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POLS329: Propaganda, Media, and American Politics

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Conditioning in “Brave New World” and Donald Trump’s Style of Rhetoric

“Everyone belongs to everyone else”. This motto not only guides society in Aldous Huxley’s “Brave New World”, but is also iterated in the works of contemporary political theorists such as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes and can be applicable to the current American political environment by looking at the rhetoric used by President Donald Trump and his administration. In Huxley’s novel, the theme of social and mental conditioning is showcased, demonstrating the ways in which citizens are discouraged, and even punished, for thinking freely and critically. In our current social and political landscape, we can draw similarities between the society that Huxley has created and how the elite and powerful are using their respective platforms to create a similar condition, one of uniformity and agreeance. The elites in “Brave New World” practice the same use of propagandistic language and self-gratification to suppress the masses into a state of blind support as the Trump administration, appealing to the desires of the masses rather than their rational needs. By comparing Huxley’s portrayal of a post-liberal, dystopian society to the rhetoric of Donald Trump, we can see how similarly the two utilize propaganda to demonstrate the relationship between those who have leverage in society and those they aim to control.

Society is a fragile thing, or at least that is what is told to members of the World State to keep them in constant fear of destroying it. Published in 1932 relishing in the effects of The Great War and its subsequent economic disparities, Huxley wrote “Brave New World” as commentary on mass consumerism and how our lack of individual integrity and identity can ultimately be used against us. The society is erected: 10 elites, the most prominent given the title ‘World Controller’, five castes confined to promoting and interacting with others in the same assignment, and unlimited pleasure for the price of a vacancy of other emotions. The World State was constructed to guard against any societal discrepancies, to ensure that the human condition is one of compliance and uniformity to prevent any catastrophes that would bring an end to the State. Beginning life assigned to one of the five castes, members of society are conditioned to think a certain way, to behave accordingly, and to only consume information and experiences that align with the purpose of their caste. This conditioning does not start and end in infancy, however. Throughout the entirety of their lives, the members of each caste are encouraged to take pride in their positioning and have no problem doing so because of the information being distributed to them which not only affirms their positioning but also their faith in the World State as the only sustainable way of governance.

Huxley demonstrates the dominant role of propaganda in sustaining the World State, even going so far as creating an entire government department dedicated to the cause. In this society, propaganda does not carry the same negative connotation as it does today. Rather, the widespread distribution of propaganda is applauded as the citizens see any government endorsement as right and just. The entire structure of life in “Brave New World” under the World State is formed around a sense of obligation and worship of the State, for they are told

that without it they would enter a state of savagery and destruction. While the World State distributes mass amounts of nationalistic propaganda, targeted messages are provided to each individual caste. Huxley writes that they are, “the three great London newspapers: The Hourly Radio, an upper-caste sheet, the pale green Gamma Gazette, and, on khaki paper and in words exclusively of one syllable, the Delta Mirror” (136). The upper-caste receives the best, most whole news (which is still heavily monitored and mostly unsubstantive) while those underneath it are presented with news which is inherently viewed as lesser because it is not the same information that the upper-caste is given. Even the different presentations of media for the castes are indicative of the subservient role of reporting and place the Alpha caste farther above the rest; a well-organized, comprehensive piece of media is better received than one that is not, regardless if the information it provides is substantive.

The World State’s motto reads, “Community. Identity. Stability”, three seemingly enjoyable nouns that when combined with the propaganda showcased in “Brave New World” become a vehicle for forcing subordination. As Huxley illustrates, the survival of the World State is dependant on an entirely complacent society. Its founders came to the conclusion that both an emotionally and physically sedated group of people was necessary to ensure the system’s success. To accomplish this, the employed propaganda took on three roles: the repetition of phrases and catchwords until they become accepted as the status-quo and social truth, the suppression of facts by the directors, and the arousal and rationalization of passions to keep the masses pleased and avoid clashing. Community, identity, and stability are advertised as the successes of society, carrying enlightened connotations and a promise for an illuminated future. However, as the dictatorial set up of the state can attest, these three guiding principles are rather

arbitrary considering that the division of castes and lack of individual identity are ever present.

This constantly showcased and repeated motto is not consonant with anyone's enlightened self-interest but it is dictated by, and appeals to, passion and a desire for instant-gratification.

Looking at the role of propaganda in upholding the World State, similarities can be drawn from the execution in "Brave New World" and our modern American political atmosphere. Since 2016, "Make America Great Again" has swept not only the nation, but the world and is connected to a single individual— Donald Trump. The impact of this controversial slogan mimics what we have seen in "Brave New World", a never-ending circulation of this phrase. It has become mass-marketed, it has been plastered on billboards, it has been tattooed on thousands of bodies across the country. A campaign slogan has rapidly transformed into a business model with a seemingly endless stream of consumers; slap the slogan on a shirt and up the price, people will still buy it. Watching a Trump campaign rally, it is clear that the audience has bought into this motto by their star-struck like response when he utters those four words. In Huxley's dystopian civilization we know that their motto, community, integrity, and stability, are falsifiable claims. Their 'community' is artificially constructed, their 'integrity' comes from following the structure that has been assigned to them from birth to death without straying, and their 'stability' can also be called a society of drug addicts. So, then, what is the reality of "Make America Great Again"? What is it that will make America great and when was it previously outstanding? These are all questions that have been asked of Donald Trump and have gone unanswered or have been answered in the shape of xenophobic legislation. Like the World State, the repetitive nature of "Make America Great Again" has turned the phrase into a powerful tool of propaganda that distracts the masses from critically thinking. In a later publication of

“Brave New World”, Huxley writes, “[...] Increasing complexity of technology and global problems led to a concentration of power both in business and government. This not only made people more willing to be subjugated but easier for the dictatorship to enact”. The commodification and frequency of Trump’s motto has demonstrated the grasp of politicians over their supporters and the continued appeasement of them.

Unaware that less than a century later business tycoon (using that term with extreme lightness) Donald Trump would be elected as the President of the United States, Aldous Huxley warned against the continuation of a hypercapitalist state and the election of officials who continue this narrative. Proudly making it his brand, Trump has not shied away from talking about his relationship with the media and goes to extensive lengths to ensure the most amount of people possible know of his disdain for any story that he does not support, most of which are criticisms of himself. Utilizing one of the complex technologies Huxley warns against, Twitter has also become a brand of Trump. With the ability to instantly share anything with millions of people, social media has become the most dangerous tool in the dissemination of nationalistic propaganda. One of the main points of contention out of more than 41,000 tweets has been his fascination with “fake news” and his degrading nature against left-wing media. Donald Trump has 350 tweets that explicitly say “fake news” with hundreds more alluding to alleged misinformation from left wing news sources. This has in-turn caused an uproar of support amongst his supporters, rejecting viable news from prominent left-wing news sources and diverting attention away from political and economic goals and transforming the political arena into a game of ‘he said, she said’, a narrative similar to that in “Brave New World”.

The use of propaganda in Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" and the rhetoric used by Donald Trump to gain and maintain support share more similarities than differences. While "Brave New World" serves as both a social commentary and a source of entertainment, the demonstration of propaganda through social conditioning and continuous nationalistic attitudes mimic the ways in which Donald Trump pins the democratic party and their news sources as other and has marketed himself as a figurehead other than President.

Works Cited

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