

Reverse Engineering the Propaganda Machine

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✓ Fact Checked

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › We fight against a truly unprecedented disinformation campaign, where the liars are claiming that everyone else is giving out misinformation, basically turning truth on its head
- › While propaganda takes many forms, mainstream media play a crucial role. The good news is that people are starting to catch on, and trust in mainstream media has dropped to an all-time low
- › By the early 1900s – literally a century ago – journalists like Upton Sinclair and George Seldes were discussing the corruption of the media, how they were owned by big business with a profit agenda, and how they were not dealing squarely with investigative reporters
- › For propaganda to be effective, there needs to be central coordination of narratives, and that’s where public relations agencies come in. Few appreciate the power that these companies have. Two-thirds to 80% of the content broadcast and published by corporate media comes from public relations firms, so most of the so-called “news” is actually brainwashing propaganda
- › Other common PR tools include “public protests,” which are actually made up of people hired by the PR company, and media will of course be sent there to cover it, and front groups, which are paid by industry to promote a particular view that benefits that industry

In this interview, Michelle Stiles reviews some of the basic tools of propaganda, which is the topic of her book, [“One Idea to Rule Them All: Reverse Engineering American](#)

Propaganda.” It’s a pertinent and apt topic in light of what’s been going on over the last few years, as we attempt to understand how we’ve been manipulated and brainwashed.

If you can understand that, then you can prevent it from happening again in the future, and you can help other people to break free from the indoctrination as well. Stiles includes the following quote from George Orwell in the book:

“In the age of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.”

That’s really our battle today, as we fight against a truly unprecedented disinformation campaign, where the liars are claiming that everyone else is giving out misinformation, basically turning truth on its head.

Most of you are aware that I was given top billing on the Center for Countering Digital Hate’s (CCDH) “disinformation dozen” list, which is a true testament to the credibility I’ve built over the past 25 years. They see me as a real threat to their propaganda machine, and it’s no small honor to be recognized as someone who’s telling the truth in this age of misinformation.

Legacy Media Were Never Deserving of Our Trust

While propaganda takes many forms, mainstream media play a crucial role. Many people my age would agree that we used to believe the media were a trusted source of information. But no more. Investigative journalism within mainstream media doesn’t exist anymore. They’re all just talking heads, reading from scripts, which is why they all sound the same, even reiterating the same sentences verbatim.

The good news is that people are starting to catch on, and trust in mainstream media has dropped to an all-time low. In her book, Stiles presents the historical view of media, and how it’s changed over time. By the early 1900s — literally a century ago — journalists like Upton Sinclair and George Seldes were discussing the corruption of the media, how they were owned by big business with a profit agenda, and how they were not dealing squarely with investigative reporters.

"They were trying to tell as many people as they could, but they couldn't get it out there," Stiles says. "And then, journalists, they were created through the schools. We had to have a degree to get into it. So now you're sort of captive. You can't really blow the whistle without blowing up your career. So that impacts it because nobody can tell the truth. And if you do come out, it's a long road to getting your own reputation set up and your own income.

I'm just hoping that people, when they take that perspective, can go, 'Wait a minute, why would we ever have trusted them?' It's a sacred trust, as Lippmann says. 'The power to determine each day what shall seem important and what will be neglected is a power unlike any that has been exercised since the Pope lost his hold on the secular mind.'

I mean, it's an amazing tool. It's a search light. It's focusing in on what's important, and it's shielding out what's deemed not important. One of the things that I bring up in the book is that the media play the role of what I call tribal elders because what they are doing is they're alerting the community to pressing issues. They're magnifying some problems and giving scant attention to others.

But the important point to remember is that if you're magnifying the wrong problems or hiding the true ones, then you're really harming society. Tribal elders were meant to help people learn and understand what was going to be a threat, and then they would counsel together, and they would execute a plan. So, when you have, in a sense, treasonous tribal elders, you really have a poison in the society."

Stiles' Journey

Stiles' first foray into propaganda came in the wake of 9/11. Initially, she didn't believe that 9/11 was a false flag operation. "I actually said to somebody, 'Nobody credible believes that, so stop.'" But later, she ended up watching a video made by Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth, and it turned out to be a life-altering decision.

"I remember I really couldn't sleep that night," she says. "It was about having those trusts torn down, and it's really a betrayal, in a large sense.

I think that's why so many people have a hard time with coronavirus ... The things we trust [include] authority, experience, what other people are doing and saying around us, the culture, the words that we use to describe the culture ... One of the points that I make in the book is that these guys ... have infiltrated these trusts.

That's the way to package propaganda in a democracy. I watched your interview with Dr. Marik and he said the same thing. He said, 'I had a hard time coming to grips with, 'Wow, there's a lot of deception even in my own industry that I haven't really even seen.'

And I think ... what we're struggling against [is] that percentage of people who may see the news as untrustworthy, but they don't see the whole thing, in a sense, they don't see the massive corruption underlying the news as the tip of the iceberg."

Tools of the Propaganda Trade

For propaganda to be effective, there needs to be central coordination of narratives, and that's where public relations agencies come in. I think hardly anyone really appreciates the power that these companies have.

For example, in the 1950s, the tobacco industry hired the PR company Hills+Knowlton (H+K). It devised the tobacco industry's now-infamous playbook, which worked for almost 50 years. Classic propaganda strategies included confusing people about the facts, discrediting the opposition and sowing doubt.

H+K was also responsible for creating the Kuwaiti witness during the Iraq war. During a hearing, H+K presented an anonymous girl who testified that Iraqi soldiers were taking babies out of incubators in the hospital and throwing them onto the freezing floor. Eventually, it was revealed that she was the daughter of a Kuwaiti ambassador and the

entire story was made up. It was a PR stunt designed to create outrage and support for the war effort in Iraq, and it worked.

Today, two-thirds to 80% of the content broadcast and published by corporate media comes from public relations firms, the top four being the Publicis Groupe, WPP (which recently acquired H+K), Omnicom and Interpublic.

In other words, most so-called mainstream media “news” is actually brainwashing propaganda. And, remarkably, when you add the 2022 revenues of these top four ad holding companies together, it’s still below \$60 billion, which is a rather modest price to control international policy and up to 80% of the global mainstream media landscape.

How PR Companies Are Used in Politics

One of the most classic stories Stiles could find while researching her book was that of Edward Bernays discussing the use of PR in politics. Bernays, widely considered the father of public relations and propaganda, rose to prominence in the 1920s.

Facts and reason were “out,” he said. Instead, if a politician wanted to advocate for lowering the tariff on wool, for example, he was to hire a PR company to create the necessary circumstances to make lowering tariffs the solution to an apparent problem. Stiles tells the story:

“The PR guy is going to talk to prominent businessmen and get them to agree to wear cotton suits to their important events as a protest. They're going to boycott wool. Somewhere else in the community, or in the nation at large, they're going to get some middle-class people to protest, so they don't seem linked together in the public's mind.

And then somewhere else, social workers will do some surveys and interview the poor, and they'll run a report on the plight of the poor and the suffering that entails from the high cost of wool, like they can't buy wool blankets and they're freezing to death.

So, you have these events being placed into the public consciousness, and that's when the politicians are going to step in and help solve the problem. So, he's teaching young PR professionals and he says, 'You're going to have to look and find out, intimately, what news feels like because you're going to create it.'

Propaganda packaged as news is devastating to a democracy. They're seeding the consciousness with the problems – and again, the news is highlighting those ... You might think, well, what does it matter if a politician advocates for lower taxes?

But let's say that powerful interests have overseas stakes in wool that they want to dump cheaply onto the United States, or they want to take out their competitors in the United States with cheap wool.

Now you have something really nefarious. You have powerful interests, big government, corporations, and the news manipulating the public to consolidate power, wealth and resources ... and they've used this playbook over and over for the last 100 years."

Things Are Often Not What They Seem

Another common PR tool is public protests. Many events presented as spontaneous public uprisings aren't that at all. They're made up by people hired by the PR agency to protest, and the media will of course be sent there to cover it.

Some of these events can be pathetically small, consisting of just a few dozen protesters, yet they'll get massive media coverage. In contrast, real, legitimate public protests can have hundreds of thousands of people present and get virtually no media coverage at all. That's one way to start telling them apart.

Of course, video has become one of the greatest tools of the propaganda trade. As noted by Stiles, "seeing is believing." It's easy to manipulate how an event comes across on video, so we need to recognize the potential dangers of a visual experience. Since

most newsworthy events don't happen in our immediate vicinity, we rarely can verify the veracity of what we see on video.

Infrastructure Belief and Trust

What Stiles refers to as “infrastructure belief” includes:

- 1. Experience** – Seeing is believing. Trusting your eyes
- 2. Authority** – Trusting the experts
- 3. Social pressure** – Trusting what other people are doing and saying
- 4. Culture** – Trusting the culture and the words people use to talk about the culture

As explained by Stiles:

“In a small local community that works great. But when you overlay a technological culture, you can't ferret out those trusts. [Yet] that's what you're relying on because we can't go and investigate everything. We can't dig up every fact.

Let me give you an example with coronavirus. We saw what happened visually. People writhing on the ground in China, hazmat suits, the draconian lockdown. Then we went to Italy and you saw gurneys and morgues. Then you went to New York City and saw floating ships and more deaths.

And then somebody died that you knew, or somebody that you know had somebody lose somebody to coronavirus. And boy, how could that be wrong? 'I'm seeing it in my own life. I've experienced it. It's happening all across the globe. That's got to be real.'

Into that comes the authorities. Grandfatherly Dr. Fauci, grandmotherly Dr. Birx, the CDC and the WHO. If you didn't trust them, you might have just trusted science, which is a good thing to trust in a society of integrity. And if you didn't

trust that, then maybe you trusted Trump ... So now you've got two points of triangulation.

And then, while everybody seems to be following along, I'm looking around to see my neighbors. Are they doing and saying ... the same thing? Are they believing the same thing as I am? OK, everybody starts wearing masks and all of a sudden you have this huge triangulation.

You're looking around in the community, trusting your eyes, trusting authorities and looking at the social response. And you're going, 'Well, this has got to be real.'

So when you and I come up and say, 'Hey, did you know that Pfizer only lowered mild symptoms in relatively healthy people?' – you would bring facts to them – they would go, 'You're nuts because I've triangulated these trusts and you've got to be loony.'

Even in families, it tore apart husbands and wives who are at odds over this. So, I say in the book that facts are tiny handmaidens to the true queens of belief, which I believe are these trusts.

And now you say, 'Well, how does language impact that?' Well, you chronicled in your newsletter that the WHO changed the definition of pandemic ... of vaccine [and] cases. Never in the history of medicine has an asymptomatic been considered a case. I test positive for TB, but I'm not a case, I don't have active TB.

Deaths were also conflated ... So the effect of those definition changes magnified the threat of the whole thing. And then, finally, you go to culture. How did that impact? Well, I think they used our Judeo-Christian ethos of 'do unto others.'

Don't go to somebody else's house and bring a virus that may kill their grandmother and I won't do it to you, especially because the outcome is

something so severe. It's not like you're giving somebody a cold. You're possibly killing them.

And so that was a slam dunk. You put all those five pieces together and people were overwhelmed. I was told I was seriously misinformed and morally reprehensible because I took the stance that I did. And I'm sure you, as well, got flack. So, that's [why] manipulating and hacking those trusts is a really big thing."

Front Groups

Yet another propaganda tool is the creation and use of front groups that typically pretend to be some sort of independent movement but are anything but. Front groups are paid and supported by industry and exist to justify some nefarious aspect of that industry.

Few people have the time to take a deep dive into how these front groups came about. There are loads of them, and they almost always use some benevolent public service name so you sound like a heartless fool for criticizing them. As noted by Stiles:

"They were using those techniques really, really early on ... It's a huge problem. If we just made front groups illegal and eliminated PR firms, boy, we'd be way ahead in advancing the truth in the country, wouldn't we?"

The Threat of Large Language Models

Of course, most industries are incredibly well-connected politically, and would likely find some other workaround, even if front groups were banned. One such workaround, which is already being deployed, is these large language models such as OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Bard. There are dozens, if not hundreds of other companies that are also working on similar products around the world, including the giant search engine Baidu in China.

I'm convinced, and I've studied this carefully, that these are the harbingers of artificial general intelligence, (AGI). It's not quite there yet, but we are really close. I'm talking about this decade. In my mind, it's inevitable. This also seems to be the consensus from the number of experts that I reviewed.

This is a major concern because, as explained in Stiles' book, language is what they use to convince us that something is true when it's not.

What better propaganda tool could you invent than an artificial intelligence that has access to just about everything that's ever been written, and that can carefully orchestrate and carry out a detailed plan to indoctrinate the entire world with falsehoods. Already, these large language models are being deployed in Media Literacy education.

"I agree with you," Stiles says. "I think it's phenomenally dangerous. [Media Literacy] is actually a propaganda campaign. So you take J-6 and you say, 'Well, these people were influenced by disinformation and it caused an insurrection, so disinformation is a threat to society.' Then you go to the legal legislative realm and you say, 'Look, we've got to do something about this. Disinformation is a threat to democracy.'

So, they have these euphemistically labeled bills called Media Literacy. They've just passed the first one, but there's a whole slew of them that are scheduled. If you go to Daily Clout¹ by Naomi Wolf, you can find they're all set up to go in many different states, basically teaching K-12 'media literacy.' I mean, what are you going to teach a kindergartner about media literacy that isn't just blatant indoctrination? They're before the age of reason."

The point is that they're using this indoctrination tool on you right now, today. And it's going to get worse and worse over time. There are some things we can do, but it's important to realize that this is probably one of the biggest propaganda threats we face.

It's also our biggest existential threat, because these AI-equipped large language models have been given the ability to code. They can recursively create software and

run that software, and continue to improve it at an exponential rate. So, it seems inevitable and only a matter of time before they start improving the code to achieve superintelligence capacity that is an existential threat to humanity.

Lex Fridman recently interviewed Max Tegmark² who is an AI scientist at MIT and has been very concerned about the dangers of AI. He is the primary author of the recent letter signed by 1800 scientists, including Elon Musk,³ recommending a six-month stop of development to integrate safety back into the equation.

His primary concern is that these large language models have been given access to human psychology, which means they know precisely how to manipulate and change human behavior. Additionally, they now have access to the internet, as discussed by a previous Lex guest, Eliezer Yudkowsky.⁴

So, the combination of recursively improving their code, having access to the internet and understanding human psychology provides what appears to be the largest existential threat to humanity. In my view it's even more than the global cabal, which will likely be using these tools which have a very high probability of backfiring on them.

Unplug, Disconnect and Take Back Your Kids

Part of the solution is to minimize your use of surveillance tools such as computers, cell phones, social media apps and Google products. Be aware of how you can be tracked and surveilled through your various electronic devices. Revert back to analog devices when possible. We also need to take control of our children's education.

"You have to take the kids back," Stiles says. "I firmly believe you've got to train them on reading and logical thinking, off the videos. Jacques Ellul published a book called 'The Humiliation of the Word' in 1970. He so perfectly portrayed what we see now in the social justice warriors. He said ... 'What training by video does is it produces an extreme conviction without logical coherence.'

So you see the social justice warriors throwing themselves on the steps of the Capitol screaming and crying – these outward displays of emotion – but if you

interview them, they really can't articulate the problem. So, I was astounded that 50 years ago, he said, 'Don't train through video.'

You can't abandon reading and training your thinking processes and critical thinking skills. I think that's really important for parents to remember. We have all these video educational materials, but they've got to read to get the thinking-skill part."

Become a Smart Sheepe and Build a Truth Movement

Stiles is also working on a new project called "Smart Sheepe" (Old English plural for "sheep") to combat the government propaganda machine. During World War I, George Creel, head of the Committee on Public Information, recruited and trained 10,000 "Four Minute Men." They were leaders in local communities who would memorize talking points from Washington and would stand up and recite them during the reel change at the movies.

"It swayed a lot of people because they were respected in their local communities and people held them in high regard," Stiles says. "10,000 men he trained. So, my challenge is, if George Creel can mobilize 10,000 men to spout Washington, D.C., talking points on behalf of the war, let's mobilize 10,000 to protect the sheep, expose the lies and the frameworks that are used to create them.

Many people don't think they can teach. But can they lead a discussion group? Can they bring this conversation into the lives of their children? Can you sit down, take the book, lead a discussion group and teach the material? You could do that with church, meetups, book clubs, et cetera. That's kind of the idea – to bring the discussion back to the people ...

The problem with anyone that gets lifted to prominence in our movement is that the news media just trains their focus on that person and attempts to destroy

them, as you well know. So we have to stop waiting for high-profile leaders to do the job, and we can start by doing something small like this. It does add up."

To learn more and get involved, visit [SmartSheepe.com](https://www.smartsheepe.com).

"Don't think of it as teaching," Stiles says. "Start a conversation. Anybody can do it. They don't have to be an expert. They don't have to have read all the books. They just have to agree to open this information. Let's unpack the idea that America has been infected with propaganda for the last 100 years. That's a real novel idea for people.

I'm a big advocate of leaving right and left to the side. Let's not argue ideology. Let's join hands because part of what they're doing is dividing us. Let's look at the material together. Let's face America's history together and make a difference that way. You can get a study guide from me, so you're not just out there on your own, and you can share questions and insights with the group, and just basically put the message out there."

Of course, also consider picking up a copy of Stiles' book, "[One Idea to Rule Them All: Reverse Engineering American Propaganda](#)," to understand how we got to where we are today, where truth and lies have been completely inverted.

Sources and References

- ¹ [Daily Clout](#)
- ² [YouTube Max Tegmark](#)
- ³ [The Guardian. April 1, 2023](#)
- ⁴ [YouTube Lex Fridman Podcast](#)