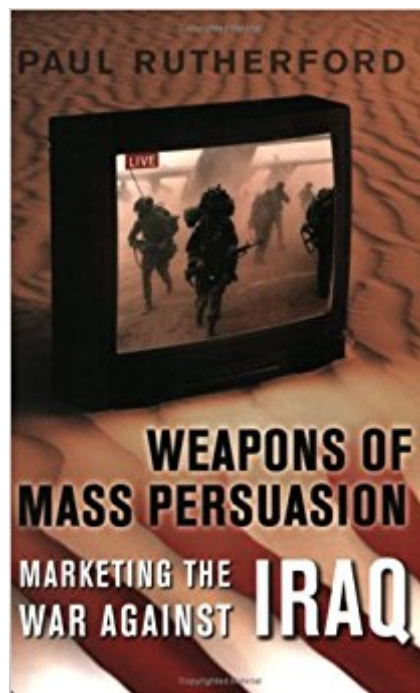




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Weapons Of Mass Persuasion: Marketing The War Against Iraq (Heritage)



Synopsis

With nearly sixty percent of Americans initially against a pre-emptive war without sanction from the United Nations, and even higher anti-war numbers in most other nations of the world, the 2003 war against Iraq quickly became an enormous public relations challenge for the George W. Bush administration. The subject of *Weapons of Mass Persuasion* is a war in which American patriotism became so mired in commercial jingoism that the demarcations between entertainment and political conduct disappeared completely. In this engaging and disturbing book, Paul Rutherford shows how the marketing campaign for the war against Iraq was constructed and carried out. He argues that not only was the campaign a new chapter in the presentation of real-time war as pop culture, but that its deeper implications have now come to constitute part of the history of modern democracy. Situating the war against Iraq within an existing tradition of war as narrative, spectacle, and, more broadly, commodity, Rutherford offers a brief overview of the history of civic advertising and propaganda, then examines in detail the different dimensions of three weeks of war presented to North Americans as it became a branded conflict, processed and cleansed to appeal to the well-established tastes of veteran consumers of popular culture. Including incisive analyses of visual material - speeches, editorial cartoons, and media political commentary, but particularly news reports of such sound bite events as the bombing of Baghdad, the toppling of the Hussein statue, and the rescue of captured soldier Private Jessica Lynch - as well as extensive polling data from around the world and interviews with the actual consumers of war, *Weapons of Mass Persuasion* chronicles the making of a Hollywood war: fast-paced and heroic, pitting the forces of good against the forces of evil to achieve a triumphant, sanitized, and commodified outcome. Not since Naomi Klein's *No Logo* have the gods of marketing and the art of commercialism been so thoroughly disrobed.

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Customer Reviews

“ | this book is crucial reading for anyone interested in the way the Iraq war was presented to the public. Lies, half-truths, infotainment, and marketing will surely come our way the next time war drums starting pounding again.” (Greg Kelly Globe and Mail)

Paul Rutherford is a professor emeritus in the Department of History at the University of Toronto.

In an interview cited by Antonia Zerbisias in the Toronto Star just before the book's release, Paul Rutherford seemed to lay out his own point of view clearly: "For a brief time the United States ceased to be a democracy and became a propaganda state." "For a short time? It was profoundly depressing to witness the United States plunge into "one of its periods of historical madness," as novelist John Le Carré wrote. And I have been hungry for analysis that would help me to understand this madness, and to move towards a long-term cure. In his book Rutherford rather pulls his punches. Not many scholars aspire to the cult status of a Noam Chomsky, both marginalized in mainstream media and idolized by those who live on the margins. As a history professor with an interest in the mass media and popular culture, Rutherford doesn't do prophetic outrage. Late in the book, Rutherford does state his perspective more directly: "The propaganda state came to America in the guise of popular culture." (191) But for the most part he focuses on describing what "information warfare" actually looks like, rather than engaging in critique. Rutherford is interested in the qualities of the Iraq war as a branded war, a commodity for mass consumption-"war as narrative and spectacle, as a form of 'infotainment'." (4) And on this score Rutherford's study succeeds. One of the best chapters is "Consuming War," in which he lists the elements of eight different genres that were woven into the "Operation Iraqi Freedom" infotainment narrative: 1) Tragedy; 2) Adventure; 3) Science Fiction (with Saddam Hussein as the "requisite monster"; 4) Action; 5) Human interest (the unending quest by reporters to find "signs that, yes, the Iraqis were eagerly awaiting liberation") (138); 6) Mystery; 7) Comedy (such as the pronouncement of "Comical Ali," Mohammed Saeed

al-Sahaf, which prefigured the increasing disconnect from reality of U.S. spokesmen); 8)

Farce. Weapons of Mass Persuasion makes good use of editorial cartoons, which often registered the cognitive dissonance that was being squelched in "serious" news outlets. One theme is the mutually exclusive, diametrically opposed worldviews on display on Fox News vs. Jazeera. Such visuals distill the critiques of writers like Nicholas Von Hoffman, who in his book *Hoax: How We Were Taken In* compares Americans to a shark in an aquarium. They "don't see the people outside the glass. It is as though America is in a 3,000 mile wide terrarium, an immense biosphere which has cut it off from the rest of the world and left it to pick its own way down the path of history." For those well aware of how cut off most people in the U.S. are from the sources of information that shape global opinion, we may wish more prescription, and less description. That is not the task Rutherford sets himself. But the interviews he includes are sometimes illuminating. One penetrating chapter concerns "The Phallic Dimension" of this war. Judy Rebick, a chair of social justice and democracy at Toronto's Ryerson's University, found the "almost sexual excitement" that reporters and viewers expressed over America's own weapons of long-distance mass destruction to be "really morally repugnant." The relatively balanced tone of this book makes it a good candidate to be used as a class text, for Communication, Sociology, Cultural Studies, Popular Culture, and others. Perhaps Rutherford should have added religious epics to his list of genres: from The Ten Commandments to The Passion. America is a religion of sorts now, but also like an overzealous corporation. It brooks no competitors, accepts no substitutes, and treats its propaganda as scripture. Propaganda "attempts to pre-empt debate" (13). American leaders are mastering new forms of propaganda as a means to discipline backsliders, or reign in wayward consumers. For most of the 20th century, Rutherford notes, American propaganda followed a "style much more akin to the sermon than the story." Propagandists in the late 20th and early 21st century have discovered that they can pre-empt debate much more successfully when people are absorbed in a story. But for the cheerleaders in the bunker, the sermon remains the same. The Propaganda State, "in the guise of popular culture," claims a God-given right to rid the world of evil. In the process, it becomes like what it fears or hates. And that is still morally repugnant.(...)

It is amazing how cleverly the war on Iraq was packaged, branded and sold to the American public (and the world's public, for that matter). Rutherford explains exactly how it was done in his book *Weapons of Mass Persuasion: Marketing the War Against Iraq*. "Shock and Awe" (my nomination for the most over-used political catch phrase of 2003) was an attempt by the Bush administration to sell a "new" type of war to the public; one in which there would be low amounts of casualties and a

quick resolution. The war in Iraq has proven to be neither. Rutherford, an academic in Toronto, used a small focus group of Canadians to ascertain the range of opinions about both the lead-up campaign to the war and the ensuing media coverage. The diversity of opinion was amazing. Some supported the war, others opposed it. But one thing that seemed to cross this political divide was a general dissatisfaction with the media coverage of the war. Rutherford calls it "Real-Time War". The media coverage of the war was incessant. There seemed to be nothing else on television at that time. The media coverage was also cleverly branded, usually with a flashy intro and some patriotic music. It made me sick. It was the worst type of propaganda, subtle. Rutherford also explores the history of propaganda in the United States. Rutherford cites 1968 as the introduction of political advertising as the dominant force in electoral discourse (Rutherford, 14). It was pretty much downhill from there. Something new to this war was the "weaponization" of the media by the Pentagon. The embedding of reporters led to a formation of a bond between the reporters and the soldiers. It is very difficult not to side with someone who you live with under fire. Most "embeds", as they have come to be called, failed miserably at being objective. This "weaponization" was a shift in policy for the Pentagon. Reporters were now a part of the war. Several Middle Eastern journalists were killed by American forces. The documentary Control Room discusses the death of an Al-Jazeera cameraman in Baghdad who was killed by American bombs. The American military had been alerted to the presence of the reporters and still a bomb was dropped on them. Other reporters were also killed making many wonder if this was simply an error or if they were being purposely targeted to stifle dissent. The media coverage of the war amounted to what some call "war porn". The coverage was shoved down our throats every day to the point of near-obscenity. Violence was celebrated and embraced as being manly. This is exactly what should NOT happen in war. It should be neither celebrated nor embraced. War is always a crime. Overall this book is an interesting and very readable account of the lead-up to war and the continuing media coverage. It is a real shame that our mainstream media has failed us so horribly.

This book looks at all of the ways the American government used propaganda to sell its war against Iraq. Though many of the concepts used are well known, some most people probably would never have thought of. For all non-Americans (like myself) it offers a view of what the American people saw (on networks such as Fox News), and it shows just how effective these strategies were by reviewing just what the American public thought (through polls which were conducted). It is an amazing book. Easy to read, very interesting, and sometime, almost unbelievable (to realize just how gullible the American population is). For any Americans, read this book. To put it plainly: It will

make you smarter. It will help you to identify the means that the government uses to persuade the public, and hopefully, teach you how to make up your own opinion, instead of just believing what you hear. And HOPEFULLY it may keep you from making the same mistake that you made this november.

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