

Truth, Deception & Systems of Power

How narratives are engineered — and how to evaluate evidence

A critical-literacy track on propaganda, narrative control, and institutional power. It teaches concrete methods for source criticism and evidence evaluation, using historical case studies — without collapsing into cynicism or unfounded conspiracy.

Focus areas: Propaganda and narrative control; Institutional power and incentive analysis; Ideology, coercion, and moral framing; Historical case studies of systemic deception; Methods for evidence evaluation and source criticism

The Anatomy of Propaganda

How consent is engineered — and how to see the machinery (Foundational · 40 min)

Using Bernays as a primary source, we dissect the repeatable techniques of narrative control and practice spotting them — while avoiding the trap of seeing conspiracies everywhere.

Framing and Salience [scholarly]

What gets emphasized determines what feels true. We examine how selection and emphasis shape perception before any lie is told.

Repetition and Authority [scholarly]

The illusory-truth effect: repeated claims feel truer. Attach an authority and emotion, and a frame becomes 'common sense.'

Incentives Without Conspiracy [historical]

Coordinated framing often emerges from shared incentives, not secret meetings. This is a crucial, non-paranoid correction to conspiracy thinking.

Evaluating Evidence Like a Detective

A repeatable method for grading any claim (Foundational · 35 min)

A hands-on method for source criticism: claim typing, primary-source tracing, incentive analysis, corroboration, and confidence calibration.

Type the Claim [scholarly]

Is it a fact, an interpretation, or a value judgment? Misfiled claims cause most arguments. Naming the type is half the work.

Trace and Corroborate [scholarly]

Follow claims to primary sources and seek independent — ideally hostile — corroboration. A hostile witness who concedes a point is gold.

Calibrate and State Confidence [scholarly]

Match your certainty to the evidence and say it out loud. 'Probably,' 'contested,' and 'unknown' are honest words.

Cognitive Self-Defense

The biases manipulators rent — and how to install friction (Foundational · 45 min)

A practical tour of the predictable thinking errors that propaganda, advertising, and feeds exploit — with concrete countermeasures drawn from Kahneman and Cialdini.

Fast and Slow [scholarly]

Most errors come from the fast, automatic system mistaking fluency for truth. The slow system can override it but is lazy — so we build procedures, not just willpower.

The High-Leverage Biases [scholarly]

Confirmation, availability, anchoring, tribe-framing, and the illusory-truth effect do most of the damage. Naming them is the first defense.

Installing Friction [scholarly]

Seek disconfirming evidence on purpose, check base rates, separate claim from claimant, and slow down on anything pre-loaded with outrage.

Reading the News Like an Analyst

Five filters, primary sources, and calibrated confidence (Intermediate · 40 min)

Uses the Herman–Chomsky propaganda model and Lippmann's insight about perception to build a repeatable routine for extracting signal from incentive-shaped coverage.

Why Framing Precedes Facts [scholarly]

Lippmann showed we're told about the world before we see it. Separating the event from the framing is step one.

The Five Filters [scholarly]

Ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideology shape news structurally — no conspiracy required. Ask whose interests a framing serves.

A Routine That Works [scholarly]

Find the primary source, read across the aisle, watch for engineered emotion, note omissions, and hold confidence proportional to evidence.

The Declassified Record

When 'conspiracy theory' is just history with the files released (Advanced · 55 min)

Walks the documented programs — MKUltra, COINTELPRO, Mockingbird, Northwoods, Gulf of Tonkin — strictly separating what the released files prove from what remains speculation, and drawing the civic lesson.

The Church Committee [historical]

A 1976 Senate investigation put it on the record: intelligence agencies experimented on citizens (MKUltra), disrupted domestic groups (COINTELPRO), and cultivated the press. Primary-source fact.

Provocation on Paper [historical]

Operation Northwoods (declassified 1997) proposed staged provocations and was rejected; the Gulf of Tonkin escalation rested on an attack the NSA's own later analysis doubts. Documents, not rumor.

Documented vs. Speculative [scholarly]

The discipline: take the verified record seriously AND demand the same evidence standard for new claims. Calibrated skepticism is civic duty, not paranoia.

Key Topics

How Manufactured Consent Works [scholarly]

The repeatable mechanics of narrative control: framing, repetition, source selection, and the engineering of consent.

A Method for Evaluating Evidence [scholarly]

A practical checklist for grading claims by source quality, corroboration, incentive, and falsifiability.

Why Repetition Feels Like Truth [scholarly]

The illusory-truth effect: familiar claims feel truer, regardless of accuracy — and how to defend against it.

A Field Guide to the Biases That Fool You [scholarly]

The handful of predictable thinking errors that propaganda and feeds exploit most.

The Six Levers of Persuasion [scholarly]

Cialdini's reciprocity, consistency, social proof, liking, authority, and scarcity — used to influence and to manipulate.

The Propaganda Model: Five Filters of the News [scholarly]

Herman and Chomsky's structural account of how news gets shaped without a central conspiracy.

How to Read the News Without Being Played [scholarly]

A concrete routine for extracting signal from coverage designed to provoke.

Controlling Reality by Controlling Language [scholarly]

How euphemism, redefinition, and Newspeak shrink the range of thinkable thoughts.

The Connection: How All Four Tracks Are One Fight [theological]

Theology, power, wellness, and AI are not four hobbies — they are four fronts in a single question: what is true, and who gets to decide?

MKUltra, COINTELPRO & Mockingbird: The Declassified Record [historical]

Three real, government-confirmed programs of mind-control research, dissident disruption, and media influence — what the documents actually show.

False Flags: Documented Cases vs. Speculation [historical]

What a 'false flag' actually is, the cases that are genuinely on the record, and how to avoid the trap of seeing them everywhere.

Intelligence and the Press: The Mockingbird Question [historical]

What is established about intelligence-media relationships — and where the popular 'Mockingbird' narrative outruns the evidence.

The Seven Devices of Propaganda [scholarly]

A 1930s taxonomy that still nails how persuasion is weaponized — name-calling, glittering generalities, and five more.

The Overton Window: How the 'Thinkable' Shifts [scholarly]

The range of acceptable opinion isn't fixed — it's moved, deliberately and accidentally. Here's the mechanism.

Dialectic & 'Problem–Reaction–Solution' [speculative]

A genuinely useful analytic frame that is also frequently overextended into unfalsifiable conspiracy — held at arm's length.

Asch, Milgram & the Pull of the Crowd [scholarly]

The classic experiments on conformity and obedience — what they really showed, and the replication caveats.

Brandolini's Law & Gell-Mann Amnesia [scholarly]

Two sharp observations about why falsehoods spread and why we keep trusting sources we've already caught being wrong.

Controlled Opposition: A Concept Held Carefully [speculative]

A real historical tactic that is also the hardest kind of claim to prove — so we treat it with disciplined skepticism.

Sources & Citations (Chicago)

Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1928).

Cornelius Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44, trans. A.J. Church and W.J. Brodribb.

Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

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Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922).

U.S. Senate, Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (Church Committee), 1976.

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 'Justification for U.S. Military Intervention in Cuba,' 1962; declassified via the National Security Archive, 1997.

Institute for Propaganda Analysis, 'How to Detect Propaganda,' Propaganda Analysis 1, no. 2 (1937).

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