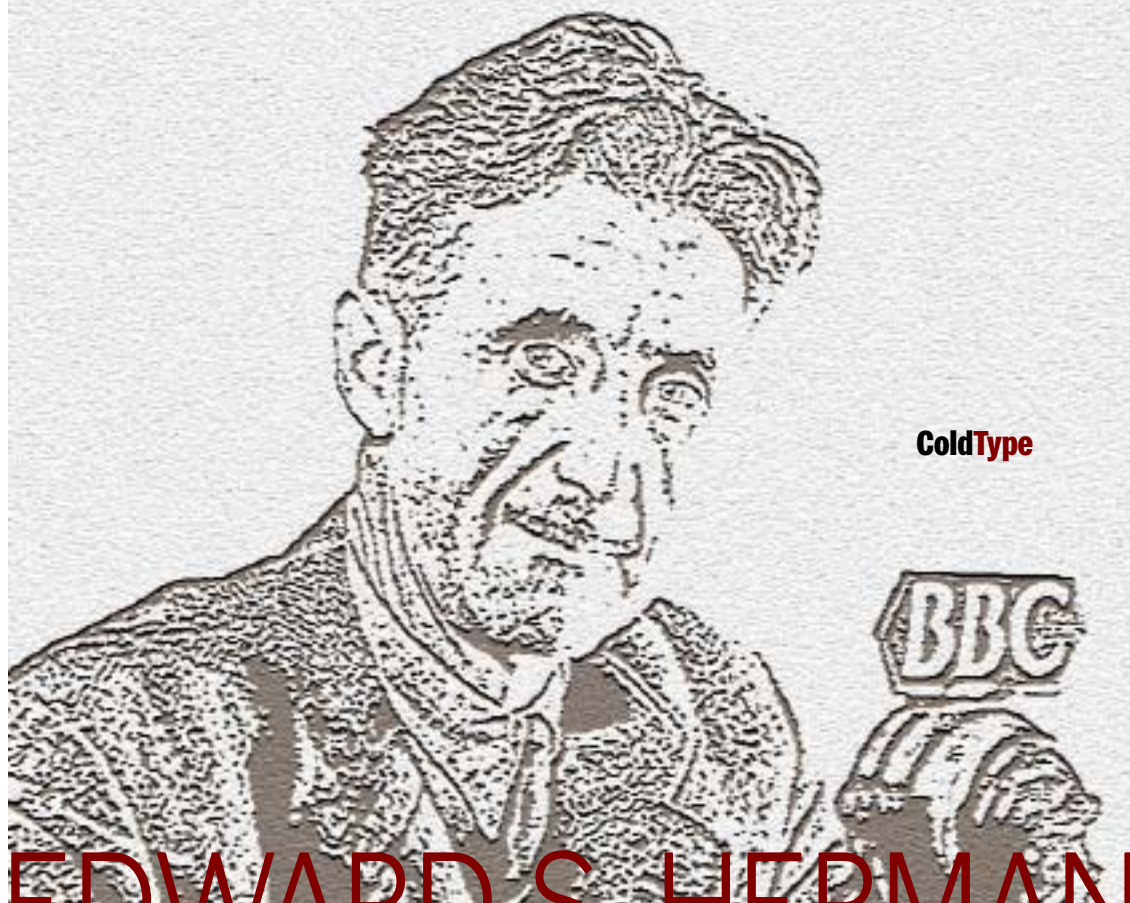


Orwell's Beautiful Fit to America

From **INGSCOC**
and **NEWSPEAK**
to **AMCAP, AMERIGOOD**
and **MARKETSPEAK**



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EDWARD S. HERMAN

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ALTHOUGH 1984 was a Cold War document that dramatized the threat of the Soviet enemy, and has always been used mainly to serve Cold War political ends, it also contained the germs of a powerful critique of U.S. and Western practice. Orwell himself suggested such applications in his essay on “Politics and the English Language” and even more explicitly in a neglected Preface to *Animal Farm*. [1] But doublespeak and thought control are far more important in the West than Orwell indicated, often in subtle forms but sometimes as crudely as in 1984, and virtually every 1984 illustration of Ingsoc, Newspeak and Doublethink have numerous counterparts in what we may call Amcap, Amerigood, and Marketspeak.

The Doublethink formulas “War Is Peace” and a “Ministry of Peace” were highlights of Newspeak. But even before Orwell published 1984, the U.S. “Department of War” had been renamed the “Department of Defense,” reflecting the Amcap-Amerigood view that our military actions and war preparations are always defensive, reasonable responses to somebody else’s provocations, and ultimately in the interest of peace.

Furthermore, Americans have been much more effective dispensers of propaganda, doublespeak, and disinformation than the managers of Ingsoc, in either 1984 or in the real world Soviet Union. The power of

information control in this country was displayed during World War I in the work of the Creel commission, and in its aftermath the United States pioneered in the development of public relations and advertising. Both of these industries have long been mobilized in the service of politics. During the 1994 election campaign in the United States, the Republican "Contract With America" was formed with the aid of a consultant who first polled the public to find out which words resonated with them, and then incorporated those words into the Contract without regard to the Contract's substance. This yielded, for example, a "Job Creation and Wage Enhancement" title for proposed actions that would reduce the capital gains tax.

Consider also the fact that in this country, as the element of rehabilitation of imprisoned criminals has diminished, the name of their places of incarceration has been changed from "jails" and "prisons" to "corrections facilities." Or that civilians killed by U.S. missiles or bombs in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, or earlier in Indochina, are always unintended "collateral damage," and are therefore morally acceptable, although there is always an official disinterest in such numbers, and sometimes even an effort made to keep this toll under wraps. Or that the 2002 war in Afghanistan was briefly called "Infinite Justice," altered to "Enduring Freedom" after complaints that only God offers infinite justice. Amcap represents a significant advance over Ingsoc.

The Role and Mechanisms of Thought Control

In fact, a good case can be made that propaganda is a more important means of social control in open societies like the United States than in closed societies like the late Soviet Union. In the former, the protection of inequalities of wealth and power, which frequently exceed those in totalitarian societies, cannot rest on the use of force, and as political scientist Harold Lasswell explained back in 1933, this compels the dominant elite to manage the ignorant multitude "largely through propaganda." [2] Similarly, in his 1922 classic, *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippmann argued that "the common interests [sometimes called the "national interest"] very largely elude public opinion entirely, and can be managed only by a specialized class whose per-

sonal interests reach beyond the locality,” “responsible” men who must “manufacture consent” among the thoughtless masses. [3]

The claim that such collective action is impossible in a free society, and that it implies some form of conspiracy, is mistaken. This claim is refuted both by the record of collective action, discussed and illustrated briefly below, as well as by an examination of how Amcap is implemented. Amcap works in part because it is the responsible men (and women) who own and run newspapers, TV stations and networks, and the other power centers in society. They manage national affairs, and “crises in democracy” are identified by the fact that, as in the infamous 1960s, important sectors of the usually apathetic general population organize and press hard for recognition of their needs. The power of this responsible elite is also reflected in society’s ideological assumptions and ways of thinking about issues, as this elite manages the flow of advertising and the work of public relations firms and thinktanks, as well as controlling access to the mass media. It takes only a small extension of Beckerian analysis – which insists on economic motives explaining virtually anything – to understand how a powerful demand for particular lines of economic and political thought might well elicit an appropriate supply response, which will be a “responsible” economics and politics that serves the “national interest.”

This system of thought control is not centrally managed, although sometimes the government orchestrates a particular propaganda campaign. It operates mainly by individual and market choices, with the frequent collective service to the national interest arising from common interests and internalized beliefs. The responsible men (and women) often disagree on tactics, but not on premises, ends, and the core ideology of a free market system. What gives this system of thought control its power and advantage over Ingsoc is that its members truly believe in Amcap, and their passion in its exposition and defense is sincere. In their patriotic ardor they put forth, accept, and internalize untruths and doublethink as impressive as anything portrayed in 1984. But at the same time they allow controversy to rage freely, although within bounds, so that there is the appearance of fully open debate when it is in fact sharply constrained. And if the responsibles agree that the “national interest” calls for a military budget of \$400 billion, this is

not even subject to any debate whatever, even though studies of public opinion have regularly shown that the “Proles” would like that budget sharply cut. [4]

Occasionally the powerful do use the police and armed forces, and sometimes covert programs of disinformation and disruption – as in the CIA’s Operation Chaos and the FBI’s Cointelpro programs – to keep oppositional movements under control. [5] More often still are propaganda campaigns to sell policy to the general population. In 1983 – only one year before 1984 – the Reagan administration organized a so-called Office of Public Diplomacy to sell its war against Nicaragua to the media and general public. Run by a CIA specialist in psychological warfare, it was explicitly designed to demonize the leftwing Sandinista government of Nicaragua by tactics that included the spread of disinformation. An office to engage in covert “public diplomacy” with the American people, its specific program titled “Operation Truth,” sounds like something straight out of 1984. But it was successful, as the media rarely if ever mentioned or criticized the OPD or Operation Truth, and they accommodated to its program. [6]

One manifestation of this accommodation provides us with an almost perfect illustration of doublethink in action. The Reagan administration wanted to build public support for the government of El Salvador, so it sponsored elections there in 1982 and 1984, in which it featured the high voter turnout and long lines of smiling voters, and played down the legal requirement to vote, the destruction of the two independent newspapers, the ongoing state terror, and the inability of the left to enter candidates. In the very same time frame, the Sandinista government of Nicaragua held an election, but here the Reagan administration wished to deny that government legitimacy, so it used a different set of criteria to judge that election. Here it ignored the high turnout and smiling voters (and the absence of a legal requirement to vote) and focused on the harassment of *La Prensa* and the voluntary refusal to participate by one oppositional candidate (who was on the CIA payroll). In a miracle of doublethink, forgetting a set of electoral criteria “and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion” (1984, 163), [7] the *New York Times* and its confreres followed the Reagan agenda and called the Nicaraguan election a “sham” on

the basis of criteria they had completely ignored in finding the Salvadoran elections heart-warming moves toward democracy. [8]

Amcap and Amerigood and Their Challenges

There are two dominant strands of thought in Amcap. One is that America is a global paterfamilias that does good and pursues benevolent and democratic ends. This has a Newspeak corollary that we may call Amerigood.

The second strand of Amcap thought and ideology is the belief in the “miracle of the market” and the view that the market can do it all. In this system of thought, and in its Newspeak counterpart, Marketspeak, the market is virtually a sacred totem, “reform” means a move toward a freer market irrespective of conditions or effects, and accolades to and proofs of the market’s efficiency crowd the intellectual marketplace. This system corresponds closely to Orwell’s “goodthink,” a body of orthodox thought immune to evidence, and it approximates Orwell’s view of the outlook of “the ancient Hebrew who knew, without knowing much else, that all nations other than his worshipped ‘false gods’” (232).

There has been a major conflict between Amerigood and Marketspeak, however, in that market openings and a prized “favorable climate of investment” have often been expedited by military leaders willing to destroy trade unions, kill social democrats and radicals, and ruthlessly terminate democracy itself. The United States has very frequently supported those serving the market at the expense of human rights and democracy. [9] But Amerigood and Marketspeak have met this challenge brilliantly, with much greater efficiency than Ingsoc and Newspeak ever met the needs of the Soviet Union.

Resolution by definition. One mode of handling the problem in Amerigood is by an internalized belief system in which words with negative connotations simply cannot be applied to us. Thus this country is never an aggressor, terrorist, or sponsor of terrorism, by definition, whatever the correspondence of facts to standard definitions. Back in May 1983, for five successive days the Soviet radio broadcaster Vladimir Danchev castigated the Soviet assault on Afghanistan, calling it an “invasion” and urging the

Afghans to resist. He was lauded as a hero in the U.S. media, and his temporary removal from the air was bitterly criticized. But in many years of study of the U.S. media performance during the Vietnam War I have never found a single mainstream journalistic reference to a U.S. "invasion" of Vietnam or U.S. "aggression" there, although the United States was invited in, like the Soviets in Afghanistan, by its own puppet government lacking minimal legitimacy. There was no Danchev in the U.S. media. Here, as in *Ingsoc*, where "Big Brother is ungood" was "a self-evident absurdity" (235), the notion of the United States committing "aggression" was outside the pale of comprehensible thought.

Resolution by forgetting and remembering according to need. The intellectual mechanism of forgetting and remembering according to momentary need is also urgently important, because in *Amerigood* this country favors and actively promotes democracy abroad, whereas in real world practice it supports democracy only very selectively. The pro-democracy stance can be emphasized when the United States attacks Cuba and passes a "Cuban Democracy Act," but the media do not discuss and reflect on the absence of a "Saudi Democracy Act" (and the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia to protect that authoritarian regime) in the same or nearby articles. In the case of the steadfast 32 year U.S. support of Suharto's military regime, or its support of Marcos's dictatorship in the Philippines, it was necessary to forget that the United States was devoted to democracy, as long as these tyrants delivered a "favorable climate of investment." But once they ceased to be viable rulers, suddenly the U.S. concern for democracy moved front and center, and this could be done without the mainstream media dwelling on the long positive support of autocracy, or looking closely at any compromising elements in the shift (such as continued support for the Indonesian army). In both cases, also, the media suddenly discovered that Suharto and Marcos had looted their countries (and U.S. aid) on a large scale, a point that had somehow escaped their attention while the looters were still serving the U.S. "national interest." This is a virtual media law, and displays their dependable service in forgetting and remembering.

Resolution by a resort to the "long run". Some "realists" and *Marketspeak*

philosophers who believe that “what’s good for America is good for the world” have a different way of reconciling U.S. support of dictators and state terrorists with the U.S. devotion to democracy. They argue that the support for a Castillo Branco in Brazil or Pinochet in Chile is pro-democracy because the freer markets they introduce will serve democracy in the long run. In *Marketspeak* there is in fact a strong tendency to make “freedom” synonymous with freedom of markets rather than political (or any other kind of) freedom. This tendency, plus the complaisance and even enthusiasm at the termination of democracy in the short run, suggests that elite interest in a “favorable climate of investment” may be stronger than any devotion to democracy. The realists’ case also suffers from its use of an argument long projected on to Big Brother: namely, that ugly means are justified by a supposedly benign end and do not themselves contaminate and even contradict that end.

Resolution by “disappearing” people. In the world of Ingsoc individuals become “unpeople” and simply disappear. In *Amcap* we have a comparable phenomenon whereby entire populations become expendable for political reasons, effectively “disappear” from the mainstream media, and can be massacred or starved without political cost. When the United States fights abroad, U.S. deaths are politically costly and must be avoided. From the Vietnam War era onward this has resulted in the increased use of capital intensive warfare, that reduces U.S. casualties but increases those of enemy soldiers and their civilian populations. But those casualties have no domestic political cost, and official and media reporting of such losses is exceedingly sparse if not absent altogether. This permits large scale killing of target forces and civilians who have been rendered “unpeople.”

It also permits entire populations to be held hostage and starved to achieve some political objective. When back in 1996 former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright replied to a question on the costs and benefits of the estimated death of half a million Iraqi children as a result of sanctions by saying that this “was worth it,” [10] her calculus rested in part on the fact that with the help of the mainstream media the Iraqi children were “unpeople” whose deaths involved no political costs to U.S. leaders.

This process of dehumanization is also evident in the treatment of client state terror and mass killings. When Pol Pot killed large numbers in Cambodia between 1975 and 1978, official and media attention and indignation were great. When in the same years Indonesia invaded East Timor, killing an even larger fraction of the population than did Pol Pot, media attention was minimal and fell to zero in the New York Times as Indonesian terror reached its peak in 1977 and 1978. Indonesia was a U.S. client state providing a favorable climate of investment, and the mainstream media treatment of the East Timorese as an unpeople was closely coordinated with U.S. policy. [11]

Even more dramatic, when the priest Jerzy Popieluszko was murdered by the police of Communist Poland in 1984, U.S. official and media attention and indignation were intense. In fact, media coverage of the Popieluszko murder was greater than its coverage of the murder of 100 religious victims in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s taken together, even though eight of these victims were U.S. citizens. [12] Popieluszko was a “worthy” victim, as he was killed by an enemy state and propaganda points could be scored against the enemy; the 100 religious in Latin America were killed in U.S. client states, and were therefore “unworthy” because attention to their victimization would have been inconvenient to U.S. policy ends. This channeling of benevolence toward Polish victims (and victims of Pol Pot) and away from victims in our own backyard (and in East Timor) made it possible for the leaders of the National Security States (and Indonesia) to kill large numbers with quiet support from the United States, and without disturbing the ideology of Amerigood.

No agreements with demons possible. As one other illustration of an Ingsoc analogue in Amcap, in Ingsoc, “any past or future agreement with him [the demonized enemy] was impossible....The Party said that Oceania had never been in alliance with Eurasia. He, Winston Smith, knew that Oceania had been in alliance with Eurasia so short a time as four years ago.” (29) In Amcap things are done more subtly. We simply pretend that our high moral stance in fighting the demon represents continuous policy, and the mainstream media cooperate by not discussing the subject.

After Pol Pot was overthrown by the Vietnamese in December 1978, the United States quietly supported him for more than a decade, giving him aid directly and indirectly, approving his retention of Cambodia's seat in the UN, and even bargaining to include him in the election process of the 1990s. The U.S. media kept this support for the demon under the rug. The U.S. invaded Panama and captured Noriega in 1989, allegedly because of his involvement in the drug trade, but actually because he failed to meet U.S. demands for support in the war against Nicaragua. Noriega had been involved in the drug trade for more than a decade previously without causing any withdrawal of U.S. support. The mainstream media did not discuss the earlier agreement with the demon.

Saddam Hussein became "another Hitler" on August 2, 1990, when he invaded Kuwait. All through the prior decade he had been given steady U.S. support in his war against Iran and after. He had received billions in loans, access to weapons, intelligence information on Iranian military deployments, and he was not ostracized because of his use of chemical weapons against Iran and his own Kurds. Following August 2, 1990, when he became an enemy, it would be difficult to find in the mainstream media any reference to the fact that this demon "had been in alliance with the U.S. as short a time ago as" August 1, 1990.

The Taliban government in Afghanistan moved beyond the pale in 1998, following the bombing of two U.S. embassies in Africa by cadres affiliated with Osama Bin Laden, who made his headquarters in Afghanistan. Then, following the deadly World Trade Center and Pentagon bombings on September 11, 2001, by terrorists allegedly linked to Bin Laden, the Bush administration issued an ultimatum to the Taliban to deliver Bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda cadres to this country or suffer the consequences. The Taliban not complying, U.S. forces attacked Afghanistan, deposed the Taliban, and installed a replacement government. Following 9/11, the Taliban government was declared to be monstrous and intolerable, even apart from its sheltering Bin Laden, and this was the general view in the mainstream media. But here again, it would be hard to find mainstream news reports or commentary recounting the fact that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda had been organ-

ized and supported by the United States and its allies Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in the 1980s to fight Soviet forces in Afghanistan, and that the United States had backed the Taliban's assumption of power in 1996 because it brought "stability" and might make possible the construction of an oil pipeline through Afghanistan. [13]

Marketspeak

As in the case of Ingsoc, Marketspeak serves to consolidate the power of the dominant elite. In Ingsoc, the claim that Big Brother could do it all served Party domination, Party economic advantage, and helped contain the incomes of the Proles. Marketspeak does the same for the dominant elite in America. Ingsoc helped assure "that economic inequality has been made permanent" (157), and Marketspeak has done the same here, even facilitating its substantial increase in recent decades.

In fact, in an interesting turnabout, the supposedly permanent condition of the victims of Ingsoc has proven to be impermanent (i.e., the Soviet Union was dissolved and its component parts have been struggling since 1989 to enter the world of Amcap and Marketspeak), whereas the victims of Amcap and Marketspeak in both the former Soviet Union and the West have been placed in the condition where, as Mrs. Thatcher so happily pronounced, "there is no alternative." The power of capital and finance to dominate elections, to limit policy options by the threat of their enhanced mobility, and their domination of the means of communication, has seemingly ended challenges to the policy dictates of capital. Under the regime of Ingsoc "there is no way in which discontent can become articulate" (158). Under the regime of Amcap and Marketspeak as well there is no way discontent can materialize in meaningful political choices or programs; rather, they will be channeled into bursts of anger and scapegoating of "government" and other convenient targets.

Under the regime of Ingsoc, the Proles were kept down by "heavy physical work, the care of home and children, petty quarrels with neighbors, films, football, beer, and above all gambling." (56) Orwell mentioned tele-

vision as a valuable diversionary instrument for keeping the Proles in line. The transformation of U.S. commercial broadcasting into an essentially entertainment vehicle, with a heavy emphasis on films, football, and other sports, and its virtual annihilation of any public service and public sphere role, is Amcap's and Marketspeak's clear improvement over the primitive workings of Ingsoc. The growth of lotteries and casinos, partly driven by capital's pressure on governments to seek funding outside of taxes, also improves on Ingsoc's methods of providing Prole diversion and depoliticization.

Under the regime of Amcap and Marketspeak, the Proles are kept down not only by physical work and diversions, but also by insecurity. In 1995, Fed Chairman Allan Greenspan explained to congress that the inflation threat was minimal because of a generalized worker insecurity, which he presented as a bonanza, although such insecurity would seem to be in itself a serious welfare detriment, on the assumption that the condition of the Proles was an important policy goal. His instrumental view of the Proles can also be seen in economic theory, where the "natural rate of unemployment" ties inflation (the bad) very closely to excessive wage demands on the part of the Proles.

This view of Prole wage increases as a threat to the national interest is a throwback to mercantilist attitudes and doctrine, where high wages were deemed bad "because they would reduce England's competing power by raising production costs," in the words of the historian of mercantilism, Edgar S. Furniss. [14] He notes that in this class-biased view of the national interest "the dominant class...attempt[ed] to bind the burdens upon the shoulders of those groups whose political power is too slight to defend them from exploitation and will find justification for its policies in the plea of national necessity." In this mercantilist and Marketspeak view of the Proles, as a cost and instrument rather than a group whose well-being is the policy objective, the Proles, like citizens of an enemy state, become "unpersons."

The accommodation of economic science to the demands of Amcap and Marketspeak have been extensive, and in many of these cases the intellectu-

al abuses and somersaults carried out to salvage Marketspeak are similar to those used to defend Ingsoc. As one example, during each merger wave from 1897-1903 onward, Marketspeak economists have found the movement to be based on efficiency considerations, and downgraded the importance of other bases of merger activity and any negative effects on competition. They have struggled valiantly to prove that the market works well in providing net public benefits here as elsewhere.

In recent years Marketspeak economists have done this by measuring the efficiency of mergers on the basis of stock price movements before and at the time of the merger, not post-merger results, although stock price measures suffer from problems of timing, contamination by influences other than efficiency, and are at best indirect. In one classic of this genre, Michael Jensen and Robert Ruback, as an afterthought, did look at post-merger financial results, which turned out to show “systematic reductions in the stock price of bidding firms following the event.” [15] They concluded that such results “are unsettling because they are inconsistent with market efficiency and suggest that changes in stock prices during takeovers overestimate the future efficiency gains from mergers.” But as Marketspeak says that free market behavior enhances efficiency, the authors did not allow those “systematic” findings to alter their conclusions.

Conclusion: A Promising Amcap Future

Ingsoc has given way to a potent replacement in Amcap, and Amcap has actually taken on more vitality with the death of Ingsoc. The ideologists of Amcap have proclaimed an “end of history,” with freedom and liberal democracy triumphant and doublethink and thought control presumably ended with the close of the system of tyranny. But such claims have little basis in reality. History has not “ended,” and since the death of the Soviet Union, wars, political and economic instability, ethnic cleansing, the global polarization of incomes, and environmental distress and threats, seem to have increased in frequency and/or intensity. Freedom and liberal democracy are increasingly constrained by national and global power structures that

sharply limit any actions helpful to the Proles.

In the increasingly inegalitarian system that prevails, Amcap, Amerigood and Marketspeak are flourishing and have a more important role to play than ever. They have been doing their job – “largely the defense of the indefensible” as Orwell put it – with a sophistication and effectiveness that Ingsoc could never command. Their innovations in language are continuous, filling all emerging propaganda gaps. At home, a law encroaching on civil liberties is called a “Patriot Act;” laws that free the weak and poor from their “entitlements” by pushing them into the labor market are referred to as “reform” and “empowerment,” and they are said to reflect “tough love” of the suffering Proles. In military and foreign policy, a government agency openly designed to disseminate disinformation is entitled “Office of Strategic Influence;” [16] missiles are “Peacekeepers,” and military alliances are “Partnerships for Peace.” The appeasement of amenable state terrorists (Mobutu, Suharto, the governments of apartheid South Africa) is called “constructive engagement”; civilian deaths from the “humanitarian bombing” of “rogue states” is “collateral damage.”

The progress and prospects of Amcap are impressive. This immensely powerful system of thought control should get the credit and recognition that it deserves.

Footnotes:

1. The “50th Anniversary Edition” of *Animal Farm* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1995), includes this Preface as Appendix 1.
2. Harold Lasswell, “Propaganda,” in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).
3. Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), pp. 31-32, 248, 310.
4. See Steven Kull, “Americans on Defense Spending: A Study of Public Attitudes,” Report on Findings, Program on International Policy Attitudes, School of Public Affairs, University of Maryland, June 19, 1996.

5. Nelson Blackstock, *Cointelpro: The FBI's Secret War on Political Freedom* (New York: Vintage, 1975); Frank Donner, *The Age of Surveillance* (New York: Vintage, 1981)
6. For an account of OPD and Operation Truth, see Peter Kornbluh, *Nicaragua: The Price of Intervention* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Policy Studies, 1987), chapter 4.
7. Otherwise unattributed page numbers in the text are to George Orwell, 1984 (New York: Signet Book, 1950).
8. For details, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988 and 2002), chapter 3.
9. For details, Edward S. Herman, *The Real Terror Network* (Boston: South End Press, 1982), esp. chapter 3; Herman. "The United States Versus Human Rights in the Third World," *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, Spring 1991; William Blum, *Rogue State* (Monroe, Me.: Common Courage Press, 2000).
10. Albright's statement was made in answer to a question by Leslie Stahl on the CBS program "60 Minutes," May 12, 1996.
11. For details, Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (Boston: South End Press, 1979), chapter 3; Edward S. Herman and David Peterson, "How The New York Times Protects Indonesian Terror In East Timor," *Z Magazine*, July/August, 1999.
12. For a full account, Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, chapter 2.
13. Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Michael T. Klare, "Bush's Master Oil Plan," *Alternet.Org*, April 23, 2002.
14. Edgar S. Furniss, *The Position of the Laborer in a System of Nationalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920). pp. 201, 203.
15. Michael Jensen and Richard Ruback, "The Market For Corporate

Control: The Scientific Evidence,” *Journal of Financial Economics*, vol. 5, 1983, p. 30.

16. This organization was quickly closed down after receiving considerable negative publicity. However, the contract for services to be carried out on behalf of the Office of Strategic Influence was not cancelled.

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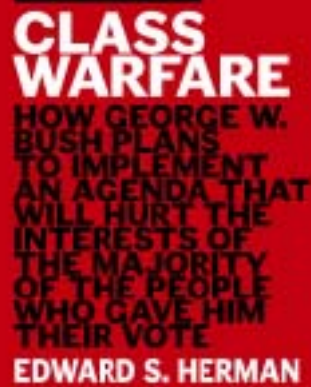
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