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Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements Of Propaganda

NOAM CHOMSKY
MEDIA CONTROL

THE SPECTACULAR ACHIEVEMENTS OF PROPAGANDA



Synopsis

Noam Chomsky's backpocket classic on wartime propaganda and opinion control begins by asserting two models of democracy - one in which the public actively participates, and one in which the public is manipulated and controlled. According to Chomsky, "propaganda is to democracy as the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state", and the mass media is the primary vehicle for delivering propaganda in the United States. From an examination of how Woodrow Wilson's Creel Commission "succeeded, within six months, in turning a pacifist population into a hysterical, war-mongering population", to Bush Sr.'s war on Iraq, Chomsky examines how the mass media and public relations industries have been used as propaganda to generate public support for going to war. Chomsky further touches on how the modern public relations industry has been influenced by Walter Lippmann's theory of "spectator democracy," in which the public is seen as a "bewildered herd" that needs to be directed, not empowered; and how the public relations industry in the United States focuses on "controlling the public mind," and not on informing it. Media Control is an invaluable primer on the secret workings of disinformation in democratic societies.

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Customer Reviews

As a brief and pithy introduction to Chomsky's anti-imperialistic thinking about media control, and as a charged denunciation of mass propaganda in the modern world (particularly US), this is a very fast-paced, slim, and intriguing read. But if you are looking for material that substantiates his claims

with hard, quantitative evidence, you'd do better with a somewhat more detailed treatise from Chomsky, e.g., "Manufacturing Consent". This though is a somewhat embittered manifesto, spewing out bits on how administrations in the past from Wilson to Bush Senior have manipulated the public into war with unlikely, usually defenceless enemies. This edition sports a new speech "The Journalist from Mars," which lends a refreshingly dissident tenor to the chorus of patriotism. The 31 new pages are particularly relevant today as President Bush picks up where his father left off, once again calling a fear-ridden population to war. Media Control might sound like a flaming rant but it is a good, crisp lead-in into Chomsky's thinking -- likely to be misinterpreted unless you are also familiar with his work otherwise. But his ideas are a welcome second opinion at a time when we should be questioning more than ever whether the spurious memes of "War on Terror", "Shock and Awe" etc are really about terrorism or tyranny at all, or a nearly-successful PR agenda pandering to the big few. A highly engaging read.

Media Control is perhaps the best short introduction to Chomsky's thought on politics and propaganda around. Whereas books like 9-11 and "What Uncle Sam Really Wants" are choppy and prone to misunderstood interpretations by readers not already accustomed to Chomsky, Media Control is coherent, in depth and very easy and quick to read. The essay is from the time after the U.S. invasion of Iraq known as "Desert Storm" and traces the uses of propaganda and misinformation from that era back to the Wilson era and Walter Lippmann's theory of media control. Chomsky perhaps displays his dry wit in this short volume more than anywhere else, with his comparison of the typical slogan "support our troops" to the absurd slogan "support the people in Iowa." What this makes clear, is the emptiness of the slogan. The question "do you support our troops?" cannot be answered with a "no" unless one is completely depraved. That question however masks the underlying question "do you support our policy?" which is something that elites in the govt. and media would prefer you not think about, because the answers would be more ambiguous and require real democratic discussion. The rulers and media heads would prefer to make those decisions for you, through what Lippmann dubbed "consent without consent". The mass media (now controlled largely by six major firms who all have holdings and enter into joint ventures with one another.) constrain debate on issues to within a moderate range, so of course most of the media will look to be at the "liberal" end of the allowed spectrum, but that only has the effect of cutting anything further to the "left" out of the discussion, so arguments many tend to go between something like the "hawks" who are for immediate war, unilaterally, and the "doves" largely represented in the media, who may tend to stand for "multi-lateralism" or waiting for more info. Thus, many who have other

ideas on the subject are left out of mainstream debate, and thus seem to not exist. What we are left with is a host of false-dichotomies and debates that we don't even want to be in.... Also, this new edition of Media Control is expanded to include transcript of a talk, previously printed in FAIR, which is a little thought experiment about how a journalist from Mars (which is what journalists who work with a critical edge are often treated like), who is highly trained at the best journalism schools in the U.S., would cover the "war on terrorism." It is interesting to read the current essay in light of the essay on the Iraq conflict ten years past. (and the new cover and print is much more attractive than the 1st edition).

One of the most to-the-point books I've read in ages. This book can be read within 45 minutes and not only gives real-life examples of modern propaganda uses and successes, but also gives a brief history of its use in the United States. The details of Gulf War propaganda use reads prophetically... the same exact tactics used in the '91 Gulf War are being used today (2003). It's as if Chomsky sees the news reports before they're produced. The pattern of media control is made starkingly clear to the reader and is sure to upset you. Few books have generated such emotion in me, and for a book this short to have such an effect speaks volumes. Highly recommended!

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