manipulates, how it actually works, as Stanley does in his work."--*Desmog Canada*"Brilliant and incisive."--*Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*"[A] timely and important work that contributes a good deal of theoretical understanding to a crucial yet relatively neglected topic of inquiry."--*Spinwatch*"A book uniquely suited to its time. . . . An example of political philosophy at its finest."--*Voegelinview*"Stanley tracks propaganda's history across continents and through decades, illuminating its power to make people vote against their own best interests. And what he has found is [that] the words being used may be as important as the politics behind them."--Nick Osbourne, *Boston Globe*"Citing examples ranging from historical racism in America to Citizens United, Stanley's critique of propaganda and ideology will only prove more influential as public and political opinion is further polarized. . . . [A] useful examination of propaganda's pervasiveness."--*Kirkus Reviews*"Stanley has produced a highly stimulating book that brings the issue of propaganda to the attention of political philosophers and draws on an impressive range of philosophical and social scientific sources to illustrate his analysis and provide support for his claims. It is bound to be widely discussed and debated."--Jonathan Wolff, *Analysis*"A searching, eclectic, lively and personal book."--Matthew Festenstein, *Political Theory*"This is a valuable, one might say indispensable, book in a time when demagogues are succeeding at a level the world has not seen since World War II. I recommend it highly."--Robert J. Sternberg, *PsycCRITIQUES*"The book's topic is fascinating, and Stanley's discussion of the relevance of theories of slurs for an analysis of large portions of public discourse and flawed ideology and its relation to the ideals of liberal democracy will hopefully bear on future research in this field."--Raphael van Riel, *Ethical Theory and*

Moral Practice" Stanley has produced a highly stimulating book that brings the issue of propaganda to the attention of political philosophers and draws on an impressive range of philosophical and social scientific sources to illustrate his analysis and provide support for his claims. It is bound to be widely discussed and debated."--Jonathan Wolff, Analysis Reviews

"Jason Stanley's *How Propaganda Works* is a novel and significant contribution that should revitalize political philosophy."--Noam Chomsky"Filled with compelling examples, this book examines what propaganda is and what threat bad propaganda poses for democracy. The case it makes--which is conceptual, normative, historical, and empirical--is persuasive and provocative. Stanley is tackling an important topic that many philosophers ignore but shouldn't."--Tommie Shelby, author of *We Who Are Dark*"This ambitious book brings Stanley's insights from epistemology and philosophy of language to bear on the self-masking role of propaganda in democracy. Generous use of concrete political applications enliven the book's arguments and drive home the topic's normative importance."--Rae Langton, University of Cambridge

Each successive generation is abound with new information extolling the machinery of propaganda and how it works. Stanley's analysis is not in the mechanical disposition of Bernays, but belongs to an unusual canon of philosophy nestled between the analytic and continental traditions. You're less likely to find reference to Walter Lippmann than you are to Ludwig Wittgenstein or Victor Klemperer; it is a really unconventional, flawed, but necessary read. It opens, as one might expect, with the exemplar of propaganda: the Third Reich. The initial pages aren't circumscribed to Goebbels and his propaganda ministry, but to the syntactic structure of language that was typical of the regime's public addresses, ordinances, and policies. Our introduction to the world of propaganda might seem a little pat to cushion it in the folds of totalitarianism; however, Stanley is not at all interested in demarcating the moral degrees of propaganda - to any inquiring mind, as far as he's concerned, the truth is the truth. Stanley provides numerous examples of propaganda, from the pre-Christian era to the present day, where deft exploitation of the language inscribed in Detroit's municipal legislation saw the severance of water and electricity across its urban territories. Stanley's work, though, is not a chronology of the excesses of propaganda and its permutations throughout the ages, but a thorough evaluation of its epistemology. Bearing this in mind, one ought not to be surprised that this is largely an exercise in philosophy, as opposed to political science. This is closer in tone to Chomsky's "Manufacturing Consent," a text that stands at the crossroads between political analysis and linguistics, than to the foundational work of Bernays or Lippmann. I must admit that my initial

response to the book was one of disappointment, but that was due to my anticipation of its content. It's not that my expectations weren't met, rather they were reserved for a different book. I am not a philosophy major, but have pursued the discipline privately for years; however, those unfamiliar with subjects like the semantic meaning of language would do better to invest their time with Wittgenstein, Kripke, Quine, Searle, et al, before reading this. Those who have a passing understanding of the analytic tradition will likely appreciate what it's going for. This certainly isn't, despite its unassuming title, an easy book to read. If you are interested in reading about propaganda in the sense generally understood, then I'd recommend the authors previously mentioned, especially Lippmann and Chomsky. To Stanley's credit, though, this isn't a deliberately obscure work, but the culmination of intellectual trends in 20th and 21st century philosophy and sociology. I recommend it all the same.

A good read on a contemporary topic of interest. Author is well prepared to delve into the subject and does so in manner that helps a reader to understand the subject content.

The American people, at this point in history (February 2017), desperately need a practical guide for recognizing propaganda and for analyzing it to see whose purpose it serves. This is not that book. As other reviewers have pointed out, it's a philosophical text that focuses (excessively in my opinion) on linguistics and epistemological abstractions. I have been a lay student of propaganda for 40 years, and I'm not an academic. But it's difficult for me to see how this book really advances or deepens our understanding of propaganda or of how propaganda works. I do, however, admire how the author makes strong connections between susceptibility to propaganda and inequality and flawed ideology.

Quite dense, I'd say of moderate to slightly intense intellectual difficulty. Was wanting something a little more summarized and accessible. Obviously well researched

This is a book we all need to read. And think about. 'Cause we're all being buffeted about by propaganda we do not have the proper tools to disengage from in order to see clearly how we are being manipulated. Kinda hard to think about. All the more reason to think about it!

Reading about how to avoid being swayed by propaganda.

Well laid out and written. A thought provoking and illuminating read.

really smart!

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