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The Propaganda of Patriotism and Color

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This paper uses Herman and Chomsky's "propaganda model" as a frame to critically analyze intersections of power, political ideology and media discourse practices. The author introduces artistic and literary considerations as well as new research in social psychology that illustrate the influence that color perception has in the formation of social and political consent. The author considers the increasing methods of propagandizing at work in contemporary media and asks whether supplementary meanings of "truth" and "news" are necessary for current denotations.

truthiness | power | color | mass media | Propaganda Model

In the midst of what then appeared to be a dramatic climb in wartime carnage in Iraq, political satirist Stephen Colbert launched his inaugural *Colbert Report* in America by introducing to the lexicon 'truthiness' and, thus, calling attention to some rather unconventional conceptions of truth and the methods by which certain uncomfortable facts about the war were, in his view, undergoing a re-engineering in the public discourse. Struck by the effect that Colbert's assessment had on the public's discussion of war, The American Dialect Society honored "truthiness" as *Word of the Year* for 2005. In the Society's executive summary of January 2006, readers find that "'truthiness' refers to the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true" (American Dialect Society, 2006). To underscore the sort of political absurdities passed off by Washington at the time, Colbert remarked with Swiftian irony, "I don't trust books. They're all fact, no heart" (2005).

At the heart of this paper is an examination of discourse practices, the workings of ideology and power, that lead to the public's consent to certain questionable truths in these times of " … belligerent, uninformed posturing" (Krugman, 2007). Here, 'consent' refers to the fairly widespread uncritical acceptance of certain 'truthiness' as produced by national media for mass consumption. For example, how did the American public come to buy the notion that invading a largely defenseless nation was, at least to some extent, part of a patriotic undertaking? What mass media techniques prevailed during the sale of this military "operation"?

Drawing upon Norman Fairclough's work in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA hereafter), this paper rests upon the premise that we underestimate the significance of language in the production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power (1989, p. 1). To this, I wish to add that we not only underestimate language but also its semiotic signs of meaning, such as, say, the uses of color, notions of national exclusivity, or the power of verbal repetition. The signs I refer to here may be understood to contain discrete meanings beyond words, such as images, gestures, scents, or other auditory or tactile impressions.

I will treat language as both a symbolic and discursive medium. Color, too, is symbolic and in certain contexts can be discursive. By this, I mean that discursive symbols once colored have the capacity to heighten their emotional import. Upon this understanding, I will examine how public figures in corporate media use language in conjunction with color to condition the consciousness of consumers so as to cultivate their consent to 'truthiness' and argue, therefore, that this approach to discourse disrupts the public's potential to focus critical attention on core social issues with an honest effort to separate truths from 'truthiness.'

By addressing the following questions, I aim to uncover at least one cause crucial to the manufacture of consent today: (a) How are popular concepts of patriotism and our sense of duty framed by mass media appeals to our emotions? (b) How does the use of language and color play a role in the manufacture of 'truthiness'? While CDA provides a useful sociopolitical framework for understanding how pundits use language to manufacture consent, I also include a well-known model for understanding how pundits appeal to an audience's economic sensibilities.

Further theoretical groundwork, as outlined in the next section, rests upon Herman and Chomsky's work in media criticism and reveals how society's powerful use mass media as tools to "fix the premises of discourse … to 'manage' public opinion" and to "mobilize support" for the particular values of the dominant culture" (1988, p. xi). Herman and Chomsky's approach combined with CDA allows "analysis of … media discourses [to] impart insight into how power and meaning intersect" (Klaehn 2009, p. 50).

Media Filters for Color

In their study *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*, Herman and Chomsky (1988) developed a novel "propaganda model," (PM hereafter) applicable to these times and central to my purpose here. Over twenty years ago they observed, in the opening chapter, that mass media serve as systems for

> ... communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. (p. 1)

While this model assumes the inherent influence that media institutions wield over society as swayed by market forces, it does not assume that newsroom workers or personalities are consciously "aligning themselves with the interests of the dominant elites" (Klaehn, 2002, p. 151) — the owners of the institutions. Instead, "it assumes that elite media recruit right-minded personnel to fill staff positions, … [and] these personnel, [having conformed to remain within the system] have internalized [the 'correct'] beliefs and attitudes which, in turn, influence media performance" (p. 151). Herman and Chomsky further argue that in a "world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfill this role [of amusing, informing and instilling the right values] requires systematic propaganda" (1988, p. 1). While the PM "focuses on the inequality of wealth and power and its … effects on mass-media interests and choices, [the model] also traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their message across to the public" (1988, p. 2). One major filter used from the 1950s through the 1980s was "anticommunism." Today, Jeffery Klaehn observes that it is "fear" (2009, p. 46). I shall add to this list of filters "patriotism" and "American exceptionalism."

With the ever-increasing "right-wing pressure on public radio and television" and "the corporate ownership of media … never … as concentrated [as it is now]," the PM has become an increasingly more relevant lens to focus on the methods of propaganda at work in today's 'free' post-industrial democracies (Klaehn, 2002, pp. 172-3). The following discussion examined how the propagandizing efforts of "right-minded media personnel" signal the uses of colors serving as patriotic symbols. It questions how color appeals to our psychosocial sensibilities, and how color is used in conjunction with language to propagandize. Following this, I will introduce the early Fauvists whose curious work with color illustrates the connections among color perception, emotion, and the underlying meaning, today, imbued in discursive and symbolic media.

Intersections of Art, Psychology and Propaganda

Colors comprise a fairly significant part of our under-standing the world around us, as well as our making supposedly informed choices about how we should best interact with the world, its various natural phenomena and other humans with whom we share the planet. Color is like an instant messenger. Of all the non-verbal forms of communication, Leatrice Eiseman notes, colour is the most immediate means of communicating messages and mean-ings (2000, p. 6). J. H. Kleynhans observes that "colour stimulates and works synergistically with all of the senses,

symbolizes abstract concepts and thoughts, expresses fantasy or wish fulfillment, recalls another time or place and produces an aesthetic or emotional response (2007, p. 46).

Strangely enough, outside the mind, color does not exist. In physical terms, objects can be said to have the color of the light reflected off their surfaces, which depends on the spectrum of that light, the viewing perspective, and the angles of illumination. So, what do these aspects of physics mean for us all as consumers of mass media? That is, how do these qualities of the physical world play into the practice of propagandizing? We can conclude that recognizing colors and deriving from them meaningful emotional responses is part of the human process of perception (Mayer, et al. 1990). Our very ability to derive meaning at this basic level of perception is fundamental to understanding why, say, brainwashing and advertising works as well as they do.

One group of meticulous professionals who make a study of color, its emotional weight and meanings, is artists. To acknowledge first the patently obvious, artists have long recognized the role that color and light play in human perception. Michael Douma, for example, recalls the words of Jacques Riviere who observed that "the true purpose of painting is to represent objects as they really are, that is to say differently from the way we see them. It tends always to give us their sensible essence, their presence, this is why the image it forms does not resemble their appearance...," because the appearance changes from moment to moment (2008, ¶4).

One notable explicit effort in giving color " ... greater emotional and expressive power" was undertaken by the Fauvists in the early part of the 20th century (Douma, 2008). Their desire to imbue color with this greater emotive power forced Fauvist painters to implement an unusual approach to portraying what they perceived. Douma observes that the " ... impossibility of liberating [color] from form on a two-dimensional canvas led the Fauvists to adopt the only physiologically viable solution: painting common objects and scenes in the 'wrong' colors" (2008).

Beyond what artists have sensed about the effects of color and luminance on perception, researchers, too, have come to theorize over effect that color and light produce on the human psyche. Though most psychologists question the value of color therapy as an area of fruitful inquiry, color as a universal "language," nonetheless, leaps cultural boundaries "in our electronically- technologically- satellite-linked 'Global Village'" (Kleynhans, 2007, p. 47). For example, hues in the red area of the spectrum are known as "warm" colors and include red, orange, and yellow. These colors evoke emotions ranging from feelings of comfort to feelings of anger and hostility. These intriguing insights into the physical properties of light and the mind's ability to perceive color have still encouraged the development of new approaches to

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helping people contend more easily with the effects of various mental disorders.

Kleynhans notes that "culture conditions the colours that we see" (p. 52.) "Colour is therefore intimately bound up with language because it supplies a system of arbitrary signs" (Gage, 1995, p. 79). In relying on certain culturally-based connections among colors and the emotional states of individuals, some psychologists have endeavored to enhance their therapeutic practices with meaningful colors that evoke positive responses to various stimuli. Some professional advocates of color therapy have observed, for example, that combative patients in manic states have responded to pale pink or soft blue walls of psychiatric wards in positive and calculable ways. Conversely, patients in depressive states appear to respond more favorably to brighter colors (Bradley & Zeiss, 2006).

Other researchers have suggested that the colors green and blue may reduce anxiety. Orange and yellow are thought to produce higher heart rates and, perhaps, higher measures of tension. Even the absence of light, which means the absence of color and knowledge, can have profound effects on our social and intellectual development. From these anecdotal examples of color's various effects on us, we can conclude that appreciating the significance of color as meaningful is not only part of our cognitive processes and socialization, but also a behavioral trait - a part of the practice of attending to personal tastes.

Beyond these clinical considerations, social psychologists have recently gained extraordinary new awareness of the role that colors can play in decision-making processes and, thus, partisan politics. Caruso et al. (2009) have demonstrated, for example, that political biases directly "influence people's visual representations of a bi-racial political candidate's skin tone" (p. 20168). Subjects who took part in the study were shown various images of a candidate whose skin tone had been re-enhanced to reflect both lighter and darker shades. Unaware of the changes in the photos, participants consistently rated the lightened photos as more representative of the candidate whose political ideology aligned with theirs.

These ways of perceiving meaning in color, or the shade of a person's skin, say much about group membership, such as in a political institution, as well as the extent to which an express connection to group power "affects conscious and unconscious reactions toward members of the in-group[1] and those of the out-group."[2] Perhaps most intriguing was the discovery that group membership correlates both with our social judgments of others and our visual perception of their physical features.[3] Caruso and his team observe that "political partisanship is a form of group membership that may bias interpretations of a bi-racial candidate's skin color so that visual representations of the candidate fit coherently with the desire to see one's own group members positively (p. 20168).

With this understanding, one can, thus, argue that certain colors can serve as useful political tools as well. Given the psychosocial qualities they carry, carefully chosen colors in media can help flesh out the desires and intentions of political partisans. The Fascists, for example, during Hitler's régime relied heavily on the semiotic import of color. With a clear understanding of the potential power of color on the formation of consent and its influence on the mind, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, Reichsminister of Propaganda, recognized the emotive effects of colors on the development of meaning in the thoughts of the individual. It has been observed, for example, that Goebbels could play on the will and emotions of the masses as though he were playing a musical instrument. In Nazi propaganda, hues in the red spectrum, for example, tended to predominate visual media designed to appeal to and stir patriotic feelings whilst darker shades, such as black and gray, tended to prevail in propaganda designed to activate anti-Semitic emotions. His methods are noted for their incredible effectiveness. Yet, his apparent talent for getting the message out and leading people where he wished was belied, as history shows, by a more deliberate plan to carry out the hideous designs of the Fascist régime. According to the German historian, author and critic Joachim Fest, Goebbels could drive "his listeners into ecstasy, ... not through the passionate inspiration of the moment, but as the result of sober psychological calculation" (1970).

Like the perception of meaning in rhetorical locutions, the perception of meaning in colors is, on the subjective level, part of a complex cognitive process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting sense data. In terms of our ability as consumers of media to assess the strength of truth claims, though, these processes only further complicate our efforts in negotiating the maze of media filters through which the political narratives stream into public space for mass consumption. That is to say, colors, when used as rhetorical devices, frustrate our efforts in discerning key differences in political fabrications and bare facts.

The Color of Patriotism

Color in American public discourse has, since 9/11/01,

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[1] Whereas an "in-group" is a social group towards which a member feels loyalty and respect, an "out-group" is a social group towards which an individual feels contempt, opposition or a desire to compete. (Wiki)

[2] Fiske S. T. (1998) cited in Caruso, E. M. (2009)

[3] Darley J. M. (1983) and Pauker, K., Rule N. O. & Ambady N. (in press) cited in Caruso, E. M. (2009)

become increasingly useful to the formation of widespread consent to questionable political policies such as the PATRIOT Act or the pre-emptive war launched by former President George W. Bush and his colleagues. When new Federal policies devised on widely contentious grounds are set in motion, the media ideologically and financially wedded to those policies must devise discourse practices that aim to create the necessary popular assent whilst filtering out of their organizations those who would dare communicate their opposition.

So little beyond the continued consolidation of power in American corporate media appears to have changed since General Smedley D. Butler's incisive post-WWI treatise on the contemptible interconnectedness of companies that profited immensely from the war. Then it was DuPont during WWI that largely felt the rhetorical fury of General Butler while today it is Halliburton, among others, in the crosshairs of ethically responsible cultural critics. Though readers may generally agree with Butler that "war is [indeed] a racket" (p. 1), it remains, especially in the reckoning of would-be profiteers, a legal and rather lucrative one. Today, as News Corps (the parent company of Fox) operates in over 70 countries across the globe, General Electric, for example, is both a major weapons manufacturer and an owner of many prominent news outlets, such as MSNBC and NBC. In terms of selling stories, points of view, and the vital military hardware, both multinational corporations stand to gain immensely by framing and promoting certain dubious wars and police actions in just the "right colors."

Alternatively, those employed in the corporate media machines, such as Phil Donahue, Jon Dupre and Clara Frenk, who had remained critical of corporate news policies at the top, who did not fall in line with certain patriotic promotions of war, tend to fall out of work.[4] As regards the role of informing and instilling the right values, the PM throws light on the consequences that "right-minded media person-nel" suffer if they themselves publicly voice their private dissent on ethical grounds. Imbuing the issues and points of view with the right colors, therefore, becomes much more than a figurative process. The following discussion of how certain pundits tend to frame issues in ways most beneficial to the corporate line rests on a study of the overt uses of color as rhetorical signs as well as the political issues made of color as emblematic of patriotism.

Lapel Pins & Power Ties

In her book, *Philosophy in a New Key* (1979), Susanne Langer observes that the interpretation of signs forms

> ... the basis of animal intelligence. Animals presumably do not distinguish between natural signs or artificial [ones]; but they use both kinds to guide their practical activities. We do the same all day long. We answer bells, watch the clock, obey warning signals, follow arrows, take off the kettle when it whistles, come at the baby's cry, and close the windows when we hear thunder. (p. 59)

Fashions and accessories are signs as well, the interpretations of which are wide open to both fallacies and facts. The old adage, for example, that "clothing makes the man" (and/or woman) has been greatly abused since its inception, especially so in recent years. Even the casual observer can feel fairly confident that more than a handful of women have been critiqued for mixing, say, a hot-pink Versace handbag with gold-framed Gucci sunshades.[5] Current feelings connected to this old saying are that what color coordinates we wear or don't wear amounts to who we are or who we are not. These sorts of interpretations, though, when offered by certain political pundits, seem even more suspicious, an issue which is, in the words of Riva Gold, "part of a broader illness affecting our society" (2009).

These common efforts in conflating dress with behavior and seeking to derive meaning from the result follows the customary lines of black and white reasoning. In terms of judging fairly the person's character, rather few competing explanations to these conclusions tend to be entertained by pundits across the political landscape. Yet, isn't an indivi-dual's dress inconsequential to an individual's behavior or moral sense? After all, dress is often no indication of these traits and sometimes signals the opposite of what can be discerned on the surface.

Langer's observations, many years ago, continue to challenge current conventions regarding political dress codes, suggesting that the logical source of our interpretations, "the mere correlation of trivial events with important ones, is really very simple and common; so much so that there is no limit to what a sign may mean" (p. 59). Today, it is the sign, or absence of a sign, on the lapel of a politician's jacket that tends to receive some of the most myopic and vitriolic assessments. Though the hot topic of color as a political tool has cooled somewhat since the last

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[4] Donahue asserts that before his firing he was pressured to present only pro-war segments on his talk show after he insisted on a two-to-one ratio of pro-war to anti-war commentators be given time to talk.

[5] Though not a *fashionista* per say, "Michelle Obama," Riva Gold notes, "...did wear a cape-like contraption that apparently had a violent collision with Big Bird. Who cares? Why is it that when an intelligent, articulate, and accomplished woman is put into the spotlight, all we talk about this what she's wearing?" (2009)

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general election that put Mr. Obama into power, the methods of propagandizing with colors remain an issue.

Not long after the catastrophic attacks were carried out in New York City and Washington DC in September 2001 did officials of most political persuasions appear in public with a conspicuous new look to their attire. Power neckties in colors approximating traditional partisan differences, Republican red and Democrat blue, were exchanged for a new sign of bipartisan unity. Red, white and blue lapel pins were suddenly, once again, *en vogue*.[6] From pantsuits to sport jackets, blazers to suit coats, the American flag lapel pin has since become nearly ubiquitous in political circles. Fair or not, the $1.29 accessory has come to embody a range of emotional associations: patriotism, unity, honor, responsibility, a sense of duty, allegiance, freedom, liberty, etc. With its use, though, has come a belief and expectation, especially in political circles, that only those who love the homeland, who are actually true patriots, wear the thing.

Whether the size or the number worn, the pin has become for some political commentators a sort of strange quantitative measure of that sublime feeling of affection that some Americans have for their country and countrymen. It appears neither to matter nor to occur to political pundits, especially of the neoconservative camp, that such a simple pin cannot adequately symbolize those sorts of warm feelings citizens reserve for their country. And so, because of these recycled meanings of duty and patriotism that pundits heap upon a simple badge, uncritical audiences seem either unwilling or unready to assess, neutrally, those who would choose not to fall in line with the arbitrary politicizing of color and fashion.

A Literary Response to Propaganda

As a way of illustrating the power of symbols and the danger of voluntary subordination to arbitrary norms, Shirley Jackson responded critically, in her short story *The Lottery* (1948), to the ghastly details of Nazi gas chambers and firing squads that had emerged from the Nuremberg Trials. Unwavering compliance to the authority of a town's traditions, typified in people's unconscious inhumanity toward one another, finds parallels in the sort of ritualistic conformity certain pundits exhibit to political influence. Jackson's tale reveals details of a community's participation in the stoning of one person singled out for sacrifice whilst Hannity's tale of Obama reveals designs for a sort of political stoning. In both instances there appears the filter for fear — the dread of

consequences for not abiding by traditions and the dread of consequences for not following traditional protocols of fully white presidents.

Like the setting of *The Lottery*, with its theme of uncritical obedience to authority, the period that shortly followed the 9/11 attacks was a time marked by anxiety, anger, fear and uncertainty, and a call to align with the traditions of political power. Who in Jackson's short story would be the victim of tradition? Who would feel the condemnation of an entire community bent on abiding by certain odd customs, or policies? In similar ways, the subtext to public criticisms leveled at certain political figures who challenge tradition today by periodically foregoing, say, the lapel pin is that these leaders are resisting the very conventions that bespeak blind obedience to some temporal authority. In other words, if the color of your badge, button or pin doesn't square with the political fashion norms of the day, you risk having your fashion sense questioned publicly in a most extreme way. This is the point at which the perception of color and uses of language intersect to create new, or atypical, understandings of patriotism. This sort of opening allows other sensibilities to be called, also, into question.

For example, one notable effort in imbuing color with " ... greater emotional and expressive power" in the political discourse, indeed, of "painting common objects … in the 'wrong' colors" (Douma, 2008) was Sean Hannity's relentless critiques of then-Senator Barack Obama and his apparent inability, or unwillingness, to observe the new fashion norms. Although a somewhat dated example of color propaganda, it remains a useful model for a study of how colors can serve to underscore the political preferences of pundits and how, even fashion, can serve these partisans' ideological agendas.

A 'Hannitizing' of Colors

Borrowed from an October 2007 Sean Hannity broadcast, the following quote offered at *Media Matters* frames the following deconstruction of Hannity's efforts. Hannity begins his critique with a reference to a reporter's question put to Obama about the Senator's choice of attire. The curious Iowan journalist wonders whether Obama's lapel shouldn't also be adorned like everyone else's with that omnipresent pin. In assuming the apparent role of self-appointed fashion constable, Hannity is now free to politicize the exchange by suggesting that the standard political reply from Obama to the reporter should have been something like, "My patriotism speaks for itself."[7] The false disappointment offered from the "fair-and-balanced" pundit, thus, paves the way for a lengthy

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[6] Not since the culture wars of the late '60s and early '70s has the flag lapel pin seen such widespread use. "Then came 9/11," observes Gilbert Cruz, "Taking a page from the Nixon Administration, George W. Bush and his aides donned the pins [and] so did anchors on Fox News …" (2008).

[7] The full transcript can be found at
http://mediamatters.org/items/200710060001?f=s_search

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negative criticism of Obama's sense of patriotism. Instead of answering the reporter's question in the only way Hannity sees as valid,

> ... the senator answered the question at length, explaining that he no longer wears such a pin at least in part because of the Iraq war. He said, quote, 'You know, the truth is, is that right after 9/11, I had a pin. Shortly after 9/11, particularly because as we were talking about the Iraq war, that became a substitute for I think true patriotism, which is speaking out on issues that are of importance to our national security, I decided I won't wear that pin on my chest. 'Instead,' he said, 'I'm going to tell the American people what I believe will make this country great, and hopefully that will be a testimony to my patriotism.' (2007)

The issue that Hannity had wanted to make of the pin, or lack of pin, on Obama's chest amounts to a standard black-and-white oversimplification of the then-Senator's process of reasoning. It is unreasoned and, arguably, akin to the kind of conclusion an irritated member of the Crips might hastily draw about a member of the Bloods passing through their turf – or vice-versa. The colors blue and red evidently pre-cipitate highly emotional responses in some individuals. Nevertheless, the Fox commentator's initial reflex appears to be, like a stereotypical gang member's, assault immediately and ask questions later.

Having developed relatively equal cognitive skills in processing new ideas, impressions, beliefs and sense data, all humans – one could confidently conclude – are not mere machines. In other words, humans are complex creatures intellectually endowed enough to think in non-linear terms, socially advanced enough to communicate complex thoughts about, say, an unjust war beyond the narrow patriotic emotions and thoughts embodied in the colors of a mere lapel pin.

As Hannity's apparent personal understanding of patriotism represents simply an overt fashionable display of the symbolic colors red, white, and blue, I would argue that patriotic feelings may be expressed in alterative ways. What Hannity's ire for Obama amounts to is merely the same sort of observation that former President G. W. Bush had made in his '01 address to the US Congress, not long after the attacks.[8] Directly proportional in its rhetorical symmetry to the former

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[8] "You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror." (Bush, 2001, November 6)

President's proclamation is Hannity's implied intent: You are either with us and our lapel pin or against us and our lapel pin. The commentator in this case leaves scarcely no middle ground for thoughtful reflection or reasoned discussion of why lapel pins of any color are entirely meaningless.

Perhaps even more curious are some of the other reasons that Hannity sites for his displeasure. In the transcript, we learn that the Obama campaign had declined to expound the import of the Senator's words at the time. The stunned and disgusted Hannity responds by asking his audience

> ... why do we wear pins? Because our country was under attack. And to politicize once again the war to this extent. Well, who cares about the war? Are you proud of your country? Do you believe in America? Do you believe that America has been, continues to be the greatest force for good in this world? I think the answer, if you ask that question of any, you know, liberal today, I think they doubt that America is a force for good in the world, that America has been, continues to be a force for good in the world. And I think it's, you know, the greatest gift God gave us and continues to be a force for good. (2007)

Hannity's *non sequiturs* aside, what begs for rebuttal is his implicit conclusion that his political foes, like Obama, fail to recognize a key difference between the war and how our feelings about the war are expressed. He asks his audience to contemplate briefly the question of who cares about the war, as if to imply that no one really does care anymore, only that we continue to "stay the course" despite where that path takes us – a hauntingly similar sort of response to the one expected of the townsfolk in *The Lottery*. Disengage from critical reflection; then, abide unquestionably by the expectations of the norm.

I am not suggesting here, as Fest had noted about Goebbels, that Hannity is in the same way attempting to whip "his listeners into [an] ecstasy, ... through the passionate inspiration of the moment," but Hannity does appear to be contemplating the possible "result of [his] sober psychological calculation" (1970) on the masses. That is to say, his approach appears to be, as Jacques Ellul affirms, in keeping with the techniques of modern propaganda derived from analyses of modern psychology and sociology (1973, p. 4).

Just beyond the notion that colors carry potentially significant psychological and emotional weight, the flag pin itself has become a conventional symbol, a widely recognized marker of abstract feelings for a nation and its people. We may be reminded, here, of the words of Walter

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Lippmann, former journalist, media critic, philosopher and presidential advisor who suggested that symbols have been used by men to both liberate minds and enslave them.

In his book, *Public Opinion*, Lippmann argues that if we view ourselves as thoughtful, reasoned people, sensible and pragmatic, that we must also recognize other features of our personalities that are not nearly as flattering, such as our voluntary subordination to symbols. Lippmann acknowledges that it is

> ... impossible to conclude that symbols are altogether instruments of the devil. ... But in the world of action they may be beneficent, and ... sometimes a necessity. The necessity is often imagined, the peril manufactured. But when quick results are imperative, the manipulation of masses through symbols may be the only quick way of having a critical thing done. It is often more important to act than to understand. It is sometimes true that the action would fail if everyone understood it. There are many affairs which cannot wait for a referendum or endure publicity, and there are times, during war for example, when a nation, an army, and even its commanders must trust strategy to a very few minds; when two conflicting opinions, though one happens to be right, are more perilous than one opinion which is wrong. The wrong opinion may have bad results, but the two opinions may entail disaster by dissolving unity. (1997, p. 151)

Lippmann's words ring especially loudly and clearly today as the resolve of a once fairly unified nation, just after the Twin Towers and Pentagon attacks, has since dissolved into two predominantly warring political factions holding onto sharp disagreements. As Rush Limbaugh periodically reminds his listeners, "It's us against them, folks," I am reminded of a desperate Adolf Hitler stirring the passions of a German people fearing a loss of social and economic power at the hands of some citizens whom they came to believe were undermining the nation.

Today in the US, obvious fractures in the largely bi-partisan resolve to destroy the "evil doers" have since formed, and it seems for virtually self-evident reasons – the Bush Doctrine, its collision with Iraq, and the blind acceptance of this doctrine by pundits who have politicized aggression and killing as a patriotic expedient. As a way of attempting to rationalize the now-open divisions between opponents and proponents of the Doctrine, media comment-ators of the neo-conservative variety have tirelessly attempt-ed to explain away the dissent by appealing to our sense of pathos.

Closing

Playing to our emotions has helped partially reframe the unjust invasion of Iraq as part of some patriotic duty to pulverize the "evil doers" wherever we might suspect they hide and no matter what kinds of facts about their innocence are presented to the contrary. Given the natural emotional responses to certain colors, already discussed, and their suggested connections to good and evil, a pundit can successfully

> … adopt the template and language of Manichean moralism as a tool for persuading citizens of the necessity and justifiability of certain actions. Controversial actions that, in fact, have little … to do with the concern of good and evil … can nonetheless be rhetorically justified via a dualistic appeal – that the action in question is necessary to fight for Good and defend against Evil. Thus, issues can be framed in Manichean terms by insincere leaders [or pundits] to manipulate public opinion, to cast morally neutral or even immoral policies as necessary for the defense of the Good and to thereby generate support for actions they wish to undertake. (Greenwald, 2007, p. 49)

Beyond the stockpiles of certain mysterious weapons of mass-destruction, the Bush-Cheney-manufactured link be-tween Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein still stands as one notable example of 'truthiness' cast in Manichean terms. Since human emotions represent fertile ground for patriotism to find roots, appealing to those feelings can engender fear and mistrust and, thus, a powerful urge to act with aggression in the face of evidence that would ordinarily call for a more reasoned response, such as diplomacy.

In effect, one could argue that pundits heavily invested in a particular political ideology would like the public to see the fractures in resolve as having developed for reasons related more exclusively to our sense of patriotism. In the minds of certain neo-conservative pundits, dissenting or even quest-ioning the morality of the war is confused, it seems, for dis-loyalty. Conversely, commentators of the opposing political camp have attempted to cast the issue of Iraq as an ethical and moral dilemma. Having reflected on the faults in the major premise used to warrant a pre-emptive defense of freedom on foreign shores, those Liberals who oppose the Doctrine have endeavored to recast the issue of pre-emptive war as logically, ethically and morally vacant. So, the power-ful voices in both parties appear to be caught in a pitched battle of painting and repainting the pre-emptive war issue in colors that best represent their stance. Thus, if you endorse the Doctrine, it is best to wrap yourself and your message in

the colors red, white and blue and hope that no one has noticed your co-opting conventional signs of patriotism for your own political purposes.

At last, it is worth recalling once more the efforts put forth by the early Fauvists. Like them, one could argue that practitioners of this approach to painting the issues are using the wrong colors, albeit for different reasons, even as the medium has moved to contemporary neoconservative mass media and the subject matter shifted from still-lifes to Barack Obama. Hannity *et al* have attempted to render this new political subject in shades of what Obama appeared to be to them rather than what he is. The effect they have achieved is remarkable in terms of the sheer pull on emotions. In terms of honesty and clarity, though, the effects appear distorted, if not unfair and unbalanced.

If one were to uncritically accept the premises upon which talk radio is laid today, that the so-called entertainers already know "the imperatives of large-market talk radio," that it's not their "job to be responsible, or nuanced" but, simply, to "be stimulating" (Wallace, 2005, ¶ 13), then – perhaps – a new definition of "news" is necessary. That is to say, if "news" is previously unknown information, should the definition also be further qualified with "not necessarily true" information? Until the meanings of today's key terms reflect "concepts and facts known to be true" (American Dialect Society, 2006), public challenges to meaningless political norms must move beyond panic-stricken appeals to emotions like those stirred up by Hannity. 'Truthiness' manufactured by commentators of his ilk about war and about associated symbolic expressions condemning it must be stripped of emotional adornments for lasting truths to emerge.

Acknowledgments

Bio

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