

REPORTING AMERICA AT WAR

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Propaganda Techniques

Adapted from the Propaganda Critic Web site. For more detailed definitions and additional examples see www.propagandacritic.com.

PROPAGANDA – the use of a variety of communication techniques that create an emotional appeal to accept a particular belief or opinion, to adopt a certain behavior or to perform a particular action. There is some disagreement about whether all persuasive communication is propagandistic or whether the propaganda label can only be applied to dishonest messages.

NAME CALLING – links a person, or idea, to a negative symbol. *Examples: commie, fascist, yuppie*

GLITTERING GENERALITIES – use of virtue words; the opposite of name calling, i.e., links a person, or idea, to a positive symbol. *Examples: democracy, patriotism, family*

The next two are ways of making false connections:

TRANSFER – a device by which the propagandist links the authority or prestige of something well-respected and revered, such as church or nation, to something he would have us accept. *Example: a political activist closes her speech with a prayer*

TESTIMONIAL – a public figure or a celebrity promotes or endorses a product, a policy, or a political candidate. *Examples: an athlete appears on the Wheaties box; an actor speaks at a political rally*

The following three constitute special appeals:

PLAIN FOLKS – attempt to convince the audience that a prominent person and his ideas are “of the people.” *Examples: a prominent politician eats at McDonald’s; an actress is photographed shopping for groceries*

BANDWAGON – makes the appeal that “everyone else is doing it, and so should you.” *Examples: an ad states that “everyone is rushing down to their Ford dealer”*

FEAR – plays on deep-seated fears; warns the audience that disaster will result if they do not follow a particular course of action. *Example: an insurance company pamphlet includes pictures of houses destroyed floods, followed up by details about home-owners’ insurance.*

The next two are types of logical fallacies:

BAD LOGIC – an illogical message is not necessarily propagandistic; it can be just a logical mistake; it is propaganda if logic is manipulated deliberately to promote a cause. *Example: Senator X wants to regulate the power industry. All Communist governments regulate their power industries. Senator X is a Communist.*

UNWARRANTED EXTRAPOLATION – making huge predictions about the future on the basis of a few small facts. *Example: If the U.S. approves NAFTA, thousands of jobs and factories will move to Mexico.*