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PROPOSED COURSE: EN 103: “Extreme Rhetoric: Pitches, Pop-Ups, PR, and Propaganda”

BLURB: Rhetoricians of the world, unite! This class will investigate argumentative rhetoric in relation to propaganda, advertising, public relations, & the manifesto.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This section of EN 103 will focus on the rhetorical strategies of propaganda, public relations, advertising, and manifestos—the texts that overtly sell us products and ideas; that shape our visions of self and other, of good and evil; that prey upon our dreams and nightmares; that inspire individuals to the heights of justice and compassion or the depths of bigotry and fear. By examining the argumentative strategies of a wide array of propaganda, we will interrogate what distinguishes overtly propagandistic texts from more traditional forms of argument. For instance, how does a manifesto differ from an essay? How do advertisements differ from documentaries? What is the difference between a press release and journalistic reportage? Are there overlaps? What are the consequences of overt, heavy-handed argumentation? Is everything an argument or a sales pitch? Is there a difference between the two? If so, what are the implications? Examining a variety of texts, from Karl Marx to pop-up ads, we will explore the whole range of argumentative styles and methods, and will in turn create some propaganda of our own. By the end of this course students will be well versed in three major forms of argumentation (Toulmin, Rogerian, & Aristotelian), and will be able to employ each effectively in their own writing. Students will work collaboratively throughout the course, will train extensively in the process of generation, revision, drafting, and will focus their efforts toward clarity of expression and the employment of a variety of rhetorical tools which will equip them to better operate in an academic writing environment. By synthesizing and employing all of the above skills alongside the presented texts, students will come to a greater understanding of rhetoric and its uses (and misuses) in their everyday lives. Together we will throw off the shackles of so-so rhetoric and stamp our (rhetorical) marks on the world!

PROPOSED TEXTS:

Stephen Wilhoit, *A Brief Guide to Writing Academic Arguments*
Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*
Selections from:
Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*
Daniel J Boorstin: *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*
Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*; and *Crystallizing Public Opinion*
Walter Lippmann: *Public Opinion*
Adam Curtis: *The Century of the Self*
Jacques Ellul: *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*
Course packet, with various essays & manifestos

UNITS OF STUDY:

VISUAL INFLUENCE

In this first unit we will analyze visual methods of argumentation and coercion—from Soviet propaganda posters to PETA ads. We'll discuss the techniques and effects of communicating visually, and how visual communication differs from textual. In the course of exploring the benefits and drawbacks of communicating via images, students will write an **analytical essay**, which examines a particular example of

visual propaganda. Texts for this unit will include selections from Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, and Daniel Boorstin's *The Image: A guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, among others.

MANIFESTOS & THE RHETORIC OF TEXTUAL PROPAGANDA

In this unit, students will examine a variety of manifestos in relation to the Aristotelian, Toulmin, and Rogerian argumentative styles, with the goal of producing a **textual analysis essay** that rebuffs or redoubts the claims made by one of the selected authors. Texts for this unit will include selections from Bernays' *Propaganda*, and Adam Curtis's documentary *The Century of the Self*.

KNOW THY DEMOGRAPHIC

In this unit, students will choose one organization—political, commercial or otherwise—and research the development of that organization's main symbols, arguments, and tropes. Who are they selling to? Why? Have their techniques changed over time? The answers to these questions will culminate in an **argumentative research essay** (either Toulmin, Rogerian, or Aristotelian). Texts for this unit will include selections from Bernays' *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, and Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion*, in addition to researched materials.

PITCH ME, SELL ME, MAKE ME BELIEVE!

In this unit, students will demonstrate the culmination of their understanding of propaganda and argumentation by producing some propaganda of their own. After selecting one cause, belief, or campaign for which the student feels dedicated, each student will write an **argumentative essay** (either Toulmin or Aristotelian) that argues HEAVILY in favor of the selected cause. Texts for this unit will include selections from Jacques Ellul's *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*.

MIDTERM & FINAL

Students will be expected to write a **midterm essay** exam that tracks their own experience with the various modes of propaganda and advertising present in their lives, in addition to a **final essay**.

WEEKLY JOURNAL ENTRIES

Students will be required to write weekly journal entries that they will submit at the beginning of each week. Journals entries will prompt students to critically engage and evaluate the texts under discussion, in addition to texts, advertisements, and arguments from the wider world.

PAPER OVERVIEW:

- Visual Analysis
- Textual analysis
- Reflective midterm
- Toulmin, Rogerian, or Aristotelian argumentative research paper
- Toulmin, Rogerian, or Aristotelian argumentative paper
- Final
- Weekly Journal entries