The Art of Political Persuasion: A History of Propaganda and Spin?

Course Content

Since the emergence of popular politics in the eighteenth century, control of mass communications has been recognised as a vital political tool by politicians and political critics alike, in both democracies and dictatorships. In the process the very nature of modern politics has been subtly changed, shaped by the power of propaganda and spin.

This course will examine the historical emergence of this development through a consideration of the key ways in which mass communication has been utilised for political ends, from art to caricature and from film to television.

The role of key practitioners of these arts will also be explored, in both democracies and dictatorships, from the propagandist techniques of David and Goebbels, Eisenstein and Riefenstahl to the populist politics of Lloyd George and FDR, and the growth of modern spin.

Finally the course will explore the very latest manifestations of these practices as we look at the role and effect of mass communication in today's political world, from the televising of primaries to the growing power of social media.

Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

▪ to critically use and evaluate a range of relevant historical evidence both primary and secondary

▪ describe the historical development of propaganda and spin as political tools

▪ identify and discuss key associated practices and practitioners